

**To the participants of the
African Union Extraordinary Summit on
Maritime Security and Safety and
Development in Africa**

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AFRIQUE EUROPE INTERACT

Vienna / Bremen, 11th October 2016

**Open letter by Afrique-Europe Interact for the occasion of the African Union
Extraordinary Summit on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in
Africa**

**Ladies and gentlemen,
dear heads of states,
dear representatives of the African Union,
dear ambassadors of African embassies in Europe,**

**for the occasion of the „African Union Extraordinary Summit on
Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa“, we want to
share with You our points of view as well as our requirements:**

At the times we are living right now, safety at sea in the context of migration has become an issue of greatest importance, especially for African societies, and a major challenge for politics. We are especially concerned about the deplorable fact that every year, thousands of people, most of them young citizens of African countries, lose their lives on the routes of migration. The Mediterranean Sea, the Gulf of Guinea, the Gulf of Aden and also the Sahara Desert have become the graves of an enormous, even not precisely known, number of sons and daughters of Africa who have set out on the quest for a better life or just to save themselves from the multiple crisis troubling their countries.

On 11th and 12th of November 2015, the heads of state of 35 African and 28 European countries have met at Valetta, the capital of Malta, to work out an action plan on migration between Africa and Europe. A fund of 1,8 billions of Euro has been launched by the European Union to put the Valetta action plan into operation. For good reasons, many of the African representatives were very reserved against this action plan, as it is focussing one more time on a repressive migration policy to prevent migration

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of Africans towards Europe, but does not take into consideration the interests of African peoples and countries. We have seen somehow, since the Valetta summit, intensive efforts from the side of European states to sign bilateral and multilateral agreements with African states according to the same logics of fighting against so-called „illegal“ migration and pushing for forced deportations. Because of this, we fear that the rights of African citizens who have become refugees or who have set out for migration are fundamentally at stake, and, beyond this, even the historical Freedom of Movement in the whole African sphere:

Say NO to readmission agreements!

A top priority issue for European states are the so-called readmission agreements – that means the collaboration of African states in the deportation of their own citizens, of people who have travelled through their territory and even of any African person who is said to be a so-called „irregular migrant“. Last April, the Dutch foreign minister Bert Koenders, in the function of a representative of the European Union, has travelled to Senegal, Mali and Ghana with the aim to sign readmission agreements. At the asylum summit in Vienna/Austria on 24th of September 2016, Egypt and the Maghreb countries as well as Niger and Mali were declared to be major targets for bringing readmission agreements into operation. Readmission agreements are in fact a bad answer to a failed policy of European states towards refugees and migrants living in Europe: Since several decades, millions of people have been living in Europe with a precarious status of residence or have been staying completely undocumented. These people, who are being called „clandestine migrants“, „irregular migrants“ or „rejected asylum seekers“ are in fact people who are daily struggling for survival and still supporting their relatives and who are living under traumatising conditions, being denied fundamental rights. The only reasonable solution to this situation, in the sense of Human Rights and also of social cohesion, would be to regularise all these persons living without solid papers, so that they could stabilise their lives in their countries of residence. Unfortunately, most European countries have chosen the opposite direction, searching to deport big numbers of so-called „irregular“ people, and claiming cooperation in the form of readmission agreements. It is obvious that such kind of policies is against the interests of African countries and their people. The governments of African countries are obliged to work for the benefit of their own citizens, including diaspora communities – in this sense, signing readmission agreements to facilitate deportation should not be acceptable at all. It is also a well known fact that African countries benefit a lot from the work of their diaspora: Their contribution, not only by directly supporting their families and relatives, but also in the form of investment and engagement in multiple sectors, is by far higher than the benefits of so-called „development aid“. Regularising all migrants could help to increase the benefits for African societies. Somehow, signing readmission agreements means risking not only to destroy the lives of people being deported, but also to increase social and economic destabilisation of the countries concerned! We embrace the fact that until now, many African governments are not ready to sign these readmission agreements that their European counterparts want to impose on them. We also want to remind you of the vigilance of many elements of African civil societies who are ready to mobilise themselves to counter any attempt of putting readmission agreements into force. During the years when Nicolas Sarkozy, at that time French minister of interior, tried to implement a bilateral agreement with Mali, this attempt failed due to powerful resistance from the side of Malian civil society – and the same reply is possible in all countries that are actually targetted by the Valetta action plan.

In this sense, we want to require from you: Say NO to any kind of readmission agreement!

According to the high number of citizens of African countries who have already been deported, we also want to appeal to you:

Do not sign any more traveling certificates for deportations! It is up to you to give strict orders to your embassies and to your authorities not to sign any more traveling documents against the will of the person concerned!

No acceptance of the European traveling certificate!

A new instrument of deportation developed by European Union states is the so-called European traveling certificate – a traveling document to send people back, which is issued by European authorities, not any more by the embassies of the countries which are targeted. In the context of the Valetta action plan, European states are searching to convince the representatives of African countries to accept the European traveling certificate as a valid document allowing entry to their territory. The consequence will automatically be a considerable rise of the numbers of people being deported and at the same time, this will put national sovereignty of African countries, to decide who is, under which conditions, given access to their territories, at stake. A project belonging to the same context is the creation of a so-called reception center in Niger, in the region of Agadez. This center is supposed to serve, among other purposes, for retaining refugees and migrants of various origin who have been deported with a European traveling certificate. We believe that as a consequence, the authorities of Niger will search for pushing these people, as most of them are no citizens of Niger, out to neighbouring countries of the region. Subsequently, severe violations of the rights of the people concerned are going to happen and there is also a serious risk of multiple problems between the countries of the Sahel region.

We require from you: Take a clear and powerful stance that your countries are not ready to accept the European traveling certificate as a valid traveling document! Do not accept the violation of the rights of migrants and refugees and do not accept national sovereignty of your countries to be put at stake!

No to the privation of Freedom of Movement in Africa, no to pushbacks at the borders!

The Freedom of Movement of people with their properties has had a long tradition on the African continent where social and family ties often go beyond national borders. This freedom is also a resource for commercial, economic, cultural and scientific exchange. For good reasons, this principle of Freedom of Movement is, among others, also an integral element of the ECOWAS protocol. This right is actually being put at stake by the conditions imposed through the Valetta action plan. European Union states are financing the upgrading of security forces on the borders and along the traveling routes as well as the installation of new technical surveillance facilities, as they are expecting intensified efforts against „irregular migration“ from the African states. As a consequence, we have observed a rising amount of harrassments against travelers at checkpoints: People are, often arbitrarily forced to pay fees or they are even sent back if their ID is not considered to be valid. Taking into consideration that most people in African countries only dispose of very small financial budgets and that many of them don't even find a chance to renew their passport or their ID cards, these small harrassments already prevent a considerable number of citizens from enjoying their right to Freedom of Movement. What is even worse is that Human Rights organisations are presently witnessing a rising number of pushbacks of people who are

suspected to be on the route of migration. Such pushbacks are happening, for example along the borders between Niger and Mali, between two ECOWAS member states, who would be obliged to respect free movement between their territories.

You also have to take severely into consideration that any kind of measures limiting Freedom of Movement and creating new barriers will also increase the deplorable numbers of people dying on the routes of migration: The more the borders are being shut down, the more migrants are getting arrested and pushed back, the more people will be forced to choose the most dangerous traveling routes, exposed to fatal dangers in the desert and at sea and more vulnerable than ever to violent blackmailing and armed gangs.

We sincerely appeal to you: It is Your duty to defend Freedom of Movement of Your citizens and the lives of people on the routes of migration! Do not accept that Europe will shut down the borders of Africa through repressive migration policies that kill migrants!

„More for more“ - say NO to the „development“ hypocrisy proposed by the Valetta action plan!

Under the title „More for more“, the Valetta action plan is searching to connect development aid programmes with collaboration on the field of migration policies. Through this so-called „aid“, European states wield their economic power to impose their conditions on African countries. Several representatives of civil societies from Mali, Senegal, Togo and Ghana have stated in a declaration from April 2016: „(...) the trust fund set up at the Valetta summit to push African countries, especially of the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa, to develop policies of migration management imposed by the European Union is nothing but a deception. In fact, the 1,8 billions of Euros from the trust fund are nothing but the remaining amount from the European Development Fund promised to Africa in the context of the Cotonou agreements which are soon running out.“

In general, the whole Valetta action plan has no social and economic benefit at all for the countries of Africa and their people. On the contrary, they represent a policy that is going to worsen fatal dangers for many thousands of migrants and at the same time to affect social and economic relations between African countries.

In this sense, we sincerely require from You: Do not accept European conditions imposed on the field of migration policies through economic pressure and false „development“ promises!

Say NO to a policy increasing the factors of social and economic destabilisation! Engage yourselves for setting up conditions allowing your citizens, together with the migrants, with the diaspora communities, to build up projects providing a real benefit for social, economic and cultural development for the people of African countries!

In this context, it is also necessary to say NO to all neo-colonial strategies by the European countries that destroy and plunder African economies. As one example, we appeal to you to cancel the EPA-treaties, as they exclusively serve European interests and will massively marginalise African products.

We appeal to You, participants of the „African Union Extraordinary Summit on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa“:

- **Refuse signing any kind of readmission agreements!**
- **Give orders to Your embassies and authorities not to sign any more traveling documents for deportation!**
- **Refuse to accept the so-called „European traveling certificate“ as a valid traveling document!**
- **Refuse push-backs and restrictions of Freedom of Movement between Your countries!**
- **Cancel all cooperation agreements signed in the context of the Valetta action plan!**
- **Engage Yourself to create legal and safe traveling routes allowing to migrants and refugees to arrive safely at the goal of their journey without risking their lives in order to make an end to the deaths in the desert and at sea!**
- **Accompany Your people to create structures providing a real social and economic perspective, facilitating the chance to decide freely between the options to stay or to leave!**
- **Engage Yourself to make an end to wars, persecution, violent conflicts, poverty, alimentary insufficiency and destruction of agricultural economies that force people to flee! Engage Yourself to create a real social and economic perspective for African peoples and for future generations!**

We strongly hope that our requirements will be taken into consideration and we remain respectfully Yours,

Transnational network Afrique-Europe Interact