

Can the Africa-EU Partnership Be Revived?

by Nicoletta Pirozzi

African and European leaders will gather in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, on 29-30 November for the fifth African Union (AU)-European Union (EU) Summit. Focused on investing in youth, the summit comes at a highly important time for the EU and Africa and will likely tackle issues related to the security-migration-development nexus.

The summit is organized in the framework of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES), launched in 2007, which represented an important step in the consolidation of the strategic partnership between the two continents.¹ It established an institutional architecture and specific funding for the implementation of key actions, seeking to develop a partnership based on shared

principles, strengthened institutional ties and agreed operational priorities. Ultimately, the JAES aims to operationalize the shared objective of moving beyond a donor/recipient relationship between the EU and Africa. These priorities have been identified through successive Action Plans (2008-2010 and 2011-2013) and more recently through the Roadmap 2014-2017.²

Beyond the undeniable political and symbolic significance of the JAES, its impact can only be measured through its implementation. Political dialogue has mainly been conducted amongst leaders at Africa-EU summits, in Cairo

¹ *The Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. A Joint Africa-EU Strategy*, 2nd EU-Africa Summit, Lisbon, 9 December 2007, http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/sites/default/files/documents/eas2007_joint_strategy_en.pdf.

² Compared with the previous action plans, for Joint Strategy implementation the Roadmap reduces the number of priority areas from eight to five: (a) peace and security; (b) democracy, good governance and human rights; (c) human development; (d) sustainable and inclusive development together with growth and continental integration; (e) global and emerging issues. See *Roadmap 2014-2017*, 4th Africa-EU Summit, Brussels, 3-4 April 2014, <http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/en/node/7911>.

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(2000), Lisbon (2007), Tripoli (2010) and Brussels (2014). Such high-level summits represented opportunities for dialogue and increased political focus on the partnership, but also times when sensitive political issues and diverging interests boiled over.

In 2010, for example, Robert Mugabe took part in the Tripoli Summit despite EU and US travel bans and asset freezes stemming from accusations of infringements on basic freedoms in Zimbabwe, while in 2014 South Africa's President Jacob Zuma boycotted the EU-Africa Summit in Brussels to protest against the invitation of Morocco, which was not a member of the AU at the time. More recently, in November 2015, in the wake of the refugee and migration crisis in Europe, European and African leaders gathered in La Valletta, Malta for a summit entirely dedicated to cooperation on migration and asylum issues. The Valletta Summit was clearly perceived by African leaders as being dominated by the EU agenda, with a strong emphasis on security, return and readmission issues, while African partners sought to maintain focus on development and improved migration and mobility governance.

A reoccurring shortcoming identified by observers during implementation of the JAES was the lack of high-level political dialogue in-between summits. The official visits of EU High Representative Federica Mogherini to the Chairmanship of the AU Commission in 2015, 2016 and 2017 seem to indicate increased efforts to remedy this flaw.

The EU's significant financial support to the AU, African regional organizations as well as African countries has always been a central feature of Europe-Africa relations, and still represents its true added value. Implementation of the JAES has benefitted from a number of financial instruments developed by the EU to support its external partners, such as the African Peace Facility (APF). The APF channelled over 2 billion euros in funding since 2004 mainly to the AU's peace support operations and capacity building.³ It is financed through the European Development Fund (EDF), an instrument originally created to channel development aid to African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, thus raising concerns among the development community about the increased securitization of the EU's engagement with Africa.

Other instruments have been used to finance different priorities in the partnership, thus creating a fragmented and complex scheme that undermines coherence and effective implementation. Moreover, the underlining objective enshrined in the JAES of ensuring joint ownership and equal partnership are jeopardised by the African partners' heavy dependency on external funding, including from the EU.

To address these shortcomings, a Pan African Programme (PanAf), the first ever EU development and cooperation

³ European Commission, *Toward the 5th Africa-EU Summit. Peace and Security*, EC Communication 4 May 2017 Factsheet No. 1, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/toward-5th-africa-eu-summit-eu-communication-4-may-2017-factsheets_en.

programme that covers the African continent as a whole, was created in 2014 as a dedicated instrument to support the JAES.⁴ However, its added value remains to be seen: its financial liquidity is modest and effectively disconnected from other EU policy instruments. Meanwhile, at the African level, the 27th AU summit held in Kigali, Rwanda in July 2016 adopted a decision to direct all AU Member States to implement a 0.2 percent levy on eligible imports to finance the AU, including by providing reliable and predictable funding for continental peace and security through the AU's Peace Fund.⁵ The decision came into force in January 2017, but only a few countries have thus far begun implementing such actions.

Another important component of the JAES is to promote a "people-centred partnership" by creating a permanent platform for information, participation and mobilization of a broad spectrum of civil society actors. However, this objective remains mostly unfulfilled, as noted by civil society representatives gathered at the third Africa-EU Civil Society Forum held in Tunis in 2017.⁶ These pointed to the fact that the Joint Annual Forum (JAF), envisioned to be

the main body promoting contributions from the private sector and civil society in the assessment of the JAES, was never established.

The implementation of the JAES has taken place in a rapidly evolving political context at the global level and specifically within Europe and Africa. The overarching objectives identified in 2007 remain valid but concrete priorities need to be adapted to new realities. This should be done not only by addressing the fulfilment of its objectives but also with regard to the evolution of both the African and European contexts, as well as the partnership itself.

A review of the Africa-EU partnership's strategic vision has become particularly urgent following the adoption of the Agenda 2063 and the EU Global Strategy (EUGS), new strategic frameworks for the African continent's socio-economic transformation and the EU's new foreign and security policy respectively.⁷

The EU has tried to link its Africa policy to the EUGS by adopting a Joint Communication on the Africa-EU partnership in May 2017,⁸ which takes stock of this evolution and clearly

⁴ European Commission, *Pan-African Programme 2014-2020. Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-2017*, 30 July 2014, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/pan-african-programme-2014-2020-multi-annual-indicative-programme-mip-2014-2017_en.

⁵ African Union Assembly, *Decision on the Outcome of the Retreat of the Assembly of the African Union* (Assembly/AU/Dec.605 (XXVII)), 27th Ordinary Session, Kigali, 17-18 July 2016, https://au.int/sites/default/files/pages/31953-file-assembly_au_dec_605_financing_the_au.pdf.

⁶ *3rd Africa-EU Civil Society Forum Declaration*, Tunis, 12 July 2017, <http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/en/node/8731>.

⁷ African Union Commission, *Agenda 2063. The Africa We Want*, September 2015, https://au.int/Agenda2063/popular_version; European External Action Service (EEAS), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016, <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/node/339>.

⁸ European Commission and European External Action Service (EEAS), *For a Renewed Impetus for the Africa-EU Partnership* (JOIN/2017/17), 4 May 2017, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52017JC0017>.

spells out the EU's main objectives for a long-standing partnership with Africa. However, being an entirely EU product, the Joint Communication might reinforce the perception among African partners that they are in fact involved in a one-way dialogue. A reassessment of the cooperation scheme and connected instruments should rather be grounded on shared ownership and dialogue, in the spirit of the partnership.

The upcoming Summit in the Ivory Coast risks being spoiled by deepening divergences between European and African leaders on human rights, migration and international justice. Nevertheless, it represents a unique opportunity to begin laying the groundwork for a revision of the JAES, identifying a joint and inclusive roadmap to accomplish this objective.

A renewed emphasis on priorities – from security to development, from youth employment to women empowerment, from an integrated approach to natural resources and technological transfers – should guide the partnership, adapting it to evolving economic, social and geopolitical contexts. A frank dialogue based on clearly identified mutual interests and an enhanced buy-in of Member States in Abidjan can – and should – pave the way for increased movement in this direction.

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