

A Renewed Partnership? The EU-Africa relationship after the EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon

by Stephen Gardner, *Euro-correspondent.com*



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The coverage of the EU-Africa summit in Lisbon (8-9 December 2007) was dominated by the conflict between European and African leaders over Economic Partnership Agreements and human rights violations. Abdoulaye Wade, Senegal's President used the occasion to warn Europe that it was losing the battle for trade and influence on the African continent.

Nevertheless, a Joint EU-Africa Strategy was agreed, with the aim of deepening the relationship between the two continents and taking into account longstanding ties and common interests. FES Brussels organised in February 2008 a post-summit workshop with experts from Europe and Africa to discuss the potential of the partnership to live up to the declarations.

Partnership beyond development

The EU-Africa Summit¹ concluded with the publication of three documents: a joint strategy paper, an Action Plan 2008-2010, and the Lisbon Declaration, which crystallised the main issues. Three broad objectives were identified for the EU-Africa strategic partnership: peace and security; governance and human rights; and trade and regional integration.

There was consensus that the Summit had been worthwhile, with first speaker **Karl-Auguste Offman**, former president of Mauritius, calling it a "good meeting." But there had been controversy: British prime minister Gordon Brown refused to attend because of the presence of Zimbabwe's president Robert Mugabe. In fact, said Offman, the opportunity to discuss with Mugabe meant that some delegates were able to criticise him directly.

One conclusion of the Summit was that there had been progress in governance and leadership in Africa. New, more progressive leaders have emerged on the continent, although many countries are still ruled by former anti-colonialist fighters such as Mugabe, and there is still corruption, war and unrest (for example in Chad and Kenya).

Herta Däubler-Gmelin, Chairperson of the Human Rights Committee, German Parliament, agreed on this point, saying that there has been "a lot of change" on the continent, with "new approaches and new ideas that can become very important between Africa and Europe." However, "very stubborn" old leaders are a barrier to adoption of governance and human rights standards. These standards are not just a "western way" but are enshrined in United Nations declarations that African countries have signed. The rule of law and human rights should be common ground for all nations.

Another issue is the emergence of China as a 'rival' in Africa to Europe. Africa's leaders, new and old, are being courted by both the EU and China, but the relationships are different. Whereas European countries were the former colonial masters, China provided support to African countries during their liberation struggles. Although African countries are now politically independent, it is not clear that they are economically independent from the former colonial powers. China is seen by some in Africa as offering a route to economic independence. In this context the EU-African relationship must be reassessed. Can a genuine partnership of equals be formed?

¹ See http://ec.europa.eu/development/services/events/eu-africa-summit-2007/index_en.cfm

A “new spirit of self-reliance” in Africa could make this possible, Däubler-Gmelin said, with leaders recognising “that deliverance does not come from outside” – either from Europe or from China. African confidence and self-reliance is important for the EU-Africa partnership.

Philippe Darmuzey of DG Development agreed the Lisbon Summit had marked a change in EU-Africa relations. The Summit signalled a move from the EU having a political commitment to its neighbouring continent, to the prospect of a true partnership that could see joint tackling of specific issues, such as trade, economic partnership agreements (EPAs), governance, and the Zimbabwe situation. This would see the EU-Africa partnership go “beyond development” to become part of a global conversation embracing issues such as terrorism and climate change.

However, the new approach must be proved in practice through the implementation of eight thematic partnerships² established by the Lisbon Action Plan. Commentators at the workshop felt that these represented enormous ambition, and questioned if the focus is clear enough and if expectations are not too high.

Peace and Security – A Partnership to build on

Perhaps the most important thematic partnership concerns peace and security. To understand this it is important to understand the focus of the EU's Defence and Security Policy (EDSP) and how it applies to Africa. First speaker **Garth Le Pere**, of South Africa's Institute for Global Dialogue, asked if the fundamental aim of EDSP was to defend the EU, to promote international stability, or both. He questioned if the EDSP has a clear strategic concept.

European countries have already intervened in Africa to further the EDSP. The EU has financially supported the Africa Peace Facility, and has had direct involvement on the ground in three situations:

- Darfur: this has included humanitarian assistance, support for an African Union force, and support for peace talks and peace agreement implementation.
- An EU force is being prepared for deployment to Chad.
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), an EU force has intervened in the east of the country.

Seeking a fresh approach

Aldo Ajello, former EU special representative for the African Great Lakes Region, said the restricted mandate given to the EU under the EDSP, and the limited resources dedicated to the policy, meant the impact of interventions was not as great as it might have been. Nevertheless, the intervention in eastern DRC had prevented massacres and promoted a peace process. The Lisbon-agreed peace and security thematic partnership was an opportunity to build on this.

However resources are needed so Africans can themselves better manage conflict resolution, with the African Union potentially playing a prominent role. Furthermore, the root causes of conflicts need to be addressed – it is unclear if EDSP is structured for this. One example of the failure to do this was in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. Some of the guilty parties from Rwanda fled to neighbouring countries and from there continued to launch attacks on Rwanda, leading to enormous instability in the Great Lakes region, Ajello said.

Addressing root causes means African countries should be supported in security sector reform, and in the separation of police, military and judicial functions. In DRC, for example, corruption in the army means the lowest ranking soldiers are often not paid, leading them to terrorise the population. This situation could be addressed using EU resources, but EU policy does not currently allow interventions of this type. However, without such issues being addressed, the peace and security strategy outlined at the Lisbon EU-Africa Summit would remain “wishful thinking,” Ajello said.

In fact, there are two key points, according to Ajello:

- The right of people to choose and replace leaders should be recognised in African countries;
- There should be separation of powers.

The EU should focus on these as the basis for development. A current barrier to democracy for many African states is their very polarised political systems, without strong parliamentary oppositions. In an election, this meant that losing parties stand to “lose everything.” It is necessary to “eliminate this drama from the concept of elections in Africa,” Ajello said. Governance in Africa needs to evolve taking African circumstances into account: ethnic and tribal divisions, the artificial borders drawn by the colonial powers, conflict over resources and prevailing corruption.

² Peace and security; democratic governance and human rights; trade, regional integration and infrastructure; the Millennium Development Goals; energy; climate change; migration, mobility and employment; and science, information society and space. See http://ec.europa.eu/development/icenter/repository/EAS2007_action_plan_2008_2010_en.pdf

Trade relations – relations of Trust?

The workshop's second panel dealt with EPA negotiations between the European Commission and blocs of African countries. The EU has concluded one full EPA with the Caribbean countries³, but considerable obstacles to concluding others remain. The Caribbean agreement had been a "tremendous piece of hard work" and could be a model for future agreements with other regions, though it would have to be adapted, said **Peter Thompson**, Director of Development and EPAs of the European Commission Directorate-General for Trade.

Negotiations in Africa have reached critical stages with the East African Community (EAC), the South African Development Community (SADC) and the Eastern and Southern Africa grouping (ESA). In addition, a number of individual countries have initialled EPAs or moved towards agreement, including Ghana, Mozambique and Ivory Coast. In West Africa and Central Africa, interim agreements have been made. The Commission's goals are to complete regional coverage, and to complete chapters outstanding in partial agreements.

But the EPAs have many critics. The panel's second speaker, **Kingsley Ofei-Nkansah**, Secretary-General of the General Agricultural Workers Union of Ghana Trades Union Congress, said he was campaigning to stop the EPAs. Who owns the initiative, how do EPAs underpin a "global Europe" agenda, and how can civil society be more involved, are just some of the questions that have been asked about EPAs. The Commission's negotiating tactics – "arm-twisting" as Ofei-Nkansah said – have also caused resentment. Some development NGOs believe the Commission has been too single-minded. A deadline for negotiations of 31 December 2007 had been set, because of the expiry on that date of the World Trade Organisation waiver relating to the Cotonou Agreement. But African regional groupings felt this gave little time to develop their positions.

This meant there was a real danger of sowing discord, especially among West African countries, according to Ofei-Nkansah. There were different views of EPAs among those countries. The EPA negotiations are thus a test case for a true partnership between the EU and Africa. The Commission should allow African regional grouping to move at their own pace, and should reinforce the link between trade, regional integration, and development.

Peter Thompson refuted the accusation of arm-twisting made against the Commission. The issue was the need to re-balance an unfair international system, he said. The 31 December 2007 deadline had been known about for at least seven years, and was a "clear and hard" deadline that should have been respected, especially as a return to a Generalised System of Preference was not an option. The current situation is not ideal, he conceded, but the negotiations are a work in progress, with some very positive aspects. The Commission accepts that "no-one liberalises easily" and will continue to listen and respond to its partners.

John Tesha, Executive Secretary of the Africa Forum, South Africa, who moderated the second panel, said trust between the negotiating partners was partly a question of keeping to deadlines, but also a question of showing flexibility. However, the EU stood accused of using the tactic of buying time and then presenting an ultimatum to African negotiators.

There is still great scope for the European and African sides to learn about one another, and the post Lisbon EU-Africa Summit agenda would have to be designed to clear up the differences between the two. Nevertheless, the Summit identified common challenges, which provide sufficient basis for a sustainable partnership. However, to shape this as an equal partnership, which complies to both partners' expectations, the dialogue has to be continued.

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Ernst Stetter, Director of the EU Office of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Brussels

³The so-called CARIFORUM countries; the agreement was initialled on 16 December 2007, see http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/acp/pr220208_en.htm