

At Abidjan summit, EU and France intensify neo-colonial scramble for Africa

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The European Union (EU) and African Union (AU) held a joint summit November 29-30 in Abidjan in the Ivory Coast. The meeting was overshadowed by the unfolding disaster caused by imperialist wars in Libya and the Sahel region, and escalating neo-colonial interventions of the EU powers, particularly France. It brought together leaders of 50 African and European countries to concentrate on EU plans to block immigration from Africa and, without saying it openly, to undermine China's growing influence in the continent.

In the lead-up to the summit, protests erupted across Africa and in France against the barbaric treatment of African refugees by the Islamist militias controlling Libya, where CNN filmed the operations of slave markets that have re-appeared since the 2011 NATO war. After these protests, African regimes withdrew their diplomats from Tripoli.

The reappearance of slavery expresses the political essence of European imperialism's neo-colonial intervention in Africa.

Six years after the military intervention on the pretext of “human rights” and the “protection” of the Libyan population against Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's government, the result is not only a humanitarian disaster—as African migrants, interned by the hundreds of thousands in horrific conditions in the camps, are sold as slaves on Libyan markets. Those responsible for this crime are now proposing to carry out a similar policy. This time they are presenting it under the cynical label of a “struggle against slavery,” reinforcing the militarization of the region and creating conditions for great-power conflicts in Africa.

Citing the threadbare pretext of the “war on terror,” the summit declared the military operations launched in the Sahel by Paris and Berlin would be intensified,

including the new G5 Sahel military force (Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mauritania), which operates together with French troops in the region.

“We will support ongoing efforts to fight terrorism, including by supporting the G5 Sahel,” declares the summit statement. French President Emmanuel Macron demanded that these countries, among the poorest in the world, provide thousands of troops for French-led military operations.

A specific summit statement on migrants in Libya calls for a “task force” to operate in the country. At the end of the summit, AU Commission President Mahamat Moussa Faki declared, “We have decided to set up a task force to act now to bring home 3,800 migrants from Libya.” He added that the main task “in the short term is to help ... women and children who are in this inhuman situation.”

The day after the summit, Macron insisted that Africa police units be sent to Libya, adding that “the deployment of military forces or police by France is not being considered at this point.” Since France already unofficially operates within Libya, such a “rescue” operation can only signify the setting up of military operations to prepare a new imperialist war in Libya.

On the pretext of fighting “people smugglers and traffickers,” the EU wants to militarily control the routes taken by migrants across the Mediterranean and Europe. The summit announced the creation in each country of special forces in order to accelerate the deportation of migrants back to their countries of origin.

Another “priority” underscored by the summit statement is to increase European investment, particularly from private sources, in Africa. According to Ivory Coast president Alassane Ouattara, the goal is “the structural transformation of Africa” and a

“transformation on the ground of Africa's resources.” This policy, including a pledge to use a European External Investment Plan to leverage up to €44 billion [\$US 52.3 billion] in investments in Africa, is aimed at increasing European capital's influence with the African bourgeoisies.

Indeed, one of the EU's main goals in the summit was to block the development of Chinese influence in Central and Western Africa. Just before the Abidjan summit opened, the Second China-Africa Investment Forum—in which hundreds of Chinese and African officials discussed boosting Chinese investment in Africa—was ending in Rabat, Morocco.

The European imperialist powers are alarmed at China's rising economic and political influence in Africa. *Le Monde* recently cited a McKinsey & Company report noting that “Chinese firms already generate 12 percent of African industrial production now estimated at \$500 billion (€430 billion). In the infrastructure sector, Chinese firms already have 50 percent of market share. More than 10,000 Chinese firms are operating on the continent, and 90 percent of them are private. ... This is enough to deflate a lot of received wisdom.”

EU and especially French imperialism, which maintained considerable economic and political control over its former colonies after “decolonization,” aim to block this development. Throughout the post-1960s’ period, the economies and societies of Francophone West Africa were subordinated to the needs of French imperialism by countless mechanisms, including the denomination of African monetary reserves in the CFA franc and a network of permanent military bases in Africa. Paris organized dozens of coups in order to preserve this control.

Moreover, the Sahel, which has abundant reserves of petroleum and natural gas, constitutes a key zone for exploitation by the multinational corporations. Beijing recently set up its own aid fund for the Sahel.

Macron's trip to Burkina Faso on the eve of the Abidjan summit had already made clear the neo-colonial character of the EU intervention in Africa. When he arrived in the capital, Ouagadougou, on November 27, he was greeted by hostile protests. The next day, protesters threw stones at the vehicles accompanying him. Near Ouagadougou University, where Macron was to speak, cars were destroyed before

his arrival. Fearing protests, Burkina Faso's government felt compelled to close all the schools on Monday and Tuesday.

A humiliating joke by Macron at the expense of Burkina President Roch Kaboré, whom he ordered to fix the air conditioning in the hall where they were speaking, only underlined his arrogant and neo-colonial outlook. Both in Burkina Faso and neighboring Ivory Coast, Macron's joke was widely seen as a humiliation for the Burkina government—perhaps deserved, given broad opposition to the Burkina government's collaboration with French imperialist wars.

Macron is already working closely with Libyan forces who are persecuting migrants. He has proposed to build triage centers in Libyan detention camps, where French officials would work with their Libyan counterparts to identify a minority of refugees to be admitted into Europe—and prevent all the rest from leaving North Africa.



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