

# Gatekeepers of the European Union

## Sudan after El-Bashir

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## Preface

Five years ago, borderline europe e.V. held the first externalisation conference in Berlin. We scrutinized the treaties, agreements and control mechanisms of the European Union, established to seal off the borders of the European Union, winner of the UN Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. Ten years later, people are still drowning in the Mediterranean, dying of thirst crossing the desert, because there are still no safe escape routes.

Sudan under El-Bashir has played a crucial role in securing the borders that have been outsourced to Africa: El-Bashir, and thus Sudan, became Europe's gatekeeper for refugees and migrants from East Africa and other parts of the world.

With the 2019 revolution, human rights activists and people on the run had high hopes that a new democratic, open and more just world would emerge in Sudan. The coup in October 2021 destroyed this hope.

What is the situation today? What consequences did the revolution and counter-coup have for refugees and People on the Move? How are the European actors reacting?

You may listen to the fifth externalisation conference focussing on East Africa on our Youtube channel.

This brochure is the result of a joint event with Bildungswerk Berlin of the Heinrich Böll Foundation and Africa Center for Justice and Peace Studies, Karthoum.



Andrea Stäritz

# The Karthoum Process is a Disgrace for the European Union



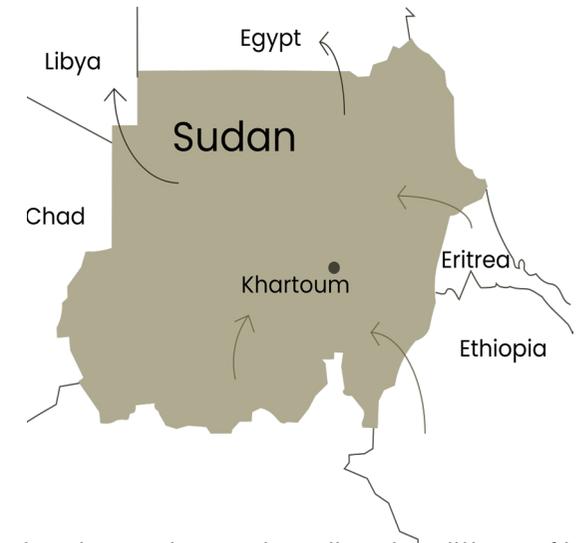
Dr. Yasir Masoud

Sudan, over five decades of subsequent political crisis and four large-scale conflicts have forcibly displaced 2.7 million Sudanese. Sudan's turbulent history of violence stems from identity conflict and socioeconomic marginalization, where government support did not extend past Khartoum's outskirts.

The 30-year dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir – yet to face International Criminal Court charges for war crimes and genocide in Sudan's southwest border region of Darfur – established a violent state that marginalized peripheral communities, mostly inhabited by non-Muslims or non-Arabs. South Sudan gaining independence in July 2011 encouraged South Kordofan and the Blue Nile States to also push for independence resulting in an explosion of violence and a decade-long insurgency in Sudan's southern border region. Resentment and hostility grew into protracted conflicts in these three states of Darfur, South Kordofan, and the Blue Nile, pushing significant numbers of Sudanese to move to Khartoum or undertake the sometimes perilous journey, e.g. to Libya and Europe.

Sudanese themselves have been on the move for decades. Whether it was escaping more than 40 years of conflict with the south, or in its border regions, Sudanese migrants frequently travel to Egypt, where they comprise the third largest group of migrants. For the majority of those making

the journey outwards, Libya and Europe.



Sudan has a long-standing tradition of hosting refugees. The country is a major transit country and host to over 2 million migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, largely from South Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. The majority of migrants arriving in Sudan report that they migrated to the country due to a combination of economic (i.e. lack of work in their countries of origin and being unable to meet basic needs) and safety (i.e. security, lack of freedom of expression and of movement) factors. Libya or Egypt are the next destinations. For those who choose not to remain in either country, they may serve as transit points before their onward journeys. Egypt may be a transit point for those making their way to Libya from where they embark on Europe-bound boats across the Mediterranean. Sudanese – comprised of a significant proportion of people from Darfur – were the

embark on Europe-bound boats across the Mediterranean. Sudanese – comprised of a significant proportion of people from Darfur – were the fifth, sixth, and seventh-largest categories of migrants arriving in Italy in 2015, 2016, and 2017 respectively. The EU special representative for Sudan described the country as one of the largest producers of refugees in the world and therefore noted that Sudan is more a country of origin than of transit.

In addition to hosting a large refugee and asylum seeker population, Sudan has a significant population of IDPs. There are approximately 3 million people displaced by conflict and violence combined with high levels of poverty and food insecurity, emanating from the South, North, and Central Darfur states, in Western Sudan.

Since the ousting of President Omar al-Bashir in early 2019, the country has been going through a significant political transition. The initial ‘transitional military council’ (TMC), criticized to be as oppressive as any previous government, handed over power to Sudan’s ‘Sovereign Council’ in August 2019 as part of Sudan’s three-year transition to civilian rule. This transition process notably involves building peace with Sudan’s border regions (which has already led to some positive steps in reducing conflict in regions like Darfur), as well as increased access to humanitarian services in areas restricted by military presence and

years of a violent insurgency. However, these illuminations did not reflect the efforts on migration issues in Sudan. Rather, the situation worsened for migrants due to the deterioration of economic conditions during the civil government, which failed to take important steps towards migration issues in Sudan, whether at the level of verses, policies, or laws., those early steps towards democracy are fragile and could derail or be hijacked in light of vested interests divided agendas, and corruption (and this is what actually happened). There is a high risk of further violence if Sudan’s population’s hopes are not fulfilled, which would lead to further displacement.

## Sudan and the European Union

Sudan, with international support and as part of the Khartoum process, passed several critical pieces of legislation and policy in recent years designed to reduce the flow or movements across its borders through the lens of smuggling and trafficking. What began as international efforts to control irregular migration from and mainly through Sudan have led to oppressive border control initiatives. Corruption and collusion by state officials with smugglers and traffickers threaten the welfare and rights of migrants and asylum seekers.



Photo by Mohamed Tohami on Unsplash

Sudan's General Intelligence Service has reportedly been implicated in trafficking activities between Eritrea and Egypt, and from Sudan to Libya. They are also accused of being notorious for torture, and violence against opposition groups, and arbitrary arrests. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) are tasked with border security as part of Sudan's partnership with the European Union (EU), despite evolving from the Janjaweed militia that is known for committing numerous atrocities in Darfur. And today, two years after the revolution, finished by the military coup, they still are pursuing their task. Along with other para-military forces, the RSF is reportedly involved in smuggling and abusing migrants, committing sexual violence against women and girls, and/or arresting migrants as retribution for not using their services. Some accounts indicate children are recruited from beyond Sudanese borders to join Sudan's militia groups like the RSF.

As a result, Sudan remains ranked as one of the world's worst countries for child soldiers attached to local militias or, in some cases, government forces.

The Government of Sudan has adopted an "open door" policy in receiving asylum seekers, providing spaces for the establishment of refugee camps, and allowing them to access social services such as education, health, and water facilities.

In addition, the government has allocated 59 spaces to establish reception centers for newcomers in the East, as well as in the White Nile region and Darfur.

Sudan has long sought to house the refugees in camps and organized settlements, to minimize the impact of the large influx of refugees, and to protect the economy, social services, and common property resources such as water, grazing, and forests from population pressure.

The Sudanese government seeks to reduce conflict and competition with Sudanese citizens by housing them in separate locations, often far away from business activities. This strategy is meant to limit scarce natural resources, job opportunities, consumer goods and social services to Sudanese citizens only.

The reality is different as more than 75% of refugees and migrants live outside the camps, for several reasons, the most important of which are the poor services provided and the flourishing activity of human trafficking gangs.

### **International Cooperation in Migration**

Despite the Sudanese cooperation with international organisations such as European Union, IOM and UNHCR, the dominant feature of it was dissatisfaction, especially among activists in the field of human rights protection. For example, the Khartoum process formed a disgrace on the forehead of the European Union and affected its reputation in the field of human rights because of its dealings with a government whose human rights record is considered as her worst ever.

The KP lacks participation and transparency. It is not based on prior empirical research and has been largely developed at the inter-state/regional institutions level with virtually no consultation or meaningful



Photo by Yusuf Yassir on Unsplash

participation of concerned communities and civil society representatives (who consequently lack awareness of the KP).

## These measures suggest that the KP has created an environment conducive to violations.

In a recent development, Sudan has employed the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), members of which have reportedly committed international crimes in Darfur, to arrest and deport “illegal im the border to Egypt and Libya. These measures suggest that the KP has created an environment conducive to violations. Sudan’s authorities may be capable of taking measures that effectively control migration. However, given the systemic CJS deficiencies, there is a high likelihood that such measures will run counter to KP and EU policies stressing the need for the protection of refugee rights and the human rights of migrants.

Under the BMM, Sudan’s Ministry of Interior requested funding for training and border infrastructure equipment, which was in principle accepted (computers, cameras, scanners, servers, cars). EUTF acknowledged the risk that “provision of equipment and training to sensitive national authorities (such as security services or border management) (is) diverted for repressive aims. Multiple sources have documented the responsibility of national authorities concer-

ned, particularly the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) and the BSF, for serious human rights violations. Sudanese border guards have also reportedly colluded with traffickers. The mitigating measures considered, such as “senior-level buy-in” and “reliance on a well-experienced implementing partner with good political relations with the target countries” provide inadequate safeguards against the risk that equipment and training serve as tools of repression. In addition, many reports speak of major corruption in the operations and activities of the United Nations and international organizations related to migration, especially if we take into account the exclusion of local civil society organizations from all their operations and the lack of cooperation among them in the migration field.



Photo by Chetan Sharma on Unsplash

## Recommendations

In view of the multiple concerns outlined above,

I recommend:

- An investigation of the EU-Sudan technical cooperation on border control which led to the build-up of the RSF and subsequently the militia of General Hemedti who is today responsible for suppressing civil society
- A comprehensive review of the Karthoum Process, particularly on human rights. Any decision to continue to engage in the Karthoum Process should be based on clear parameters aimed at ensuring coherence, transparency, and the protection of rights, both of refugees and other migrants
- Capacity building for Sudanese national organizations working in the field of refugees and migrants with a focus on re-introduction of human rights standards
- Facilitate the access of all refugees and forced migrants to adequate humanitarian assistance;
- Removal of restrictions imposed by those residing in camps on the freedom of movement of migrants and refugees, in particular.

I can simply say that nothing new for the benefit of the citizens or the migrants has happened after the change (...).



Interview with Ibrahim Izzeldeen from SudanUprisingGermany

## What is SudanUprising? What is SudanUprising in Germany?

SudanUprising Germany is an activist platform founded by Sudanese and Sudanese-German activists shortly after the revolution began in Sudan in December 2018. We use this platform to support the revolutionary demands of freedom, peace and justice in Sudan, in order to connect the Sudanese revolution in solidarity with emancipatory struggles in Europe, Africa and around the world, and to call for a decolonization of European foreign policy in Africa and the "Middle East".

**Sudan under El Bashir was known as the „Gatekeeper“ of the European Union, to block refugees from travelling North to cross the EU borders. How did this work and how did influence the civil society in Sudan?**

Yes, al-Bashir was playing the role of a guard to prevent the flow of migrants, through well-known agreements such as the Khartoum process and others deals under the table, and in return he used European Union funds to suppress protesters against his policies and direct civil society in favour of sustaining his long rule. The most dangerous thing in the matter was supporting the Rapid Support Forces, employing them as border guards, and strengthening them even at the expense of the national army.

**In 2019 the Sudanese people have risen up and were able push El Bashir out of power. It was a triumph for democracy and human rights. Has it also changed the lives and opportunities of/for refugees to live a life in peace and security?**

In the December 2019 revolution, the Sudanese people managed to remove Al-Bashir from power. Perhaps it was a momentary victory by removing years of oppression and religious Military authoritarianism. Unfortunately, this did not change or improve the lives and opportunities of the refugees, not even the Sudanese themselves. The Bashir Security Committee and Al-Bashir's men seized power by force of arms and still control the entire state. I can simply say that nothing new for the benefit of the citizens or the migrants has happened after the change, and that everything It happened for the worse...

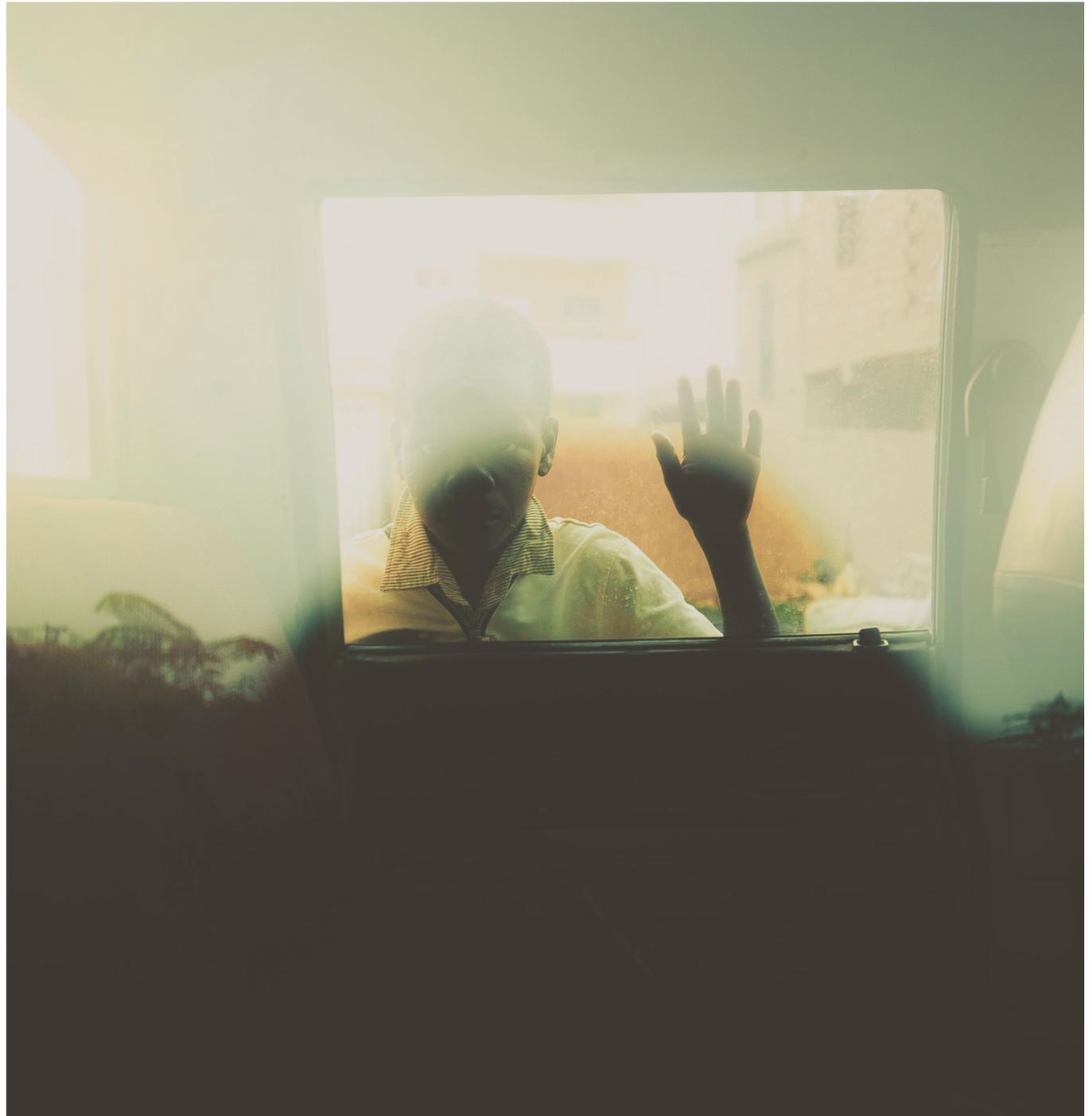
**In October last year (2021) a military coup has smashed the revolutionary gains - who are those in power today and how have they profited from the support of EU Of Sudan?**

The same group that formed Al-Bashir's security committee led by Al-Burhan and Hemedti their militia and military followers is the one that hijacked the authority and now in control of the Sudanese state

now. Bashir's security committee led by Al-Burhan and Hemedti their militia and military followers is the one that hijacked the authority and now in control of the Sudanese state now.

The Rapid Support Forces „Janjaweed“ led by Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo are among the leaders of the October coup. This militia, which was formed by Omar al-Bashir, was working as a gatekeeper - border guard for the European Union, and there are many studies, research and investigations confirming the financial and logistical support these militias received from the European Union, directly or indirectly.

Perhaps this cooperation has actually stopped due to internal pressure, resistance and political instability, and due to the formal opposition of the United States and the European Union to the coup. But in my estimation, the European Union may return to cooperate again with the militia in another way on the border file, especially if we take with us the mediation efforts led by the European Union with the United Nations US and Saudi mission in Sudan, between the military and civilians opposed to the coup.



# I'm in Italy and I'm safe.



Sara Creta

After years immersed in Libyan horror, David Oliver Yambio arrived in Italy. When he called me I couldn't believe that he managed to arrive. David is 24 years old, he's originally from South Sudan, a small village near the joint border of South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic. Hundreds if not thousands in his village were forced to leave their homes when violence broke out. He lost his father during the war and since then has been travelling in search of safety. He tried to cross the Mediterranean three times. The first, in January 2019, he was rescued by the cargo ship Lady Sham but instead of disembarking in a safe harbour, he was brought back to Misrata. He spent months detained in various detention centers: Tarik-al-Sikka, Al-Mabani, Al Kararim. Moved and packed from one prison to another. Abandoned with scarce food and dirty water With no options to go back to South Sudan and little hope he will be evacuated to safety, he decided to cross again. This time he was safe.

David has been leading campaigns and protests in Tripoli for over 100 days, with hundreds of other men, women and childrens asking for evacuation and safety. Their sit-in in front of the UNHCR head-quarter in Tripoli was violently dismantled by the Directorate for combating illegal

migration (DCIM) alongside other militias. He was wanted by the Tripoli-based Internal Security Forces, a group led by Militia leader Lotfi al-Harari. Al-Harari, who was the deputy head of the Abu Salim Central Security Force militia, he has been involved in crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations since 2011, including arbitrary detention, torture and enforced disappearances.

I'm glad David is finally safe. But the same day he arrived in Italy, Mohamed Mahmoud Abdulaziz, a 19 year old from Darfur, hanged himself to death inside Ain Zara detention centre in Tripoli. Few days earlier, Mohammad Hamad Adam, 25 years old from Darfur, was shot dead by Niger security forces in Agadez camp. They both were originally from Darfur. As many others I have met, they are perpetually unsettled people. Hundreds of thousands are now running for their lives, and even more are left with nothing in Darfur. The vast majority of people I have met from Darfur were young men or teenagers. When I visited the region last summer, many were asking about the way to Libya and the central Mediterranean. Others were worried for their family members who haven't called back home since. Like Muzammil's family. He drowned in the Mediterranean in 2019. His family live in Zam-zam camp in Darfur. As for many others in Darfur, migration has long been a key part of their livelihoods. Families experience

multiple displacements, moving from one village to another, one camp to another, or returning to their home village only to be displaced again. Around 442,000 people were displaced in 2021, which is five-fold the number displaced in 2020, and the highest after 2014. This is the highest number of civilians fleeing violence since the height of Darfur's conflict ten years ago.

Sudan's border with Chad is about 1,400 km long, and with Libya 380km. Two large groups of Sudanese were forcibly deported from Libya over the past month.

They were summarily expelled from the Ganfouda and al-Kufra detention centers in Southern Libya.

I spoke with some of them who were recently expelled to Sudan via the desert. Once they managed to send me a picture from their journey back home. Fragment of their journey back, as it is impossible to visit these areas.

The official figures indicate that 7,500 have been expelled from Libya's external land borders in 2019 and 2020. Others have been expelled from Algeria.

Approximately two thousand migrants are expelled from Algeria and Libya every month on average, including people with severe injuries, rape victims, and people suffering from serious trauma. 'We had to pay 260 dinars to the Libyan authorities

. 'Hunger was our biggest problem', one of them told me over the phone. Some have simply been abandoned, while others have been abducted and re-trafficked into Libya as victims of sexual violence. How far can Europe push back its borders? Kilometres of barbed wire border fences and high-tech patrols by land, air and sea. Unlawful and often brutal push-backs. And then the desert.



Photo by Mahardhika Kim on Unsplash

## Many are trapped in Sudan, living in a perpetual state of fear and exploitation.

Sudan hosts over a million refugees from South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia and many other countries. Many are trapped in Sudan, living in a perpetual state of fear and exploitation. Eritrean men and women in Khartoum and Kassala told me they had no intention of staying in Sudan, despite being aware of the risks of using smugglers to take them through Libya and Egypt. In Wadsharefy, where Eritreans have been welcomed as refugees since the 1980s, when they fought for independence against the Communist government.

In Wadsharefy, where Eritreans have been welcomed as refugees since the 1980s, when they fought for independence against the Communist government in Ethiopia, the United Nations sheet metal shacks have now become a patchwork of concrete houses. Teenagers, blocked for weeks in the transit center, tell of their escape from compulsory conscription and the economic and social collapse of Eritrea. „Sawa“ is the word that occurs most frequently in their memories. Here the border is only 15 km away. The Taka mountains surround this city in western Sudan. The Gash River, which rises in southern Eritrea, near Asmara and continues in north-eastern Sudan to get lost in the desert, de-

limits the natural border between the two countries. It is along these ancient routes that what the United Nations has called the worst human trafficking took place. Everywhere, images are installed warning of the danger of the journey across the Mediterranean sea. But for many there is no alternative. “I will not lie to you, I want to take the road to Libya. I am collecting the necessary money”, Aster said, adding: “There are those who say don’t go to Libya, you will be arrested and tortured, but I have a dream, I want to change my life”.

Photo by Abdulaziz Mohammed on Unsplash

