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The Challenges of Europe-Africa Relations

Background Paper

Objectives

The aim of this conference is to debate the issues and central challenges to Africa and the possible European responses, in order to define an agenda of priorities for the relations between the two continents on the long-term. This will be done through a debate on three specific themes – Development Cooperation, Conflicts and Security, Governance and Human Rights – that represent major areas of debate in the Europe-Africa current dialogue. The debates will contribute to identify the tendencies, constrains, challenges and opportunities of this ongoing process.

The conference will bring together a wide range of actors involved in the Europe-Africa dialogue, providing an opportunity for exchanges of experiences and knowledge between parliamentarians, academics, institutional partners, private sector and civil society actors, and officials / decision-makers working on Europe-Africa relations.

The conference will also mark the beginning of the process of creating an Europe-Africa Dialogue Forum, a project that is being worked between the North-South Centre and the Institute for Strategic and International Studies (IEEI). The forum intends to be a permanent network of experts and institutions that will contribute to an enhanced dialogue between Europe and Africa, through regular debates, research on specific issues, publications and dissemination activities.

Outputs

The conference is expected to present conclusions and recommendations on some issues of the Europe-Africa relations, particularly having in view the second Europe-Africa Summit, to be held in Lisbon.

The main documentation – such as background papers and presentations at the conference – will be published and widely distributed.

Context

In April 2000, African and EU heads of state met in Cairo and made the joint decision to set up a global framework for dialogue between the two continents. The first summit represented a symbolic milestone of significant importance in the relationship between the two continents, for it was the first high-level meeting between African and European countries, outside the existing frame of agreements (Cotonou, the Francophone community, Commonwealth and CPLP).

In order for this new level of multilateral relationship to be expressed into solid actions, an agenda of priorities, focused on a long-term perspective, will probably allow approaching the African challenges in their proper dimension. The plan of action adopted in Cairo focuses mainly on eight topics of mutual interest: conflict prevention, human rights and good governance, debt, the restitution of cultural property, regional economic integration, the environment and drought, food security, and AIDS and other pandemics. The coming into effect of the African Union (AU) at the OAU Summit in Lusaka in July 2002 and the adoption of NEPAD by all the continent's heads of state brought two major new dimensions to this dialogue, establishing a "new pan-African level of governance".

Since Cairo Summit, the Europe-Africa dialogue has registered some positive progress in different areas such as conflict management and resolution, Human rights and democracy. On other key issues like HIV/AIDS and pandemics, regional integration and trade, environment, food security, Africa's external debt discussions continue¹. It is clear that the second Europe-Africa summit will be a key moment for the EU-AU relationship to develop and acquire a crucial political dimension and also to establish a framework for the EU-Africa political dialogue.

In a context of profound changes in Europe and in Africa, the dialogue will have to take into account several dimensions:

First of all, the challenges that arise to the European integration process and the consequences that the Convention of Europe, the future enlargement to 25 States and the current reform of the European Commission will have in the relationship with the African countries. Over the next few years, a series of major changes are due to take place in European governance and institutional structure, which are likely to have a strong impact on the European Union's global positioning and external actions. The coexistence of different perspectives on the division of powers between the member-states, the Commission and the Common Security and Foreign Policy (CSFP), regarding the European foreign relationship framework, represents an enigma when it comes to the future evolution of Africa's role in the European interests and the model to be followed in the partnership between both continents.

Several financial negotiations and decisions for the next 4 years will establish the parameters for Overseas Development Assistance from the EU, namely the mid-term

¹ For a detailed analysis of the recent developments in the several areas of the Europe-Africa dialogue, please see the Communication from the Commission to the Council on "The EU-Africa Dialogue", June 2003. http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/com/cnc/2003/com2003_0316en01.pdf

review of the 9th EDF allocations in 2004, the negotiations for the multi-annual overall budget framework that will start in 2004 and the negotiation of the 10th EDF in 2006. The ACP-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) Negotiations (until December 2007), the Reform of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and WTO negotiations will also have a strong influence in the future of economic and trade relations between Europe and Africa

Secondly, and unlike the European process - more consolidated and unified in terms of the economies, the regimes and political values - Africa is far from having a common political identity or an integrated economic reality. The instability of some political regimes, internal conflicts and the feebleness of the economies, will hardly lead to internal or regional unity and coherence. Several interrogations are thus justified concerning the limits and the potential of the African integration processes (both continental and regional) and the part to be played by Europe in this field.

However, African leaders are becoming more proactive in the way they position themselves *vis à vis* the international community. In one year, the AU has been developing coherent policies and concrete actions, particularly on the field of democracy and human rights (with the introduction of the peer review mechanism, the creation of the Pan-African Parliament and the Africa Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights), as well as in conflict management and resolution (establishment of the Peace and Security Council, peace mission in Burundi, AU special envoys, etc). The AU Maputo Summit addressed a number of important questions – namely the financial constraints of the organisation - and resulted in a range of concrete proposals– such as the creation of a Peace Support Operational Facility -, that will need further discussion and definition.

Thirdly, the acknowledgement of the failure in the development strategies pursued so far and of the insufficiency of the results in international cooperation leads us to the necessity of an urgent change in the approach. In face of the difficulty found in mobilising supplementary resources for development aid, member-states and the European Institutions themselves tend to concentrate the existing means in the search of a virtuous mixture between debt relief, structural adjustments, fight against poverty and humanitarian and emergency aid, concentrating more on the consequences of the problems and minimising the symptoms, rather than in its causes. In this context, the change of approach into a long-term perspective that allows an attack to the deepest roots of these problems becomes essential to a successful implementation of the relationship established between partners. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) initiative may be one important step.

In sum, the Europe-Africa Dialogue has to be taken forward in a way that is fully complementary with the AU and NEPAD processes by providing NEPAD and AU political and diplomatic support and ensuring the adequate financial backup for their development. To be successful, the dialogue will have to be inclusive (open to a wide range of actors, such as civil society and parliamentarians) and pursue the creation of partnerships and concrete programs in several areas, such as the consolidation of democracy and good governance, the rule of law, human rights, poverty eradication and peace and security.

Subjects and Discussion Points

Note for the Speakers:

Each intervention should have 10-15 minutes maximum. The speakers are invited to elaborate a written document on the theme of the session, to be distributed during the meeting and published after the conference.

The discussion points presented below are merely indicative of some specific themes we would like to address in the debate. In the interventions, speakers are free to focus on any theme that they feel relevant to the general theme of the session, being particularly encouraged to give concrete examples of their practical experience.

Theme I – Development Cooperation

In respect to development cooperation, Africa has been increasingly marginalised, since aid levels are declining while most donor agencies appear increasingly reluctant to take risks (e.g. for peace missions) or to explore ways to invest in structured forms of development cooperation in situations of crisis or conflict (beyond humanitarian aid). Moreover, the frequent tendency at all donor level to force reality to fit their legal framework instead of adapting the framework to reality highlights the limits of traditional cooperation and enforces the need for innovative approaches.

The articulation between the existing initiatives and structures, such as the Cotonou agreement and the New Initiative for African Development (NEPAD), and also other development partners strategies (such as the United Nations or the World Bank) are areas that remain mostly unexplored. It is therefore necessary to find new paths of coordination and complementarity that can lead to an increased effectiveness and sustainability of cooperation and development actions.

Cooperation Trends in the International Context

What are the main consequences of the recent international developments (11th September' attacks, unilateral intervention in Iraq) in EU external policy and influence?

How will the institutional changes in the EU (enlargement, external relations and EC reform) affect the external policy and actions towards the African countries?

What is the added value of the EU *vis a vis* other international actors present in Africa, such as the World Bank or the United Nations?

What are the positive and negative impacts of the current development cooperation trends – political conditionality, performance criteria – in the effectiveness and coherence of cooperation policies and actions in Africa?

Cooperation and Regionalism

How can the EU support the continental and regional integration efforts in Africa?

What strategies should be implemented in order to improve the EU-AU dialogue?

What impact EU's developing relationship with the AU will have on the Cotonou Agreement and the cohesion of the ACP Group?

How to contribute to a better implementation of the Cotonou agreement and ensure coherence and complementarity with the other ongoing processes and agreements (Europe-Africa Summit, AU and NEPAD, G-8 strategy towards Africa, Euro-Med agreements, EU-South Africa agreement)?

Theme II – Conflicts and Security

Armed conflicts in Africa keep raising serious humanitarian questions and compromising the success of all the internal development strategies as well as the co-operation actions promoted by the international institutions. These conflicts are characterised by a growing complexity, either it concerns the diversity of actors involved (more and more often not only the states but also less-controllable actors such as armed militia, mercenaries, illegal business men and local warlords, etc), the different levels of the conflict impact (personal, local, regional or national), the various interests involved or the multiplicity of the conflict's deep causes, which are very difficult to generalise.

In this scenario, and despite the growing disengagement of the international community towards Africa, the international organisations on the field, namely the United Nations, the World Bank and the European Union, have been trying to develop new mechanisms to respond to complex emergencies. These efforts have been formally materialised by the emergence of new specialised units (eg. the Post-conflict Unit of the World Bank) or by the production of different decisions concerning conflict prevention, management and resolution. At the European level, we can point out the introduction of this subject in the Euro-African Summit Plan of Action held in 2000, the common position on conflict prevention in Africa (May 2001) and the legal arrangements within the new EU-ACP Agreement (Cotonou) – Article 11. Besides recognising that stability is probably one of the most important pre-condition for development, the European states also link this with their concerns in the international security field.

Nevertheless, if on the one hand the operability of these arrangements and resolutions is still far from reality, on the other hand we can witness a growing role being played by the African actors in an attempt to reach peaceful solutions to these conflicts. The creation of the AU Peace and Security Council and the adoption of a work programme on peace and security by all AU member states in October 2002, as well as the EC programme in support of AU peace building activities (April 2003), are important developments towards the strengthening of the African capacities.

***Conflict Resolution and the Promotion of Peace:
What Role for International and regional Organisations?***

What are the main lessons learned on international interventions in African conflicts?

What are the possible strategies and mechanisms to support the reconstruction and national reconciliation processes? How to implement effective actions to promote the consolidation of a democratic culture, rule of law and respect for human rights, that constitute basic necessary conditions to a sustainable peace? What is the role to be played by the EU in this field?

What strategies must be pursued in order to reach a rational use and effective mobilisation of resources in favour of conflict prevention in the framework of the EU-Africa dialogue?

***The African Capacities of intervention, mediation
and conflict resolution***

How can the African capacities of conflict resolution, peacekeeping and early warning be reinforced? In which ways can the EU support the AU in this area? How to ensure an effective functioning of the Peace and Security Council?

What role to be played by the sub-regional organisations (such as CEDEAO and SADC) and how to establish effective cooperation and complementarity with the AU?

What are the lessons learned till now– which principles are essential to a successful mediation, in which conditions should a military intervention be pursued, how should political efforts and military actions be co-ordinated in specific cases?

Theme III– Governance and Human Rights

Despite the formal democratic system, violation of human rights is still a reality in some African countries. Democratic institutions, such as parliaments, courts or an independent police, are still fragile and in several cases have as basis a long institutional culture of non-democratic regimes.

However, supporting institutional capacity building and the reform of the political system at different levels is still very difficult, mainly because it remains a hard problem to commit funds to areas in which the results are not measurable or short-term effective. The positive and negative aspects of the current tendencies in international and European development cooperation in the political area and their political impact in Africa societies are questions to explore. First, the focus on conditionality and performance in the allocation of funds, being justifiable in terms of impact and financial reasons, carries the risk of penalising exactly the weaker states, which are, by definition, the ones that need aid the most. Second, the tendency to support other actors to reach faster the needed population

(international and local NGOs) can also raise new tensions in a given society and contribute to bypass the state, ultimately reinforcing its weakness. Third, the inconsistencies between foreign policy and development policy at European level, as well as a strict interpretation of political conditionality (e.g. elections holding) originates double standards of European policy for different countries in similar situations.

Moreover, if some major developments have been taken place on the Europe-Africa dialogue in specific issues such as the fight against corruption, human trafficking and support to Africa institutions,² other important areas – namely migration – need further debate and wider cooperation.

The Reinforcement of Democratic Structures: What Role for the European Union?

How to encourage peaceful political shifts between the governments in function and the opposition?

Are there ways and paths to promote democratic institutions – including civil society organisations - that are not controlled by specific interest or social groups and biased decisions?

What concrete strategies must be pursued by donors – namely the EU - to support the reinforcement of the parliaments' role and the impartiality of the judicial system?

Is there a role for the Pan-Africa Parliament, namely in relation with national and sub-regional Parliaments?

Human Rights

How to encourage economic, social and political rights in the African countries?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current regional and sub-regional human rights instruments and mechanisms of monitoring?

What are the necessary conditions for the recently established Africa Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to have a strong influence in the promotion of human rights at national level?

How can the EU principles and positions on human rights be translated in effective actions and mechanisms in the EU-Africa dialogue framework?

What measures for finding new sources of funding for the promotion and protection of human rights in the new AU and NEPAD framework?

² On human trafficking, a plan of action was elaborated (to be adopted in the Lisbon Summit). A preliminary Programme on democracy, governance and human rights was recently presented to the European side. The AU approved a Convention against corruption.

Europe-Africa Relations: Defining an agenda of priorities

Closed Door Round Table

The round table will have the participation of the speakers in the plenary sessions.

The aim is to work upon the conclusions of each session, establishing an agenda of priorities for the Europe-Africa relationship, that can be used as a plan of action for each of the themes debated in the previous sessions.

These conclusions and recommendations will be presented to officials and the heads of state and government for the next Europe-Africa Summit.

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