



1404 The Brussels EU – Africa Summit, a missed chance for a stronger partnership



Representatives of 54 African and 28 European States met in Brussels on 2 and 3 April for the 4th EU-Africa Summit. The meeting had a broad-ranging agenda under the title “Investing in People, Prosperity and Peace”.

In 2007's 2nd EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon, the EU and Africa redefined their partnership moving from a strategy *for* Africa to a strategic partnership *with* Africa. The Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) adopted at that time was intended to be the policy framework to bring about the change in the partnership. From being a donor the EU wanted to become a trade

partner as it believed *trade and foreign investment will do the development that aid failed to do in Africa*. Today seven years later, the attitude of Europe has not changed much and the political enthusiasm of Lisbon has dried up.

In recent years, both continents have experienced profound transformations. In the EU the serious economic crisis and political disenchantment have caused a feeling of insecurity among citizens. Europe, formerly Africa's main trade partner is being displaced by the BRICS. Yet Europe needs African raw materials. Could this be the reason why the EU insists so much on finalizing the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) despite the small percentage that trade with Africa represents for the EU? Or is it that 2014 is an EU election year (and so the end of this Commission's mandate) and they want to finish the negotiations started more than 10 years ago? Especially since the EU's attention is currently being drawn to the trade agreement being negotiated with the USA. By contrast, Africa is living a moment of euphoria with economic growth since 1995. Even if this growth has not spilled down to the majority of the population, it gives hope for a better future and maintains the dream of the possible socio-economic transformation of Africa. The many natural resources of the continent are coveted by many countries. Despite that, Africa suffers from poverty, unemployment and insecurity; the continent is becoming an opportunity for investors as it offers high returns and it now has more trade partners than the EU. All this can explain why African countries and regions are not so keen on signing the EPAs with the EU, especially as they consider many of their demands have not been heard. Furthermore EPAs will not help the integration of the regions at a time when Africa's priority is the creation of an African common market by 2017. Though Africa wanted to include EPAs in the agenda, the EU refused.

The EU is the largest importer of manufactured goods from Africa and the most important donor for Africa. Yet EU-Africa relations are still imbalanced. While Africa wants a partnership between equals based on mutual respect and equality, European policies towards African countries are unfair especially in trade, taxation and agriculture.

1.1. Towards a change in the geopolitical context between Africa and Europe

These realities mean the beginning of a change in the geopolitical context. While Africa is growing, Europe is in crisis. Africa has the minerals and resources that Europe needs. The growth of the African middle class and the size of Africa's youth population provide opportunities for European enterprises, if they pay attention not only to their profits but of the development of Africa.

Till now Africa has been the weak link in the relations between the two continents. But if all African countries were to join together, speak with one voice and take a stronger position they could negotiate a new partnership with Europe with much more favourable terms for the continent. This would oblige Europe to become aware that Africa has changed and that the EU needs to be more attentive to the

continent's development. This will result not in Africa being abandoned by Europe, but in a more balanced relationship between the two continents.

At the 4th EU-Africa Summit in Brussels, both Africa and Europe ~~have~~ missed the chance of strengthening this partnership.

1.2. *Difficulty in changing the old attitudes in the relationship*

Africa and Europe are clinging to their 'old attitudes' and finding it hard to adopt their new roles. Europe still sees itself as a donor and the EU leadership does not seem to realize that things have changed. It needs to move away from paternalism and humanitarianism, not only in words but above all in practice, while African states must cease to wield Europe's guilty past for leverage. The EU needs to listen more and pay attention to demands that favour the integral development of the African continent, because Africa's prosperity and security is in Europe's interests. On the African side, countries do not speak with one voice and have difficulty in coming together to look at the interests of their people. Often they are won over with promises of Aid. The EU plays *the carrot game*, continuing its attitude of *donor* and, when faced with difficulties, often the only solution found is to offer more aid. An example is the unilateral offer of the European Commission to Africa of € 28 billion over the period 2014-2020, for the financing of the JAES action plan.

The well-being of Africa and Europe is important for both continents. European economic underperformance hurts Africa, resulting in less trade, tourism and remittances from diaspora. On the other side, the poverty and unemployment of Africa harms Europe, as it means insecurity, danger of conflict, migrants in Europe and increasing aid for development and security. Prosperity and development to be sustainable need to reach both continents. The youth of Africa could be an opportunity for both continents if they were skilled.

Both sides say they want a partnership of equals, but at the moment the equality is not a reality, in neither the economic nor the political sphere.

1.3. *The EU-Africa partnership*

Currently the relationships between Africa and the EU are tense due to the serious divergences on trade (EPAs), international justice, governance and cultural cooperation. The political atmosphere of the Summit was not good. The unilateral decision of the EU to invite some chiefs of state and exclude other caused an additional problem, so much so that there was a discussion at the African Union about suspending the summit.

Despite the desire for a change in the partnership expressed by Angela Merkel and by European Council President Van Rompuy as a 'shift from development cooperation to a partnership of equals with trade and investment playing a key role', both see the change mainly as the enhancement of trade and investment, yet much more is needed to implement the change.

The Brussels summit was disappointing. No new decisions were planned and the final document lacks a strong political message from both sides. The summit also missed the opportunity to draw up agreements on trade, agriculture and climate change. It did adopt a roadmap for the EU-Africa relations for 2014-2017, covering 5 priority areas for joint action: Peace and Security; Democracy, Good Governance and Human Rights; Human Development; Sustainable and inclusive development and growth and continental integration; Global and emerging issues. However, the EU avoided a badly needed political dialogue on the refoundation of the partnership between equals and continues to offer the carrot of Aid dependence.

The [Declaration](#), with no clear timeframe, focuses on the main political, economic and social issues affecting the on-going relations between the EU and Africa; it is at best a wish-list.

The Summit has missed the chance to address issues like maintaining the growth of Africa, the role of the continent in the international arena, market integration in Africa, national and regional conflicts, the aftermath of the Arab Spring, democracy, the rule of law, governance and human rights in Africa.

Two issues seem to have taken up the agenda: the Central African Republic (CAR) crisis and trade.

The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, who attended the meeting, warned that 19,000 Muslims "face slaughter" in CAR and promised to do "everything possible" to improve the international response to the crisis. The EU announced plans to send 1,000 troops from different EU countries by May 2014. But the EU decided not to send its standing rapid-response 'battle-group' to the Central African Republic. Some member states see the Central African Republic as very far away and as an internal problem of an African country while others do not want to meet the French demand. The result is that the EU mission's operational plan approved on 17 March will not be deployed before May.

For the EU, trade was the hidden agenda of the summit as it refused to put the EPAs on the agenda. Europe wants to end Africa's dependence on European state-funded aid and strengthen the trade relationships. For African countries the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between Europe and various African blocs are also important but not in the way the EU wants them after more than 10 years of negotiations. The EPAs will redefine Africa's trading relationship with Europe and are clear cases of power imbalances as they risk endangering the food security and livelihoods of poor people and farmers in African countries and are a threat to the industrialisation of the continent. Even if in the Joint Africa Europe Strategy (JAES) the importance of enhancing the unity of the African continent is recognized, the EPAs continue to favour a fragmented approach.

The lack of coherence in EU policy damages Africa. While the EU supports development and humanitarian projects in many African countries, some EU policies, mainly trade, harm these same countries. The imposed EU deadline for signing the EPAs (October 2014), puts African countries under pressure without there being clarity as to how further trade liberalisation will foster development.

1.4. The final declaration of the Summit

The final declaration of the summit had 3 titles: Peace and security, Prosperity and People.

Peace and security is seen as essential for development and prosperity. They committed themselves to political dialogue on international criminal justice and to ensuring peace and stability in Africa; to fight international terrorism and to combat the spread of small arms. EU economic support in security co-operation (around €325 million a year) is guaranteed through to 2020 to respond to crises and support African security efforts.

Prosperity. Commitments to create jobs and stimulate long-term growth on both continents; to cooperate in maritime policy; to support African countries in climate-resilience and low-emissions; to ensure prudent and transparent management of respective natural resources and responsible mineral sourcing; to encourage greater investment and economic development; to develop transport, access to drinking water and to sustainable and affordable energy.

People. To uphold human rights in both continents; to strengthen efforts towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals by 2015; to pursue policies to promote job creation; to promote student exchange; to tackle the social and human impact of irregular migration; to manage the migratory flows; to fight human trafficking and to ensure the respect of human rights for all migrants. The summit also adopted a separate [declaration on migration and mobility](#).

To find out more (link to the Joint Africa Europe Strategy (JAES))

The Joint Africa Europe Strategy (JAES)

Parliamentary Summit European Parliamentarians (EP) and the Pan-African Parliament

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