

EU approves military operation against Mediterranean refugees

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The European Union is putting its plans for a military intervention in the Mediterranean and North Africa into action. The decision was made by EU foreign and defence ministers at a meeting in Brussels on Monday.

A press release states: “The Council has agreed today (18 May) to establish an EU military operation—EUNAVFOR Med—to break the business model of smugglers and traffickers of people in the Mediterranean. This decision, which is one element of the comprehensive EU response to the migration challenge, will enable the formal start of the operational planning for the naval operation.”

The first phase of the mission to uncover the smuggling networks and their routes will begin immediately, to be followed by a second and third phase “that would work to search, seize and disrupt the assets of smugglers.”

According to the press release, the Italian Rear Admiral Enrico Credendino will direct the intervention. Rome will be the headquarters of the operation, which will initially last 12 months. The costs of a two-month “preparatory phase” are estimated at €11.82 million.

The appointment of Credendino alone makes clear the nature of the mission. The Italian Admiral has been in command of Operation Atalanta, the EU’s military intervention off the coast of Somalia. Warships of EU member states hunt for suspected pirates, attacking not only ships, but also supposed pirate camps ashore.

Although initially only the first phase is to be implemented, it is clear that the EU is prepared for much more extensive action. According to the press release, the operation will “tackle the root causes of irregular migration as requested by the European Council on 23 April 2015.”

At that time, following a series of terrible disasters in the Mediterranean with more than 2,000 deaths, the EU

leaders had adopted the infamous “Ten-Point Plan for Migration.” It includes stricter police and military operations against refugees and lays the foundation for a massive military intervention in Africa.

Since then, the plans have advanced further. Prior to the meeting on Monday, *Spiegel Online* reported a concept developed by the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini: “What Mogherini has prepared over six pages, is no less than the possible launch of a new EU military mission.” Its mandate relies on Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, which authorizes the use of military force.

The text of Mogherini’s document suggests a far-reaching plan of attack. “The mandate should expressly allow operations in the waters of Libya and on Libyan territory to destroy the smugglers’ infrastructure there,” it states. Threats from the weapons in the possession of Libyan militias, including air defence systems and ground-to-air missiles should be countered with a martial “Force Protection” operation prepared for a “hostile environment.”

The EU’s plans are as revealing as they are criminal. Of course, the European elites and their henchmen in the mainstream media fail to make any mention of the fact that the chaos in Libya and the dramatic refugee disaster in the Middle East and North Africa are a direct result of Western policy. The wars conducted and supported by the US and the European states—including the NATO bombing of Libya in 2011 and the arming of Islamist militias to overthrow Gaddafi—have destroyed an entire region and turned millions into refugees.

Now, the imperialist powers are using the disaster to once again prepare military interventions behind the backs of the population.

Over the weekend, *Bild am Sonntag* published an “exclusive interview” with the German Commander

Alexander Gottschalk, on board the frigate *Hessen* off the Libyan coast. While the paper tried to present the naval action as a “humanitarian” operation to rescue small refugee children, it is clear that military actions have already begun.

Asked what would happen to the boats after the refugees were rescued, the captain responded: “We must destroy the boats because they are a maritime hazard to other boats on the open sea. On the other hand, it could be that we erroneously regard an empty boat from the air as a boat in distress and go to save it. That can cost valuable time lost in saving occupied boats. Therefore we let the air out of inflatable dinghies and set them on fire. We also sink the less common wooden boats.”

Even *Die Zeit*, which publishes war propaganda in weekly instalments, noted under the headline “German frigate has license to sink” that using the military to destroy smugglers’ boats was “controversial.”

In addition to legal questions, it was “also unclear how the boats are to be detected. The military access powers were still open, with an eye on the position of the UN Security Council.”

To put it plainly: without a UN mandate, the military operation is in violation of international law and has even less legal cover than the criminal NATO attack on Libya four years ago!

Nevertheless, in contrast to its hesitation to intervene in Libya then, Germany stands at the head of the intervention today. Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD, Social Democratic Party) declared in Brussels that the mission could begin quickly, adding that this was the consensus within the EU. At the same time, Steinmeier, who has repeatedly demanded a greater role for Germany in the world, warned that military action alone would not change the situation.

What is envisaged by Steinmeier and the German elite is a much broader EU engagement in Africa. Even before the recent EU foreign ministers’ meeting in April, he had declared to the press: “I think we need to see that we are faced with a daunting task ... We know that the migration pressure will not relent as long as we have instability in North Africa and therefore what needs our attention, and it will be not be resolved in the short term, are the transit routes and countries of origin, and the most important transit country is at the moment Libya, a country that is falling apart if we do not

interrupt and reverse the process.”

On Monday, at a joint press conference with Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU, Christian Democratic Union), he urged the “bringing to power of a government of national unity” in this resource-rich country.

A WSWS perspective, “The refugee catastrophe and the new ‘scramble for Africa,’” explained what the real objectives of Brussels and Berlin are.

To understand this, one needs only to look at the “Africa Policy Guidelines” adopted by the German government in the spring of 2014. The document speaks of the “growing relevance of Africa for Germany and Europe,” stemming, in part, from the growing economy and “rich natural resources” of the continent. The statement calls on the German government to act “early, quickly, decisively and substantially,” and to “use the full range of its available resources.”



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