

EU-Africa Pre Summit Meeting

Brussels, November 16, 2010

Europe-Africa Research Network

Ahead of the 3rd Africa-EU Summit that will be held in Tripoli (Libya) the 29-30 of November 2010, this EARN meeting provided a timely opportunity: (i) to discuss the Joint Africa-EU Strategy's (JAES) main achievements, as well as the difficulties encountered in strengthening the political partnership and in enhancing cooperation between the two continents; and (ii) to gather views of African and European officials and other actors on what they see as the main priorities and expectations for the upcoming Summit, and main challenges to the future of their relations.

African and European officials present in the meeting engaged in a frank discussion about the challenges to the partnership. There is wide recognition that changes need to be brought into the relationship for building a new type of political partnership based on common interests and respect for each other priorities.

For this discussion, the organisers invited: Mr. Rudi Brieven, Chairman of the Africa Working Group in the EU Council; Mr. Ibn Chambas, Secretary-General of the ACP Group; Ms. Eva Joly, Member of the European Parliament and Chairperson of its Development Committee; Mr. Philippe Darmuzey, Head of Pan-African Unit at the European Commission; Mr. Fernando Jorge Cardoso, Chair of the Europe-Africa Policy Research Network (EARN); and Mr. Ramón García Gallardo of SJ Berwin and host of the meeting. Ambassador Anil Sooklal of the South Africa Embassy to the EU, kindly accepted to join the panellists and express his views in the absence of the representative of the AU delegation to the EU. The event was chaired by Mr. Geert Laporte, Head of Institutional Relations of the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM, Maastricht).

The event also provided EARN with an opportunity to present the network to the audience, and to launch and disseminate its first political dialogue report on EU-Africa relations – Beyond Development Aid: Political Dialogue on Global Issues of Common Concern – and its policy proposal to effectively build a 'new strategic political partnership' – Agenda for Action. An EARN Proposal on the Joint Africa-EU Strategy and the Future of Africa-EU Relations.

Summary of the discussion

The Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES):

Mixed results, but no doubts about its relevance and potential

One of the panellists characterised the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) as “an empty shell” that lacks political will and financing means. Most panellists and participants – African and European – shared however a more positive view on the importance and continued relevance of the JAES and of Summit meetings. In their perspective, the JAES did promote a mode of interaction that did not exist in the past. It facilitated understanding between the parties on a number of issues where they have different views and positions, as well as discussions on global issues. It created thus opportunities for agreeing on joint positions on some of these matters.

But as underlined by some EU officials, the JAES is work in progress and although politics are key to the partnership, it requires institutions and it is also about technicalities. There is some progress in discussing global issues of common interest and there are attempts at coordinating positions. However, as stressed by an EU official, despite the willingness of some actors to move faster, it is a process that will take time and can not be forced, nor should it be expected that European and African nations automatically change their policies or for instance vote differently in the UN.

There is nevertheless a recognition that much needs to be improved in order to move beyond a predominantly technocratic partnership. Aspects that ought to deserve greater attention and that require a change in attitude/approach on the European and/or African side include:

. *Moving beyond unilateral priorities and interests.* As African participants stress, the JAES should not be a unidirectional relationship. So far, progress is more visible in those areas where Europe has the greatest interest and African priorities are ignored. As one participant put it, “African solutions to African problems has not been fully understood and taken on board”; European positions and attitudes on Zimbabwe and on ICC’s indictment of the Sudanese President are clear examples.

. *Moving towards concrete and realistic results,* or else there is a risk that the parties will start losing interest in the partnership. The 1st Action Plan of the JAES is considered a good plan that looks at the issues that matter, but both parties agree it was overambitious. The 2nd Action Plan should be more focused on the implementation and in making progress, but as one EU official recalled “the Joint Expert Groups are not implementing agencies”, stressing that progress in implementation must come from greater political drive, adaptation of instruments, and a closer involvement of other actors beyond the two Commissions, including at regional and national level.

. *Addressing other concerns beyond development aid.* As one African participant stressed, the partnership is still too much focused on development. However, it seems undeniable that development still drives much of the African interest in the partnership with Europe; as one African representative stated, it would be important that the 3rd Africa-EU Summit provides some concrete responses to African problems, specially after increasing disenchantment with the G20 and its failure to pay greater attention to the development agenda.

.Treating Africa as one. The EU recognises it needs to do more to put in practice the idea inherent in the JAES of treating Africa as one, namely by adapting its programmes and instruments. However, as reminded by an EU official and acknowledged also by some African participants, Africans too need to do more to make it happen. Discussion on the review of the Cotonou partnership agreement illustrated how difficult it was to get the African and the ACP group to agree to changes in the agreement to allow for a continental approach to relations with Africa.

The mixed results of the JAES should not lead to or imply a questioning of the continued importance of Europe for Africa. Europe remains Africa's number one partner, beyond that has a number of social ties as well as being a major supporter in the area of peace and security. The parties must, however, recognise and accept that it is not an exclusive relationship or one devoted of competitors. On the contrary, as one African panellist stated, the question should be reversed; one should be asking instead to what extent Africa still is a priority for Europe.

Priorities and Expectations for the Summit:

Address divisive issues and focus on achieving concrete results

Summits, although hardly ever groundbreaking, are politically relevant and carry a symbolic meaning that should not be underestimated, especially at a time when many African States are celebrating their 50 years of independence. Most participants also shared the view that Summits are a moment of opportunity to focus on common interests and goals, lay differences on the table and speak frankly and openly about them. As an EU official put it, just the fact of managing to gather such a High Level intercontinental Summit is in itself of significant importance and a major political challenge.

Development and economic growth through investment and job creation (e.g. in infrastructure), and the role of and dialogue with the private sector, will be at the core of the priority issues for the 3rd Summit meeting. Other relevant and related themes will be addressed and continue to be priorities for the partnership, namely: peace and security, supporting African countries attaining the Millennium Development Goals, trade, climate change and how the partnership defines itself in the world.

For African participants, the main focus of the Summit should be on implementation and in providing concrete responses to African problems. Even in the most visible and best working partnerships in the JAES like the Peace and Security, questions remain on how it will evolve, move towards the next steps and improve the linkages with the RECs. Most panellists agreed the Summit must also address divisive issues in the partnership, namely the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), corruption (both in Africa and how European banks in some circumstances enable this), among others. There seems to be wide conviction – EU officials sounded particularly assuring – that it will happen and dialogue will continue despite the differences. As they argue, disagreements are bound to happen, but the relationship is now a much more matured

one as discussion on matters that in the past have been (and still are) controversial, like governance and human rights illustrate.

Various African participants, in particular, criticised the lack of information on the JAES and on the process of preparation for the Summit. Unlike in the run-up to the 2nd EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon in December 2007, this time there has been no dialogue and involvement of African diplomatic officials in Brussels in the preparation process.

Critical issues for an enhanced partnership

.Avoid that the partnership remains too institutionally driven. So far, the two Commissions have been overwhelmingly present, as it was left to them to manage the partnership. Besides other institutional actors (e.g. the RECs, which should be given a greater voice in the views of some African participants), civil society and business actors need to be more present. There is no clarity yet on how this will happen.

.Greater participation of Member States on both sides. There is a lack of ownership by Member States on both European and African side that is now gradually improving, but it needs to be more than a commitment to meet and discuss every 3 years. Quoting the words of a panellist, “we need to identify champions to move the partnership”.

.Reduce the asymmetry in capacity and means between African and European actors of the JAES.

.Improve and adapt financing tools and mechanisms and have the Member States contribute and participate in these too. For the EC, more than creating a pan African envelope, what is important is to clearly identify and improve programmes and instruments of interest to both sides, and render them flexible.

.Improve the communication on the JAES. There is a need for a better communication on the achievements and progress of the JAES to institutional actors and the wider public. Key facts and figures will soon be posted on the official website dedicated to the JAES, as announced by an EC official.

The EU-Africa Pre Summit Meeting was hosted by Okra-Express

