10th Käte Hamburger Dialogue:
Prospective Migration Policy – Scenario Building on Relations Between West Africa and Europe

Executive Summary

In 2017, Käte Hamburger Kolleg / Centre for Global Cooperation Research (KHK/GCR21) together with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) held a series of workshops on "The future of migration policy: Building scenarios on the relations between Europe and West Africa". The four resulting scenarios are intended to shed light on what is at stake, as well as on the context of migration policies between the two regions. As one of the scenario presentation platforms, the 10th Käte Hamburger Dialogue on 'Prospective Migration Policy – Scenario Building on Relations Between West Africa and Europe' featured Prof. Dr Petra Bendel (Interdisciplinary Centre for Area Studies at the Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg—FAU), Dr Stephen Adaawen (Alumni Postdoc Fellow at KHK/GCR21), Prof. Dr Volker Heins (KHK/GCR21 and Ruhr University Bochum), Dr Benjamin Schraven (German Development Institute in Bonn), and Prof. Dr Tobias Debiel (KHK/GCR21 and Institute for Development and Peace—INEF) as the moderator.

In their welcome remarks, Dr Markus Böckenförde (KHK/GCR21), Elisabeth Braune (FES) and Dr Norbert Jegelka (Interdisciplinary Centre for Integration and Migration Research—InZentIM) introduced their respective institutes and the outcome of their cooperation. The four resulting scenarios had so far been presented to practitioners and politicians at the European Parliament in Brussels, in Abidjan during the EU-African Summit 2017, and at the Bundestag in Berlin. Thus, this Käte Hamburger Dialogue saw the first academic discussion about implications of the scenarios on existing or new strands of research.

Introducing the methodology behind the scenarios, Professor Debiel elaborated on the “Shell Method” whose key feature is the inclusion of diverse teams with members from various relevant backgrounds. Developed draft scenarios are tested for relevance, plausibility, clarity and other criteria to ensure that all contributors in the teams agree with them. Before giving the floor to the panellists to present the scenarios, Debiel mapped driving forces and critical uncertainties to migration which the first workshops had identified as crucial parameters for the building of their scenarios. Driving forces include; for example, governance, unemployment, migration policies, demography, political processes, economic policies and insecurity. Among important critical
uncertainties which would affect future developments of migration patterns and migration policies are e.g. a possible political or financial collapse of the EU, (civil) uprisings in West Africa, anarchy in the Sahel region, and other external escalations.

Next, Stephen Adaawen presented the first two scenarios which are rather pessimistic about future developments of the EU and West Africa, and their relationship. The first scenario, “Unequal Relationship”, presents a future in which a deteriorating economic and political situation in West Africa leads to a dramatic increase in migration to Europe. In a “Conflicting Relationship”, a fragmented Europe closes up against migration, pushing West Africa(ns) to seek alternative destinations and partners.

Petra Bendel then introduced the other scenarios, which appeared to be more optimistic about the shared future of the two regions. The “Pragmatic Relationship”-scenario sees Europe and West Africa making joint efforts to manage migration and minimize irregular migration from West Africa to the EU, e.g. through the externalisation of EU-borders into Africa and a refocused European development effort and changed export policies. Most optimistic of all is the fourth scenario which depicts an “Equal Relationship” between Europe and West Africa leading to a decline in irregular migration in a context of transition towards a balanced partnership. Stabilization and political improvement in West Africa give reason to hope for better quality of life there, and the EU opens up more legal immigration opportunities.

In his comment, Benjamin Schraven pointed out deficits in research that the scenario building process suggests: the often severe data and research gaps regarding West Africa – EU migration flows. He reminded the panel and the audience that the influence of certain factors on migration and possible incentives for migration are yet to be understood. Schraven emphasized the need for more qualitative research about irregular migration and stressed his assessment that researchers barely comprehend possible interconnections between different migration types (e.g. rural-urban and international migration).

Volker Heins’s input criticized the scenarios for being overly careful in their visions of the future and for relying on questionable assumptions. Especially, the fourth scenario, according to Heins, was based on a neo-Malthusian cause-assumption positing that migration is caused by poverty, bad governance and uncontrolled population growth. He cited contrary empirical evidence showing that increased migration comes from middle income countries rather than low income countries and explained the positive correlation with the increased
availability of resources. He further criticized the unbalanced perception the scenarios entail when the Four Futures demand one-sided reforms in Africa and ignore European xenophobic problems as well as the fact that some European countries ranked lower on governance indices than some African countries.

Inputs by the panel were followed by a brief discussion between panellists and with the audience. Reacting to a question about the implications of data and knowledge scarcity for the scenarios, Schraven explained that additional data would probably only increase the scenarios’s precision without significantly changing them. Bendel, however, found that especially driving forces of migration are under-researched. While there are “migration humps” that can be linked to certain factors, driving factors of migration often vary between countries or even individuals. Comments from students in the audience criticized that effects of climate change were yet to be included sufficiently as driving factors of migration. Another missing factor pointed out by audience members was the influence of media and the idealized and misleading images of Europe and the United States produced by the film industry. Other criticisms went even further, claiming that an “Equal Relationship”, as in the fourth scenario, fails to represent the concept of equality if the direction of migration in that scenario remains unidirectional, from West Africa to Europe.

The Dialogue wrapped up with one last round of comments from the panellists. Adaawen took up the point about media influence on the image of Europe abroad, agreeing that “even I had weird perceptions about Europe [before coming here]”. He advocated for a relaxation of restrictive EU visa policies, arguing that this might keep people from resorting to desperate means for their journey and promote more circular migration between the two regions. Heins stressed that humans have always migrated and the “propensity to migrate might just be human”. Bendel expressed her hope for more interdisciplinary research to close the knowledge gaps in migration research. Responding to the criticism regarding the unidirectionality of migration flows in the “Equal Relationship” scenario, she explained that EU-West Africa migration was included in the scenario, especially in the form of African diaspora returning from Europe and investing to build up their country. Closing the discussion, Schraven reminded everyone of the African perspective on migration which he described as opposite to the European one. From an African point of view, (regular) migration is mutually beneficial to both regions, as African migrants can bolster the shrinking European labour force caused by Europe’s changing demographic and Africa benefits from migrants’ remittances. Instead of focusing on ways to block irregular migration, policymaking efforts should look to ways to enable and regulate regular migration.