

## SAFE PASSAGE INSTEAD OF SHADY MIGRATION DEALS

CCME EXPRESSES CONCERN ON EU-TUNISIA AGREEMENT, CONTRADICTS EU COMMISSION PRESIDENT

On 16<sup>th</sup> July 2023, the European Commission and Tunisia signed a “strategic partnership” agreement, aiming among other issues at stopping migrants and refugees from arriving in Europe.

During the morning of 13<sup>th</sup> September this agreement was praised by EU Commission President in her State of the Union speech as mutually beneficial.<sup>1</sup> Only hours later an official delegation of the European Parliament wishing to explore the situation in Tunisia was denied entry into the country by Tunisian authorities.<sup>2</sup>

The agreement binds the EU to provide Tunisia with financial support that amounts to €785 million, out of which a total of €105 million is assigned to migration management: fighting against “irregular migration”, providing financial and technical support to “further improve the management of Tunisian borders” in addition to supporting “the return of irregular migrants in Tunisia to their countries of origin”. (source: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_23\\_3887](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_23_3887)) . Further details are so far unknown and it is questionable whether the European Union even had a mandate to enter into such an agreement.

Despite recent reports from organisations like Human Rights Watch (Links: [here](#) and [here](#)) that documented the harassment of sub-Saharan Africans and violations of their rights by Tunisian security forces at the Tunisia-Libya border amid a generally oppressive climate, the EU intends to proceed with funding operations of the Tunisian government, under the pretext of fighting smuggling and disrupting the work of human traffickers. This follows patterns of migration co-operation with third countries like Libya which have resulted in or contributed to grave human rights violations towards refugees and migrants.

Independent media as well as church partners have also reported a worrying increase of racist attacks and harassment towards sub-Saharan Africans living in Tunisia following President Kais Saied’s speech of 21 February 2023. The locking out of an EP delegation further augments our concerns.

The planned cooperation will make the EU officially co-responsible for what happens to migrants and refugees in Tunisia and at its borders. Instead of offering protection to those who desperately need it, the EU continues to out-source its responsibilities to third countries which, like Tunisia, have no functional asylum system and but do have proven human rights violations.

Such a deal is a huge step in the wrong direction for the EU:

- It undermines the need for effective and fair access to asylum and safety for those who seek it; instead it fights these vulnerable persons, violates their rights, and endangers their lives and well-being under the pretext of fighting smuggling and irregular migration;
- There so far is no indication that there will be a binding conditionality, which would make financial support conditional on full respect of human rights;
- Additionally, and from a legal perspective, the deal raises many concerns regarding its transparency as the negotiation process proceeded without the foreseen explicit involvement of

<sup>1</sup> [://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/speech\\_23\\_4426](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ov/speech_23_4426)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/tunisia-denies-entry-to-eu-lawmakers-delegation/>

the European Council. Apparently, 13 Member States have already complained about being excluded from the Memorandum of Understanding with Tunisia<sup>3</sup>;

- It is of concern that both the process toward the agreement as well as the precise content of the agreement are not public;
- Such a deal might become a blueprint for signing other deals with Mediterranean countries, like Morocco, to keep migrants off of the shores of Europe – with deadly consequences.

Tunisia has proved to be a threatening space for migrants and refugees, especially sub-Saharan Africans, with an alarming rise in discrimination and racial violence. The footage we are seeing from Tunisia of migrants held at the borders with Libya; men; women and children begging for water during a +45 degree heatwave gives real cause for concern.

Humans will never stop seeking safety and will always flee from life-threatening situations in their home countries. Deals on migration control will not stop them from trying, but simply increase the price they have to pay with their savings, their rights and, sadly, with their lives.

CCME therefore calls on the EU institutions: instead of investing hundreds of millions of euros to push people back and cause more deaths at the borders:

- ✓ Invest in SAFE PASSAGE into refugee protection and legal labour migration; into adequate, fair and efficient procedures that allow refugees to seek safety without threat to their lives and livelihoods and that enable European societies to welcome them.
- ✓ Invest in a serious and continued effort to address push factors so as to ensure sustainable development that helps to improve people's living conditions;
- ✓ Block finance for cooperation with Tunisia unless human rights compliance and monitoring of the measures financed by EU money can be guaranteed.

Brussels 19<sup>th</sup> September 2023

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<sup>3</sup> [Tunisia pact: EU member states complain of exclusion from migration deal | Middle East Eye](#)