



Re-discovering EurAfrica

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Summary

- European integration is historically linked to the idea of EurAfrica
- The scope of the EU-Africa relationship has been widened since the turn of century to include new issues ranging from climate change to terrorism and from liberalization of trade to migration
- However the widening of the agenda has posed new coherence dilemmas for the EU
- Despite Brexit, new challenges (migration, China and climate change) and opportunities (freer trade and development) are expected to lead to a stronger and less asymmetrical partnership, making a non-colonial EurAfrica a real possibility.

Introduction

“The Schuman Declaration made explicit reference to the development of Africa as one of the main objectives of the nascent European Community.”

Every year, on the 9th of May, the European Union celebrates the "Europe Day". On that day, seventy years ago, the French Foreign Minister Robert Schumann, presented his plan for political cooperation in Europe. The so-called Schumann Declaration is considered to be the founding text of European integration. Schumann, as all of Europe's founding fathers - including Jean Monnet, Guy Mollet, Paul-Henri Spaak, Konrad Adenauer and Alcide de Gaspari, was acutely conscious that Europe's best hope of becoming an independent power in a bipolar world was to increase its landmass, population and material wealth. Together with all these great politicians he was a passionate advocate of the idea of "Eurafrica".

The Schuman Declaration made explicit reference to the development of Africa as one of the main objectives of the nascent European Community. However, this aspect of the Schuman Plan "is often squeamishly excised from the text" (Hansen & Jonsson 2016: 123). Indeed, it was the colonial era, and the colonialist ideology was lurking beneath the surface of the Eurafrica concept. Both the Europeans and the Africans wanted to leave their past behind.

The journey which began in Rome in 1957 as a primarily colonial and paternalistic donor-recipient relationship was wound up in Lisbon, half a century later, as a professed "partnership of equals". The European Union has very much progressed on this objective in the last couple of decades. The EU continues to be the main trade partner of Africa (though increasingly challenged by China), by far its main source of foreign investment and its largest provider of development aid. The Euro-African relationship scope has been broadened beyond the traditional tools of trade and aid to include new or redefined areas of cooperation such as good governance, peace and security, migration and combatting terrorism. They also refer to the UN Sustainable Development Goals including, but not limited to, poverty and hunger eradication, reducing inequality, security, environmental protection and climate change. In an interview, just before the last German election in 2019, Angela Merkel argued proudly that EU's "policies on Africa, now follow a common strategy, which a few years ago would have been unthinkable" (Guardian 2019).

There is much truth in Merkel's statement. An EU Strategy for Africa was adopted in 2005 and an Africa-EU Strategic Partnership in 2007 which is implemented through periodic action plans. The EU has also negotiated a series of economic partnership agreements (EPAs) with the 48 countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. These agreements aim to liberalize trade in compliance to World Trade Organization rules and create a shared trade and development partnership backed up by development support. The European Development Fund (EDF) finances development programmes and initiatives in Africa (with a budget of around 30 billion euros for the period 2017-20). The EDF also provides funding for an African Peace Facility to finance African Union's (AU) military operations in the continent - aiming among others to create an African Standby Force. The EU Commission and the AU Commission now meet regularly, in the context of a "continent-to-continent partnership". And an Africa-EU Summit is held every three years, with summits having taken place in Cairo in 2000, Lisbon in 2007, Tripoli in 2010, Brussels in 2014 and Abidjan in 2017. Finally, the European Union has deployed a number of military and civilian missions in Africa to promote peace and security.

Migration has become an important issue in the relationship. In June 2016, the European Council agreed to deepen cooperation with key African countries of origin and transit.

The EU has put into place and implemented this framework starting with a number of priority countries of origin and transit – Mali, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, and Ethiopia. The so-called "Compacts" with these countries are designed to deliver clear targets and joint commitments combining different policy elements like development aid, trade, mobility, energy, security, digital policy in order to regulate migration.

Challenges and Dilemmas

“The widening of the EU-Africa partnership has brought in the forefront the perennial issue of EU policy incoherence.”

The widening of the EU-Africa partnership has brought in the forefront the perennial issue of EU policy incoherence. Policy incoherence (where two or more policies may push in different directions) is usually discussed in domestic politics. However, in regional integration the problem is more acute because far more actors interact in a variety of different ways.

There are many types of incoherence examined by the relevant literature: Horizontal, which reflect problems created by the interaction of various policy areas, vertical which refers to policy coordination between the member states and the Commission, internal incoherence which relates to consistency between the EU's different decision-making bodies and departments, external which reflects donor-recipient relations, multilateral which has to do with the relationships among international organizations or narrative incoherence which refers to what the EU does and what it says it is doing (Carbone 2013).

For many years, the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been criticized for having a deleterious impact upon many African countries and undermining EU's development aid priorities. EU subsidies have often led to overproduction, with excess being 'dumped' on developing countries. Apart from this, the ever more stringent sanitary and environmental standards imposed by the EU present an additional obstacle for African agricultural exports. So, the CAP was considered, with much justification, as impairing EU's development policy that focuses on poverty reduction. However, changes in EU policies in the last decade have brought important benefits to African farmers, through reductions in the anti-competitive subsidies paid to European producers and preferential access to European markets through the Everything-but-Arms initiative and the subsequent EPAs (Matthews 2013: 203). So in this area there was much progress towards more policy coherence.

However, the priorities of the EU's development policy faced another challenge. EU's development cooperation has continuously been under the pressure of subordination to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and of being linked to external security priorities. There are increasing tensions between DG RELEX in the European Commission and DG Development: the first criticizes the second for not being focused enough on the wider foreign policy goals of the EU - and especially on security. Although on paper the Commissioner for Development has the portfolio for all developing countries, in practice DG Development has become an "empty shell" (Hurt 2010: 166).

“Several studies have suggested that development aid actually enables migration by providing individuals with resources that facilitate movement across borders.”

EU is using development policy to pressure African countries to control migration. This is the most important coherence challenge for the EU. Several studies have suggested that development aid actually enables migration by providing individuals with resources that facilitate movement across borders. After all, most migrants to Europe come from the richer Senegal than the poorer Mali or from the more developed Southern than the less developed Northern Nigeria. Thus, the more EU supports African development, the more migration increases. How the EU should solve this dilemma? Is at the very end policy

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coherence a 'mission impossible'? The answer is no. There are always new ideas. A recent study based on data from 101 developing countries spanning twenty-five years has shown that governance aid does reduce emigration rates from developing countries in contrast to social and economic aid that seems to have no impact (Gamso & Yuldashev 2018). A good advice to policy-makers!

Indeed the EU-Africa relationship, despite the declarations about a "partnership of equals" is at best asymmetrical. Geopolitics still matter - as always. Southern and Eastern European countries are far less interested in developing the partnership with Africa. And even for the North Europeans, some African countries are considered as "aid darlings" because of historical links, geopolitical and economic interests, while "aid orphans", some of which are among the neediest and poorest in Africa, are systematically overlooked.

“...the fate of the two continents is closely intelinked - probably more so than in any other time since the end of colonialism.”

Although Brexit will negatively affect the EU-Africa relationship (UK was traditionally one "of Africa's strongest champions in Brussels" and its contribution to EDF stands for 15% of the total), the fate of the two continents is closely intelinked - probably more so than in any other time since the end of colonialism. China's inroads to Africa is challenging European interests in Adrica and climate change and migration will certainly be major drivers for closer cooperation in the immediate future.

Africa is more peaceful and in several ways its governments are more responsive to public needs than ever before. Major reforms at the continental level (including the African Union institutions and the signing of the Continental Free Trade Area in 2018) will promote integration, development and trade. In face of new challenges and opportunities, it is time for Europe and Africa to re-discover EurAfrica - forgetting the paternalistic history of the concept and redefining it so as to reflect a less unequal partnership. Encouraging trade and investment, providing more aid for good governance, promoting mobility and legal migration and understanding that there is no security without development should be the guiding principles in Europe's future relations with Africa.

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