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# Valletta Summit on Migration: A booster shot or a new initiative?

By *Dr. Mehari Taddele Maru* - 10 November 2015 at 12:28 pm



AP Photo/Marko Drobnyakovic

Hard hit by the migration crisis, the European Union (EU) in a desperate effort to respond to the crisis has called a summit on migration in Valletta, Malta from 11-12 November 2015. The African side has been invited to participate in this meeting. The EU and African Union (AU) have presented separate position documents reflecting their priorities and approaches to address migration and its positive and negative consequences. The EU's Valletta Summit document addresses five major focus areas: *The Development benefits of migration and addressing root causes, Legal migration and mobility, International protection and asylum, Prevention of and the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, and Cooperation on return and readmission.* There is a sixth hidden agenda: the new EU migration containment strategy.

## EU's Migration Policy of Containment

The EU has already adopted a short-term approach in the form of its 'migration containment policy' and use of military force in response to smuggling. But will containment of migrants work? In the context of the current migration crisis, containment refers to stopping migrants wherever they are, and holding them in countries of origin if possible, and in countries of transit if necessary. With this migration containment policy, EU is going to create 'migration rentier states' such as

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Turkey where EU pledged billions of USD. Similarly, EU has pledged an Emergency Trust Fund of USD 2 Billion for Africa that will be paid for African rentier states such as Eritrea. In addition to the migration rentier states, another key player in the containment policy is the Frontex, EU border agency, which is increasingly operating and securitizing migration in countries of transit for now and may continue to do so in the countries of origin.

#### **Refugees in Europe: From Political Asset to Cultural Threat and Economic Liability**

The migration crisis in Europe and elsewhere is not new. It has been for decades since the end of Cold War. With the end of the Cold War, refugees who were considered a political asset for many western countries during the Cold War turned into, first, economic liability and now cultural threat.

#### **European Reflexive Reaction: The Syrian Crisis as Accelerator**

In the past nine months, Europe receives a total of 731,732 migrants, of which 77 percent are through Eastern routes and 23 percent through the African routes. More than 60 percent of the overall migrants crossing to EU are from Syria, while 132,434 are African nationals of which Eritreans constitute 21 percent and followed by the Nigerians at 12 percent.

The game changer in the EU's reflexive response to migration is the Syrian migration flux as result of the Syrian on-going crisis. Migration has also contributed to the changing dynamics in the local politics of many European countries. Even in the traditionally social democratic countries of Scandinavian countries, populist anti-immigration right wing parties are on the raise in political rhetoric and in parliaments. Communities in the EU consider migration to be more than a socio-economic issue that could lead to threats to their cultural survival. High political and societal pressure from host communities in countries of destination make the main difference in the public spotlight and in terms of media coverage, and therefore the difference in response by the governments concerned, including countries of transit and origin, the media and the international community. Coupled with the financial crisis in the Southern Mediterranean member countries, EU has been tested to the limit by local and national political actors. Despite clear understanding that reflexive reactions and containment policies will not work, EU is unable to effectively assert its mandate on such Europe-wide challenges and the most sustainable solution. In a nutshell, due to the migration crisis, local politics is winning over the European continental discourse. Even worst, the democratic political culture of Europe is showing some elements of popular intolerance to divergence views.

As with any other crisis, if seized properly migration could serve as trigger for rethinking the partnership between Africa and Europe on development and trade. These are long-term aims. Given that the Valletta Summit is being held in the shadow of the migration crisis, it is eliciting more concerns and dilemmas than hope. Due to the 'crisis-mood reaction', with containment policy, the Valletta Summit may only offer false hopes, replacing impactful long-term projects by activities that will allow the existing problems to linger. But why should Valletta focus on medium and long-term solutions?

#### **The Migration Crisis as a Development Question**

Hamstrung in old routes, migrants will pay more to seek another routes. Confinement will only increase the transaction cost including daring to take more fatal routes. The EU needs to see migration as a development issue; as long as there are conditions of extreme poverty, conflicts and large constraints against achieving a decent livelihood in Africa, Europe will continue to experience migration stress. The crisis concerning migration governance still persists and will continue to present challenges within and outside of Africa. While the EU has identified migration as one

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of its five highest priority agenda items, in Africa, migration has been accorded a low level of urgency and importance on the national agenda. The limited media coverage about migration routes other than the Mediterranean route from North Africa to Europe is one reason. Due to pressure of numbers and Europe's interests, and the tragic conditions of migrants, the media extensively and dramatically covers the Mediterranean Sea route. This special attention is also related to the policies of countries of destination, in this case the EU and its member states, particularly Italy. Other migrants using routes such as the Southern African or Yemen routes face similar or even worse situations, including death in containers or at the hands of criminals and in congested prisons as well as the increasing possibility of xenophobic attacks. This collective social psychology in many African communities, including Africa's youth, is encapsulated in the term 'any where but Africa'.

**The Local Act -Global Impacts of Migration**

Migration is a local individual act with a serious global impact. The solution lies in strong collaboration between the local, the national and global actors. For this reason, the game changers in the transformation of migration governance are states and local authorities and communities. Establishing effective governance of migration could only be achieved with the active involvement of states and local communities, which is unthinkable to achieve without a long-term engagement.

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Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons – which entered into force on 6 December 2012.

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