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Working paper №9, 2016 (№23)

«New partnership» of EU Commission – an «ambitious plan» with unclear prospects

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Presented by EU Commission on June 7, 2016, the initiative of «new partnership» with African states and neighboring countries provoked controversial reaction of European public. The main problem of the «ambitious plan» is its realization. Will Commission succeed in attracting finances of member-states and private investors for achievement of the goals set or will the EU have to cut the development policy budget to stop the migration inflows to Europe?

In the conditions of unprecedented transnational migration growth, the lack of adequate migration management becomes a global problem of international politics. This is especially true for the EU that is trying to cope with the current migration crisis.

In May 2015 in «European Agenda on Migration»¹ the EU Commission named higher efficiency of legal immigration as one of means for settling the crisis. In accordance with «external dimension» concept of the EU migration policy, in crisis conditions migration management should form a part of EU foreign policy and be realized through dialogue with immigrant source countries, elaboration of legal migration channels and fighting human smuggling and trafficking. The foundations of the process were laid by EU and African states summit in Valetta in November 2015.

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A European Agenda on Migration. Brussels, 13.5.2015, COM (2015) 240 final.

Having initially focused on preventing migrant inflow by the Western Balkan and Central Mediterranean routes and fighting human smuggling, the Commission addressed the legal immigration improvement objective only a year after, by presenting on June 7, 2016 the new migration management strategy. It issued the Communication² and a number of legislative initiatives on partnership with immigrant source countries, revision of the directive on attraction of highly qualified professionals to the EU («Blue map» directive), and integration of immigrants, living in the EU.

«Partnership framework with third countries» was presented by the High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy Federica Mogherini and First Vice-Chairman of the Commission Frans Timmermans. The main driver of the initiative is development of cooperation in trade and visa liberalization with the states, sending migrants to Europe from Africa – Niger, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal, Ethiopia, and Middle East – Jordan and Lebanon. Later, the priority list of the new EU strategy is to be enlarged by Tunisia and Libya. In order to stimulate the partnering countries to cooperation and prevention of illegal immigration, the EU is prepared to allocate up to 62 bln euros to be invested in private sector, with the first 8 bln euros payable in the first four years for migration flow regulation.

The new strategy provides for short and long-term perspectives. In the short term the EU plans to stimulate countries to defend their borders more efficiently and prevent the potential refugees from emigration. In the long term the strategy provides for financing social and economic development of the source states in general, eliminating the reasons for mass emigration in the bud.

Several days prior to presentation of the partnership framework, Jyrki Katainen, Commission Vice-Chairman for jobs, growth, investment and competitiveness, said that the Commission intended to use the positive experience of the European fund for strategic investments, financial instrument of Juncker investment plan, to create conditions for innovative investments in developing countries. Mogherini voiced this initiative as well during the session of Foreign ministers' council in late May. The plan is partially based on the corresponding initiative of Italy, named the «Migration pact» and aimed at preventing migration from African countries by means of investment.

The partnering states are offered individually developed models of cooperation with the EU – so-called «compacts» – with use of foreign policy instruments (ex., Trust fund for Africa), and trade policy instruments for 2016-2020. In short term the Commission plans to invest 1 bln euros: one half to be paid by European Development Fund, the other – by member-states. By 2020 the additional investments into the Fund for Africa should amount to 8 bln euros. In long term the Commission considers the External investment plan for 31 bln euros with further increase to 62 bln euros, relying on both member-states and private investors.

As for visas, the main focus is on mobility of African states citizens in accordance with the programs of Partnership for mobility, and not specifically on liberalization of visa regimes. However, the principle of financial stimulation of the states, capable of keeping their citizens

² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, and the European Investment Bank on establishing a new Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Agenda on Migration. Strasbourg, 7.6.2016 COM (2016) 385 final.

from emigration by providing proper social and economic living conditions is the foundation of the future EU strategy.

The work on readmission of illegal immigrants from the territories of EU states is continued as well. No negotiations planned on signing respective agreements, but the Commission expects the countries, receiving the financial aid, to fulfill their obligations on reintegration of the illegal immigrants sent out the EU.

In return to financing the African states, the EU sets strict conditions to their governments. «New partnership» provides for combination of awards and punishments. The Commission makes it clear that it will stimulate the countries that are ready for cooperation, at the same time warning those who will not express such intent. The states, receiving investments, must demonstrate their efforts on border control and readmission of the citizens who illegally entered the EU, even without official agreements on readmission. They are bound to recognize the EU regulations on return of illegal immigrants, and to improve national procedures of registering citizens to identify those exiled from the EU. In short, African countries will have to streamline their migration management, which will not be easy in reality. They will have to eliminate gaps in national legislations and create special agencies for fighting human smuggling, including ratification of the corresponding UN protocol, investigation and prevention of human trafficking and its financing; improvement of information exchange and fake visas control. The Commission will monitor the process and financially punish every country that is not demonstrating proper efforts. The extent of stimulation will directly depend on the success of each government in this respect.

As an example of successful cooperation between the EU and immigrant source countries the Commission names the agreement between the EU and Turkey of March 2016, that resulted in serious reduction of migration flow. Such comparison, however, puzzled a number of European Parliament members: they believe this agreement has a lot of drawbacks infringing the rights of migrants and, thus, it cannot form a base for cooperation with African states.

Questionable is the mere method of political condition applied by the EU to the African partners. European Parliament members doubt the necessity of strict dictation and subjecting the economic aid to the ability of African states to maintain proper border control. Moreover, the funds for such aid are not formed yet, this, the promises are still not backed by real means.

Non-governmental human rights organizations reacted even more negatively. The coalition of over 104 NGOs, including *Amnesty International* and *Oxfam*, urged the Commission to abandon its controversial plan. They criticized the «new partnership» saying it opened a «dark chapter» in the history. NGOs mainly object the EU intentions not to stimulate social and economic development of African countries, but to stop the migration of population, thus, impeding its ability to seek refuge and international protection, which violates corresponding international agreements on the rights of refugees.

Despite the criticism, the Commission started to realize its plan. As promised, on September 14, 2016, J.-C. Juncker in his report to the European Parliament on the state of affairs in the

EU³ presented the «new partnership» as the second phase of the Investment plan. The launch of the «ambitious Investment plan for Africa and neighboring countries» was declared by the Commission on the verge of the UN summit in New York on September 19, devoted to migration management. Short term plans provide for preparation and adoption of 59 programs with the budget of 930 mln euros for Northern Africa, Sahel, lake Chad, Horn of Africa.

Remarkable that the new ambitious plan of the Commission was presented to the European Parliament on the same day when the UK Parliament members were discussing the report proving that the invasion of Libya and assistance in overthrowing the Gaddafi regime was a mistake. «Since then, – the report states, – Libya has been in a chaos. ISIS (terrorist organization, prohibited in Russia) gained support in the country, former rebels continue the warfare, and human traders set up a large scale operation, sending dozens of people in dangerous sea journeys to the shores of Europe»⁴. So the «new partnership» initiative appears to be an attempt to correct the foreign policy mistakes that led to such negative consequences.

As for the European Parliament members, they do not share the optimism about the «new partnership», because it is not backed by sufficient financial guarantees. For example, the report, adopted by majority of votes just before the announcement of Juncker and prepared by a representative of Italian Five Star movement, lists actual contributions of member-states to the Trust fund, established during the Valetta summit: «They are far from what was expected – 81,71 mln euros in April 2016 (4,5% of the planned 1,8 bln euros)»⁵.

Conclusions

The main concern of the critics of the «new partnership» is that the aspiration of the EU leaders to stop immigration at any cost contradicts with the fundamental goals of the development policy, providing for modernization of African countries through investment, and not just for keeping their population from emigration. Private companies are unlikely to invest in the unstable regions, while member-states have many times demonstrated their readiness to finance the migration management.

Even though the new initiative of the Commission does look ambitious, it will inevitably encounter difficulties on the way to its final implementation, and, what's more important, in its realization. For several weeks Brussels will host discussions on institutional aspects of the Commission plans – management structure, functionality, responsibilities etc. The historical competition between various departments of EU institutions can be aggravated by the contradictions between the European asylum support office and member-states. The main question – will proper financing for the «new partnership» be in place or will they have to cut budget expenses on development policy to fight immigration? – has yet to find its answer.

Date of initial release in Russian: September 16, 2016.

This publication can be downloaded at: <http://en.instituteofeurope.ru/publications/analytics>

³ European Commission – Press release. State of the Union 2016: Commission Targets Stronger External Borders. Strasbourg, 14 September 2016

⁴ MPs deliver damning verdict on David Cameron's Libya intervention. The Guardian, 14.09.2016/ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/14/mps-deliver-damning-verdict-on-camersons-libya-intervention>

⁵ European Parliament. Draft report Ignazio Corrao. The EU Trust Fund for Africa: the implications for development and humanitarian aid. 7.4.2016