

Zentrum für Europäische Integrationsforschung
Center for European Integration Studies
Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität Bonn



Discussion Paper

C282
2024

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Africa – EU Relations: The evolution of an agenda of partnership



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ISSN 1435-3288

ISBN 978-3-9825496-3-7

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Dušan Brujić

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1. Introduction

After the 2022 AU-EU Summit, the current period focuses on action plans in the run-up to the forthcoming 2024 AU-EU Summit. This paper gives an overview of the evolution of the Africa-EU Partnership and its priorities between the years 2000 and 2022.

Since the creation of the European Union (EU), Africa has always had a special place on the EU agenda, with its development being one of the EU's top priorities. In 1950 while announcing the creation of the EU, Robert Schuman also delivered a very powerful message concerning Africa:

“...Europe will be able to pursue the achievement of one of its essential tasks, namely, the development of the African continent...”¹

The European interest in African development was partly because of the feeling of guilt and responsibility, looking back at the colonial past characterized by slavery and exploitation. On the other hand, geographical proximity also played an important role, forcing cross-continental cooperation on some of the mutual key issues and challenges. Many other dominant factors include historical, cultural and language ties. However, the long and turbulent history shared between the two continents led to an intertwined relationship with a very complex dynamic filled with tensions, disagreements and accusations at intervals. While there were times when the two continents were perceived as antagonists, the general nature of the relations has been stable and positive

1 European Union. (1950). Schuman declaration May 1950. Available at: https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/1945-59/schuman-declaration-may-1950_en

ever since the official establishment of the Africa-EU Partnership in the year 2000, with both sides realizing their mutual and beneficial dependency.

Nevertheless, some challenges are testing the current partnership. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic exposed many health-, travel- and migration-related issues. Furthermore, the war in Ukraine did not only heavily impact Europe on many fronts, with the energy question perhaps being the most debated issue, but Africa as well, with significant threats to food security on the continent. These challenges bring many new themes to the agenda between the partners while deepening the existing ones. Further troubles, some of which are more continent-to-continent related, are also discussed between African and EU leaders, making the agenda very extensive and diverse. There are undoubtedly many expectations and responsibilities from the EU's side when dealing with Africa's issues, making EU activities and policies even more relevant. There are also many contradicting opinions towards the partnership, with relations understandably being differently perceived from Africa's and Europe's perspectives.

2. Africa - EU Relations: State of play

2.1. Relevance and complexities of the Relations

Africa is not only considered Europe's closest neighbour, but the continent also shares a rich history, common values, and interests with EU countries. It represents one of the EU's most important trading partners and has the highest growth potential, especially in some of the critical sectors for the EU, such as green energy, agriculture, health and digital innovations². The political and economic relations that go far beyond trade and aid dependency between the two continents are dynamic and vital for their further growth and

2 African Development Bank Group. (2023). Africa's economic growth to outpace global forecast in 2023-2024 – African Development Bank biannual report. Press release, 19 January 2023. Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/africas-economic-growth-outpace-global-forecast-2023-2024-african-development-bank-biannual-report-58293>

Africa – EU Relations: The evolution of an agenda of partnership

development. One often describes the EU as the African partner of choice, which is only natural considering all the historical and geographical aspects³.

However, their relationship is becoming increasingly complex internally and externally. Today, African nations are not limited to European cooperation, but can instead opt for new alliances, including those with China, Russia, India, or Brazil, giving African states more leverage. As the Vice President of African Development Bank, Kevin Uruma puts it:

“...The continent (Africa) remains a treasure trove for smart investors globally”.⁴

This changing dynamic drastically altered the narrative, challenging the Africa-EU relations while affecting the progressively relevant themes covered. Thus, one can easily argue that the EU can no longer focus on a limited number of issues that it considers essential, such as migration and security, and expect African nations to choose it as its leading partner when alternative partners offer various other beneficial arrangements. Going towards re-establishing the leading position at a multilateral level, the EU has to support African aspirations on essential sustainable development issues.

Furthermore, the EU's transition to a more geopolitical approach carries risks for its relationship with Africa. The perception of Africa as a battleground between the EU and China, a trend observed in recent years⁵, also is at odds with the principle of related interests and sustained dynamics between continents. With both the EU and China offering a partnership-oriented relationship, it is becoming more complex, with Chinese partnership based on ‘mutual goals and respect’⁶ and EU's foremost on common values by contrast. Therefore, there is not only an intensification of Africa-EU relations, but the Chinese influence is also growing with good examples of successful Chinese

3 European External Action Service. (2022). Europe Must Be Africa's Partner of Choice. Press release, 14 February 2022. Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/europe-must-be-africas-partner-choice_en

4 See note #2

5 Hodzi O. (2020). The China effect: African agency, derivative power and renegotiation of the EU-Africa relations. In *The Routledge Handbook of EU-Africa Relations*. Routledge, pp. 256-265.

6 Abegunrin O., and Manyeruke C. (2020). *China's Power in Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan.

initiatives in Africa, such as FOCAC (Forum on China-Africa Cooperation), being on a steady incline. The big power rivalry occurring in Africa puts dramatic pressure on the relations. The academics, especially on the African side, agree that the EU has to offer better solutions than China and other potential partners and that it should be the only way for the EU to deal with this issue. Still, this is not the only factor creating barriers to Africa–EU relations.

2.2. Importance of Africa for Europe and vice versa

Historically, Europe needed Africa just as much as Africa needed Europe. If we focus on post-colonial relations, it remains clear that exporting raw materials still plays a significant role. Nevertheless, this is not surprising, as Africa's resource richness was its best-kept secret for a long time. Africa likely has all the necessary elements to become the world's largest energy exporter considering its abundance of land, sun and wind.⁷

With Europe and Africa only separated by the Mediterranean Sea, some EU member states have always had solidarity interests, close ties and geographical proximity with the African continent, as well as shared common challenges. The links and challenges are very diverse. Some of them are demographic, such as the stagnating and aging European population while facing a growing inflow of young Africans, exerting migratory pressures. They are also energy-related, with Europe needing hydrocarbons, coal, and even solar energy from the African continent⁸. Lastly, they are cultural and linguistic, with some of the most spoken languages in Africa including European languages such as English, French and Portuguese. Moreover, the six official languages of the AU are English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Arabic and Kiswahili, four of which are also the official EU languages⁹.

7 IRENA. (2021). The Renewable Energy Transition in Africa. Available at: https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2021/March/Renewable_Energy_Transition_Africa_2021.pdf

8 Pleeck, S, Denton F. & Mitchell I. (2022). An EU Tax on African Carbon – Assessing the Impact and Ways Forward. Center for Global Development. Available at: <https://cgdev.org/blog/eu-tax-african-carbon-assessing-impact-and-ways-forward>

9 African Union.

Africa – EU Relations: The evolution of an agenda of partnership

Africa is undoubtedly the continent with the most significant natural resources and demographic potential, experiencing a booming population. According to current estimates, African population is expected to rise from 962 million globally in 2017 to 2.1 billion in 2050¹⁰. Furthermore, Africa's wealth is also found in its soil. Some argue that the world's food production will depend on the continent's agriculture, holding 65% of the uncultivated arable land to feed 9 billion individuals by 2050¹¹. Nevertheless, the distribution of fertile land is uneven, with large desert areas in some regions and highly fertile wetlands around watersheds and major rivers. Also, Africa has enormous green energy potential, making it possible for renewable energy to become a future prominent, affordable, and competitive electricity source in Africa and Europe. While access to electricity in sub-Saharan Africa is expanding, some researchers forecast that electricity demand will increase by 3 percent annually. However, the primary sources of the region's energy, such as coal, oil, and traditional biomass, are associated with severe environmental and health damage¹².

Mineral-producing countries are the least diversified, with their economies vulnerable to changing commodity prices, suffering from corruption and profits being enjoyed by a handful of people close to power¹³. Even though Africa is more successful in production and exports of raw materials than any other continent, it is also developing ambitions for better use of its natural resources. Economic relations with Europe remain vitally important for Africa in terms of development, with the EU and its members representing

10 United Nations. (2020). World population projected to reach 9.8 billion in 2050, and 11.2 billion in 2100. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/desa/world-population-projected-reach-98-billion-2050-and-112-billion-2100>

11 Adesina, A. (2018). Unlocking Africa's Agricultural Potential to Create Wealth. African Development Bank Group. Public Lecture of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, held at the FAO Head Office, Rome, Italy, August 27, 2018. Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/fr/news-and-events/unlocking-africas-agricultural-potential-to-create-wealth-18437>

12 Schwerhoff G., and Sy M. (2020). Where the sun shines. Renewable energy sources, especially solar, are ideal for meeting Africa's electrical power needs. International Monetary Fund. Available at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2020/03/powering-Africa-with-solar-energy-sy>

13 See previous note

more than half of the commercial and financial relations of the continent¹⁴. However, they tend to decrease due to the diversification of African partners and the reorientation of Europe towards other areas of proximity and, specifically, the Asian world. Nevertheless, Africa still considers the EU its most important trading partner, accounting for around one-third of African trade, and is a vital source of foreign direct investment (FDI) on the continent¹⁵. While the reciprocal nature of relations is desperately needed, it is easier said than done.

2.3. The Current EU Agenda in comparison to the AU Agenda

2.3.1. EU Strategic Agenda

The EU agenda for the current period of time dates back to a meeting in Brussels on 20 June 2019, when the European Council agreed on 'A new strategic agenda 2019-2024', intended to guide the work of institutions for the 5 years period. The strategic agenda set out four main priorities: protecting citizens and freedoms; developing a strong and vibrant economic base; building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe; and finally, promoting European interests and values on the global stage¹⁶.

One of the key specific actions the European Council agreed on, was the importance of developing a comprehensive partnership with Africa. Some argue that this was mainly a response to increasing migration pressures, in particular from sub-Saharan Africa¹⁷. Still, Africa being the only continent directly mentioned in the strategic agenda actions highlighted its significance as one of the EU's top priorities. In their policy paper *From crisis exit to world challenges: The EU's Strategic Agenda 2019*, Éric Maurice and

14 European Parliament. (2022). The future of EU-Africa trade relations. At a Glance. Press release, 2 June 2022. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/Reg-Data/etudes/ATAG/2022/733539/EPRS_ATA\(2022\)733539_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/Reg-Data/etudes/ATAG/2022/733539/EPRS_ATA(2022)733539_EN.pdf)

15 See previous note

16 European Council. (2019). A new strategic agenda 2019-2024. Press Release, 20 June 2019. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/20/a-new-strategic-agenda-2019-2024/>

17 Maurice, É., and Menneteau, M. (2019). From crisis exit to world challenges: The EU Strategic Agenda 2019. Fondation Robert Schuman. Available at: <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/doc/questions-d-europe/qe-521-en.pdf>

Africa – EU Relations: The evolution of an agenda of partnership

Magali Menneteau¹⁸ hinted that the reason for putting Africa so high on the agenda might also be a result of the rise of China on the continent. Although the agenda was certainly very important for the intercontinental relations, the rhetoric of promoting and protecting ‘European values and way of life’ was misunderstood or criticized by many. Some described it as ‘grotesque’, implying that the EU was indirectly pointing at its immigration policy using this wording¹⁹. Nevertheless, the official message itself was positive and important for the Africa-EU relations, foremost the part focusing on the partnership. Overall, the agenda signaled that the EU will focus less on its neighbourhood, especially in the east, and more on the essential and continual partnership²⁰. This is however likely to change again with the ongoing war in Ukraine and all the impacts it has on Europe, thus it will be interesting to see the strategic agenda for the post 2024 period.

Later, in 2020, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Josep Borrell, named two key priorities, beyond those in Europe’s neighbourhood. One of which was devoted to Africa:

“The EU must frame a new, integrated strategy for and with Africa, our sister continent. We need to think big and use our policies on trade, innovation, climate change, cyberspace, security, investment, and migration to give substance to our rhetoric about being equal partners”.²¹

Because of the traditional cultural bond some countries in Europe were always more invested in intensifying relations with Africa. Furthermore, countries such as Portugal and France were more open to African migration, which resulted in a significant political and cultural influence in Africa still

18 See previous note

19 Stone J. (2019). EU accused of adopting ‘fascist rhetoric’ with new Commissioner for Protecting Our European Way of Life to oversee immigration policy. Independent. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/brexit-news-latest-commissioner-for-protecting-our-european-way-of-life-ursula-von-der-leyen-a9098991.html>

20 See note #17

21 Borrell, J. (2020). Embracing Europe’s power. Project Syndicate. Press Release, 8 February 2020. Available at: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/embracing-europe-s-power-by-josep-borrell-2020-02?barrier=accesspaylog>

present today. Interestingly, estimates from the sixteenth century placed Lisbon's black population at about ten per cent of the city's total inhabitants²². It is difficult to measure the impact this had on relations, but it is certainly a much different situation than what most EU member states are used to even today, especially in Eastern Europe. This also possibly influences the openness to migration of present times, even though it is clear that it is of very different nature. The French President Emmanuel Macron, on several occasions, including during his speech in Sorbonne, Paris, on 26 September 2017 emphasized the importance of Africa for Europe:

“Europe must have a foreign policy that focuses on certain priorities: first of all, the Mediterranean region and Africa (...) it must develop a new partnership with Africa, based on education, health, and the energy transition”.²³

It is understandable that countries, which had historic ties with Africa, are even to this day more involved and also have broader agendas than others. This is also surely impacting the EU stance towards Africa and the continent being one of the key priorities for the EU overall.

2.3.2. African Strategic Agenda

The current strategic agenda - Agenda 2063 - in Africa was first created in 2013, before it was finalized a couple years later, and was a reflection of what people want to witness in 50 years' time²⁴. The Agenda included seven priorities aspired from Africans for Africa, essentially creating a prosperous, peaceful, integrated and united, strong and influential continent with people-driven development and recognized cultural identity²⁵.

It is visible that there are certain similarities in the way the aspirations are set, when we compare it to the European model. This comes as no surprise since the European model was followed by many regionalism projects in the

22 Vogt, J. L. (1973). The Lisbon Slave House and African Trade, 1486-1521. Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 117(1), pp. 1-16.

23 Macron, E. (2017). President Macron gives speech on new initiative for Europe. Elysee. 26 September 2017. Available at: <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/president-macron-gives-speech-on-new-initiative-for-europe>

24 African Union. (2015). Agenda 2063. Popular version. Final Edition, April 2015. Available at: https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Policy-Documents/Agenda2063_Popular_Version_English.pdf

25 See previous note

world. Although not everything that works in Europe can have the same effect in other regions, with the way the integration has developed and thrived the EU can always be considered a good model for others²⁶. Nonetheless, the African strategy, unlike the European one, has no mention of the other continent, in this case Europe, and the partnership with it. Still, the themes it focuses on are often those that are the highest on the agenda between Africa and the EU, making it a tremendously optimistic sign for the partnership.

2.4. Historical heritage and events leading up to the formation of the Modern-day Agenda, Key Themes and Priorities

Even with essentiality of the cooperation for a very long time, unilateralism constituted the central aspect of the EU approach to Africa, with no or little equality among the partners. The cooperation was based on the two dominant factors: aid and trade. European development aid was of key importance for the Africa–EU relations and always on top of the agenda. The EU development assistance to Africa was provided both from the general budget of the EU and through the European Development Fund (EDF)²⁷, making it a donor-recipient nature of relationship with little or no equality. On the other hand, there was basic trade between partners, with Africa exporting commodities, the practice it is still known for. Even though a lot has changed in the meantime, European development aid and African significant exports of commodities are still very much present even in the modern-day partnership.

Many academics however also harshly criticize the way the EU has been dealing with the infamous colonial past, which is often claimed veiled or forgotten. In the article *EU memory politics and Europe's forgotten colonial past*, Aline Sierp²⁸ argued that EU strategies for behaving towards the colonial past of its member states can be best described as ‘a mixture of amnesia, redirection and atonement, with amnesia and redirection clearly being the

26 Kühnhardt, L. (2010). *Region-Building: Vol. I: The Global Proliferation of Regional Integration* (Vol. 1). Berghahn Books.

27 Dearden S. (2008). *EU Development Policy: Delivering Aid Effectiveness*. Jean Monnet / Robert Schuman Paper Series, 8(10). Available at: <http://aei.pitt.edu/9008/1/DeardenEUdevelopmentLong08edi.pdf>

28 Sierp, A. (2020). *EU memory politics and Europe's forgotten colonial past*. *Interventions*, 22(6), pp. 686-702.

dominant mode'. It was also suggested that the EU has only restricted power to develop and spread a narrative of reparation for the criminal wrongdoings committed under colonialism as long as its remembrance is used by its member states to divide rather than unite. Steps taken by the European institutions in the direction of making the colonial past become a part of an overarching European collective memory, able to contribute to the strengthening of European political identity were said to be minimal²⁹. With the EU being founded as a peace project and European identity only made stronger through enduring memory and dealing with its history, it is only more perplexing.

It is possible to overcome, at least in part, the weight of the historical legacy that has marked many of the Africa and Europe debates. In his book *Decolonization in Africa*, Hargreaves³⁰ argued however that even though decolonisation, meaning 'the abolition of all prejudice, of all superiority complex, in the mind of the colonizer, and also of all inferiority complex in the mind of the colonized' represents 'an epic historic transformation', it is 'still far from complete'. Other academics agree that the decolonisation period has embedded certain perception and understanding and is still heavily impacting the present events. When we take this into consideration it changes the way we perceive the partnership and can be useful to explain some of its imperfections. Thus, even with colonial past being long behind us and EU's general generosity when it comes to the African continent this could still somewhat be a barrier to Africa-EU relations.

However, there are huge differences among European member states, especially among Eastern and Western European countries, as well as between the North and South of Europe. These differences are usually related to the different countries' policies and strategies featuring Africa, including migration. This could be explained in part by proximity with the South being directly affected, but also by the history of colonialism, with the Western Europe's dominant presence in Africa, leading to a mismatched level of cultural influence and overall power on the continent felt to this day.

29 See previous note

30 Hargreaves, J. D. (2014). *Decolonization in Africa*. Routledge.

Africa – EU Relations: The evolution of an agenda of partnership

The relations changed drastically after the decolonisation period and a lot has taken place in-between. When it comes to trade, the Lomé Convention in 1975 marked an important point in history as at the time the EU eliminated most trade barriers on imports from developing nations in 46 Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific region (OACPS), former colonies of EU countries³¹. The Convention was later replaced by the Cotonou Agreement, which was also replaced in January 2008 with New partnership agreements based on reciprocity with the 79 countries involved, split in regional groupings³². On 3 December 2020, the EU and the Organisation of OACPS reached a political deal on a new agreement that succeeds the Cotonou Partnership Agreement. Marking the end of the negotiations, the ‘post-Cotonou’ agreement was initialled on 15 April 2021 and is supposed to serve as the new legal framework for EU relations with the given group of countries³³.

Nevertheless, the EU has maintained a system of relations with Africa based on strong paternalism for decades. This asymmetric relationship has revolved around non-reciprocal trade relations, with a strong development aid component. Starting in 2000, the EU began to pivot from the donor-recipient relationship model to a model with the rhetoric of equals. There was one of the focal points of the previous Juncker Commission, which made evident efforts to highlight the importance of European initiatives “with Africa” signalling a more equal cooperation.

A long way is behind the two partners in achieving the partnership there is today with a thorough agenda and strategy. From different national strategies of EU member states dealing with Africa to common EU strategies and their neighbourhood policies featuring the continent among other regions to finally, EU strategy focusing solely and specifically on Africa. Most past strat-

31 Salvatore, D. (2014). *International Economics: trade and finance* (11). Singapore: John Wiley & Sons.

32 Engel, U., and Gomes Porto, J. (2010). *Africa’s New Peace and Security Architecture: Promoting Norms, Institutionalizing Solutions*. Ashgate.

33 Gabriel, A., and Boniface O. (2011). *The African Union and the challenges of regional integration in Africa: What hope for Africa’s development*. Lambert Academic Publishing.

egies with Africa dealt with the development assistance, with many EU development aid strategies and previously national aid strategies³⁴. All of this has impacted the agenda there is today between the two partners. Moreover, before the first Summit, there was no platform for the EU and Africa to commonly address the key issues and create a valuable political agenda. This has however drastically changed in the beginning of this century.

3. Overview of Africa – EU Summits

3.1. First Summit in Cairo (2000)

The Cairo Summit can undoubtedly be regarded as one of the major events and shifts in the modern history of Africa-Europe relations. It marked the first time that the Heads of State and Government of African countries and of the EU as well as the President of the European Commission met for an Africa-Europe Summit. This gathering, later labelled as the first ever Africa-EU Summit under the Aegis of the OAU (later legally transformed into the African Union) and EU, took place in Cairo, Egypt in April 2000. It marked an unprecedented moment in the history of the two continents and resulted in the *Cairo Declaration*, which served as the stepping stone of the more formalized and structured future discussions between the two groups of countries, creating the basis of the vital partnership³⁵.

As the Cairo Summit also meant the official establishment of the Africa – EU Partnership, it created the initial modern-day agenda to build on between the two partners. The arguably very ambitious declaration included a broad set of priorities, which stretched far and beyond, incorporating a great deal of different thematic areas, featuring economic, political, cultural, social and development issues. Even though it was encompassing a wide range of different themes, the emphasis was put on shared values and a strive for achiev-

34 Olsen, G. R. (2001). European Public Opinion and Aid to Africa: Is There a Link? *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 39(4), 645–674.

35 EC, European Commission. (2000). Africa-Europe Summit under the Aegis of the OAU and the EU Cairo, 3-4 April 2000. Press Release, 7 April 2000. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/PRES_00_901

ing participatory democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, good governance, pluralism, international peace and security, political stability and confidence among nations³⁶.

Jack Mangala in his article *Africa-EU Strategic Partnership: Significance and Implications*³⁷ suggested that with the Cairo summit, the EU finally recognized Africa's growing strategic importance, making it rethink its traditional engagement with the continent. According to his evaluation it also made a part of a broad reconceptualization process that was taking place at the time, resulting in a shift from humanitarianism to a strategic view of Africa. This can evidently be observed by both focusing on the themes and the language used in the declaration. Even though the Cairo declaration did not use the notion 'Partnership of Equals' it did describe it as the 'global partnership between Africa and Europe for the Twenty First Century, in a spirit of equality, respect, alliance and co-operation between the two regions'³⁸.

With trade traditionally being a crucial aspect of the Africa–EU relations, one of the main goals set for the future was none other than 'Integrating Africa into the world economy'³⁹. This included not only trade, but also investment, resources for development and external debt, which was growing in Africa at a very high rate. The globalisation trend was introduced as a serious challenge to African countries in an era of a continuous decline in Africa's share of world trade - the decline which even two decades later still hasn't been successfully dealt with. Even with the African exports of goods and services having seen their fastest growth in the past decade, the volumes still remain low at just 3 per cent of global trade⁴⁰. This does indicate that the

36 See previous note

37 Mangala, J. (2013). *Africa-EU Strategic Partnership: Significance and Implications*. Africa and the European Union. Palgrave Macmillan, New York. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137269478_1

38 See note #35

39 See note #35

40 The World Bank. (2022). Greater and More Diverse Participation in Global Trade is Key to Achieving Africa's Economic Transformation, says New World Bank Book. Press Release, 10 February 2020. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/02/10/greater-and-more-diverse-participation-in-global-trade-is-key-to-achieving-africa-s-economic-transformation-says-new-wor>

declaration had the relevant goals and priorities set, but raises the question of whether the subsequent actions taken were effective enough.

The decline of foreign investment flows to Africa, especially those of private origin, was also addressed with the goal of encouraging FDI in Africa. It goes without saying that this has drastically changed over time, as now Africa is experiencing one of biggest growths in foreign investment flows, entirely reshaping the narrative and Africa's position. Nevertheless, despite the significant increase, investment flows to Africa just in 2021 accounted for only 5.2% of global FDI, making it fascinatingly small in comparison to the rest of the world (a solid improvement however from the year before, when it accounted for only 4,1%)⁴¹. The declaration also touched upon the importance of enhancing South-South co-operation and the poverty reduction in Africa. Human rights and fundamental freedoms were also at the top of the list of priorities, with massive violations of humanitarian law existing and some African leaders put under scrutiny. The question of racism as a thematic point was nevertheless only briefly mentioned.

Cultural issues, more precisely, cultural goods stolen or exported illicitly were also one of the themes discussed in the initial summit. This was somewhat controversial considering the colonial past with a significant number of African cultural goods and heritage found in European museums: such as Egyptian Rosetta Stone in the British National Museum, and the bust Queen Nefertiti at the city's Old Museum in Berlin, Germany⁴². It is perhaps an ironic coincidence that the first ever Africa–EU Summit was held exactly in Egypt, especially taking into account how much importance has the topic recently gotten with the country attempting to get many of these cultural items back and Egyptian officials very vociferous about it⁴³.

41 UNCTAD, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2022). Investment flows to Africa reached a record \$83 billion in 2021. Press Release, 9 June 2022. Available at: <https://unctad.org/news/investment-flows-africa-reached-record-83-billion-2021>

42 El-Geressi Y. (2019). Egypt Wants its Treasures Back: Demands for Repatriation of Plundered Artifacts are Becoming Hard to Ignore. The Majalla. Available at: <https://eng.majalla.com/node/73996/egypt-wants-its-treasures-back>

43 See previous note

Overall, the declaration formed a well-structured starting point of discussions, which created the narrative for future negotiation rounds and meetings. Nevertheless, the declaration itself felt very unequal, in a way that the EU on most of the presented issues seemed to be looking out for Africa, with little mention of learning from each other and mutual benefits. Even though the declaration used the term ‘equal’ to define the relations between the two country groups, it is difficult to argue that there was actually equality or proportionality among the partners, not only in benefits, but also in interests.

Even though the Cairo declaration with its broad and profound initial agenda created an unprecedented value for the regions and their future relations some parts of the declaration did create a reason for concern for some academics. For instance, in his article *Beyond Cairo: Emerging pattern of Euro-African relationship*⁴⁴, Bolade M. Eyinla argued that the favourable projections of the declaration were not enough to avoid the disempowerment of Africa in the agenda of common European foreign and security policy. He, however, also suggested that the EU would continue to focus on Africa in a reactive manner and concentrating on conflict prevention and management, to avoid Europe absorbing the effects of political instability and exacerbating socio-economic conditions. The future, as well as the impact that the summit would have, were obviously difficult to predict at the time, still the Cairo declaration was a huge step forward for the Africa-EU relations.

3.2. *Second Summit in Lisbon (2007)*

A lot has happened between the first gathering in 2000 in Cairo and the second time European and African leaders came together 7 years later for the second summit. In Africa most importantly the African Union (AU) was established in 2002, enabling the EU to discuss pan-African issues with an international organisation. The newly formed Union could offer a new continental framework for addressing African issues, being a recognised voice for

44 Eyinla, B. M. (2004). *Beyond Cairo: Emerging pattern of Euro-African relationship*. Africa: Rivista Trimestrale Di Studi e Documentazione Dell’Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, 59(2), pp. 159–178. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40761736>

the continent, together with NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development), its main economic instrument at the time. Europe on the other hand witnessed a historic Eastern enlargement in 2004⁴⁵, making the EU grow in membership and scope. This event, together with other political developments in the EU, meant a deepening of Europe's integration process and, with more united Europe and bigger EU, acquiring new responsibilities in the world with greater power and possibly bigger appetite on the world stage.

The Lisbon Summit moreover took place in the capital of Portugal in December 2007, the year when Europe celebrated the 50th anniversary of the European integration and on the other hand, Africa celebrated the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the independence of Africa⁴⁶. There was also a controversy around the summit, with Africa visibly lagging behind on certain issues and African leaders including Zimbabwe and Sudan being singled out by German Chancellor Angela Merkel for not respecting human rights' provisions⁴⁷.

The focal point of the *Lisbon Declaration* were the lessons learned from the past and the common future, with some of the key challenges of the future including energy and climate change, migration and gender issues. Apart from building a new strategic political partnership for the future, overcoming the traditional donor-recipient relationship was also set as a priority. The Lisbon Declaration was also the first to use the term 'Partnership of Equals' to describe the multifaceted and dynamic Africa-EU relations, the term used ever since. Moreover, during the Lisbon Summit the first European political framework to address Africa as a single entity, i.e. the Africa-EU Joint Strategy, was adopted⁴⁸.

45 European Union.

46 Council of the European Union. (2007). Lisbon Declaration - EU Africa Summit. 16343/07 (Presse 290). Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/er/97494.pdf

47 Bugge, A., and Almeida, H. (2007). EU-Africa summit ends in trade deadlock. Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-eu-africa-idUKL074780720071209>

48 See note #46

Africa – EU Relations: The evolution of an agenda of partnership

This summit with the newly established strategy seemed to be a huge step forward, to more equal and substantial partnership and continent-to-continent dialogue. Some of the key differences in wording of the declarations in comparison to the one from Cairo also included calling the two partners, Africa and the EU, continents instead of regions⁴⁹. This was presumably a result of events that took place prior to the summit, specifically the establishment of AU (consisting of the entire continent) and furthermore the great enlargement of the EU, with the majority of Europe now being a part of the Union.

Joint Africa - EU Strategy (JAES)

Important to note is that, together with the Strategy, the first short-term Action Plans came along, aiming to enhance political dialogue at all levels. Shared vision was identified and discussed for the first time among partners. The strategy strengthening partnership was based on a Euro-African consensus on values, common interests and common strategic objectives, striving to bridge development divide between Africa and Europe through the strengthening of economic cooperation and the promotion of sustainable development on both continents⁵⁰.

The strategy aimed at promoting more accurate images of the two continents and surpassing the inherited negative stereotypes, with a focus on vast positive developments, experiences and lesson learned from the past⁵¹. The strategy also tackled a great deal of different themes, from financial ones, including transparent and accountable management of public funds, institutional development and reform, fight against corruption, corporate social responsibility, money-laundering and tax-fraud, to pharmaceutical production, vaccines and epidemics and environmentally friendly technologies and products⁵². The different themes of the so-called "People-centred partnership" were structured and defined in eight specific Africa-EU Partnerships: 1. Partnership on Peace and Security; 2. Partnership on Democratic Governance

49 See note #46

50 Council of the European Union. (2007). The Africa - EU Strategic Partnership: A Joint Africa - EU Strategy. 16344/07 (Presse 291). Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/97496.pdf

51 See previous note

52 See note #50

and Human Rights; 3. Partnership on Trade, Regional Integration and Infrastructure; 4. Partnership on the Millennium Development Goals; 5. Partnership on Energy; 6. Partnership on Climate Change; 7. Partnership on Migration, Mobility and Employment; 8. Partnership on Science, Information Society and Space⁵³.

It represented another big jump from the outset agenda from Cairo, with relations which go beyond development cooperation by opening up the dialogue on issues of joint political concern and interest. Furthermore, the partnership seemingly moved away from a focus on solely African matters and openly addressed global and European issues. The revisited and improved partnership was meant to be centred on people, not on institutions, with the great importance of African and European representatives of civil society, youth, the private sector, trade unions, researchers and scientists⁵⁴.

In their paper *What next for the joint Africa–EU strategy: Perspectives on revitalising an innovative framework*⁵⁵, Jean Bossuyt and Andrew Sherriff examined the Joint Africa – EU Strategy and came to the conclusion that several JAES thematic partnerships mainly focused on obsolete topics (e.g. peace and security, governance and economic development). Still, they believed that the JAES also included major innovations with the objective of ‘overcoming the traditional donor-recipient relationship’ and essentially fundamentally changing Africa-EU relations. Some partnerships however were considered ‘more advanced than others in terms of modalities, action priorities and road maps’ by other academics⁵⁶. The partnership still made a clear distinction among the different themes, facilitating the way to approach the

53 See note #50

54 See note #50

55 Bossuyt, J., and Sherriff, A. (2010). *What next for the joint Africa–EU strategy. Perspectives on revitalising an innovative framework*. ECDPM. Available at: <https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/DP-49-JAES-Perspectives-Revitalising-Innovative-Framework-2010.pdf>

56 Tywuschik, V., and Sherriff, A. (2009). *Beyond Structures? Reflections on the Implementation of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy*. ECDPM. Discussion Paper No. 87. Available at: <https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/DP-87-JAES-Reflections-Implementation-Joint-Africa-EU-Strategy-2009.pdf>

issues and act. The Joint Strategy had huge implications for the future and marked an important moment in history of the Africa-EU relations.

3.3. *Third Summit in Tripoli (2010)*

Second in Africa and third overall Africa-EU Summit was held in Tripoli in 2010 under the theme ‘Investment, economic growth and job creation’. It aimed to emphasise the link between stronger economic cooperation and regional integration and highlighted the importance of increased private sector engagement for achieving political objectives. It moreover called for increased cooperation in the fields of science and information society creating inclusive knowledge-based and globally competitive economy⁵⁷. The EU and African leaders adopted the *Tripoli Declaration*, renewing the commitments and focusing on investment and economic growth, taking into account the global financial crisis of 2007-2008⁵⁸. With the Tripoli Declaration the second Action Plan (2011-2013) of JAES was adopted, calling for reinforced cooperation in the eight thematic partnerships in the first Action Plan (2008-2010), with outlined main beneficiaries for each partnership. Moreover, the EU and African leaders also adopted a Joint declaration on climate change.

Energy, the main theme of the fifth partnership was among others perceived to be at the heart of development and an essential prerequisite for economic growth and reaching the MDGs (Millennial Development Goals). It was projected that one of the main challenges of the 21st century will be meeting growing energy needs. Furthermore, access to reliable and sustainable energy supplies were predicted to be essential for both Africa and Europe⁵⁹. The main objectives of this partnership focused on energy security dialogue, and improved access to reliable, secure, affordable, climate friendly and sustainable energy services for both continents. Terms in use also included energy infrastructure investments, energy efficiency and most essentially renewable energy.

57 EC, European Commission. (2010). 3rd Africa EU-Summit 29/30 November, Tripoli. Press Release, 23 November 2010. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_10_604

58 See previous note

59 See note #57

The Tripoli summit further stressed its relevance, by noting that renewable energy is becoming a fundamental requirement for tackling challenges such as climate change and maintained economic growth. At the time, only 12% of Africa's hydropower potential was exploited, compared with 70% in Europe⁶⁰. Not much has changed since. In 2021 Africa's hydropower potential was approximately 340 GW, of which around only 11% were exploited⁶¹. In comparison it was estimated that for Europe, North America, South America and Asia the same figure was 53%, 39%, 26% and 20% respectively. For the first time in three summits, solar, wind, and geothermal energy have been included on the agenda, making the Tripoli summit an important step forward. There was also mention of the need for substantial investments in the energy infrastructure and joint actions planned in this field. The main tool to increase energy security, crucial for both continents, according to the declaration was diversification of energy supplies, with more use of local renewable energy sources, in combination with increased regional power trade⁶².

Not the highest theme on the agenda but still covered was climate change, which was also the focal point of the sixth thematic partnership. It was recognized that the African continent was particularly vulnerable when it comes to climate change, specifically in relation to food security, sustainable water supply and extreme weather phenomena, including floods, droughts and desertification. It was concluded that these serious issues require an Africa-EU joint effort⁶³. Some of the tackled priorities were the necessity of common agenda on climate change policies and cooperation, and withstanding land degradation and aridity. One of the main goals of the Africa-EU partnership stressed was reducing the impact of climate change on African populations and on their environment. Related themes tackled included deforestation, water resources management, land management and very importantly carbon

60 See note #57

61 Ruppert, L., Pedersen A., and Mandago S. (2021). SEFA Appraisal Report (SAR) – Green Baseload. Africa Hydropower Modernization Program. Sustainable Energy Fund for Africa. African Development Bank Group, 20 September 2021. Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/multinational-africa-hydropower-modernization-program-project-appraisal-report>

62 See note #57

63 See note #57

Africa – EU Relations: The evolution of an agenda of partnership

market. More specifically, the question was raised how to strengthen African possibilities to better exploit opportunities under the carbon market (trading systems in which carbon credits are sold and bought, with one tradable carbon credit equals one tonne of carbon dioxide or the equivalent amount of a different greenhouse gas reduced, sequestered or avoided)⁶⁴.

With migration being a major political issue, both in the EU and in Africa, it was noted that the public and political debate often focused exclusively on the downsides of migration, with many opportunities to consider. Equal approach when it comes to migration was created, with the partnership ultimately aiming to bring benefits to all migrants in both Africa and the EU. It covered inter- and intra-continental migration and all types of migrants, including economic, refugees, permanent, temporary, workers, students and scholars. Many different categories of African citizens were supposed to benefit from the partnership, including African indigenous plants increasingly used in the pharmaceutical sector. European citizens were also expected to benefit since medicines developed from African raw materials could also be available in Europe⁶⁵.

Overall, partnerships have remained, but additional was the mention of achievements made in the meantime. It gave the opportunity to discuss developments that occurred. It covered everything important, building on the initial two summits, with emphasis on energy, which was at the heart of the summit. Some characterised the summit in Tripoli more realistic and cautious than the previous ones. Even with the fact that this summit introduced the theme of ‘Investment, economic growth and job creation’, it served primarily to reaffirm the initial eight priority areas⁶⁶. Some point out that despite of the good level of engagement and cooperation throughout the period (2005– 2010), African states ‘complained vociferously that the EU was continuing to use trade agreements in a selective manner that maximised benefits

64 UNDP, United Nations Development Programme. (2022). What are carbon markets and why are they important? Climate Promise. 18 May, 2022. Available at: <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-are-carbon-markets-and-why-are-they-important>

65 See note #57

66 Kell, F., and Vines, A. (2020). The evolution of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (2007– 2020). In *The Routledge Handbook of EU-Africa Relations*. Routledge, pp. 105-120.

to the EU and continued to impose unacceptable levels of political conditionality on governance, security and human rights’⁶⁷.

3.4. *Fourth Summit in Brussels (2014)*

The 4th Africa-EU summit once again brought together the EU and African leaders and a total of 90 delegations. The theme of the summit was ‘Investing in people, prosperity and peace’, with benefits to the citizens of both continents in accordance with the JAES being the focal point. In the *Brussels Summit Declaration*, there was emphasis on major developments and progress made with regard to democracy, governance and human rights, with still room for improvement⁶⁸. Africa was also praised for experiencing pronounced economic growth, with ever more countries and people reaching middle-income status and attracting increased investment flows

The summit had a slightly different approach, instead of different thematic partnerships, roadmap with strategic priorities, as well as, separate key areas were tackled, including, peace and security, prosperity and people. The roadmap which set out strategic priorities in areas of mutual interest. The five agreed priorities for the period 2014-2017 were: peace and security; democracy, good governance and human rights; human development; sustainable and inclusive development and growth and continental integration; and global and emerging issues⁶⁹.

The Paris Agreement was also a topic discussed, not surprisingly since it was one of the key strategic themes in the EU and its member states. Related to it, the declaration also covered themes such as the climate-resilient and low-emission development strategies for economies to cope with climate change, going a step further from Tripoli in 2010. The transformation of agriculture in order to provide food resilience, food and nutrition security and a dynamic commercial sector, was acknowledged as pivotal, especially in Africa⁷⁰.

67 Lahiff, E. (2020). Agriculture and land in EU-Africa relations. In *The Routledge Handbook of EU-Africa Relations*. Routledge, pp. 336-348.

68 European Council. (2014). Declaration. Fourth EU-Africa Summit, 2-3 April 2014, Brussels. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/23894/142096.pdf>

69 See previous note

70 See note #69

Higher education was considered to play a central role in enhancing citizenship and democratic values as well as providing a country with the skilled workers, managers and administrators that would foster sustainable development and encourage the trade and investment needed⁷¹. With the people in centre of the agenda, some topics were naturally gaining even more importance, including migration and employment (with focus on SMEs), which were outlined as key issues for all stakeholders. Irregular migration and tragedies it brought were also covered, with a clear goal to prevent such events in the future, while describing the trafficking of human beings as modern slavery⁷².

A noticeable shift from the previous declarations was the clear emphasis on the more equal wording, potentially leading to more balanced relations. For the most issues that were tackled in the declaration it was recognized that they are concerning both continents, and not only or mainly Africa, and this was highlighted in many parts.

3.5. *Fifth Summit in Abidjan (2017)*

The fifth AU-EU summit took place in the end of November 2017 in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. The gathering once again brought together EU and African leaders to define the future direction for cooperation between the two continents and was held under the agreed general theme of 'Investing in youth for accelerated inclusive growth and sustainable development'. The joint *Abidjan Declaration* outlined common priorities for the Africa-EU partnership in four strategic areas: economic opportunities for youth; peace and security; mobility and migration; cooperation on governance⁷³. The four common priorities agreed on for the time being were: investing in people - education, science, technology and skills development; strengthening resilience, peace,

71 See note #69

72 See note #69

73 European Council. (2017). Declaration. Investing in Youth for Accelerated Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development. African Union – European Union Summit 2017. 29 – 30 November 2017. AU-EU/Decl.1(V). Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31991/33454-pr-final_declaration_au_eu_summit.pdf

security and governance; migration and mobility; and finally mobilizing investments for African structural sustainable transformation⁷⁴.

The focus on youth included an additional positive shift in the agenda, recognizing the vital role young people play. The European side emphasized again that the EU is Africa's closest neighbour and biggest partner for both investment and trade, as well as development aid and humanitarian assistance. Leaders also adopted a joint statement on the migrant situation in Libya, condemning the inhuman treatment of migrants and refugees by criminal groups. Investing in youth was characterized key priority for Africa and the EU with the 60% of African population being under the age of 25⁷⁵.

African and EU leaders agreed to support the mobility of students and academics in Africa while also enhancing exchange programmes between the continents and at the same time to jointly address the root causes of irregular migration. Moreover, Paris agreement was once again mentioned on this occasion as well as the importance of tackling climate change. Different sides differently perceived the Abidjan Summit, some argued that it was focusing on important issues, other feared that more proposals, especially under science, technology and innovation should have been put forward.

3.6. Sixth Summit in Brussels (2022)

The heads of state or government of the member states of the African Union and the European Union met for the sixth AU-EU Summit with the title "A Joint vision for 2030", in Brussels on 17 and 18 February 2022. They met under the Co-Chairpersonship of Mr. Charles Michel, President of the European Council and Mr. Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal and Chairperson of the AU⁷⁶. The summit was held in an unusual context, marked above all by the new health and financial priorities of the African countries,

74 See previous note

75 European Council. (2017). 5th African Union - EU Summit, 29-30 November 2017. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2017/11/29-30/>

76 European Union and African Union. (2022). Sixth European Union - African Union Summit: A Joint Vision for 2030. Available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/54412/final_declaration-en.pdf

Africa – EU Relations: The evolution of an agenda of partnership

that no one anticipated, after the Covid-19 pandemic, which not only managed to postpone the summit for two years, but created many hardships on both continents. Nevertheless, it brought a joint vision, which included a strong European commitment to support access to vaccines, new financial commitments from the EU in response to African demands and other common challenges, repeated many times⁷⁷.

There was more focus on women's empowerment in all spheres of life, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, the fight against inequalities and children's rights. The importance of food security and nutrition was also acknowledged, as well as the vitality of transparent remittances and dealing effectively with the brain-drain issue. The migration agenda was even further broadened with some of the additional themes covered being: supporting strengthened border management and achieving effective improvements on return, readmission and reintegration, including promoting voluntary return and facilitating sustainable reintegration of returned persons⁷⁸.

Equitable access to vaccines, as well as voluntary technology transfers were prioritized. This was a huge milestone in the agenda setting of the partnership. The AU and the EU also underlined the urgency of the WTOs contribution to the fight against the pandemic and to the recovery of the global economy, which also included intellectual property related matters⁷⁹.

The summit also tackled increased spending through international programmes in the fields of health, climate, biodiversity, education and security to facilitate economic recovery. The lending instruments for sustainable investment projects in priority sectors were agreed on. The emphasis was also put on a joint AU-EU Innovation Agenda, including exchanges of young citizens, volunteers and students, through the expanded Erasmus+ programme and partnerships between universities⁸⁰.

The issue of cultural exchanges and the movement of artists and artworks between the two continents was also put forward. A mutual undertaking for

77 See previous note

78 See note #76

79 See note #76

80 See note #76

the restitution of cultural assets and protection of cultural heritage also made it on the agenda, bringing the agenda forward from the cultural cooperations in the initial summits. Investment package was also tackled, focusing on priorities and needs of the African countries, including: investment in energy; transport and digital infrastructure; energy transition that is fair, access to electricity; green transition; and the Paris Agreement⁸¹. Also put forward was the digital transformation, that ought to support trusted connectivity through investments in infrastructures and an affordable and enhanced access to the digital and data economy while boosting digital entrepreneurship and skills.

This Declaration, which for some critics was nothing more than a new European way of marking the new agenda, seemed to be the basis on which the new EU strategy with Africa would be discussed. Some novel priority topics appeared in it, including digital transformation and the green transition, along with other priorities already common in the partnership.

Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa

The Joint Africa-EU Strategy from 2007 is still of relevance representing an important step in the relationship between the EU and Africa. However, in 2007, the world was a different place and the reality of the partnership with Africa was in a different global context. This led to partners recently realizing the necessity of a new Strategy. Furthermore, only 11 years later in 2018, six of the ten fastest growing economies in the world were African and the number of middle-income or high-income countries in Africa even higher. Moreover, new opportunities arising from the digital transformation, the demographic dividend, low-cost renewable energy, the green transition and a low-carbon, blue and circular economy also made its mark. This was in line with the vision of the African leaders' transformative initiatives, including the African Union's Agenda 2063, the African Continental Free Trade Area and many other developments taking place at the same time⁸².

One of the aims of the Joint Communication was revising the partnership and the new EU strategy with Africa, with partners reflecting on the shifts

81 See note #76

82 EC, European Commission. (2022). Africa-EU Partnership. Available at: https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/africa-eu-partnership_en

and overall trends in the world and among partners. The changed structure with five new partnerships included: 1) partnership for green transition and energy access; 2) partnership for digital transformation; 3) partnership for sustainable growth and jobs; 4) partnership for peace and governance; and 5) partnership on migration and mobility⁸³.

Along with the regional and continental economic integration in Africa, European Green Deal (with a focus on low-carbon, resource efficient and climate-resilient future) and the digital transformation were put forward as one of the key priorities for the first time. It was proposed that the EU scales up EU-Africa academic and scientific cooperation, including on technical and vocational education and training, and enhancing skills development⁸⁴. Even though Covid-19 and subsequently delay of the summit negatively impacted this document, it still represented a big step forward with crucial new spheres and themes discussed.

4. Summary of Developments and Key Priorities

4.1. Summary of Developments

Focusing on the themes included on the agenda over the years, it is evident that the summits display a complex mosaic of overlapping strategies. However, after analysing further the summits and declarations that came along, it is noticeable that there is a good amount of repetitions and limitations with, in essence, similar themes consistently high on the agenda. It is not easy, however, to be conclusive on the matter.

Even though it is challenging to compare documents of different sizes and purposes, if one analyses the two strategic documents, namely the *Joint Strategy* from 2007 and the *Joint Communication: Towards a Comprehensive Joint Strategy* from 2020, the shifts over time are difficult to miss. Nevertheless, themes such as migration, climate change, energy, security, education and a few others were dominant in both documents, making changes over time rather mild than dramatic. Some aspects, such as the increasing

83 See previous note

84 See note #82

importance of digital transformation as a theme and the introduction of different renewable energy sources, still indicate a broadening and deepening of the agenda. Unfortunately, it remains unclear whether these changes represent real significant improvements. One could argue that most changes occurred because of external factors, such as digitalization and energy scares taking places regardless of the partnership. Even the great agenda developments on health seem to be predominantly reactive with the pandemic heavily affecting the continents.

Nonetheless, the developments should not be neglected since a lot has been achieved since the get-go. From solely having EU development aid strategies or even national aid strategies to a partnership with a common Africa-EU Strategy we have today. Some important themes however were not covered or tackled enough in the documents, such as tourism, representing an unexplored or unseized opportunity for both continents to benefit from. Many themes were only touched on surface-level and have yet to open important debates. However, the agenda has broadened regarding engagements between Africa and Europe in the broadest possible sense. This is the main starting point, and the question remaining is - how and in which direction?

In the initial documents, there was much debate on what Africa needed to achieve, and little say on what the EU has to do differently, making it a seemingly asymmetrical relationship. However, this language and narrative have been gradually changing ever since, with some inevitable setbacks at times. For instance, formulating an EU strategy for Africa in 2020 presumably involved little involvement of African partners and no timely consultations between the parties necessary for an equal partnership. Such course of action and decisions made with no pre-discussions were criticized on several occasions by many.⁸⁵ Therefore, it is vital for the EU to evolve in how it works and collaborates with African partners, systematically promoting a timely and inclusive dialogue between the parties. When one compares the agenda to the EU agendas with some other partners, such as the Transatlantic Part-

85 Laporte, G. (2022). The sixth AU-EU summit: partners in therapy? EU Observer. Available at: <https://euobserver.com/opinion/154317>

nership, the difference is evident as inequality in that case is never considered an issue. Nonetheless, we could argue that the Africa–EU partnership goes much deeper with a broader set of priorities. Even if the African voice perhaps not equally heard, with the political and economic shifts on the world stage, it is becoming louder and more apparent, making Africa a more robust negotiator with a choice.

4.2. Key priorities for the future

“Covid-19, climate change, terrorism (...) many challenges threaten both Africa and Europe. Yet there are countless opportunities available to us as well. We have known for a long time that it is only together that we can move forward better and faster, but there is now an urgent need to accelerate the pace, taking inspiration from the Olympic motto ‘faster, stronger, higher’. To be stronger together on the world stage and to aim higher, to jointly carry out concrete, innovative and transformative projects - this is what I want us to work on together”⁸⁶.

In his speech in February 2021, Josep Borrell pointed out that there are undoubtedly many priorities for which the EU and Africa should increase their cooperation. Focusing on the themes provided in the primary Africa-EU documents, critical themes for the partnership include but are not limited to: health; migration; green energy; climate change; agriculture and food security; education and youth. It is challenging to compare them as they are all equally essential and simply different. However, migration was seemingly the most discussed theme in the literature by far, probably because it had substantial direct implications on Europe, a moreover very emotional topic for many. The two other themes, which were progressively high on the agenda because of their implications on the future and relevance in the current global state of affairs, include (renewable) energy and climate change.

4.2.1. Migration

With migration being overly debated during the Africa-EU summits and covered in the literature, it is difficult to avoid its importance and implications.

86 EBCAM (2021). Africa and Europe: In the face of common opportunities and challenges, let's build common responses. Press Release, 27 October 2021. Available at: <https://www.ebcam.eu/news/africa/2153-africa-and-europe-in-the-face-of-common-opportunities-and-challenges-let-s-build-common-responses>

The rising population in Africa, along with poverty and opportunities abroad, is a critical factor leading to migration pressure from Africa to Europe. Nevertheless, studies show that often countries in Africa which have higher population growth are experiencing lower migration in terms of percentage⁸⁷. With Africa being the fastest growing region in the world, many African countries are regarded as promising economic partners and dynamic future markets for European industry⁸⁸. It is also important to note that migration has been one of the most relevant topics for the EU for decades, regardless of the complicated relationship with the African continent. Some go as far as to say that the migration has been a long-time central European concern, officially characterized and referred to as the movement of non-EU citizens or third-country nationals in the EU's overall migration policy⁸⁹, including those from Africa. The topic has however become very complex with constant significant changes in the migration policy mosaic.

Even though poverty in Africa is one of the factors leading to migration, academics argue that the poorest countries on earth do not produce migrants but rather middle-income countries. There is a need for a certain level of economic development before people become aware or capable of migrating or even considering it. There are many negative associations with the existing migration in Africa, as the young and educated middle-class population is needed for development. They are trained in Africa, but are leaving their countries and going abroad to contribute to other economies. Therefore, the migratory pressures are not only a threat for Europe but for Africa considering its economies, innovation and entrepreneurship suffering as a result⁹⁰.

There are also many positive aspects connected to migration, especially when one takes remittances into account. Remittances constitute an important source of income and foreign currency in many developing countries

87 EC, European Commission. (2018). Many more to come: Migration from and within Africa. Joint Research Institute.

88 See note #2

89 Caviedes, A. (2016). European integration and the governance of migration. *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 12(1), pp. 552-565.

90 Lopes, C. (2022). Decolonising Africa-Europe relations. Oxford Martin School. Video. Available at: <https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/events/decolonising-africa-europe-relations/>

and are, therefore, a core element of growth and development⁹¹. Many African countries, in different ways, depend on the migrants living in Europe. Some of them may live in poorer conditions than the majority of Europeans, but it is still crucial for them to be able to help their own family and their economies. Thus, the African perspective might be completely different from the European, more sceptical one. Migration is still one the most controversial and fascinating topics on the agenda, and it is critical to tackle it in the right way so that no partner experiences adverse effects, with a lot at stake on both sides. The migration topic will surely be discussed for the years to come, especially considering the demographic situation on both continents⁹².

4.2.2. *Green energy*

For years, the energy question was on the agenda between Africa and the EU. However, with the implications of the war in Ukraine and the subsequent introduction of sanctions against Russia, the previously biggest energy exporter to the EU, the question gained even more relevance. When it comes to the energy issue, there often appears to be a wrong belief in Europe that Africa needs its support, instead of forging a mutually beneficial exchange and acknowledging the importance of an equal partnership on the issue. In theory, Africa is rich in resources and the EU's interest and willingness to finance the energy projects makes for an ideal partnership. With Africa's potential, including solar and hydrogen energy, often tackled in official documents, the question is why has renewable energy from Africa not yet become the primary energy source in both Africa and Europe?

One of many examples, the Desertec project, which recognized the great potential of solar energy in Africa, gave the impression of a groundbreaking innovation bound for success and huge benefits. Nevertheless, it was unsuccessful and destined to fail at the end⁹³. It is complicated to explain or un-

91 Kühnhardt, L. (2014). Africa Consensus: New Interests, Initiatives, and Partners

92 See note #10

93 Schmitt, T. (2018). (Why) did Desertec fail? An interim analysis of a large-scale renewable energy infrastructure project from a Social Studies of Technology perspective, *Local Environment*, 23:7, 747-776, DOI:

derstand the reasons behind it without seeing the big picture. One could argue that there is the factor of unstable political conditions in Africa. Furthermore, the lack of infrastructure and the transportation of solar energy is still a big technological issue, presenting huge challenges⁹⁴. However, perhaps the simplest explanation lies in the initial idea itself and the lack of cooperation. We could argue that the only way projects of this size and impact can work is when not only the EU but also Africa realizes the energy needs existing on the continent alone. The whole issue of green energy, including solar and hydrogen energy, regardless of the willingness or lack of it, is still very complex, and there will be a need for a lot of investment and research to do it effectively. However, the opportunity is there. The needs of African population are growing each day and will undoubtedly eventually result in more initiatives from the African side. The continent is offering endless opportunities for renewable energy, perhaps the critical resource of the future, especially for Europe. Such projects should be able to bring the Africa-EU Partnership to the next level with a much more pragmatic future agenda.

4.2.3. Climate change and green transition

Climate change and environmental degradation in Africa have been an enormous problem for a long time, with many side aspects. On the other hand, the EU's environmental policies led by the European Green Deal have the protection of biodiversity and countering climate change as one of its top priorities⁹⁵. With its motto being 'striving to be the first climate-neutral continent' carbon emissions become increasingly important, not only for Europe but also for the partner countries and regions. Even though this is a vital topic to tackle among partners, focusing on the low-carbon economy and introducing carbon credit, a common practice of late, might be an unfair way for the EU to deal with Africa⁹⁶. Although carbon markets and other deals support

10.1080/13549839.2018.1469119. Available at:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2018.1469119>

94 See previous note

95 EC, European Commission. (2022). A European Green Deal. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

96 See note #90

Africa – EU Relations: The evolution of an agenda of partnership

climate transition, some fear that they are consequently deepening the isolation of countries that have contributed the least to climate change impacts, including African countries. They argue that even though Africa only accounts for around 4 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions, the smallest percent in the world it suffers the most. While contributing the least, having not industrialized as much as other regions, Africa is still experiencing great damage. Moreover, the countries of the continent are suffering from the structures that allowed others to develop and enrich themselves with emissions⁹⁷. Having this in mind, changing the approach of tackling this issue should be worthy of consideration, especially for the countries capitalizing on the matter, while Africa was set on the side.

There's a fear carbon credit would deteriorate the potential for development in Africa, making trade less profitable and decreasing its negotiator position. Even more so when we consider that most of what Africa exports are commodities, which are classified as carbon-intensive and thus disable African enterprises from proving that they are immune to carbon intensity or certain levels of carbon intensity. As a result, Africa is penalized and pays taxes for its exports⁹⁸. Even though it results in fewer emissions, it comes at a very high cost for the population of Africa. Although climate change should be one of the top priorities, it is clear there should be a different way to tackle the situation in Africa, with a common solution between the partners.

Having said that, the global challenge of reducing vulnerability and combating climate change is still increasingly significant for both continents. With Africa being the home to the vast natural capital, unique biodiversity and ecosystems such as rainforests, there is a risk of overexploitation and depletion in addition to the threats posed by unsustainable fishing and management of water resources, pollution, desertification, and, in the case of coastal areas, rising sea levels. A clean circular economy with fair value chains, which is also equitable, could be a key for transitioning to a sustainable economic model⁹⁹. The implication climate change threatens to have on either

97 See note #90

98 See note #90

99 See note #82

continent is difficult to predict and may influence other issues, such as migration and food security. Therefore, it only seems appropriate to prioritize the matter and intelligently address it together.

5. Conclusions

Developments of the agenda have led to undeniable positive outcomes; however, they were also characterized by endless discussions of never-changing themes, some of which are slowly becoming less important in the global context. With the new threats to the success of the partnership, it is clear that in order to continue to nurture mutually beneficial relations the focus of the partnership should outgrow the democracy and the rule of law concept. Instead, the key element for the future shall shift onto what the partners can do to speed up further development of Africa and avoid stagnation of Europe, focusing on endless opportunities that sectors such as green energy and digitalization offer. This could as a result lead to more prosperity in African countries and increase the power of individual people, also decreasing the migration pressures and possibly the population growth.

As we can see in this paper, for the big part the migration theme was the central issue of debate, it may have however been looked at from the wrong perspective. Additionally, the official documents and strategies seem to be less pragmatic and more ideological, making fundamental changes challenging to achieve. The agenda-setting was also clearly following the global trends and was changing due to their side effects, making us wonder how the agenda would have broadened without such shifts. Nevertheless, the modernizing and ever more equal language used in the official documents and the willingness to tackle a wide variety of different themes encourages us to believe that the partnership is crucial for both, with the agenda only bound to grow further.

Takeaways

Based on the discussion in the paper, the following three recommendations and takeaways ought to be considered for future improvements of the agenda

Africa – EU Relations: The evolution of an agenda of partnership

and success of the partnership ahead of the forthcoming 2024 Africa-EU Summit:

- Even though the agenda is relevant, deliberate and comprehensive, a more pragmatic and cooperative approach is needed, especially when dealing with the most relevant themes for the future, such as climate change and green energy;
- The agenda should tackle the history of inequality, including the colonial past, more clearly and build on it naturally if it wishes to achieve a genuine Partnership of equals;
- The agenda between the EU and the AU should be set more proactively instead of allowing global shifts and trends dictate the way the agenda is created.

A more practical and proactive approach would help take the agenda and the partnership to reach the next level, benefiting both continents. Further, the global trends are very unpredictable, as we saw with the Covid-19 pandemic, making it even more difficult for the partners to adjust rapidly and be proactive. Both the EU and Africa seem to realize that they need each other; however, the presence of other potential partners requires a more diversified cooperation arrangement. Given the geographical proximity and historical ties between the two, the EU and Africa should seek to further build on the foundations of comprehensive and mutually beneficial cooperation. Moving from unilateral EU policies and actions to more engaging and reciprocal relations and a genuine partnership does represent a huge step forward and is vital for both sides. Nonetheless, there is still a need for more unity and cooperation between the partners on a global level and on the themes that will present crucial future challenges and opportunities, with the Africa-EU Partnership pivotal for both. Lastly, further focus on the development of key sectors, especially those dealing with development and infrastructure, including cooperation on future joint green energy projects could be the game changer for the forthcoming 2024 AU-EU Summit and common strategic agenda of the two partners.

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