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EU RESTRICTS SALE OF INFLATABLE BOATS AND MOTORS TO LIBYA: HOW MUCH EFFICIENT IS THIS MOVE IN TACKLING THE MIGRANT SURGE ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN TO EUROPE?

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The Global Emergency and Counterterrorism Institute embraces the ideal to curb illegal migration not only from Africa to Europe but also across the world. The present policy brief reviews recent EU decision to restrict the sale of inflatable boats and motors to Libya in a bid to tackle the migrant surge across the Mediterranean. We hope our insights will be useful to officials, decision-makers, law enforcement agencies, civil societies and others organisations engaging in immigration issues.

THE SUBSTANCE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION DECISION

The European Union has restricted the sale of inflatable boats and motors to Libya. This recent decision is aiming to reduce the number of migrants dangerously crossing into Europe across the Mediterranean.

Member countries to ban such supply including outboard boats “where there are reasonable grounds to believe that they will be used by people smugglers and human traffickers”

During a meeting, EU foreign ministers agreed to allow member countries to ban such supply including outboard boats “where there are reasonable



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grounds to believe that they will be used by people smugglers and human traffickers”.

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The other decision issued by EU foreign ministers was to extend a border aid mission in Libya, where most of the 100,000 refugees and migrants departed from this year to arrive in Italy. Additionally, the measure will apply to boats and motors transiting through the EU, but not to fishermen or others with legitimate need for them.

THE MEANING OF THE EUROPEAN UNION DECISION

The European Union decision to restrict/ban the sale of inflatable boats and motors to Libya in a bid to curb the migratory crisis fails to address the roots of illegal migration. Solving the migrant surge amounts to answer the question of “Why” and not of “How”. In other words, one should not focus on How migrants manage to get to Europe but on Why they leave



their homeland in the first place. The recent EU decision seems to be implementing some sort of “embargo” on inflatable boats and motors to Libya. This move might not be efficient enough to provide a sustainable solution to irregular migration across the Mediterranean.

The European Union decision to restrict/ban the sale of inflatable boats and motors to Libya is inappropriate and may result in serious and unfortunate consequences. In the quest for a genuine solution to the migration surge, the European consideration of human life is obvious. However, when issuing policies and decisions, it is crucial to assess the whole situation from every angle. It is a prerequisite to understand the mindset of candidates to irregular migration but also that of migrant smugglers. Smugglers’ networks care only for their profit and not the safety of their clients. Smugglers capitalise on chaos to maximise gains from desperate and vulnerable human beings. Resultantly, in case these smugglers may no longer have access to inflatable boats and motors, they may well find cheaper and perilous alternatives that might result in an increase in deaths in the Mediterranean when crossing. As already reported by Operation Sophia, the destruction of vessels led to “an unintended consequence” as the smugglers started to send those willing



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to reach European coast aboard “unseaworthy vessels.” The report went on to observe that this has increased the risk for migrants, for “70 percent of all boats leaving the Libyan coast contributes to making journeys increasingly dangerous” leading to “a tragic increase in deaths” 2,150 dead as of 2 July 2017. Additionally, the recent Eu decision may stimulate the rise of black markets for the prohibited items. At some point, this may also result in various sorts of engines being fitted to makeshift boats which will surely result in deadly consequences.

The number of Libyans citizens candidates to irregular migration is not significant and the European Union decision to focus on Libya is a poor one. Illegal migrants going to Europe through Libya in most of the cases, come from the whole African continent including West Africa, East Africa, North Africa and Central Africa. In such a context, it is important to conceive the Libyan territory not as a departure point but as a “meeting point”, a “transit area” and more seriously a “waiting room” for illegal migrants en route to Italy and then to the European Union. Technically, at this step of the trip, it becomes virtually impossible to stimulate a change of mind of migrants who have been waiting in Libya, sometimes for years to embark. The decision by the Eu foreign ministers should have gained



more in focusing on migrants' steps before reaching Libya which is literally located at the doors steps of Europe. As recently pointed out by the report on Operation Sophia aimed to tackling the migrant surge from Libya, irregular migration starts onshore because "once the boats have set sail, it is too late to undermine the business of people smuggling."

The Global Emergency and Counterterrorism Institute have repeatedly suggested what it believes to be the most sustainable solutions to the surge of migrants. It is about searching for remedies by shifting to a holistic approach considering local, regional and international dynamics. Leaders and officials from various countries not only in Africa but also from Europe should work in concert to prevent the current migrant surge across the Mediterranean. Time has come to start filling the gap of education, lack of infrastructures, chronic unemployment and poverty between the west and the South. Initiative against corruption, authoritarian regimes, national and transnational crimes whether organised or not, illicit financial flows, terrorism, emergencies and other security challenges remain the most promising solutions to end the irregular migration across the Mediterranean.



About the author:

Gerard Emmanuel Kamdem Kanga was trained in law and political science, human rights, critical theory, security and gender analysis. Holding a doctoral degree in laws with focus on emergency regimes from the University of Pretoria, he has over the years, developed a sound expertise in emergency and security issues. Gerard is the Executive Director of the Global Emergency and Counterterrorism Institute.