

The EU-Africa Summit: strategy and partnership

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The EU-Africa Heads of State Summit, to be held in Lisbon in on December 8-9, under the Portuguese EU Presidency, will constitute an important opportunity for Africa and Europe to strengthen their political and economic relations. This revision is particularly important in light of a changing global geo-political landscape, with a need for the European Union and Africa to take into account changing global realities, new partnerships and good practices.

The political-economic climates on both continents have changed substantially in recent years. Africa, for example, has undergone significant political developments on both the continental and regional levels. Africa is at its most stable and democratic since independence in the 1960s (in spite of a few exceptions). The creation of the AU and NEPAD in 2002 has provided the impetus for the development of a new set of initiatives and policies to govern the relationship between the two continents. The African integration process is moving forward independently and the AU and its subsidiary institutions have provided the EU with a platform for a more systemic engagement with African states on a host of new issues, over and above traditional development assistance.

Within the EU context there have also been obvious shifts in the political and economic landscape with the expansion of the Union to 27 member states. The EU, for example, has expanded its range of foreign policy capabilities and its willingness to utilise them. This has had a profound effect on how the EU views its responsibilities as an international actor.

The EU has also realised that in order to further its security agenda in Africa it must engage constructively with the African Peace and Security Architecture, with particular technical and financial support for the African-led Peace Facility. It is imperative that Africa establishes modalities for a long-term constructive engagement with the EU in this regard. The EU's rapidly developing Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and ESDP are increasingly affecting the EU's policies and approach in Africa (notably with the planned EUFOR mission to Chad and the Central African Republic).

¹The South African Institute for International Affairs' publications can be found at: <http://www.saiia.org.za/>

Apart from changes on both continents, the international context has lent new urgency to the commitment of both sides to a strategic partnership. Europe and Africa collectively face pressing global concerns such as migration, terrorism, climate change and energy security. Africa is an essential partner in this regard and can not be ignored. Because Europe represents the world's largest trading bloc and largest donor, it wields enormous influence and has a critical role to play in Africa. Various member states of the EU enjoy long-standing historical and cultural ties with Africa.

Background to the strategy document

The first EU-Africa Summit was held in Cairo in 2000 and set in motion a structured political dialogue between the EU and Africa. The summit yielded the Cairo Declaration and the Cairo Plan of Action, both addressing the issues of trade, debt, political issues, peace building and conflict prevention, and development concerns.

Despite the 2000 meeting, it was only in December 2005 that the EU adopted its first common, coherent and comprehensive "EU Strategy for Africa", setting out guidelines for a new Africa-Europe partnership. The aim of this strategy was to establish a single framework for continental engagement, include all stakeholders and confirm Africa's development as one of EU's top political priorities. This document, however, is a strategy *by* Europe *for* Africa, and in no way recognises the partnership among equals, or a joint strategy.

The collaboration was further strengthened in 2006 by the 6th EU-Africa Ministerial Troika Meeting in Vienna on May 8, and by the AU Commission-European Commission meeting in Addis Ababa on October 2. These events, among numerous others, have contributed to a growing consensus among European and African leaders about the interconnectedness of peace, security, human rights, governance, trade and development challenges.

On 31 October this year, AU and EU officials met in Accra to set the agenda for the joint summit. These consultations will culminate in the adoption of the joint strategy at the 2nd EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon in December 2007. The strategy will act as a reference framework for continent-to-continent relations over the next decade, and will be based on a joint Euro-African consensus on values and common interests. Four overarching principles will guide the engagement: dealing with Africa as a single entity, acknowledging the interdependence between the EU and Africa, reflecting ownership and joint responsibility of the processes, and prioritising human rights, the rule of law, democratic governance and the right to development.

2007 has therefore presented a unique opportunity to institutionalise and further bolster continent-to-continent cooperation. The joint approach will shape and determine the future policy priorities of EU-Africa cooperation and advance structures to reinforce an equal and fair partnership. The strategy document builds on the following pillars: peace and security, good governance and human rights, trade and regional integration, and key development issues. There will be an accompanying action plan (2008-2010) that is intended to translate these commitments into eight priority areas. These include partnerships on peace and security; democratic governance and human rights; trade and regional integration; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); energy; climate change; migration; mobility and employment; science; the information society and space.

However, there are some obstacles. In all the pillars and priority areas of the strategy there are challenges regarding the monitoring and implementation of the EU-Africa arrangements, as well as a lack of mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability in the process. There is also a need to increase the inclusion of civil society organisations in the preparation and implementation phase of the strategy. Currently there is a lack of information available at both regional and pan-African levels.

South Africa and the EU-Africa Strategy

South Africa views the joint strategy as a very constructive development. The partnership agreement provides a platform to define past EU-Africa relations, moving away from a donor-recipient relationship to one of equal political partnership - even if in reality the partners are not equal in economic and development terms.

South Africa is insisting that both negotiating partners need a change of mindset - similar to the one SA has faced recently with its negotiation of the EU-SA Strategy which will culminate in an EU-SA summit in the first quarter of 2008. South Africa believes that Africans should not ask "what can the EU give us", but rather "how can we assume responsibility and engage the EU constructively to help us overcome the developmental challenges that we face?" South Africa is insisting that the AU, prior to the negotiations, identify critical areas of engagement with the EU, and make concrete proposals on how to move forward. After all, the summit represents an ideal platform where Africa can raise concerns about historical and current discrepancies.

Who should attend the summit: a view from the EU, AU and SA

There has been much controversy over the issue of attendance at the EU-Africa Summit in December. Africa and EU member states seem to have differing opinions on whether Zimbabwe's leader Robert Mugabe should or should not attend.

Member countries of the EU have adopted different positions with regard to President Mugabe's presence in Lisbon. This comes against the backdrop of a five-year travel sanction imposed on Mugabe and many of his officials by the EU after the Zimbabwean leader won elections in 2002 - which were widely considered unfair. Britain, the leading voice in the EU supporting the sanctions, has stated that a travel ban is pointless if the EU continues to invite Mugabe to prestigious events on European soil. Britain's Prime Minister Gordon Brown claims that the Portuguese are sending out the wrong message by extending an invitation to Mugabe - signalling a willingness to relax their moral principles to do business with undemocratic leaders. Mr Brown will not attend the Lisbon summit, but will be represented by Valerie Amos of Britain's upper parliamentary chamber, the House of Lords. The Czech Republic is supporting Brown in this regard and will also boycott the summit.

Some Nordic countries have opposed Zimbabwe's participation but seem unwilling to boycott the event. Chancellor Merkel of Germany has insisted from the outset that the Zimbabwean leader should be allowed to attend the event so that his peers could engage him on allegations of undemocratic governance and human rights abuses.

The AU position (in accordance with South Africa²) is somewhat different. The AU insists that all 53 member states should be allowed to take part in the summit and that each member has the right to freely constitute their delegations, including Zimbabwe. According to Alpha Oumar Konare, AU Commission Chairman, "This is a matter of principle and not a sign of political support for the government of Zimbabwe". He says that the Zimbabwe issue will be dealt with by Africans themselves through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) forum. In March 2007, South African President Mbeki was tasked with mediating an end to the deadlock in Zimbabwe. President Mbeki is currently in the process of facilitating dialogue with the government, its ruling party, as well as the opposition.

The AU believes that these top-level negotiations with the EU are critical and that the Zimbabwe issue is secondary. The EU is the biggest trade and development partner for the majority of African states and because of its importance these negotiations cannot be postponed indefinitely. Seven years have passed since the last Heads of State meeting between the EU and African leaders took place in 2000 in Cairo, and the AU would prefer to avoid another such delay. Plans for a second collapsed in 2003 because of a similar dispute over Mugabe's attendance.

The only AU member state to criticise Mugabe's participation is Nigeria. The Nigerian President Umaru Yar'Adua said: "I want to emphasise that what is happening in Zimbabwe is not in conformity with the rule of law. I do not subscribe to this".³ He added: "There are so many opportunities which will be provided by the Africa and Europe Summit and therefore the Zimbabwean problem should not bog down these opportunities."

This sentiment sums up the views of the EU and AU, that the Zimbabwe issue must not dominate the partnership discussions or in any way paralyse practical steps towards a reciprocal and fair EU-Africa partnership.

Conclusion

The Lisbon Summit should be seen as one milestone in a longer-term process, rather than an end in itself. The joint strategy's most important element is not the document but the process emboldening the strategy. It has heightened expectations about future EU-Africa relations.

But clearly, any future partnership that is sustainable must be based on mutual accountability and commitment from both negotiating parties. AU members need, for example, to promote good governance throughout the continent and improve their domestic accountability. On the one hand, Africans need to move beyond the dependency debate and develop a concrete and serious game plan, identifying what the continent wants from the partnership arrangement, and making sure the strategy encompasses its needs and concerns. Africa needs to break out of the old reactive and sometimes passive mindset, which focused specifically on Africa as the development client, and come to the table as responsible and proactive partner for the EU.

On the other hand, the EU member states must address some of their contradictory policies towards Africa. The credibility of the European partnership in Africa is often

² South Africa's ruling party, the ANC, has published comments on their view of the EU-Africa Summit and the attendance issue. See <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/anctoday/2007/at41.htm>.

³ Speaking at the third Germany-European Partnership with Africa in Wiesbaden, Germany (6 November 2007), Umaru Yar'Adua condemned Mugabe for disregarding the rule of law. For further information please see: <http://allafrica.com/stories/200711061071.html>

undermined by negative historical perceptions, the lack of policy coherence of EU member states towards Africa, the lack of transparency and accountability of its development programmes on the continent, and double standards towards its various partner countries.

If these areas are addressed sufficiently the EU-Africa partnership could move beyond the donor-client relationship towards a fully-fledged partnership arrangement. However, if the joint strategy is to have its desired outcome, there are certain issues that it must address. These include the lack of prioritisation in the strategy and the lack of focus, as well as clearer implementation, monitoring of benchmarks and enforcement of EU commitments on aid and assistance to Africa. Progress towards achieving an effective outcome should also include a more proactive involvement by civil society, parliaments and youth. The success of the process will depend on scrutiny from those outside of bureaucracy and the political elite.

The accompanying action plan must move beyond a mere expression of goodwill and translate political intent into real and concrete dialogue and cooperation, across all functional levels of state and society, and based on a spirit of true partnership.

It is increasingly apparent that if the EU wants to remain a privileged partner of Africa it must be willing to reinforce and reinvent its current relationship with the continent on all levels - institutionally, politically and culturally - given the emergence of other actors such as China and India on the African scene.

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