

Combating the root causes of refugee movement ad absurdum

Wolfgang Kaleck, 29 June 2016

French philosopher Alain Badiou rightly pointed out recently that our public life is determined by two ideas that are doomed to failure: market-based consensus and universal commercialization combined with an anxious reversion to identity and nation, a reactionary dam aimed at holding back this globalization.

Mass movement of refugees has always been around, especially in the last decades. The burden is borne largely by developing countries, as was the case for instance with the estimated 60 million refugees on the move in 2014; we know that nine out of ten refugees stay in their home regions. But this doesn't stop the knee-jerk responses by populist nationalist movements in the West, and similarly irrational moves from our governments.

Everyone knows that many of the reasons refugees are forced to leave home have international roots, from the fallout of colonization and an unjust world trade system to repressive regimes and war. The effects of globalization and the need to combat the root causes of refugee movement are widely discussed here in Germany. And what could be better than ensuring that people are no longer forced to leave home through poverty, violence and persecution? But the goodwill and solidarity that arose initially towards refugees is increasingly displaced by calls for closing borders, as reflected in the election successes of the *Alternative für Deutschland* and other New Right parties. The fatal consequences of this have starting taking practical effect in migration policies.

A drastic example of this is what is known as the Khartoum Process. Since October 2014, the EU has been working with Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Kenya, Egypt and Tunisia in an effort to better control migration from North and East Africa. Some of these projects have noble aims, such as education programs for refugees in the region. But one of the initiative's main purposes is cooperation in the areas of border controls and combating irregular migration and people smuggling – with states that include some of the world's worst dictatorships.

A police training center is planned for Cairo, in a country with over 50,000 political detainees. Also foreseen is the strengthening of the institutional capacities of law enforcement authorities in Eritrea, otherwise known as the North Korea of Africa. In May 2016, it emerged that the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) will take a leading role in the implementation of an EU project on the monitoring of the border between Sudan and Eritrea. A reminder: Sudan is ruled by Omar al-Bashir, who is sought by an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity and genocide. In light of this, German development work in Sudan has been suspended – but because this is an EU project, Germany will make an exception.

At EU level, there is clearly an awareness of the explosive potential of this collaboration: one brief on the Khartoum Process from April 2015 included a note that its contents should under no circumstances be made public. Key documents shedding light on the project emerged only through digging by researchers.

The Khartoum Process reveals how the EU and its member states are trying to dodge their own responsibilities by outsourcing border controls to third party states. In this way, the notion of combating the root causes of refugee movement is utterly distorted: African tyrants

are called on to prevent any movement of people from their territories and thus ensure that the shadowy sides of globalization are once again kept from European eyes.