

EU–AU partnership for peace: entering a joint future of sustainable development

Recommendation of the Council for Sustainable Development

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Summary

2020 should mark the beginning of a new EU–Africa partnership with changes to the collaboration's substance and procedures. The development of a comprehensive strategy for a new EU–Africa partnership by the European Commission and the planned summit with the African Union (AU) during Germany's Presidency of the Council of the EU present an opportunity for the two continents to forge an ambitious new future together. This future should be founded on a comprehensive partnership for peace, hallmarked by shared values and interests. A partnership of equals can only be achieved if transparency is also instilled regarding areas where the interests of the EU and the AU diverge.

Below are proposals for a renewal of the European–African cooperation which are based on the German government's policies and, in some cases, go beyond them in order to strengthen the future viability of this collaboration. The recommendations for action are aimed at the Federal Government as an influential Member State of the European Union and in view of the responsibility it holds during its Council presidency.

The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) believes that the new EU–AU partnership's key objective must be addressing both sides' social, economic and ecological aims and considering the shared interests of people on both continents in equal measure:

- In the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, a large number of African states took decisive action to protect public health early on, with many imposing lockdowns. As a result, the virus has not spread rapidly in many countries to date. However, the indirect economic and social consequences of the crisis are devastating for the continent. Inequalities and severe hardships have been becoming increasingly apparent since the beginning of the year. The EU must help Africa to overcome the immediate socio-economic impact of the pandemic by supporting investments in public education and health and establishing social security systems which benefit all and thereby reduce social and economic inequalities and bolster social resilience. Special attention should be paid to collaborating on healthcare. The continent has a great deal of experience in combating epidemics, so a partnership-based collaboration on healthcare and health education is beneficial for both continents. Now is the time to deliver on unfulfilled bilateral and European pledges to strengthen health systems. These undertakings must also be examined for new requirements in the context of the pandemic.
- The EU must have an honest intention to adjust its trade policy with African countries so as to fully support the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Existing trade agreements/Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) may not be allowed to undermine this objective and must be amended accordingly. Furthermore, African countries must not be pushed into extending new EPAs or to conclude new agreements.
- The African countries – especially those with poorer economies – currently spend far more on repaying debt than on their own health systems. Given the consequences of the pandemic, not only is it necessary to defer debt repayments: a long-term remission of bilateral and multilateral debts is also needed in order to make financial resources available quickly. The German Council for Sustainable Development calls on the Federal Government, the European Commission and the European Parliament to provide complete transparency concerning the funds made available to African partner countries in real terms and to avoid lending wherever possible. To bring about a long-term improvement in funding for sustainable development, the EU and AU should make a joint commitment to the following points: to tackle tax evasion and tax avoidance effectively, the African countries should become part of the Automatic Exchange of Information by tax authorities which already exists between the OECD states. Furthermore, the partner countries' support is indispensable in establishing and strengthening effective, solidarity-based tax systems and the capacities needed for these, as well as in setting up a beneficial ownership register for individuals to identify their activities and provide public transparency.
- Decisive action must be taken on the climate crisis as a shared challenge. Despite COVID-19, both sides' climate policy objectives must be achieved quickly, ambitiously and in a spirit of partnership. The EU's target is climate neutrality by 2050, while the African goal is a climate-neutral expansion of the energy/electricity supply and compensation for climate-related losses, damage and stranded assets, i.e. unutilised fossil reserves. Fields for cooperation are the implementation of climate policy contributions, access to technological

innovations, the production and use of green hydrogen, and adapting to climate change (including a system of safeguards for imports of green hydrogen)¹.

- Gender equality should be a fixed part of relations to enable the two parties to achieve SDG 5 together and thereby have positive impacts on a number of other SDGs. Building on the European Gender Equality Strategy, discrimination against women and girls should be ended on both continents, along with all forms of violence against girls and women – including, in particular, genital mutilation. Additionally, female sexual and reproductive rights should be promoted.
- As a partnership for peace, the European–African collaboration must be founded on promoting democracy, the rule of law and strong public institutions so as to maintain and/or establish peace and align economic developments with the rights and needs of all people and the preservation of natural resources. This includes ensuring personal safety and managing civilian conflicts, protecting civic freedoms and strictly complying with the EU’s Common Position issued in 2008 concerning arms exports and the prevention of regional conflicts.
- With regard to migration, the EU’s proposal to gear cooperation towards implementing the Global Compact for Migration is to be welcomed. This should make it possible to focus on the two sides’ shared interest in facilitating regular migration from Africa to Europe, protecting the existing liberal migration regimes within the African regional organisations, and balancing this sensibly with the protection of Europe’s external borders.

Ahead of the planned EU–AU summit, the European Commission has scheduled a series of dialogue events with a large number of stakeholders. Now, the German Federal Government needs to provide innovative, ambitious impetus for the development of this partnership during its Presidency of the Council of the EU. Furthermore, it needs to promote suitable dialogue processes with extensive stakeholder involvement and establish these long-term.

1. Cornerstones of a partnership of equals with Africa

Despite the dramatic change in the underlying conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the German Council for Sustainable Development advises the Federal Government to keep pursuing trailblazing processes for a partnership of equals between the African continent and the European Union vigorously and emphatically and to adjust them to account for the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the underlying conditions and challenges.

The European Commission presented its “Joint Communication towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa”² on 9 March 2020. This document serves as the basis and strategic framework for the

¹ See the recommendation of the RNE re the Federal Government’s National Hydrogen Strategy issued in June 2020, https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/20200617_RNE_Recommendation_Hydrogen.pdf.

² ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/communication-eu-africa-strategy-join-2020-4-final_en.pdf

future nature of relations between the EU and Africa. However, parts of it are already outdated due to the huge impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Europe and Africa and its effect on multilateral collaboration. Over the next few months, as President of the Council, the Federal Government is therefore called upon to adjust to the new underlying conditions and concrete challenges and to facilitate a transparent, constructive partnership process.

Published on 9 March 2020, the joint communication by the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy sets out the need for a stronger partnership between the EU and Africa. It emphasises that the interests of both sides in this partnership reflect the maturity of the relationship and that the 2030 Agenda should serve as the basis for the partnership. In concrete terms, the European Commission and the High Representative of the African Union define five areas in which key partnerships should be established. Regardless of whether the EU–AU summit takes place in October 2020, the setting of a concrete partnership agenda should be pursued vigorously and as an ongoing dialogue process.

The five pillars of the “Joint Communication towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa” are:

- I. **A partnership for green transition and energy access:** investing in Africa’s scientific capacities, establishing nature-based solutions, promoting a circular economy, smart urbanisation, safe and sustainable agri-food systems, support with the implementation of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the launch of a green energy initiative.
- II. **A partnership for digital transformation:** investing in infrastructure and energy sources, establishing a regulatory environment for competitive markets, making digitalisation accessible for all sectors and developing high-quality learning and vocational training opportunities.
- III. **A partnership for sustainable growth and jobs:** stimulating entrepreneurship in the interests of economic diversification, bringing about regional and continental integration by establishing a continental single market based on the African Continental Free Trade Agreement, linked with closer trade relations between the two continents. Furthermore, supporting political reforms for the rule of law, competition and transparency, promoting gender equality, implementing human rights standards, investing in basic healthcare, and scaling up academic and scientific cooperation between the two continents.
- IV. **A partnership for peace and governance:** taking an integrated approach to conflicts and crises, cooperating more closely on election monitoring, and strengthening civil society organisations and human rights advocates.
- V. **A partnership for migration and mobility:** capacity building for effective migration and border management, creating a joint framework for the Continent-to-Continent Migration and Mobility Dialogue.

To breathe life into this strategic framework, the RNE considers it necessary for the two sides to work on a joint vision of this partnership for both continents. This should pay particular attention

to the new underlying conditions and challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. This vision should focus on the two continents' interdependencies, social cohesion, climate neutrality and bright future prospects for people in line with the global SDGs. Cooperation within the individual pillars should centre on these factors.

To promote sustainable development in Africa, the economic cooperation between Africa and the EU must not be one-sided, serving Europe's export and investment interests. Instead, it must be founded on a shared interest in sustainable social and economic development. This includes promoting regional cycles in Africa to create sustainable jobs outside of the low-wage sector for local people. The agricultural and food sector is particularly promising in this connection and already offers by far the most employment opportunities in Africa. The current COVID-19 pandemic has also shown the severe impact which disruptions in regional distribution chains can have on urban populations' food security. With this in mind, the EU must design its agricultural policy so as to ensure that exporting surplus food from Europe at low prices does not have a negative impact on Africa's production and supply of food. The contradiction between Europe's support of the African Continental Free Trade Area and the market opening for EU goods embedded in the national EPAs must therefore be resolved quickly and transparently in favour of the AfCFTA. In the view of the RNE, the Federal Government should work to ensure that the African Union is initially given the time it needs to develop solution proposals which both help to establish the AfCFTA and reformulate future trade relationships with the EU so that solutions can then be agreed by both parties. The German Federal Government should also champion a stronger voice for Africa in the G20. The individual European members of the G20 and the EU should constantly enable and support this.

Climate protection and digitalisation lend themselves particularly well to the development of a shared vision which is founded on partnership and implemented jointly. For instance, African countries could be helped to expand and utilise renewable energies and to produce and export green hydrogen and methanol, making it possible for the African continent to become a technological pioneer in this field and significantly supporting the European and global shift towards climate neutrality. Collaboration in the field of renewables and green transformation processes should be linked more closely with the European Green Deal to create more synergies in Europe's foreign and climate policy. Building on the large number of African digitalisation initiatives and the shared digitalisation experience prompted by COVID-19, partnerships in this area in particular could open up innovative prospects for education, training and jobs for young people on both continents.

It is good and right that African initiatives are incorporated into the fields of "Peace and security" and "Migration and mobility". Efforts here centre on enabling regular migration from Africa to Europe, supporting regional security partnerships – in part by refraining from exporting arms – entering into joint disarmament initiatives which are presented to the United Nations, and strengthening Africa's voice within the UN Security Council.

The European Commission presented its Gender Equality Strategy³ in March 2020. Among other things, the strategy includes setting targets for specific areas, such as gender equality in corporate managerial positions, eliminating digital gender inequality, and ensuring equal pay. In African countries, women play a key role in agricultural production and family food security. At the same time, however, women are disadvantaged in the distribution of profits and land rights. Gender-equitable land rights issues and the economic support of women are considered a mainstay of sustainable development.

Establishing social security systems is also essential in Africa, as the COVID-19 pandemic has shown. This should play a role in the European–African partnership as well. Furthermore, both continents’ health systems need strengthening to significantly boost their resilience to pandemics and epidemics. This should include promoting sexual and reproductive rights for women and girls.

The rule of law and functioning institutions are essential for peace, security and sustainable development. Considering the many radical changes around the world, an African–European dialogue should be based much more strongly on a shared set of human rights-based values and embed these within its institutions and procedures. The RNE recommends developing an instrument for a dialogue on the rule of law with the AU which ensures that human rights are observed, promotes structures consistent with the rule of law and the separation of powers, and ensures legal certainty for small and medium-sized enterprises.

At the same time, combating tax evasion and tax avoidance should be given key status as an area of interest to both partners and a means of funding sustainable development. The EU and AU should make a joint commitment to the following points: the African countries should become part of the Automatic Exchange of Information by tax authorities which already exists between the OECD states. Both sides should work towards a beneficial ownership register. Additionally – in line with the OECD standard – country-specific reporting should become compulsory to make data on the extent of multinational companies’ activities publicly transparent. A partnership of equals for peace must therefore make the establishment and strengthening of effective, solidarity-based tax systems and the necessary capacities a priority.

2. Germany’s Presidency of the Council of the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic – utilising opportunities for the partnership process and tackling inequalities

2020 is dominated by the global consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the coming months, the pandemic’s social and economic consequences in particular will come to light in both Europe and Africa with their impact on livelihoods. The current efforts to support the EU’s recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic should also be the starting point for the EU and AU to develop a shared vision of the future for the socio-ecological transformation of the economy. This is the only way for the expansion of Europe’s Green Deal to prove its credibility and effectiveness in the new environment for social, economic, ecological and health policy development.

³ European Commission 2020: A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025; eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152&from=EN

The determinants for collaboration have changed at German level too. The influx of large numbers of refugees and migrants has placed the question of relations with our neighbouring continent centre-stage in the political debate. Growing inequalities in Germany and Europe caused by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to shape this debate as well. Since 2017, the German Federal Government has tabled various international and national initiatives for Africa and taken a leading role here in the context of the G20. Now, the Federal Government should seize the opportunity as President of the Council of the EU to shape relations between Germany or the EU and the AU by linking the various national and European initiatives in a coherent and consistent manner.

To put into practice the spirit of partnership which hallmarks von der Leyen's Commission, the EU should quickly conclude its Multiannual Financial Framework and the negotiations concerning a successor to the Cotonou Agreement. This would lay solid foundations for a partnership between the two continents. As soon as the EU institutions have reached an agreement on the Multiannual Financial Framework, the European Development Fund contained within it, and the post-Cotonou framework, they can develop a joint strategy with their African partners – working with civil society in all of the countries – which clearly shows the change of direction that is urgently needed. In doing so, the sub-Saharan Cotonou framework must be extended to include North Africa and the African Union as the EU's legitimate partner for all objectives of the future collaboration. For decades, the partnership with Africa has been dominated by development assistance. Given the current impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is reason to fear that the progress achieved in connection with the SDGs will fade into the background again. It is therefore essential that an inclusive dialogue process be established between the two continents to develop innovative instruments for business and trade which promote a partnership of equals for peace. The German Council for Sustainable Development calls on the Federal Government, the European Commission and the European Parliament to provide transparency concerning the funds made available to African partner countries in real terms and to avoid lending wherever possible. Furthermore, these public funds should primarily be used to bolster public services and resilience in African countries and thereby be invested above all in the fields of health, education, food and social security. Investments should chiefly be made in the public sector and in civil society, which has been severely weakened. Investments in businesses should benefit local small and medium-sized enterprises first and foremost.

The time in the run-up to the EU–AU summit should be used for inclusive, virtual consultation processes concerning the substance of the partnership and involving all those affected. The focal areas put forward by the EU and the AU can be discussed, adjusted and changed to ensure that the end result is a joint African–European agenda which is in line with the African Union's 2063 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As a result of the pandemic, surveillance efforts are on the rise around the world while data protection and the right to privacy are increasingly being breached. This leads to severe restrictions on civil society. In addition, the impact of measures to curb the pandemic are threatening livelihoods and having severe economic, social and cultural consequences. As UN Secretary-General Guterres warned, the pandemic does not only pose a threat to development around the world: it

also increases instability and uncertainty, fuels unrest and heightens conflicts. Precisely because it is such a complex crisis and the risk of discrimination is high, it is more important than ever to involve civil society. The RNE advises the German Federal Government to send a strong signal concerning the protection and support of both civil society and independent media in relations between the EU and the AU. This should help to flag up negative impacts and human rights violations associated with measures and highlight the need for corrections, as well as making the voices of those affected heard in the public discourse.

In the interests of the Sustainable Development Goals, it is essential that an environment is also created in Europe which ensures that globalisation is built on equality and fairness. For this reason, the necessary change processes must be implemented quickly in Europe as well (see the RNE's recommendation "Making an ambitious start to the decade of sustainability"⁴ [in German only]).

Despite professing a commitment to sustainable development, the draft strategy for EU–AU relations has a one-sided view on people. The document's underlying vision places people at the service of the economy – not the other way around. However, the global 2030 Agenda states that human development should be at the heart of and consistent with social, economic and ecological considerations.

⁴ See www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/20200513_RNE-Stellungnahme_Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie.pdf