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Governance and Africa-Europe Relations

I. Context

One of the most important achievements of the Lisbon Summit was the adoption of “A Joint Africa-EU Strategy” and “The Action Plan 2008-2010”. The intention was to establish a new stage in the Africa-EU relationship in order “to forge a new and stronger partnership”.¹ One of the four main objectives of the strategy is “to strengthen and promote peace, security, democratic governance and human rights, fundamental freedoms, gender equality, sustainable economic development, including industrialization, and regional and continental integration in Africa”.²

The issue of governance deserved a particular attention from both parties but there is no universal definition of governance. While some core elements are common in the definitions used, there are also important variations.

The European approach underlines the importance of fighting corruption and the strengthening of public finance management, while the African side gives more importance to the accountability of the States to their citizens, reinforcement and consolidation of the democratic institutions. In other words, the African side tends to give relevance to the process and its evolution as a whole, while the European approach emphasizes the results of the process.

It is important to consider the integrated process, not only one component. We have to accept that there is an evolution in the definition of governance. In fact, “over the past few years, consensus has been growing on the inextricable linkages between governance and crucial development objectives such as poverty reduction, economic growth, peace and security as well as sustainable development. Governance is also at the core of the new aid delivery modalities. The provision of budget support critically depends on a set of governance conditions in the partner country”.³

During the process of the negotiations for the adoption of the “Joint Strategy”, the open spirit and consistent determination to achieve positive results and consensual contents prevailed. It is now crucial to maintain this determination during the process of implementation. This means not adopting unilateral positions and conditionality, but to accept the importance of working together through the process of open political

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¹ Joint Africa-EU Strategy, I. Context, Shared Vision and Principles

² Idem

³ Jan Vanheukelom, James Mackie & Jean Bossuyt; Analytical Papers-“Political Dimension: Introductory Note,” Policy Managers Report 13: The Cotonou Partnership Agreement: What Role in Changing World”. ECDPM, Nov.2007.

dialogue and respecting the already existing African mechanisms, for instance the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).

One important principle established in the AU-EU Joint Strategy is that “the partnership and its further development will be guided by the fundamental principle of the unity of Africa, the interdependence between Africa and Europe, ownership and joint responsibility, respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law, as well as the right to development. In light of this new partnership, both sides also commit themselves to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of existing agreements, policies and instruments”.⁴ The main challenge is to maintain the momentum and the dynamics created by the adoption of the AU-EU Joint Strategy in the forthcoming years.

II. Governance

Good governance is an essential condition to promote sustainable development, poverty alleviation and economic development. The African and European countries, according to the contents of the Joint Strategy and the Action Plan, must adopt a “shared vision, principles and attitudes” as real partners, rather than in a donor-recipient approach.

Africa has taken into account the responsibility for its own development, as well as the importance of good governance, including the consolidation of democratic institutions, respect of human rights, democratic principles, the rule of law, management of natural resources, the fight against corruption and fraud, transparent and accountable management of public funds, and institutional development and reforms.

The African experience demonstrates that development to be meaningful and sustainable must be owned and driven by its beneficiaries. No outsider, however generous with means and resources, can replace the role of local governments towards meaningful and sustainable development. People are not developed, they develop themselves, interpreting and integrating the experiences of others into their own culture. In this particular case, the European partnership must complement the African efforts.

Good governance and democracy promotes individual rights and the freedoms of citizens to participate fully in nation-building and development. It ensures the preservation of the rule of law through democratic institutions and the participation of civil society. Peace and stability creates an enabling environment for the exercise of citizens to fulfil their citizenship rights. Together with peace and stability, good governance and democracy ensure that citizens enjoy freedom.

III. Governance: What Does it Mean for Africa?

African countries recognize that better governance is a prerequisite for more sustainable and equitable growth, generating development to the benefit of African citizens. Good governance includes the capacity of governments to manage its economic and social resources effectively, and to design and implement sound policies in which actors such as civil society and business should operate; to promote economic efficiency through equitable rules; and to curtail corruption and malpractice in the public and private domain.

The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) is an innovative programme which builds on African self-esteem to foster integrated development and

⁴ . AU-EU Joint Strategy-3. Principle

interdependence in the continent. NEPAD, therefore, is not only a roadmap to Africa's development, but also a call for African self reliance, so that external assistance is perceived to complement (not replace) continental resources while the Africans themselves remain in the driving seat of the development process.

In terms of good governance it is important to mention that African leaders have adopted Peer Review Mechanisms – the APRM. This is a voluntary scheme aimed at enabling African countries to strengthen their democratic rule and governance structures by sharing and disseminating codes of best practice, good governance, transparency and accountability while subjecting themselves to constructive peer security.

The Partnership between Africa and Europe cannot replace the existing African instruments and initiatives. The EU can play an important role supporting African institutional development and capacity-building. The EU support must be a result of dialogue with Africa in order to apply the principle of African and local ownership and agenda. In this context, the joint strategy must be interpreted as a complement and a way to enhance dialogue between the two parties in order to help to define the issues of common interest and concern and agree on common positions, taking into account the need to jointly undertake specific initiatives and actions.

It is important to recognize that the problem of mismanagement and lack of good governance still exists in some African States, but it is also important to mention the positive evolution in the last few years. The good examples must be emphasized and supported in order to stimulate the few remained African countries with problems on good governance. The challenge is how to do that in a constructive and sustainable way. If we well understand the contents of the AU-EU Joint Strategy, political dialogue is the best way to do that. On the contrary, the results of applying conditionality directly and in a strict sense may have negative consequences for the majority of the people.

IV. Europe and the Implementation of the Africa-EU Joint Strategy

After the historic first Africa-Europe Summit held in Cairo in April 2000, the Heads of State signed the Cairo Declaration and set up the Plan of Action. Huge expectations were then created in terms of the future of an Africa-Europe partnership in new, wide framework to increase the cooperation and political dialogue between the two continents. In order to take concrete action, they adopted an agenda of priorities with long-term objectives, allowing African challenges to be addressed fully. The Cairo Plan of Action focuses on eight topics interesting both Parties: conflict prevention, human rights and good governance, debt, restitution of cultural property, regional economic integration, the environment and drought, food security, and HIV/AIDS and other pandemics. Some results were achieved, particularly on conflict management and resolution, human rights and democracy.

After that, the Zimbabwe impasse, started formally in 2002 at the Africa-Europe Ministerial meeting in Burkina Faso, was a key obstacle to increasing the relationship between the two continents. We went a long way until the II Africa-Europe Summit in Lisbon, in December 2007. This event represented in itself another symbolic milestone of significant importance in the relationship between the two continents.

The implementation of the new Africa-Europe Strategy in practice is a huge challenge for both parties, taking into account some actions taken unilaterally by the EU, which can put at risk the political dialogue and the partnership established.

The partnership agreed was supposed to be “furthermore governed by strengthened political dialogue, co-management and co-responsibility in bilateral cooperation and towards global issues, burden-sharing and mutual accountability, solidarity and mutual confidence, equality and justice, common and human security, respect for international law and agreements, gender equality and non-discrimination and, not least, a long-term approach”⁵. In fact, European partners usually put on the table unilateral political conditionalities and other pre-conditions in the process of cooperation, while not considering political dialogue as a priority.

On the other hand, there are some decisions and legal instruments adopted by the EU which can affect the environment for safe cooperation. Recently, the EU adopted “guidelines related to the human rights defending” and one of the aspects is related to the instructions given to European Embassies and Diplomatic Missions to produce regular reports on the situation of human rights in the host countries. The joint strategy considers that the shared vision “... will be implemented through successive short-term Action Plans and enhanced political dialogue at all levels, resulting in concrete and measurable outcomes in all areas of the partnership”.⁶ In spite of being a valid and positive objective, the model which was adopted to protect and promote human rights can be inappropriate, since there are already adequate mechanisms to monitor the human rights and to support the defenders in the partnership between Africa and EU.

Undoubtedly, the promotion and respect of human rights is one aspect that concerns the majority of African countries, and Europe can play an important role in helping to strengthen African capacities in that important issue.

The adopted law related to illegal immigrants on June 18 was decided by the Europeans in parallel to the existing negotiations between Africa and Europe on migration issues. This is part of a common agenda and would be better to find joint solutions for the problem of illegal migration. The possibility for illegal immigrants to stay 18 months in jail is something excessive. But, adversely, Europeans adopted strategies to promote opportunities for the “African brains”, promoting the migration of people who can play a crucial role for the development of Africa.

V. Implementing the AU-EU Joint Strategy: Challenges

The future of Africa-EU relations now has important and innovative instruments, namely the Africa-EU Joint Strategy, and it covers a very wide agenda, including important issues such as governance and democracy.

However, in spite of the adoption of this Strategy, Africa-EU relations entail some challenges which should be considered carefully. Political dialogue must to be used by both parties as a tool to manage this partnership in an effective and sustainable way. Political dialogue mechanisms are fundamental to create an appropriate environment to facilitate the effective implementation of the joint strategy. It would also help to introduce good governance and human rights as a priority in this process, focusing on transparency and mutual responsibility. Good governance and the necessary tools to ensure its proper implementation deserve particular attention from both Africans and Europeans.

⁵ The Africa-EU Joint Strategy, 3.Principles, nr.7

⁶ The Africa-EU Joint Strategy, 4.Shared Vision (part.5)

The good governance agenda in the Africa-EU relationship is what they can do to coordinate actions on issues of global governance such as UN reforms and the checks and balances of power in the international finance institutions, where global politics are defined.

The capacity to influence the international agenda in different issues like climate change and environment, world security and migration among others, can be increased with better cooperation and coordination between the two continents. As a result of this, the implementation of the Action Plan of the Africa-EU Joint Strategy will become more effective.

In conclusion, the Africa-EU Joint Strategy puts in place a wide range of important objectives, but the main challenges ahead for Africans and Europeans are how to:

- Promote good governance and respect for human rights;
- Promote democratic principles and the rules of state;
- Increase the quality of judiciary system;
- Guarantee the accountability and transparency in the management of the public funds;
- Deal jointly with the issues related to the migration;
- Take common positions and specific initiatives on all aspects of governance;
- Coordinate positions on global issues in international *fora* such as the UN reforms.

The general answer for the challenges can be found in the correct and comprehensive use of the already existing and established tool - “political dialogue”. In other words, it is fundamental not to take unilateral decisions on issues of common interest, but to consider them as part of the Africa-EU joint strategy.