

## **ESF Athens Seminar 1: Freedom of movement versus the European migration regime of camps and externalisation of the borders**

### **Slot 1 introduction: Short chronology of the EU camp projects and the collaboration with countries of transit and origin concerning migration control, esp. as a reaction to movements of migrants**

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(read more on [www.lager.org](http://www.lager.org): The European War on Refugees and: [www.fluechtlingsrat-hamburg.de](http://www.fluechtlingsrat-hamburg.de), Lagerpolitik, 5.-8.5.05)

Before we hear from different regions outside the EU borders, I want to give a short overview on the history of the European policies of externalisation of borders and camps, especially concerning Africa. I see these policies mainly as a reaction to movements of people and as different trials to introduce a selective and murderish migration management, together with new partners in the South and East of Europe. There are a lot of contradictions in these policies, which we should take into consideration for our strategies.

The first European projects for refugee camps in areas of war and crisis and at the borders of the EU were developed – not accidentally! – at the same time when the war in Irak started in **spring 2003**. A paper of the British cabinet and Home Office, cynically called “**A New Vision for Refugees**”, comprised two elements: so-called “**Regional Protection Areas**” (**RPA**), near or even in countries producing refugees, and so-called “**Transit Processing Centres**” (**TPC**) outside the EU borders, in which refugees in transit as well as those deported back from EU countries would be interned to examine their asylum claims.

Reacting to these concepts, Ruud Lubbers, **UNHCR**, presented in March 2003 his “**three prong model**” for a more effective management of refugees. The main difference to the British projects: **Closed refugee camps** should be build **inside the (extended) EU**.

On a conference of the **EU ministers** of justice and interior affairs at the end of **March 2003**, the Netherlands, Italy and Spain supported the UNHCR-version of the British concept, while the German minister of the interior, Schily, made sceptical remarks. He said, the British proposal would increase rather than reduce the numbers of migrants trying to get into Europe. He would agree on the same aims, but these camps would not work, they would only attract additional refugees (interview to “The Observer”, 11.5.03).

The Swedish government criticized the concept because of legal and humanitarian reasons, similar to a huge number of refugee- and human rights organisations. Officially Britain withdrew her proposal of TPCs on the **EU summit 2003** in Greece. But the EU summit gave the **green light for pilot schemes**. (“The idea is to bring safe havens closer to the people and their places of origin”, a spokesman of the EU Commission said to journalists on the EU summit.)

Almost for one year, the discussions about these projects took place only in circles of specialists. With the hustle and bustle in the media about the “case of **Cap Anamur**” (a German ship which took 37 African refugees on board in the Mediterranean) in **July 2004** these projects suddenly came up again, caused by the proposal of the German minister of the interior, Schily – in quick agreement with his Italian colleague Pisanu – to build so-called “**Auffanglager**” (**reception camps**) **for boat people in North Africa**. “This is more human than drowning”, Schily said about this solution. An institution for refugees picked up on the sea should be built, which takes and examines asylum claims. If the asylum claim is recognized, this institution should look for a reception of these persons in a third country, normally “close to their country of

origin with support of the EU" (Schily in FAZ 22.7.04). Refugees should get asylum in Europe only "on a voluntary basis of the respective states". At the same time, a clearing centre should be installed outside Europe, where EU member states could register their demands for legal immigration.

On the **EU level** and in most **North African governments** the reactions on Schily's projects were sceptic or even critical. On a meeting of the EU ministers of the interior in **October 2004**, Schily suddenly talked only about "**Welcome Centres**" for refugees in North Africa. The EU ministers **decided to set up five reception centres** in Algeria, Libya, Mauretania, Morocco and Tunisia at a date not yet agreed on. It was stressed that no asylum claims for Europe could be processed in these camps, only for the respective country. The Moroccan minister of the interior declared that his country was not ready to accept such camps. On 14.10.04 the **EU Parliament** said "no" to refugee camps outside the EU. On the **EU summit in november 2004** there were no clear decisions.

In the meantime, facts were created: Italy started in October 2003 to deport boat people stranded on **Lampedusa to Libya** without examining their asylum claims and gives money to the Libyan government for detention centers, camps and deportations. After lifting the weapons embargo of the EU against Libya in October 2004, governments and bodies of the EU are negotiating with Ghaddafi.

Camps also exist in **other North African countries** like Tunisia. Technology for border control, experts and trainers are sent there, which is at the same time a good business for European companies like Siemens.

In **September and October 2005**, hundreds of Sub-Saharan migrants, living and organizing themselves in the forests around **Ceuta and Melilla**, stormed the border fences of the Spanish enclaves, starting some days before a **Spanish-Moroccan summit** on migration took place near Sevilla. One consequence of stricter border controls in Ceuta and Melilla and on the coasts of Morocco is the **shifting of migration routes** to longer and more dangerous ones, like those from **Mauretania to the Canary Islands**. We will hear more about these events and reactions of the EU later.

But also in **other regions** migration movements take place, and sometimes we read about resistance of migrants on their way or in detention centers. Just two examples:

- In **Egypt** about 3500 refugees from Sudan had occupied a park in front of the UNHCR office in Cairo and demanded to be registered and allowed to go to safer countries. The UNHCR refused to accept them as refugees, and on the 30<sup>th</sup> December the camp was stormed and destroyed by the police, whereby 76 refugees died, hundreds were injured, arrested and deported.
- In **Malta** (EU member state since May 2004) more migrants and refugees who originally wanted to go to Italy, find themselves stranded and put into detention centers for at least 18 months. Hunger strikes and actions like a march to the airport on the 7<sup>th</sup> March take place regularly. Malta is negotiating with Libya about deportations and begging the EU for money to fight "illegal immigration".

An **informal meeting of the EU ministers of the interior in Vienna** decided in **January 2006** to build pilot projects of refugee **camps in Tansania and Ukraine**. At the end of **April**, the ministers agreed on **more joint deportation flights**, coordinated by the new FRONTEX Agency. One destination of these charter flights are **West African countries**. Their corrupt governments are forced to sign contracts to prevent so-called "illegal migration" already before migrants start from there, for example by **controlling airports and harbours**. (The German newspaper "taz" reported in a small article on 21.8.04 that the police in **Sierra Leone** prevented a ship with more than 500 refugees on board to leave the harbour into the direction of the

Canary Islands. During this common action of the Sierra Leonean, the Spanish and the Guinean authorities the captain and the crew were arrested.) By promising money for projects and also for the private pockets of government officials (like those of a dubious **delegation from Guinee** coming to Germany to “identify” refugees), they are put under pressure to take back deportees without asking if they are really citizens of that country.

But countries of origin are on the other hand interested in the money transfer from migrants. That is one reason why there are also **deportation agreements** which **failed**, like the one between **Switzerland and Senegal**, which was already signed in January 2003. It intended to deport rejected African asylum seekers, whose identity could not be proved, to Senegal and to intern them on the airport in Dakar, where African Embassies could pick out “their” citizens. Because of protests of human rights organisations and African migrants, who were just on holidays in Senegal, the Senegalese parliament refused in March 2003 to adopt the agreement. **Gambia**, who was also chosen as a “dumping ground” for refugees, refused this dirty job up to now, and a big article on this topic which we sent from Hamburg, was published in the press. Also in **Burkina Faso** reports from refugees who were in danger to be deported from Germany without valid papers were published and lead to many discussions.

About such kind of **cooperation between activists in European and African countries** on the grassroots level and proposals from the WSF in Bamako for common actions we should discuss later. I think such a cooperation is the only way to challenge the EU policy of externalisation of their migration regime.