Interests and disadvantages of migration for North African states

1.   Introduction

"North and sub-Saharan African governments argue that the EU approaches migration one-sided as a security problem and that it is impossible to stop migration as long as its economic and political root causes persist", de Haas (2006) says. Although while in Europe, there is only recently attention for the development aspect of migration, it is not a new issue for North African countries. They implement policies to prevent 'brain drain', to encourage return migration, to stimulate remittances and to channel them into productive investments, and to involve diaspora populations into national development strategies (de Haas, 2007).

Different actors have different goals. Every social, economical or political process, although not driven by one specific actor, supports or affects in varying degrees interests of actors. It is important to take these influences into account when studying such processes. This is also the case for migration. It is not a neutral process, but a process that supports and hurts the interests of actors in some degree. For some actors, migration is a more advantageous process than for others. This papers takes a look on the interests and disadvantages of migration for North African states.

2.   Remittances and economical interests

According to the International Organization for Migration (2006), remittances consist of all the monetary transfers send by migrants to their country of origin. Generally remittances are sent by migrant workers to relatives in their country of origin. In 2005 development countries received 167 billion in remittances.

Although the EU aims at complying North African countries to it's migration policy, de Haas (2006) argues that North African and sub-Saharan African countries have little genuine interest in curbing emigration. "Continuing emigration serves vital political and economic interests in relieving pressure on internal labor markets and generating substantial remittances", he argues.

Sending remittances to their countries of origin is an important motivation of migration for North African people (Zhory, 2005). Remitted funds are important for the economy of the North African countries at the macro level as well as at the micro level. According to the World Bank (2008), remittances to Morocco were good for 9.5 percent of the GDP in 2006. In Tunisia and Egypt

remittances were good for 5 percent of the GDP, and in Algeria 2.2 percent. Apart from remittances, some North-African countries benefit from migration by encouraging migration in order to manage unemployment levels (Baldwin-Edwards, 2006; Goldschmidt, 2006).

Despite the common idea that remittances are not used for productive investments, De Haas (2005) argues that remittances potentially enable migrants and their family to invest in agriculture and other private enterprises. Migration should thus not lead to passive dependency on remittances, but can lead to increased economic activities.

Financial transfers from remittances are higher than official development assistance (ODA) (de Haas, 2005). During the whole 1990's, officially recorded remittances to developing countries have been 17% higher than ODA.

3.   *Transit and destination migration*

Another reason why North African countries are reluctant to adopt dominant EU discourses on combating illegal immigration is a fear of these countries that adopting such a policy would reinforce their position as destination country (de Haas, 2006). Some sub-Saharan migrants consider North-African as their primary destination, and migrants that fail to reach Europe join migrant communities in Northern Africa. North African states are also reluctant to readmit third country nationals, who used their territories as a transit to go to Europe. They are opposed to EU proposals for establishing processing centers for immigrants in North Africa and sea patrols because these measures threaten national sovereignty and could encourage more immigrants to settle in Northern Africa.

The increasing trend of international migration during the period from 1970 until 1990 was reversed in the 1990's, and by 2000 the region was estimated to host 1.9 million international migrants (Zlotnik, 2004). According to de Haas (2006) between 2.2 and 4 million, mainly Sudanese, sub-Saharan migrants now live in Egypt, 1 to 1.5 million live in Libya and at least 100,000 sub-Saharan migrants live in Mauritania and Algeria. Tunisia and Morocco house smaller but growing numbers of sub-Saharan immigrants, currently several tens of thousands. The sub-Saharan migration to North-African countries substantially increased in the 1990's as a consequence of the "Pan-African" immigration policies[1], pursued by Libya, and civil wars and economic decline in sub-Saharan countries.

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1   In the 1990's, as result of the UN embargo and the lack of support of other Arab countries, Qadhafi positioned himself as an African leader (de Haas, 2006). As a part of his new pan-African policy, sub-Saharan immigrants were attracted to work in Libya, in the spirit of pan-African solidarity. They usually worked in unattractive jobs, that Libyans did not want to take up.

Transit migration is migration to a country that is a stopover between the home and the destination country (Fargues, Bensaâd, 2007). Although the circulation of persons is easier and cheaper nowadays than it used to be, immigration is continuously more difficult as a result of tightened border controls. Migrants cannot reach the destination country they prefer and stay in a transit country, becoming their new destination. North African states are reluctant to take measures that would reinforce their position as destination country. Why is that? Fargues and Bensaâd (2007) see five reasons:

1) Economical reasons: North-African countries already suffer from high unemployment and low returns, and migrants are competitors with nationals for scarce resources.

2) Social challenges: migrants often form additional groups and cause tensions with the local population.

3) Legal and administrative challenges: most of these countries perceive themselves as sending countries and lack of legal provisions, governing the entry and settlement of aliens.

4) Security concerns: transit migration is linked with the emergence of criminal networks such as human trafficking networks.

5) Diplomatic challenges: transit migrations is a bone of connection to the home and intended destination country. Transit migration requires cooperation with home and destination countries.

4. Brain drain

According to Sabour (1995) "[...] the countries whose highly skilled people move to other areas consider it rightly as detrimental to their national interest and development". There are several factors behind the migration and non-return of highly skilled people, the so called "brain drain". A first reason is the lack of freedom of expression in North African countries. Secondly there is an encouraging, flexible and permissive academical atmosphere in guest countries and a lack of it in North African states. A third reason is psychological and cultural identification with Western values, and a last reason is the construction of a social network and ties in the guest country.

African countries are concerned about EU policies to attract high-skilled migrants (Kubosva, 2007). They fear a brain drain as the result of the EU's "Blue Card" system and urge the EU to consider the ethical aspects of it. For its part, the EU says that the blue card scheme will contain measures to "minimize" the danger of brain drain from poor countries, such as banning active recruitments in developing countries already suffering from a serious brain drain. The EU's proposal also supports

circular migration, which allows those with a blue card to go back to their home countries and return again to Europe, without having the whole procedure again. According to the EU high-skilled workers are more likely to go back to heir home countries this way.

Brain drain is said to have two negative effects on the sending country's economy (Dos Santos, Postel-Vinay; 2003). Firstly, as the skilled workers are generally among the highest tax players, the state looses a substantial amount of income. Secondly, the state bears the cost of the investments in highly-skilled people, such as education, while it does not receive the returns of it.

Despite North African states' concerns, Baldwin-Edwards (2006) argues with data that there is not a serious problem of brain-drain for any North African country. For other African countries however, the same cannot be said.

Other authors also nuance the burden caused by brain drain in the sending country. The possibility of migration raises the expected return of immigration and is thus an incentive for education (Dos Santos, Postel-Vinay; 2003). As not all highly-educated people are able to migrate, the possibility of brain drain increases the level of education in a country. Another argument is that, if the research sector of the sending country is less efficient than that of the receiving country, the sending economy can benefit from imitation and knowledge diffusion, in case of brain drain. As Olesen (2002) notes, migration is rarely only in one way. More often than not, migrants intent to return to the home country after a shorter or longer period of time abroad. There are several possible reasons to return. Cerase (as cited in Olesen, 2002) distinguishes four categories: *return of failure*: migrants who did not manage to find a job in their guest county, *return of conservatism*: migrants who realize they cannot thrive in a different cultures, *return of retirement*: migrants who want to retire in their home country, and *return of innovation*: migrants who return with more knowledge to their home country, this is the so called brain gain (see further).

Despite the "myth" of brain drain, many countries perceive the migration of highly-skilled laborers as disadvantageous and take measures aimed at preventing it (de Haas, 2005). In fact, stay-at-home policies have proved to be ineffective and even counterproductive. De Haas gives the example of Morocco, where civil servants who emigrate are excluded from the civil service for their lifetime, causing that they cannot deploy their knowledge and skills upon return.

5. Returnees and brain gain

The oil crisis in 1973 meant the end of the recruitment of North-African workers in Europe (de Haas, 2007). European countries tried to incite migrants to return. These policies typically failed. The first reason was the lack of opportunities for economic reintegration in most countries of

origin. The second reason is that the increasingly restrictive immigration policies and visa restrictions had the paradoxical effect of pushing migrants into permanent settlement rather than the reverse.

According to Dos Santos and Postel-Vinay (2003), the free choice of workers to choose their location makes it possible that some natives decide to return to their home country once they have accumulated a certain amount of knowledge abroad, while some prefer to stay permanently in the same country, either the home country or abroad. Such two-way mobility can have an expansionary effect on the economy of the home country. Migrants acquire human capital in their guest countries and diffuse some of their knowledge in their home country when they return. De Haas (2005) also agrees with the benefits of brain drain for home countries: "In the medium to long run, in particular, the departure of the highly skilled may have beneficial effects in the form of a counterflow of remittances, investments, trade relations, new knowledge, innovations, attitudes and information".

However, some authors nuance the actual benefits of brain gain. Nayfeh (2007) argues that countries have failed to transform their brain drain into a brain gain. There is a lack of research facilities, with the average allocation for research and development in Muslim countries being only about 0.2 percent. Moreover, there is a lack of academic freedom, and fear of persecution.

6. Development and military aid

Migration streams are in the interest of North African states in the way that they can use cooperation with the EU in controlling it as a bargaining chip in negotiations of development aid (de Haas, 2006).

Several EU countries have reacted to increasing sub-Saharan immigration by attempting to "externalize" border controls (de Haas, 2006). They put pressure on North African states to tighten their borders and to sign readmission agreements, in return for development aid, financial support for border controls, military equipment, and a limited numbers of temporary work permits for migrants. De Haas gives Italy and Spain as examples of states that have recently concluded agreements as these with African countries. Since 2003, Spain and Morocco, as well as Italy and Libya, are cooperating in border patrolling.

Libya made an agreement with Italy in 2004 to stop illegal migration and deport unauthorized sub-Saharan migrants to their countries of origin (de Haas, 2006). Two months after the Libyan-Italian agreement, the EU agreed to lift its 18-years arms embargo, giving the abandonment of it's weapons of mass destruction program as the reason. Italy had lobbied hard to lift the ban so that Libya could import equipment to better control its borders.

According to de Haas (2006), African states perceive the aid provided in exchange for migration control as too limited to have a meaningful impact, while they complain about the EU's protectionist economic policies as harming Africa's development.

7. International standing

Policies of North African states concerning migration can both improve and deteriorate the countries standing in the international community.

Libya for example collaborated more closely with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the EU than any other North African country in terms of border control, as a part of its efforts to improve the country's standing in the international community (de Haas, 2006). In 2003 and 2004, Morocco and Tunisia passed new immigration laws against irregular migration and human smuggling, in the line of the EU's policy.

On the other hand, North African states are harshly criticized for their ill treatment of migrants. According to Baldwin-Edwards (2006) "the treatment of illegal migrants, returned migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees and guestworkers have been shown by all independent sources to be at best inadequate, at worst profoundly inhuman".

For example, although Morocco and Nigeria cooperate on readmission of illegal migrants residing in Morocco, more usual illegal migrants are imprisoned or simply evicted from the Moroccan territory in the Algerian desert (Baldwin-Edwards, 2006). Moreover, violence from authorities against migrants is common. Out of 2,193 cases between 2003 and 2005 of sub-Saharan nationals being treated by Médecins Sans Frontières after physical violence, 52% injuries were caused by Moroccan security services, 29% by criminal networks and 15% by Spanish security services.

In 2005, after arresting several hundred migrants encamped in the mountains surrounding the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, Morocco deported them to Algeria (Goldschmidt, 2006). Some of them were abandoned without food or water in the desert. Only two weeks earlier, 15 migrants were killed by fire while trying to cross the fence to the Spanish enclaves. The events shocked the international community and media criticism and protest of human rights organizations was intense.

8. Relations with Sub-Sahara countries

De Haas (2006) argues that "EU countries fail to understand the strategic geopolitical and economic interests competing North African states have in maintaining good relations with sub-Saharan states". Not only is migration a factor in their relations with their Northern neighbors, but also with

their Southern neighbors. Relations with sub-Saharan states are likely to be harmed by mass expulsions, the maltreatment of immigrants, or visa requirements introduced after EU pressure.

Goldschmidt (2006) gives the example of Morocco. Since the beginning of the 1960's, the country has taken care to preserve its relations with sub-Saharan countries. Morocco is engaged in educational, military and economical cooperation with sub-Saharan states. The country has interest in preserving and improving these relations. Migrant deportation however is likely to cast Morocco in a bad light in the region.

9. Conclusion

North African states have both advantages and disadvantages in the migration process. Remittances, migration that eases unemployment rates and return migration are perceived by them as positive, while brain drain and transit migration are perceived as negative aspects of the process. However, brain drain could serve the interest of North African states, and provide them with knowledge and skilled people, if these state first take measures that create a stimulating environment. Development aid is used by European states as a way to put pressure on their North-African neighbors to tighten their borders. Although serving their interest, official development assistance is generally less important than remittances, and although cooperation can improve their international standing, taking part in the EU's security approach can also damage their image. It is also problematic for their relations with sub-Saharan countries, which some of them have expanded in the last decades.

The migration process is thus sometimes advantageous while sometimes disadvantageous for North African states. These unequal interests could serve as an explanation of sometimes apparently contradictory migration policies.

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