



IOM TRANSIT CENTRE, AGADEZ (NIGER), MARCH 2017

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Migreurop is a network of organisations, activists and researchers in twenty different countries in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Our goal is to publicize and denounce policies which marginalize, in particular through detention in camps, different forms of deportation, border closures, as well as the externalization of migratory controls carried out by the European Union and its member states. We contribute to defending the fundamental rights of exiles (including the right to “leave any country, including his own”) and to promoting the freedom of movement and settlement.

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On 10 October 2016, Niamey welcomed German Chancellor Angela Merkel with pomp and ceremony. She made no secret of the fact that “security” and “immigration” were her two main concerns. Her purpose was to implement the endlessly repeated “recommendations”: Niger, a “transit country” should receive support in order to play its part as migration filter. Programmes to “reinforce local institutions” would make it possible to clearly distinguish between “refugees” – to be protected *in situ* – and “migrants” to be “escorted back” to their “countries of origin”. In other words, as the French president recently said, Niger and its neighbours (Libya, Chad, etc.) should yield, allow their country to become a territory of camps and accept their role as hotspot (see *Brief #4*). The neo-colonial underpinnings inherent in this view of Euro-African relations has led the highly accommodating Niger authorities to remind us that the interests of their nationals and their national sovereignty deserve greater consideration. These intergovernmental negotiations are still ongoing, whereas in Libya deals are struck directly with the heads of militias who are willing to play jailor, provided they can get their hands on the funds doled out to the border guards of the European Union (EU).

Niger: interference and neo-colonialism in the name of development

Sharing borders with Libya, Algeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Nigeria and Chad, Niger has long been a hub of multi-faceted migration, with zones that have traditionally had high levels of mobility (Niamey, Zinder, Agadez, Tahoua) – often circular – primarily within the sub-region (West and Central Africa) then, in some cases on towards Libya and Algeria and, in rare instances, towards Europe, where the Nigerien diaspora remains small.

While the country was for many years eclipsed by neighbouring Libya – the EU’s special partner in Gaddafi’s era – and very much on the periphery of migration control negotiations, Niger is today at the core of European policy. This situation has arisen, firstly, through a ricochet effect whereby Niger has taken in ill-treated African migrants sent back from Libya and, secondly as it has become a key transit country following the closure of several routes (through Mauritania and Mali) due to sub-regional conflicts (the wars in Libya in 2011 and Mali in 2012 and terrorist attacks in the Sahel); as a result of these closures the people who would normally travel along these routes have shifted across to Niger.

Going further

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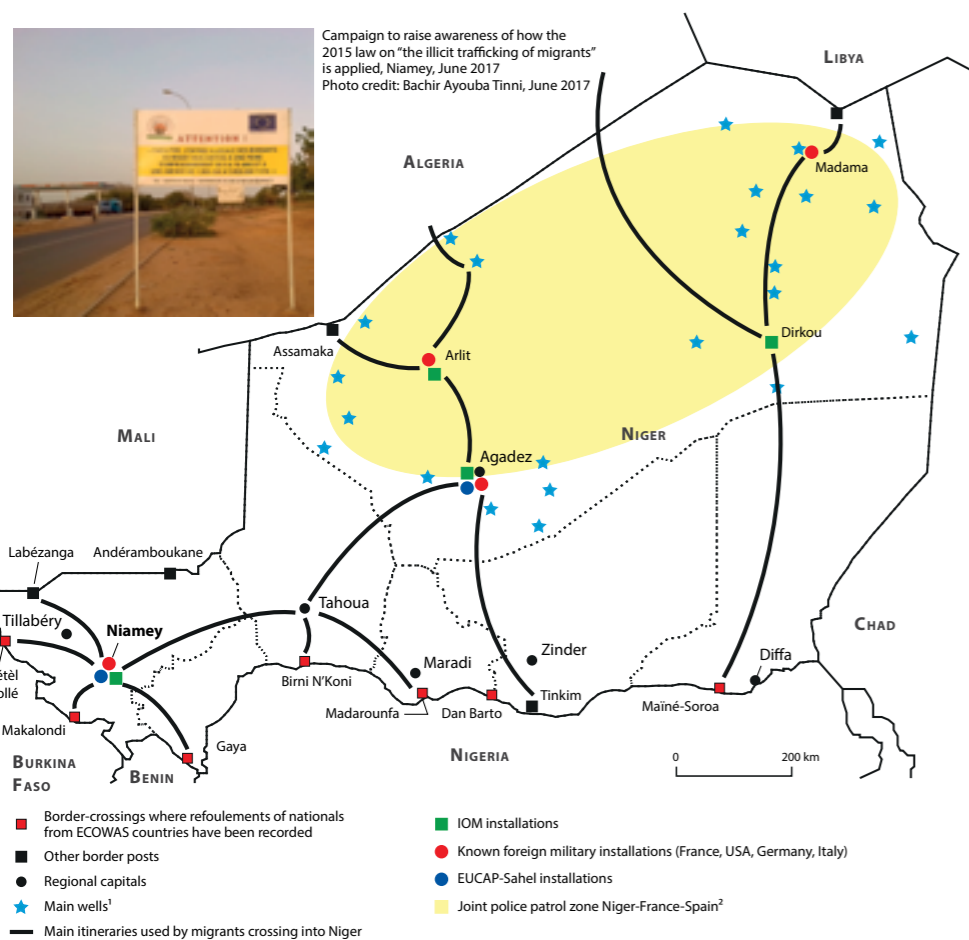
Niger: interference and neo-colonialism, in the name of development

CONTINUATION OF THE ARTICLE OF PAGE 1

Although the country has substantial natural resources (notably uranium), Niger is ranked as one of the poorest countries on the planet. Considered as stable since 2011, despite the insecurity of the broader region, Niger represents an area that is easily accessible for the European Union, which already has a presence there and is extending its influence: through the “Strategy for the security and development of the Sahel” (2011), by means of a civil mission to support internal security forces and the fight against terrorism and organised crime (EUCAP Sahel Niger, 2012), via a special partnership between the European Union and the Sahel G5, and sums allocated to Niger from the Trust Fund (see p.3) established at the Valleta Summit (Malta, November 2015).



Campania to raise awareness of how the 2015 law on the illicit trafficking of migrants is applied, Niamey, June 2017
Photo credit: Bachir Ayoubou Tinni, June 2017



¹ Located along the main routes across the Sahara (or very near them), wells are pivotal relay stations, vital for the survival of people crossing the desert. Increased checks on these crossing points lead drivers to avoid them and therefore take greater risks. The “criminalisation” of migration routes has led to a rise in the number of dead bodies found in the Sahara since the beginning of 2017.
² ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/niger-reseaux-eutf-18042016_fr.pdf & ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/t05-eutf-sah-ne-2016_fr.pdf

2013	2014	2015	2016	2017 (janvier - juin)
October: 92 Nigerien migrants die on the way to Algeria.	Algeria arranges the expulsion of several thousand Nigerien nationals and West Africans.	18 Nigerien migrants die on their way to Algeria.	34 Nigerien migrants die on the way to Algeria.	- 8 Nigerien migrants die on the way to Algeria - 144 West-African migrants die on their way to Libya - 159 migrants rescued from the desert by the Nigerien army

Until 2017, the road to Algeria was the most dangerous path for migrants due to irregular border crossing and the Algerian border policy. The application of the 2015 law on the illicit trafficking of migrants as well as tougher checks along the road has not led to a reduction in the number of tragedies. On the contrary, we are seeing a new increase in the number of people found dead in the Nigerien Sahara and in the number of people being rescued. The data presented is incomplete, drawn from Nigerien press, and has been analysed through three information portals since 2013 (<http://aniamey.com>; <https://nigerdiaspora.net>; <http://www.tamtaminfo.com>). These figures only account for the dead bodies that have been found. Not all are.

Map prepared by Florence Boyer, head of research at the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), member of URMIS (Université Paris-Denis Diderot). © Migreurop (2017) Atlas des migrants en Europe. Approches critiques des politiques migratoires, Paris, Armand Colin, 176 p.

country, has taken up the mantle and discourse of the EU’s security-based approach and has become a buffer country, intended to keep migrants in place by deterring and criminalising their movement. In addition, this is all taking place within a regional area of free movement (ECOWAS protocol) and despite the fact that the “transit economy” represents a key source of revenue for the country’s population. The meagre rewards reaped locally have serious repercussions (see below). With strong displays of discontent from “actors in the field of migration” in the Agadez region, Niger could soon find its status as special partner downgraded. The main financial flows are already being redirected to Libya, which is once again dominating the attentions of Italy and the EU.

Through shape-shifting multi-layer collaboration (political, financial and military) that incorporates all existing frameworks for cooperation (the Cotonou agreement, Rabat Process and Valleta, multi- and bi-lateral approaches) and a large number of actors (see box), the EU has – since 2012 but especially since 2015 – made Niger the lynchpin of its regional approach, continuously providing reinforcements in order to secure the land borders of West Africa for its own benefit.

The mission entrusted to Niger, largely in exchange for international political endorsement, is to stem the flow of migrants in the region – all supposedly destined for Europe – by “retaining” populations in the country’s departure zones and by facilitating deportations from or to neighbouring countries. African nationals ricochet from one border to the next, sometimes under cover of an agreement, as is the case between Algeria and Niger, which, in turn – through the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – sends non-nationals back to their country of origin, or enables their “voluntary” return from their national territory (see box).

At the risk of destabilising part of the sub-region, Niger, a transit

Failure foretold: transforming the transit economy by force of arms

The Sahel is among the priority zones listed in the Trust Fund for Africa, which funds activities in many countries throughout the sub-region. Nearly 140 million euros (140M€) have been allocated to Niger through this fund in order to “prevent irregular migration”, ensure “better management of migration” (91.9M€) and “develop a global strategy for stability, security and resilience” (48M€, of which 36M€ is for “border management and security”) – a paltry sum, especially in light of the six billion Euros the EU has pledged to give Turkey for the same purpose (see Brief #5).

In concrete terms, 60 % of funds relating directly to migration is intended for “keeping populations in their home countries,” stemming and controlling migration, and sending back migrants. Of the 140 M€, only 28 M€ goes directly to Niger (AJUSEN programme and PAIERA action plan). The rest is to be managed by six inter-governmental or cooperation agencies (see box) and one local NGO. Largely drawn from the budget normally devoted to “development”, these forms of funding essentially align with the EU’s own interests and make little contribution to improving the lives of the local population.

Niger has also made changes to its legislative framework and policing practices. The law relating to the “illicit trafficking of migrants”, adopted in 2015, criminalises transporting or providing shelter to migrants. The consequences of this reform include refoulements at the border, drivers being arrested, so-called “facilitators of illegal migration” being convicted and the dismantling of the “ghettos” where persons in transit find shelter.

Although migratory movements across the region have dipped only slightly since the entry into force of this reform, the “transit economy” has changed radically. The city of Agadez sees ever fewer gains from this circulation. Those who benefit from the criminalisation of migration are the traffickers and security forces.

The migrants themselves, driven underground, must circumvent the roads and wells most subject to checks. At the border posts, they may be blackmailed by law enforcement agents and “road blockers”. Now facing much greater risks, the numbers of those found dead in the desert are on the rise. Meanwhile, the local population – deprived of income from the “transit economy” and

THE AGENTS OF CONTROL OVER NIGER’S BORDERS

Action by the IOM essentially consists of monitoring movement and policies on returns (participation in refoulements from Algeria, running five transit centres open to people who have shown a willingness to return to their points of departure, and promoting “voluntary” return operations).

Alongside the IOM, the main government development agencies feature amongst the beneficiaries of the Trust Fund for their actions that will, supposedly, help to reduce the number of departures.

As part of a “State reconstruction” project, CIVIPOL, the consulting and service company of the French

Ministry of the Interior has been appointed to assist local security forces in their mission of “territorial control, investigation and maintenance of public security”.

Aside from the European agency Frontex – which has had a liaison officer in Niger since August 2017 – 120 international experts have been deployed across the territory as part of the operation EUCAP Sahel Niger, while a “Joint Investigation Team” (ECI) brings together Spanish, French and Nigerien police. All the while, the French, German and Italian military – present to support the French-led operation Barkhane – alongside the American army, are taking part in the Sahel G5 Summit.

Following the allocation of EU funding, migration in Niger – hitherto considered “transit” – is now described as “irregular”. This, in turn, leads to reinforcement of the operational and repressive powers of local authorities, ramping up of border checks, profiling of migrants and the “monitoring” of travel. EUCAP Sahel Niger – whose mandate was extended to include migration issues in August 2015 – and foreign armies present in Niger (see box) are stepping in to assist in these operations, which is a sign of how concerns ostensibly about “security” are actually being manipulated to achieve other ends.

without other professional opportunity – sinks deeper into poverty as mounting frustration leads to fears of another armed rebellion.

Even though civil society has opposed this crackdown in the name of security, despite intensified repression, the elected officials on the region of Agadez – who previously stood firmly against these measures – now express support for “keeping populations in their countries of origin”. The scramble to pocket European funding has indeed begun.