



ISSUES OF THE AFRICA-EUROPE SUMMIT ON APRIL 2014: A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE AFRICA-EUROPE PARTNERSHIP

The Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) - adopted in Lisbon in 2007 - was supposed to lay the foundations and principles of a paradigm shift in the relationship between Africa and Europe mainly based on aid dependence and the creed of free trade since the Cotonou Agreement signed in 2000. The Africa-EU Strategy and the implementation of the action plan, considered as the new policy framework for Africa-EU relations, aimed to create the conditions for a new political partnership between equals. Seven years after the adoption of the JAES and in the light of a new Africa-Europe Summit, both sides agree to recognize that the partnership was essentially technical and bureaucratic, and did not succeed to achieve either these ambitious goals nor a new dynamic in the relations between the two parts.

The African side meanwhile, has completed a critical evaluation of this partnership at a meeting held from June 10 to 13, 2013 in Zanzibar by the African Union, which brought together all the stakeholders mobilized by the JAES (Member States, Representatives of the AUC, NPCA-NEPAD, APRM, PAP, RECs, CSOs, Think tanks...). Beyond the analysis of difficulties in the implementation of the strategy and its fundamental flaws, it is important to ensure that the African side will speak with one voice on this issue at the next Summit. This is obviously an approach and a political issue that should be seriously debated in the political organs of the African Union. The solemn declaration on the 50th anniversary of the OAU/AU adopted at the 21st Session of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government on May 26, 2013 reiterated this need for Africa to speak with one voice and to act collectively in order to promote its interests and common positions in all its partnerships.

Prospects for the next Africa-Europe Summit on April 2014

The next meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union in January 2014 represents the single biggest opportunity for them to make a political statement on the assessment of the Africa-EU strategy and on the expectations concerning the next Africa-EU Summit scheduled for April 2014.

On the European side, 2014 is the last year in office of the current European Commission under the direction of Mr. Barroso; and the European elections are scheduled for June 2014. It is obvious that for the last year of operation - and in a context of economic, political and social major crisis - the European Commission and the Member States do not consider Africa as a priority and have less the need to rebuild the foundations of a new partnership. Moreover, the emergency of an aggiornamento of the European approach of partnership with Africa - taking into account the major concerns of social and economic transformation of the continent - is not captured by the European side.

In the absence of a strong political message from Africa, the European Union will be satisfied with an entertaining Summit limited itself to tell the historical weight of the relationship between Europe and Africa, and offering to focus this partnership on a few strategic priorities for Europe in any case on behalf of a pseudo efficiency. Also in the absence of a clear expression of a political vision that Africa expects from the partnership with Europe, especially the European Union and the European Commission will be free to continue to exert strong pressure on African actors in charge of the partnership. Therefore the adoption of a political declaration of Africa on the future of the JAES also has a strategic significance.



What Agenda for Europe?

With the increasing competition from emerging economies, particularly the BRICS, the European agenda is more than ever to secure the European markets in Africa and in particular the access to raw materials and extractive resources.

It is for this reason that Europe refuses to reconsider the partnership and the free trade agreements, even if it puts in question the African integration and divides the Africans. It is moreover significant that the issue of the economic partnership agreements have been excluded from the JAES at the beginning despite multiple requests from the African side to reconsider the economic partnership agreements, in the context of revitalization of the African agenda in the regional integration, whose primary term is the creation of an African common market by 2017, the European side does not move on this issue. The recent letter from the President of the African Union Commission to her counterpart of the European Union in this regard, aiming to ask for a priority on a pan-African free trade agreement, has not received further response than the previous President's requests.

Similarly, while the JAES objective was the creation of a new policy framework aiming to recognize the unity of the African continent and the need to treat it as one, Europe still refuses to address this issue and continues to favor a fragmented approach of its relationship with Africa through the proliferation of tools which often compete with each other. These include, among others, the Mediterranean partnership as part of the European neighbourhood policy, the European migration policy, the Sahel Strategy of the European Union, ... Building on its position as a donor, and on the remains of the aporia syndrome of aid dependence, Europe maintains knowingly the African divisions that allow it not to change its agenda vis-à-vis Africa and avoid a real political dialogue on a re-foundation of the partnership.

The Africa-Europe Summit in 2014 will be an opportunity for Europe to rethink its partnership and agenda with Africa. Europe will have to, by this Summit and inside its various institutions, initiate a genuine working exploration and reflection, otherwise the meeting will not only be a missed opportunity but will sink its relationship with Africa for many years.

What African Agenda ?

The African agenda is dominated by the need to maintain the momentum of positive economic growth of over 5% that the continent knows since 1995, accelerate the regional integration process and the socio-economic transformation of Africa through the implementation of the 2063 Vision. For Africa, the priority is no longer aid but trade, the momentum is no longer that of the asymmetry suffered but an equal partnership between global actors, each one with his own added value in a globalized environment increasingly competitive. These priorities, which go through the need to treat Africa as one, must be included in the political position of Africa's expectations, regarding its relations with the European Union, that could be adopted at the Summit in January.

The second major policy issue that should be included in this position is the negotiation of a global cooperation policy framework encompassing the African Union from 2020 (see below).

The Africa-European Union Summit should be an opportunity to open a real political debate on these key issues, and the reaction of the European part in addressing these three elements should be a test on their sincerity and their willingness to revitalize their relationship with Africa. Without significant results of this test, it could not be excluded to consider a postponement of the Summit to 2015, or at least after the election of a new European Commission.



It now belongs to the african side and African States to show their unity and political will to renegotiate the structural and political basis for a renewed partnership with Europe; which is in a position of weakness (economic crisis, but also political and social, ...) but clings to its dominance as a donor, while therefore recognizing that the bulk of financing for development will now come from the private sector (see the EC Agenda for Change). In addition, Africa must understand that in the same time Europe is more dependent than ever on its african markets and therefore its position as the preferred partner for Africa. This creates a new geopolitical context favorable to change the balance of power and the terms of trade between Europe and Africa. A strong position by Africa should not fear an abandonment of Africa by Europe; on the contrary : it is the best way to lead Europe towards the awareness that it now has to be more attentive to Africa if it wants to continue to pursue a special relationship.

Towards a new cooperation and policy framework ?

It is now clear that the JAES (without a legal value) does not constitute a new policy framework unlikely to govern and change the basis of political relations and cooperation between Africa and Europe. The issue of establishing a new legal and political framework as well as the introduction of new instruments of cooperation, including financial ones, necessary to support the Africa -Europe partnership on new bases, is arising and will arise with the renegotiation of the Cotonou Agreement with the ACP in 2000 for 20 years.

As the European Commission has begun to prepare a new cooperation agreement with the ACP countries for the next 20 years (legislated to take effect in 2020) and while the joint strategy was foreseeing the gradual adaptation of the cooperation instruments - in order to include the African Union as a full region in the european cooperation, the EU refuses so far to involve the African Union as a partner in the preparation of the negotiation, limiting itself to discuss with ACP countries (countries and regions). An essential dimension of the negotiation of the next cooperation agreement will indeed question the recognition of the regions/continents (that is to say, Africa, Caribbean Pacific) as a specific political entity in the cooperation agreement. The issue of integration of the African Union in the future cooperation, as a whole stakeholder,

should be a major element of the political dialogue.

It is quite significant that the European Commission has unilaterally proposed to Africa the allocation of a pan-African envelope for the financing of the JAES action plan, outside the traditional instruments of cooperation with Africa (countries and regional organizations) registered in the Cotonou Agreement. The European Commission should, logically, provide an african regional allocation under the 11th EDF in process. This would have allowed to articulate and create synergies and complementarity between the actions at the local, national, regional and pan-african levels in the same perspective of the implementation of the strategic program for accelerating the integration of African Union. The European proposal undermines once again the question of the african continent's unity and puts again the question of the coherence of EU policies vis-à -vis the process of the african integration.

What Agenda for the next Africa-Europe Summit ?

The development of the next Africa-EU Summit agenda will be of a crucial importance, and the African Union Commission will have to play a strategic role in fostering the political process. It is indeed important to break radically with the practice of having an agenda defined and imposed by the european side, notwithstanding the existence of consultations, in order to arrive at a shared and owned agenda for the two partners, taking into account their priorities and their respective interests. In this context, and following the political position of Africa which was released in January, the themes put forward by the african side should focus only on political issues, that is to say :

- Redefining the basis of a cooperation agreement for the full participation of the African Union as a stakeholder, in this perspective, the African Union must participate in the preparation of the next post-Cotonou agreement cooperation.

- Redefining the basis of an agreement on cooperation and partnership to effectively treat Africa as one.



- The positioning of the strategy for socio-economic transformation of Africa as a major priority of the renewed partnership between Africa and Europe partnership.
- Flattening of the issue of negotiating economic partnership agreements and calls on Europe to engage in the negotiation of a pan-african partnership.



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