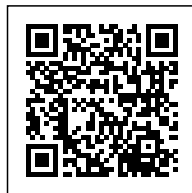


# EU AND AU: THE FACE BEHIND THE MASK

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Even if the difficult international scene (Ukrainian war and the persistence of COVID) seems to make us forget everything else, occurrences, such as the 6th EU/AU Summit, maintain their validity and even increase their value, especially for future prospects in the light of the afore mentioned crises.

This Summit has been described very superficially as one of the typical *kermesses* of the international community, where dozens of heads of state and government and senior leaders of international and regional organizations are in an infinite ballet of bilateral encounters (more or less confidential), dinners, mass meetings, group photos. It has been all this (and it could not have been otherwise).

But the Summit has also been much more and is part of the various partnership conferences that many states and organizations have in place in their relation with the African continent, such as Australia (with the AAPF, Australia Africa Partnership Forum ), China (with FOCAC, Forum on China–Africa Cooperation); France, India, Iran, Russia, Japan (with TICAD, Tokyo International Conference on African Development), Russia, South Korea, Turkey, the USA (with AGOA, African Growth and Opportunity Act), Italy (with its ministerial conferences), Hungary, Germany, the OECD with the AFP (Africa Partnership Forum) and the EU.

These conferences and summits seem to be the modern re-edition of the "scramble for Africa" of the late 19th Century, when all the powers, large, mid, and small, competed to divide up colonies and protectorates and get their hands on local resources through partition conferences. A lot has changed, but a lot has remained the same. Modes have become less direct (apparently), but economic interests have grown and extended to sectors ignored until recently, starting with hunting for the mineral products necessary for new technologies, the grabbing of land for agricultural use, intensive fishing, mega infrastructures.

It is true that the decisions adopted in the final Brussels declaration of 18 February were numerous and contain some differences compared to previous summits (2000, 2007, 2010, 2014, 2017). There are 8 years left to realize this "vision for 2030." Europe and Africa have decided to move towards a new "state of mind," to which the incumbent President of the AU, the head of the state of Senegal, Macky Sall, returned at the closing ceremony: "We also need to create a new working climate, a climate that is more suited to the political will we want to give to this partnership. A new mood needs to be instilled in Euro-African relations. This is what I called, new relational software based on a true vision of partnership, for shared growth and prosperity," he insisted.

The Summit's final declaration underlines a common vision, and calls for a renewed partnership, based on "human bonds, respect for sovereignty, mutual responsibility and respect, shared values, equality between partners and mutual commitments." An extensive program. And concretely, this is what the next few years of this partnership will be like:

### **150 Billion Euros For Africa Through The Global Gateway**

This EU initiative launched in December 2021 aims to mobilize € 300 billion over the next 3 years, according to Ursula Von Der Leyen, President of the European Commission; and it is the backbone, politically and financial speaking, of the Summit. 150 billion euros will be allocated to Africa for the African investment plan.

The Global Gateway is an alternative that Europe offers Africa to work on investments, at a time when Russia and China (with Belt and Road Initiative, BRI) are invading the continent. The EU intends to invest primarily in people and infrastructure. Announced at the opening of the Summit, the financial support of Europe through the Global Gateway was therefore confirmed. The significant amount of at least € 150 billion aims to encourage sustainable investments on a large scale.

"We have decided to mobilize around projects that correspond to African priorities, in order to support development, innovation, prosperity in the climate, digital and infrastructure sectors," said the President of the European Council (and former Belgian Prime Minister), Charles Michel. He especially insisted on creating a follow-up mechanism to give substance to the intentions: "It has happened that in the past the intentions were strong, generous and extremely ambitious and the results did not always match our ambitions. There we will put in place a follow-up and monitoring mechanism."

The EU wishes to become Africa's main partner of reference for financing its infrastructure. Several projects have been identified, including a list of strategic corridors, a sector where EU has had strong experience, especially for railways. They could involve CamRail rehabilitation projects, the Damietta-El Mansoura-Tanta railway corridor or the Tanzania-Uganda, Ghana-Burkina Faso-Mali interconnections.

### **Six Hubs For RNA Vaccines**

These hubs will be created in Senegal, Egypt, Tunisia, South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria, the first

countries to host an RNA messenger technology transfer. These will consist in the training of scientists and the production of vaccines against COVID-19, to then commercialize them in Africa and beyond the continent.

This technology transfer will mobilize 40 million Euros from the European consultancy side. "The remaining argument is related to intellectual property rights and even there the conclusions we have reached are encouraging and should allow us, in the coming months, by spring, to arrive at a dynamic compromise that will allow us to complete things", assured Macky Sall, President of the AU.

## **A Green Partnership**

The common vision adopted in Brussels is also ecological. Europe will support the climate resilience of African countries. This will be done through the implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). The partnership will also be oriented towards the development of supply chains.

Similarly, the launch of a joint EU/AU action plan for the development of plant proteins in Africa will make it possible to make the economic component of the "Great Green Wall" operational, responding to a triple challenge of food and nutrition security on a continental scale and the development of sustainable agro-ecological practices.

"We have to support Africa in its agricultural model. Here I would like to recall the importance for us of the great green wall which is a Pan-African initiative that we reactivated in January 2021", declared the French president. African and European leaders went further to reaffirm their commitment to the full implementation of the Paris Agreement and the outcome of the conferences of the parties.

"We recognize that Africa's energy transition is vital for its industrialization and for bridging the energy gap. We will support Africa in its transition to promote just and sustainable pathways to climate neutrality. We recognize the importance of using available natural resources as part of this energy transition process", reads the final declaration of the Brussels Summit.

"We want green partnerships to flourish on the continent. The world needs Africa to fight climate change," concluded Ursula von der Leyen. The aim of environmental rehabilitation of vast areas is

focused to avoid those masses of population being forced to migrate because of unbearable living conditions.

## **New Approaches To Migration**

The "delicate" (sic) issue of preventing irregular immigration is also being discussed, as well as the measures to be taken in the face of the smuggling of migrants. Priority was given to efforts for effective improvements in terms of return, readmission, and reintegration.

Asylum systems will be strengthened to provide adequate reception and protection for those entitled to them. But the leaders tried to focus on the root of the evil, with key measures to promote the empowerment of young people and women.

"We have taken steps to finance African training centers to allow training in trades that correspond to this economic development that I have spoken about," said French President Emmanuel Macron, who held the EU rotational Presidency.

## **Security And Stability: "Reversing The Approach"**

The other big step forward of the EU/AU Summit is the paradigm shift on security and stability issues. Without renouncing the support of the European military forces, the leaders of the two continents are counting on the strengthening of capabilities and equipment to intensify the autonomous operations of African forces.

"Today there is an absolute need to look things in the face and act accordingly. African states are ready to mobilize men. We also have the AU reserve forces in our architecture, brigades by region (they were planned to be five, but it is missed target, so far). I think we have to reverse the approach," said Moussa Faki Mahamat, President of the AU Commission (former Chad FM), who also expressed his vision of financing peace at the end of the summit.

Europe too sees priority in this direction. French President Emmanuel Macron also took the opportunity to recall the directives by stating, "We have consolidated a partnership approach based on the requests

and needs expressed by African countries", before acknowledging African mobilization capacity within a regional framework. "We support the request of African states to the United Nations for new mechanisms that can be financed by the UN and that allow African armies to carry out stabilization operations in the fight against terrorism."

Cooperation between the two continents will also be strengthened on other issues, such as fighting organized crime, maritime safety.

## **A Constellation Of Satellites To Connect The Two Continents**

The latest decision was not actually taken in Brussels, but this Summit confirmed that it will benefit all of Africa. On Wednesday 16 February, during the Space Summit organized in Toulouse, France, the EU decided to launch a "megaconstellation" of 250 satellites. With an estimated budget of six billion euros, this constellation will provide a high-speed internet connection, even in the digital desert areas that currently struggle to access a traditional terrestrial network. However, these myriads of satellites will cover a low orbit area of about 500 kilometers above Europe and Africa.

## **Conclusion**

This thorough examination shows that the Summit (and its usual list of nice words and good will) and its results have a strong political and strategic background on the part of Brussels, that of trying to free Africa from Chinese and Russian influence. In this strategy the events linked to the aggression of Moscow against the Ukraine, the ambiguous position of Beijing and a worrying number of African states that either abstained or did not participate in the UN General Assembly vote that condemned Russia, makes more urgent, for the Brussels perspective, the implementation of this plan.

The project was born as a response above all to the Summits that Moscow and Beijing have had in recent times (that of Sochi in 2019 and a second one scheduled for next November ) and that of Dakar last November; those meetings also raised the alert for the acceleration that Russia (especially in Mali and Central Africa) and Beijing have given to their African policies (China would be interested in obtaining a new military base in an African country after the one in Djibouti, but one which overlooks the Atlantic Ocean; and it speaks insistently of Equatorial Guinea).

It is not known how African states will respond. The new international situation could be an excellent temptation to raise the price, not just financial, of their collaboration with Europe. Meanwhile, given the persistent difficulties in relations with the coup junta in Bamako, which is very close to Moscow, the EU has just announced that it will withdraw its training mission for the Malian armed forces, the EUTM-Mali.

It is useful to consider that in such a large project on the part of Europe there are also national priorities, especially on the French side which, given the tarnishing of the "Francafrique," finds the EU plan particularly useful in trying to resume her influence in the continent.

What was lacking in the Summit, however, was the commitment by both (Brussels and Addis Ababa) to improve the governance of African countries, whose low (not to say non-existent, in too many contexts) quality is at the root of the difficulties facing the continent.

Another silence (at least public) on the European side was the mutations by force of the constitutional frameworks with coups d'état (Mali, Chad, Guinea, Burkina Faso) or referendums that remove limits to presidential mandates and allow ossification of the ruling classes and transformation of republics into de facto hereditary monarchies (as in the case of Chad, and the next one would be Uganda). These are not insignificant details that could make the whole European project unrealistic, inconclusive, and expensive.

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***Featured image:** "Africa," an engraving by Nicolaas Berchem, published by Pieter Mortier, ca. 1690.*

