

Hacia una nueva visión europea de la cooperación con África

Resumen:

África es un continente tan inmenso como contradictorio. En el actual entorno internacional, África aparece como un continente en auge con algunos de los países de más rápido crecimiento en los últimos años del mundo, lo que ofrece grandes oportunidades para la cooperación. Pero también, África se enfrenta a un número creciente de desafíos que comparte con Europa, incluidos el cambio climático, la presión demográfica, la transición energética, la transformación digital, la amenaza terrorista, o la guerra en Ucrania.

Si bien los lazos que unen a África y Europa son amplios y profundos como consecuencia de la historia, la proximidad geográfica y los intereses compartidos, el nuevo orden internacional que está emergiendo hace que África esté atrayendo la atención de otros actores globales que compiten con Europa. La Unión Europea debe adaptarse a esta nueva realidad con una visión renovada de lo que debe ser su asociación estratégica con África, que integre mejor las preocupaciones africanas y europeas a la hora de abordar juntos los desafíos comunes del siglo XXI. El resultado debería ser una asociación reforzada con África que haga la cooperación más ágil, más transparente y más eficiente, superando las dificultades que ha presentado en las últimas décadas. Si Europa quiere evitar ser desplazada por potencias competidoras, es hora de llevar la relación con África a un nivel más elevado.

Palabras clave:

África, Unión Europea, cooperación, convenios, intereses, riesgos, seguridad, visión.

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Africa in the global context

Africa is Europe's closest neighbour. It is a geographical space of 30 million square kilometres, comprising almost a quarter of the world's emerged lands and divided into 53 states. Poorly placed in the context of globalisation, the last decades have not favoured African development like in other regions of the world, mainly Asia, which have achieved remarkable levels of wealth.

Africa, particularly the sub-Saharan region, has been characterised by a weak connection to the rest of the world, where it has been playing a role primarily as a supplier of raw materials. Until very recently, the region was a clear loser in the global economic chessboard, with a marked and permanent vulnerability due to an unfavourable international situation and its own endemic problems.

The continent is home to the 10 poorest countries in the world and to more than 18 million refugees and displaced persons¹. This represents 10% of the world's population, with population growth expected to double Africa's current population by 2050 from the current 1.1 billion to more than 2.2 billion, more than half of whom will be young people. This reflects the existence of an imposing demographic gap vis-à-vis a Europe in steep demographic decline, which is an incentive for emigration. Indeed, how to integrate a growing number of African migrant populations into European societies is one of the main challenges that Europe needs to address, not so much in a reactive but in a proactive and forward-looking approach.

Africa's problems are not just economic. The internal challenges it faces are also numerous from a security point of view. These include seventeen African conflicts and wars, a number that has tripled in fifteen years and which has affected millions of people, some now for decades². The destructuring of numerous states across a large part of the continent, which are incapable of guaranteeing the minimum security functions for their inhabitants and control of their territory; and the rise of terrorist phenomena, very present in the Sahel region, but whose radius of action extends to the Horn of Africa and the Gulf

¹ «África, el continente con más países en conflicto». ACNUR. 2017. Available in <https://eacnur.org/es/actualidad/noticias/emergencias/africa-el-continente-con-mas-paises-en-conflicto>

² «África Conflicto, La ONU dice que se ha triplicado el número de conflictos en África en 15 años». *la Vanguardia*. 6 de febrero de 2020. Available in <https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20200206/473307466388/la-onu-dice-que-se-ha-triplicado-el-numero-de-conflictos-en-africa-en-15-anos.html>

of Guinea, threatening that large regions of East, Central and West Africa will become ungovernable territories. At the same time, the advance of jihadism in Africa, from the Sahel to the Gulf of Guinea, is of increasing concern to the West, as was made clear at the NATO summit in Madrid in June with its explicit reference to the 'southern flank'.

The future of the region is closely linked to the demographic factor and, in particular, to a young population that is set to be one of the main drivers of Africa's economic strength in the medium and long terms. According to the IMF, by 2035 the number of sub-Saharan Africans of working age will exceed the number of this group available in the rest of the world. The working-age population will remain stable and sustained over the coming decades, potentially representing a remarkable comparative advantage for African countries and an invaluable opportunity in the internationalisation of their economies.

This abundance of young labour can be a valuable demographic dividend in an ageing world, and an economic opportunity for Africa and its demographically depressed European partners, including Spain. It is not an easy process and Africa will need to create between 15 and 20 million jobs per year in the coming decades until 2035 (compared to the current 3 million) if it is to offer full life prospects to an essentially young population (48% under the age of 15). This is one of the biggest challenges for the future in Africa and the current unemployment rates among young Africans, as high as 40% in some countries, indicate the significant risk faced if Africa fails to create sufficient economic and employment opportunities to provide decent living conditions for hundreds of millions of young people.

In a scenario where Africa is unable to transform the population explosion into economic growth, social cohesion and political stability will be seriously threatened³. Young African men and women will seek alternatives in radicalism, smuggling and mass migration. In an increasingly interconnected world, African societies will not be the only ones to suffer the negative effects of this scenario; Spain and Europe will also be directly affected.

Growing global interest in Africa

What is more, Africa is a continent that is set to play an increasingly important role in international relations. Its demographic profile, natural wealth and rate of growth have

³ GÓMEZ-JORDANA MOYA, Rafael. «Propuesta para la acción exterior de España en África Subsahariana». *Iberglobal*. 2018. Available in https://www.iberglobal.com/files/2018/propuestas_africa_gomez_jordana.pdf

made it the target of the interests, ambitions and expectations of many relevant actors, mainly the major powers, but also the emerging powers. The international community is beginning to understand that Africa has an important role to play not only as a potential beneficiary of action, but also as a provider of global public goods. Africa's future looks so promising that from being defined in 2000 by the American magazine *The Economist* as "the hopeless continent", a decade later the same magazine defined it as "Africa rising"⁴, to end up affirming in 2020 that "Africa is changing so fast that it is difficult to ignore"⁵.

The most obvious case of Africa is China's interest. The growth of its economic penetration in Africa in recent years has been exponential. Although only 4% of Chinese investment flows to Africa, in just under 20 years this percentage has served to consolidate China's influence as the continent's most important trading and investment partner. Chinese companies have been able to make better use of their comparative advantages than European companies, notably their greater speed of decision-making and project implementation, their lesser interference in the internal affairs of African countries, and their lesser reluctance to use corruption to achieve their objectives⁶.

China's interest in Africa also extends to the field of security, with its longstanding contribution of blue helmets to UN peacekeeping operations and, more recently, in 2017, the installation of military bases in Djibouti, and possibly soon in Equatorial Guinea, which if it comes to pass would be its first military base in the Atlantic⁷.

China's "soft power" policy also extends to the diplomatic field, with its first mediation effort in June 2022 in Addis Ababa, a peace conference to resolve conflicts in the Horn of Africa, within the framework of the African Union. With this initiative, China is seeking

⁴ ADEWUNMION, Femi. «How the Economist changed its tune on Africa». *How we made it in Africa*. 12 de Noviembre de 2011. Available in <https://www.howwemadeitinafrica.com/how-the-economist-changed-its-tune-on-africa/14001/#:~:text=In%20May%202000%2C%20respected%20magazine%20The%20Economist%20on,and%20a%20string%20of%20wars%20across%20the%20continent>.

⁵ ROSENTHAL, Jonathan. «Africa is changing so rapidly, it is becoming hard to ignore». *The Economist*, Special report. 26 de Marzo de 2023.

⁶ SCHWIKOWSKI, Martina. «China's winning path to African investment». *DW*. 07 de febrero de 2022. Available in <https://www.dw.com/en/chinas-winning-approach-to-african-investment/a-62535649>

⁷ «Why Equatorial Guinea May Host China's First Atlantic Naval Base». *The Maritime Executive*. 07 de enero de 2022. Available in <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/why-equatorial-guinea-may-host-china-s-first-atlantic-naval-base>

an alternative approach to the West, signalling a slow but significant shift from its traditional policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of African countries⁸.

However, together with China, Africa is attracting the interest of other powers and international organisations that seek to weave diverse networks of political and commercial relations with Africa, which they see as a continent of opportunities in a complex and increasingly competitive global context.

In this regard, France, a country with major interests, held an innovative France-Africa summit in Montpellier in November 2021 with the participation of governments and civil society. A month later, Türkiye, an emerging power in Africa, held its third summit in Istanbul, attended by numerous African leaders and addressing development and security issues. In August, it was Japan's turn to convene the eighth international conference on African development in Tunis⁹, bringing together representatives of countries and international organisations to strengthen economic and social ties. After years of disinterest, even the US is sitting up and taking an interest. In December 2022, President Biden gathered 49 African leaders in Washington and pledged to support the continent's democratisation and the African Union's development vision¹⁰.

As for Russia, it held the first Russia-Africa summit in 2019 in the resort city of Sochi, attended by 43 heads of state or government. The intention was to expand its influence in a continent where it competes at a disadvantage with the West and China. Russia has defended its military expansion in Africa, a region it sees as a progressive centre of "world economic growth"¹¹, with the possible opening of a naval base in the Red Sea and the supply of arms to the Central African Republic (CAR). The second Russia-Africa summit, which was to have taken place in 2021, was postponed to August 2023 and held in St. Petersburg under the theme "For Peace, Security and Prosperity". Although President Vladimir Putin tried to regain some of his lost lustre on the international stage by showing

⁸ DE PRADO, César, «¿Qué pasa entre China y África?» *Observatorio de la Política China*. 14 de enero de 2023. Available in <https://politica-china.org/areas/politica-exterior/que-pasa-entre-china-y-africa>

⁹ «Turkey-Africa Summit takes leaders to Istanbul». *Africa Times*. 17 diciembre 2021. Available in <https://africatimes.com/2021/12/17/turkey-africa-summit-takes-leaders-to-istanbul/>

¹⁰ «U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit: Strengthening Partnerships to Meet Shared Priorities». *The White House*. 15 de Diciembre de 2022. Available in <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/12/15/u-s-africa-leaders-summit-strengthening-partnerships-to-meet-shared-priorities/>

¹¹ MEZA, Andrés. «Vladimir Putin preside la primera cumbre Rusia-África» *France24*. 24 de Octubre de 2019. Available in <https://www.france24.com/es/20191024putin-preside-cumbre-rusia-africa>

that Russia was not alone, the reality is that the result was not outstanding, confirming Moscow's declining role as a global partner¹².

Despite its limitations, Russia has been able to exploit European weaknesses in Africa. The withdrawal of French and European troops from Mali, Burkina Faso and, more recently, Niger, where the authorities and populations alike are increasingly hostile to Western presence, has provided a great opportunity for Russian penetration. The presence of the private security company Wagner has changed the entire security paradigm in the Sahel, where Russia is trying to strengthen its ties with Africa as a way of showing that it is not as isolated as it appears. Europe, for its part, is competing with Russia for greater influence in Africa, needing to woo the continent and regain the ground lost to Moscow as a reliable partner in the fight against terrorism and food insecurity¹³.

Relations between the EU and the African Union. The route of Conventions

The need for the EU to pay greater attention to Africa began to be felt in the 1960s when the vast majority of African countries became independent, forcing the creation of a legal framework to regulate their relations with Europe.

Cooperation between the two continents initially took the form of trade and development aid policies. In 1963, the then European Economic Community (EEC) signed the Yaoundé Convention (Cameroon) on trade and cooperation with the AASM (Associated African States and Madagascar), made up of 18 newly independent former African colonies. The agreement was based on the principle of free trade between the EEC and each of the AASM countries with which the EEC countries had historical links. This guaranteed the supply of agricultural and mining raw materials to the EEC, and prices and market access for producers to the community.

After it expired on 29 July 1969, a second Yaoundé Convention was signed with 21 African countries. This time the negotiations were more tense, as some European countries, Germany and the Netherlands in particular, felt that the EEC was paying for

¹² «Rusia-África: Una cumbre a la baja». *Informe semanal de política exterior número 1334. Política Exterior*. 31 de julio de 2023. Available in <https://www.politicaexterior.com/articulo-completo/rusia-afrika-una-cumbre-a-la-baja-335024/>

¹³ NARANJO, Jose y ESPAÑOL. «Marc Rusia y Occidente compiten por ganarse el favor de África». *El País*. 26 de julio de 2022. Available in <https://elpais.com/internacional/2022-07-26/rusia-y-occidente-compiten-por-ganarse-el-favor-de-afrika.html>

France's special relations with its former colonies¹⁴. Nonetheless, the convention entered into force on 1 January 1971, the same date as the Arusha Agreement with the three African Great Lakes countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, the two treaties being similar¹⁵.

In 1975, both agreements were finalised, forming the basis of the so-called Lomé Conventions, ambitious trade and assistance agreements between the European Economic Community (EEC) and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, in particular the former British, Dutch, Belgian and French colonies. The first Lomé Convention (Lomé I), which entered into force in April 1976, provided that most ACP agricultural and mineral exports would enter the EEC duty free, via preferential access based on a quota system for products such as sugar and beef that competed with EEC Europeans. Alongside this, the EEC pledged to invest €3 billion of what was then the embryonic Euro, the European Unit of Account, for the benefit of the ACP countries¹⁶.

The convention was renegotiated and renewed three times between January 1981 and December 1989, as the number of countries increased from 46 signatories in Lomé I to 71 ACP countries in the revised Lomé IV (1995-2000).

However, the Lomé Conventions had important limitations, as was demonstrated in 1995, when the US government denounced the Lomé IV Convention to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for violating its rules, triggering a bitter dispute between Europeans and Americans that ended with the WTO ruling that the EU-ACP agreements were not compatible with its regulations¹⁷.

¹⁴ FRISCH, Dieter. «La politique de développement de l'Union européenne: Un regard personnel sur 50 ans de coopération internationale». *Rapport ECDPM 15*. Maastricht: ECDPM. 2008. Available in <http://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/PMR-15-Politique-Developpement-Union-Europeenne-2008.pdf>.

¹⁵ FRISCH, Dieter. «La politique de développement de l'Union européenne: Un regard personnel sur 50 ans de coopération internationale». *Rapport ECDPM 15*. Maastricht: ECDPM. 2008. Available in <http://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/PMR-15-Politique-Developpement-Union-Europeenne-2008.pdf>.

¹⁶ FRISCH, Dieter. «La politique de développement de l'Union européenne: Un regard personnel sur 50 ans de coopération internationale». *Rapport ECDPM 15*. Maastricht: ECDPM. 2008. Available in <http://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/PMR-15-Politique-Developpement-Union-Europeenne-2008.pdf>.

¹⁷ «Banana Wars Continue—Chiquita Once Again Tries to Work Its Omnipotent Will, Now Under New Management: Likely Big Losers Will Be CARICOM's Windward Islands». *Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA)*. Washington, D.C. 16 de Mayo de 2005.

In any case, Lomé was a milestone in the modern history of international law, symbolising the replacement of a neo-colonial partnership with an inter-regional trade and development system between the EEC and the ACP based on legal regulation¹⁸.

In 2000, the Lomé IV Convention was replaced by the Cotonou Agreement, a treaty between the then 15 EU member states and the group of 78 ACP states (Cuba did not sign), which became the backbone of the partnership between the two groups of countries. Its objective, more ambitious than the different Lomé Conventions, was to contribute to the eradication of poverty, to support the sustainable economic, cultural and social development of the partner countries and to assist the progressive integration of their respective economies into the world economy. To this end, the Cotonou Agreement was based on three pillars: development cooperation, economic and trade cooperation, and political dialogue¹⁹.

The Cotonou Agreement sought to achieve a close partnership based on the principle of equality between partners and the fact that it was the ACP countries that determined their own development policies and the degree of cooperation they wanted with the EU. Perhaps the main novelty of this agreement, on the trade side, was that for the first time it decoupled it from development aid. To this end, it established free trade areas between the EU and the ACP countries, known as Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).

¹⁸ LIMA SAKR, Rafael. «Regionalism as development: The Lomé Conventions I and II (1975–1985)». *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 36, 33–59, p.58. 2023.

¹⁹ «Acuerdo de Cotonou». *Consejo Europeo*. Available in

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/policias/cotonou-agreement/#cotonou>



SOURCE: Cotonou Agreement. European Council.

Alongside the economic dimension, the Cotonou Agreement had an important political profile, reflecting European concerns about the need for a comprehensive political dialogue that included migration and security issues, as well as the fights against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

From the outset, however, there were numerous protests from ACP countries, which saw the agreements as damaging to their fragile economies. The vast majority of African states questioned the partnership proposed by Europe and began to consider the idea of establishing trade relations with emerging countries, mainly China, but also others such as India and Brazil²⁰.

The fifth EU-Africa summit, which took place in Abidjan in November 2017, showed that many points of the Cotonou Agreement were no longer adapted to the international context, and that the time had come to establish a specific partnership with the African continent and another with the Caribbean and Pacific regions, given that both areas were very heterogeneous. The effectiveness of bilateral or multilateral aid was also questioned.

²⁰ BIDAULT, Marie-Christine. «Fin de l'Accord de Cotonou et nouvelle forme de coopération ?». *Les Yeux du Monde*. 03 de diciembre de 2019. Available in [2020 : Fin de l'Accord de Cotonou et nouvelle forme de coopération ? - Les Yeux du Monde \(les-yeux-du-monde.fr\)](https://les-yeux-du-monde.fr)

A year later, in an unprecedented exercise in self-criticism, the European Court of Auditors considered in its special report n°20/2018²¹ that EU support for Africa was having little effect and that trade agreements, often to the benefit of European countries, were leading them to compensate African countries with aid that only served to generate corruption and social unrest. To this effect, it recommended greater coherence in European policies by prioritising investment and industrial development.

Despite this criticism, on 28 September 2018 the EU began to formally renegotiate the Cotonou Agreements, which were extended in December 2020 for a 20-year period starting in 2021, and included, along with trade aspects, other areas such as democracy and human rights, climate change and poverty eradication²².

The African peace and security architecture

In 2002, the African Union (AU), an intergovernmental organisation based in Addis Ababa that brings together 55 African nations²³, created the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) as a long-term, structural response to the security challenges facing the African continent. The APSA was to provide the AU and sub-regional organisations (SROs) with a political mandate, as well as a set of institutions, laws and procedures that would give them access to the necessary tools to prevent, manage and resolve African conflicts.

To do so, it has a governing body, the Peace and Security Council (PSC), established by AU member states in 2002 as the "permanent decision-making body for conflict prevention, management and resolution", and is supported in its work by the AU Commission, as well as a Panel of the Wise, a continental early warning system and a Peace Fund.

The AU relies for its action in the field of peace and security on ten African sub-regional organisations (SROs), which have been given a mandate for cooperation by their

²¹«Rapport spécial n° 20/2018: Aide de l'Union européenne à l'architecture africaine de paix et de sécurité: un recentrage s'impose». COUR DES COMPTES EUROPÉENNE. 18 de septiembere de 2018. Available in https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR18_20/SR_APSA_FR.pdf

²² «Partnership agreement between [the European Union / the European Union and its member states], of the one part, and members of the Organisation of african, caribbean and pacific states, of the other part». 2021, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-04/negotiated-agreement-text-initialled-by-eu-oacps-chief-negotiators-20210415_en.pdf

²³ The AU was created in 2000 and succeeded the Organization of African Unity. In 2017, all 55 African countries were members of the African Union.

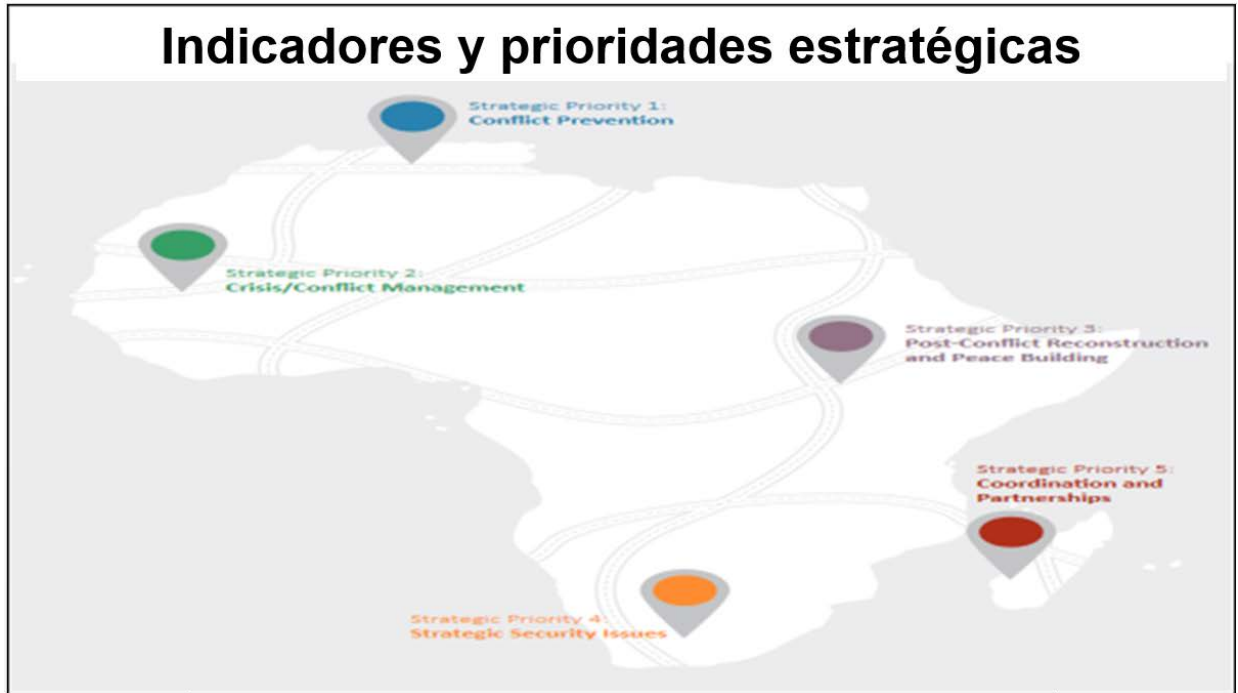
respective member states, based on the principles of subsidiarity and complementarity. Eight are Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and two are Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (RMs)²⁴.

Since its founding, the AU together with the SROs has intervened in some half of the violent conflicts that have occurred in Africa. Interventions have been carried out through diplomatic channels or in the form of mediation and peace support operations, or a combination of these three elements. Their results have been questionable on most occasions.

With a view to increasing its operational effectiveness, in December 2015 the AU and SROs set out an APSA roadmap, covering five strategic priorities: conflict prevention, crisis and conflict management, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding, strategic security issues (illegal entry of SALW, counter-IED/explosive ordnance management, disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, counter-terrorism measures, illicit financial flows, maritime strategy and combating transnational organised crime and cybercrime), and coordination and partnerships within the APSA framework²⁵.

²⁴The regional economic communities are the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). For their part, the RMs are the East African Standby Force Coordination Mechanism (EASFCOM) and the North African Regional Capability (CRAN).

²⁵ «African Peace and Security Architecture. APSA Roadmap 2016 – 2020». *African Union Commission, Peace and Security Department*, Addis Ababa. Diciembre de 2015. Available in <https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/2015-en-apsa-roadmap-final.pdf>



SOURCE: African Peace and Security Architecture. APSA Roadmap 2016 - 2020.

However, the big problem for APSA is financial. At the time of its founding, AU member states agreed to establish an African Peace Fund to finance AU missions. This fund would be drawn mainly from the AU budget²⁶, together with voluntary contributions from other external donors. However, less than half of African states pay their full contribution to the AU budget on time, thereby reducing it by 33% in the period 2011-2015, while forcing donor countries to finance a large share of it (54% in 2017).

Moreover, only a small proportion of the AU's budget went to the African Peace Fund. Although in 2014, AU member states agreed to increase the financial resources allocated to the African Peace Facility to 12% of the AU's regular budget, the amount disbursed in 2016 amounted to just 7% (i.e. less than €6 million).

European support for Africa's peace and security architecture

The EU has demonstrated its interest in focusing on peace and security on the African continent in several high-level strategies on conflict prevention and security, the most recent being the 2016 EU Global Strategy. The EU considers the AU as its political interlocutor at the continental level, with the Africa-EU Partnership, established in 2000

²⁶ Protocolo relativo al establecimiento del Consejo de Paz y Seguridad de la Unión Africana, artículo 21.

at the first Africa-EU Summit in Cairo, being the formal channel for EU relations with Africa and the first element of European support to the African peace and security architecture.

This intercontinental partnership is guided by the so-called Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES), which was adopted at the second EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon in 2007, bringing together the leaders of 27 European and 54 African states, along with the presidents of the continental institutions. The JAES was conceived as an instrument for joint strategic planning, and a framework for cooperation and policy dialogue. The JAES was to reflect the Euro-African consensus on common values, common interests and common strategic objectives, and was intended to provide an overall long-term framework for Africa-EU relations²⁷. This strategy was to be implemented through the funding of jointly identified priorities of common interest to both the EU and Africa, and had a significant impact on the daily lives of citizens on both continents.

Its focus was on strengthening economic cooperation and promoting sustainable development that would bring the two continents closer together on the basis of peace, security, democracy, prosperity, solidarity and human dignity. To this end, the EU would channel its financial support for APSA's development through the European Development Fund (EDF). The main channels through which EDF aid is channelled are the African Peace Facility (APF), created by the EU in 2003, and the Regional Indicative Programmes (RIPs).

In the years up to the end of the implementation period of this strategy in 2020, the funds were mostly used (80%) to finance AU and African sub-regional organisations' (SROs) peace operations in the Central African Republic, Sudan, South Sudan, Mali, Somalia, the Lake Chad Basin and Comoros²⁸.

The JAES has had little success, however, as many African countries see it as reflecting European paternalistic behaviour, and having an excessive focus on European values of democracy, human rights and sustainability. This is a serious problem for governments

²⁷«A Joint Africa-EU Strategy». *European Commission*. 2007. Available in

https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/publication/joint-africa-eu-strategy_en

²⁸ « 2003/3/: Decision No 3/2003 of the ACP-EC Council of Ministers of 11 December 2003 on the use of resources from the long-term development envelope of the ninth EDF for the creation of a Peace Facility for Africa ». *EUR-Lex*. 2003. Available in <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/peace-facility-for-africa.html>

that find it extremely difficult to meet European standards and that see the EU as aid recipients rather than as equal partners²⁹.

For its part, the EU acknowledged in a report issued in 2018 by the Court of Auditors³⁰ that the JAES has had little strategic impact and lacks a long-term vision and clear political commitment. During those years, financial support had been limited to covering the AU's operational costs, such as staff costs, with no clear priorities having been defined in advance. Consequently, the funding of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) had become completely dependent on European contributions, preventing funding instruments from being used in a coherent manner. There was also a lack of information on the results obtained.

A few years later, during the AU-EU Summit in Abidjan in 2017, both institutions recognised the need to strengthen the relationship, agreeing to expand their cooperation on a stronger, more structured and longer-term basis. In this context, on 23 May 2018 the European Commission and the African Union Commission signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Peace, Security and Governance, which provided an expanded framework for enhanced cooperation between the AU and the EU in the field of peace and security³¹.

The JAES is not the only instrument for cooperation. Alongside it, the EU-Africa partnership is being developed via formal dialogue at several levels:

- EU-AU summits, which are held, in principle, every three years and bring together heads of state or government, the latest being the sixth EU-AU summit held on 17-18 February 2022 in Brussels;
- regular ministerial (or "troika") meetings, which bring together representatives of EU and African countries, together with the African Union Commission and EU institutions, including the Council of the EU;

²⁹ SCHWIKOWSKI, Martina. *Ibidem*.

³⁰ «Rapport spécial n° 20/2018: Aide de l'Union européenne à l'architecture africaine de paix et de sécurité: un recentrage s'impose» *Cour des Comptes Européenne*. 18 de septiembre de 2018. Available in https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR18_20/SR_APSA_FR.pdf

³¹ «Memorandum of Understanding Between The African Union And The European Union on Peace, Security and Governance». *EU External Action Service*. 23 de mayo de 2018. Available in https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/medghme_2018.05.23_16.31.36_5c4n7108_1.pdf

- and last, EU-AU inter-commission meetings. The 11th meeting took place on 28 November 2022 in Brussels, with both the EU and the AU committing to their strategic partnership and reviewing progress on the implementation of the joint commitments made at the 6th EU-AU Summit in February 2022.

In addition to the high-level joint meetings (i.e. summits, committee-to-committee meetings and ministerial meetings) that drive relations, the EU also engages in dialogue with various partners to advance mutually agreed priorities.

A new vision for cooperation with Africa

By 2020, thirteen years after the first strategy, eleven of the eighteen missions and operations launched under the umbrella of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy were deployed in Africa³². By that time, the EU had become Africa's largest trading and investment partner and the main supporter of the African Continental Free Trade Area. In 2018, total trade in goods between the 27 EU member states and Africa had reached a value of €235 billion, 32% of Africa's total, compared to €125 billion for China (17%) and €46 billion for the US (6%). Similarly, the direct investment stock of the 27 EU member states in Africa in 2017 was worth €222 billion, more than five times that of the US (€42 billion) and China (€38 billion)³³.

³² «Infographic - Africa and Europe: a joint vision for 2030» European Council. Available in <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/africa-and-europe-a-joint-vision-for-2030/>

³³ «Questions and Answers: Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa», *European Commission*. Brussels. 9 de Marzo de 2020. Available in file:///C:/Users/ifuecob/Documents/IEEE%202023/CONFERENCIAS/2023%2007%2010%20Rabat%20%20African%20Peace%20&%20Security%20Annual%20Conference/Questions_and_Answers_Towards_a_Comprehensive_Strategy_with_Africa.pdf



SOURCE: Questions and Answers: “Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa”, European Commission.

Faced with the reality of this new scenario of growing momentum in EU-Africa relations, the EU was aware of the importance of preserving its own economic and security interests vis-à-vis increased geopolitical competition; only in this way could it remain a major player on the African continent. The new opportunities and challenges in Africa therefore obliged the EU to review its strategy given the growing interest of EU member states in the African continent. This was especially necessary at a time when the EU was facing geopolitical competition from China, Russia, Türkiye, India and the post-Brexit UK.

In this regard, the European Commission's 2020 programme of work announced that the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy "will develop a comprehensive new strategy with Africa to boost economic relations, create jobs on both continents and deepen our partnership in all areas"³⁴.

A first step in the direction of addressing common goals and global challenges came in March 2020 as the world started to face COVID-19. The European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) issued a joint communiqué entitled "Towards

³⁴ «Questions and Answers: Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa», *European Commission*. Brussels. 9 de Marzo de 2020. Available in file:///C:/Users/ifuecob/Documents/IEEE%202023/CONFERENCIAS/2023%2007%2010%20Rabat%20%20African%20Peace%20&%20Security%20Annual%20Conference/Questions_and_Answers_Towards_a_Comprehensive_Strategy_with_Africa.pdf

a comprehensive strategy with Africa"³⁵, proposing to build a new comprehensive partnership with the continent that would boost economic relations, create jobs on both continents and deepen the partnership in all areas.

As the title suggests, the joint communiqué is not a strategy as such, but a proposal to develop a joint strategy with Africa. It reflects the aspirations of Agenda 2063, which presents the AU's vision for an "integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa", and whose main objective is to position Africa as an international power. At the same time, it presents the key areas on which the EU wants the strategy to focus: green transition and access to energy, digital transformation, sustainable growth and job creation, peace, security and governance in Africa, and the issue of migration and human mobility.

This vision seeks to enhance cooperation in line with European and African aspirations, and based on shared interests and values. The Council consequently adopted conclusions on Africa on 30 June 2020, reaffirming the paramount importance of a stronger EU-Africa partnership. The conclusions noted that the joint communication was an excellent basis from which to launch a new and ambitious partnership with Africa, and that the forthcoming sixth EU-African Union summit would be a crucial opportunity for the renewal of a comprehensive common strategic approach to fulfil this aspiration.

A year later, on 25 March 2021, the European Parliament approved the new EU-Africa strategy to create a new 'truly geopolitical' partnership between the two entities, given that they 'are geographically close and have strong historical, cultural and socio-economic ties, reinforced by their growing common strategic interests and challenges'³⁶. The new strategy also underlines that the EU is Africa's main partner "for all purposes in terms of trade, investment, official development assistance (ODA), humanitarian aid and security".

However, it would be necessary to wait until the sixth EU-AU Summit in Brussels on 17-18 February 2022, almost five years after the last one in Abidjan, to implement this

³⁵ «Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa, JOIN (2020) 4 final (and related documentation) ». *European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. Junio de 2020. Available in [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/651965/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)651965_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/651965/EPRS_BRI(2020)651965_EN.pdf)

³⁶ «Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa, JOIN (2020) 4 final (and related documentation) ». *European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. Junio de 2020. Available in [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/651965/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)651965_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/651965/EPRS_BRI(2020)651965_EN.pdf)

strategy through the adoption of an EU-AU "Joint Vision" for 2030³⁷. This vision should be the foundation of the new Europe-Africa partnership, based on four pillars: an investment package in Africa with €150 billion in grants and investments to support digital transformation, renewable energy, education and other areas on the African continent³⁸; a renewed and enhanced cooperation on peace and security in the framework of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA); one on migration and mobility; and last, a commitment to multilateralism within the rules-based international order, with the United Nations at its centre.

Balance of EU-AU cooperation. The impact of the war in Ukraine

When taking stock of cooperation between the EU and the AU, it should be noted that there is a certain scepticism on the African side about the EU's real will to turn Africa into a preferential partner that goes beyond rhetorical declarations by European leaders at summits on the need for a strengthened partnership, and to make concessions in this regard that meet African expectations.

African countries seem to have come to the conclusion that the EU does not consider African agendas with regard to migration, energy transition, or responses to threats to peace and security on the continent. Cooperation remains based on an asymmetric relationship, where Europe talks a lot about partnership, but seems unwilling to deliver on its promises, let alone make concessions³⁹.

For its part, the EU is aware that, unlike before, Africa now has a choice of partners: China, Türkiye, Russia, allowing African countries to shift power relations as a way of demonstrating that they have other options.

Africa can now, beyond Europe, join partnerships with other countries, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the US Strategy towards sub-Saharan Africa launched

³⁷ «6th European Union - African Union Summit: A Joint Vision for 2030». Available in https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/54412/final_declaration-en.pdf

³⁸ »Hacia una nueva asociación entre África y la UE», *Parlamento Europeo*. 23 de junio de 2022. Available in <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/es/headlines/world/20210311STO99734/hacia-una-nueva-asociacion-entre-africa-y-la-ue#:~:text=Los%20eurodiputados%20aprobaron%20el%2025%20de%20marzo%20de,sobre%20las%20re-laciones%20entre%20la%20UE%20y%20%20C3%81frica>.

³⁹ ZIDI, Paulina. «Sommet UE-UA: "Il y a un scepticisme du côté des pays africains"» *RFI*. 16 de febrero de 2022.

late last summer. The EU-AU relationship is therefore only one of several opportunities for the continent.

An example of this new, more assertive African attitude is the UN General Assembly vote in February 2023 demanding Russia's immediate withdrawal from Ukraine. Several African countries abstained (Ethiopia, Guinea, Mozambique, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, Zimbabwe and the Republic of Congo), thereby revealing the existence of deep divisions within African countries and testing relations with Europe.

The effect is a certain European nervousness that is leading the EU to promise to invest more in Africa, to mobilise more funds, investments and international aid to the tune of billions of euros that have never been offered before, but without sufficient reflection on how to deliver on this. However, African governments are taking a certain distance from this new European enthusiasm as they are not convinced of the new reality, especially in a context of war in Europe where the strategic - and financial - priorities are in Ukraine.

This African perception is likewise tainted by the controversial presence of some European states in Africa that have been supporting some dysfunctional governments, having served to undermine the confidence of the African population, and especially its younger sector, about Europe's real intentions.

In parallel, the EU has traditionally been reluctant to support African governments with a poor human rights record in their countries. This has led to the issue of governance being almost completely absent from the debate in recent times. The European side's experience of many years of lecturing Africans on values has led it to the conviction that this issue cannot be dealt with in a coherent manner, given that the debate falls on deaf ears. More recently, the EU seems determined to adopt a more pragmatic stance in terms of seeking out African allies, taking the risk that they may behave as a controversial rule of law.

This would be the case in point, for example, in Rwanda, which has become the reference state for the EU, despite the fact that the country is the target of numerous human rights criticisms. This new attitude would not have been possible a few years ago regarding Mugabe's Zimbabwe. Nowadays, the EU wants to prevent debates on common ground from eventually contaminating the agenda, which would have a serious impact on any attempt at EU-AU partnership.

One factor that is having significant implications for the Africa-Europe relationship is Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its impact on global power relations, which is having serious consequences in Africa. Africa is paying a high economic and food price for the ongoing war, with the danger of losing a decade of growth. Many African governments understand that they are being marginalised in a war that is being treated as a zero-sum game and in which they are not only not the protagonists, but they are the born losers. The wave of disillusionment sweeping Africa is leading African governments to make decisions in the context of an uncertain future based on self-interest, including circumventing sanctions and securing alliances with non-Western countries.

Last, the impact of the war on food security has inevitably affected the dialogue around the EU-AU relationship. Although Africa was already suffering from food problems before the war, the Russian invasion has only worsened the situation, increasing tensions in relations with Europe, which remains, given its greater economic availability, the main recipient region for Russian and Ukrainian grain⁴⁰.

Conclusions

In recent years, there has been a strategic reflection within the AU and the EU on how to improve cooperation between the two organisations and make it more efficient, thereby overcoming the difficulties that have arisen in recent decades. Both organisations recognise that they have converging interests in a number of areas, such as combating climate change and promoting a sustainable and job-creating African economy. However, they have yet to find common ground on controversial issues such as migration, security management and the fight against terrorism. It is much more difficult for them to reach an understanding on the identification and definition of what core values are.

The way to overcome differences would be, as Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AU Commission, indicated at the AU-EU Commission meeting in February 2020, for the EU not to try to impose its criteria when deciding on cooperation and to consider African positions on issues such as the role of international criminal justice, sexual orientation and identity, the death penalty, and the central role of the AU in resolving crises on its continent. In this regard, the EU must also overcome what Carlos Lopes, the

⁴⁰ AYCART-PIQUER, Laia y MEREDITH, Dora. «Un año desde que Rusia invadió Ucrania: implicaciones para la relación África-Europa» *ODI*. 15 de marzo de 2023. Available in <https://odi.org/en/insights/one-year-since-russia-invaded-ukraine-implications-for-the-africa-europe-relationship/>

AU's High Representative in negotiations with the EU, defines as the EU countries' 'fixation' on the 'migration threat'⁴¹. Only the recognition and acceptance of these differences will remove the obstacles that can hinder cooperation.

The EU and the AU have a unique opportunity to shape a partnership that is more ambitious and better adapted to today's realities. An ageing Europe, impoverished by the war in Ukraine and threatened by decline, faces a young, dynamic and growing Africa. Europe needs labour that it can only find in the South and seeks to do so by limiting uncontrolled migration in favour of professional mobility. For its part, Africa wants to get out of the rentier economy, fight corruption and poverty by industrialising based on its raw natural resources, and leave underdevelopment behind. The priorities are not the same and the interests may not be either, but both are easily compatible for the common benefit of Africans and Europeans.

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⁴¹ «Understanding the EU's approach to a new partnership with Africa, EU Policies – Insight, p.8». *European Parliament research Service*. Junio de 2020. Available in [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/698905/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)698905_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/698905/EPRS_BRI(2022)698905_EN.pdf)