

Germany wants migrants to remain in Africa

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Angela Merkel became the first German chancellor to visit Mali and Niger on 9–11 October. On 14 October, the chancellor received the presidents of Chad and Nigeria in Berlin. At the same time, the German minister of foreign affairs, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, took part in a meeting of the German-Nigerian commission for combating terrorism. Niger, Mali and Chad are the countries which refugees from Southern Africa are travelling through en route to Libya. Merkel visited the Bundeswehr soldiers stationed as part of the MINUSMA mission in Mali. In Niger, she announced that 17 million euros will be given to reduce unemployment (and promised that an additional 60 million euros will be offered, if the projects are implemented effectively; these funds are offered in addition to the development aid granted so far). She added that a further 10 million euros will be allocated for equipping the services in charge of combating smuggling and for improving the permeability of the state borders. Merkel also announced that a conference concerning investments in Africa would be held during the German presidency of the G20 in 2017.

Migrants from Africa have not made up a large proportion of the asylum seekers in Germany so far: in 2016, 250,000 Syrians submitted applications for asylum, against 13,000 applications received from citizens of Eritrea, and this was the largest number of applications to have been submitted from an African country.

Commentary

- The visits made by German politicians to countries through which the migration route from Africa to Europe runs signify that Germany intends to strengthen its engagement to reduce the permeability of state borders in these countries. Berlin fears that the number of refugees from Africa could grow. Niger and Mali are the key transit countries on this route. Merkel made it clear that the continuation of the policy of financial support will depend on whether Niger and Mali meet the German government's expectations as regards strengthening state borders and combating people smugglers.
- The German perception of Africa as a place for making economic investments in selected countries (South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria) has been changing in line with the migration crisis. Germany ever more often points out that such phenomena as migration and terrorism originating from Africa pose a direct threat to it. The fact that the character of Merkel's foreign visits has now changed puts a spotlight on the change in approach. She was not accompanied by an economic delegation, which was an exception. This time Merkel's advisor for the migration crisis, Jan Hecker, accompanied her on the visit, and

the talks during the meetings concerned only migration and the fight against terrorism.

- The visit to Africa was also aimed at demonstrating Merkel's activity on the international scene in dealing with the causes of migration. The countries Merkel visited as well as Chad and Nigeria are expected to join the so-called 'migration partnerships' being negotiated by the European Commission. The goal of these partnerships is to keep the migrants in Africa in exchange for financial support from the EU. It seems that, as with the EU-Turkey deal, Merkel is setting the frameworks of agreements between African countries and the European Commission. The visit, after the deal with Turkey and the adoption of stricter refugee regulations, is another element of her policy aimed at regaining falling voter confidence ahead of the parliamentary election in 2017.