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# The EU & Africa



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## Introduction

The ties that bind Africa to the EU are strong: they are historical, political and economic but they are often the subject of controversy because of the colonial history of European countries (that are now EU members) and because of the desire of some African countries to keep those memories fresh in order to excuse the shortcomings of their own governance. Since the 1970s the EU has built up a relationship with Africa which moves on from that era, which recognises both Africa's problems and its place in the world.

In recent years the EU-African relationship has been characterised by a widening out the dialogue from aid and African issues to consulting on broader issues of interest to both parties. Africa is a big continent with a multiplicity of different countries, ethnic divisions and religions. This paper, which focuses most of its attention on sub-Saharan Africa, cannot cover the detail of all the many issues and problems that concern Africa and Africans but focuses on the key problems, the EU's political relationship with the continent, the major policy areas of peace and security, democracy and governance, trade and infrastructure; and finally, it looks at future developments.

## Background: Africa Today

With a population of 991 million, the African continent has 14.6 per cent of the world's population.<sup>1</sup> UN data comparing the median age of populations around the world, shows that there are at least twenty African countries where the median age is 18 years or less, compared to just three countries in the rest of the world.<sup>2</sup> The proportion of adults aged 15-49 living with HIV/AIDS in Africa is the highest in the world, at 5.2 per cent, but that overall figure is dwarfed by the percentage infected in some individual countries – as many as 20 per cent in Botswana and in Zambia. It is estimated that 22.4 million of the world's 33.4 million HIV/AIDS infected people live in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of wealth, Africa has vast natural resources but only a tiny share of the world's wealth. A study in 2000 found that Africa had just one per cent of the world's household wealth, compared to over 34 per cent in North America and 29.6 per cent in Europe.<sup>4</sup> The mineral resources of Africa have often proved to be a source of conflict: diamonds fuelled internal conflict in Angola and Sierra Leone in the 1990s, leading to UN Security Council intervention. In the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, mineral resources are an important factor.

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<sup>1</sup> See Kevin Kinsella & Wan He, *An Aging World: 2008 – International Population Report*, US Census Bureau, 18 June 2009

<sup>2</sup> UN, *World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision, Volume III – Analytical Report*, 12 June 2006, pp. xxiii, 25, 30, 31, 32

<sup>3</sup> UNAIDS, *AIDS Epidemic Update*, 25 November 2009, pp. 11, 21, 82

<sup>4</sup> James B. Davies *et al.*, *The World Distribution of Household Wealth*, United Nations University, Discussion Paper No. 2008/03, 28 February 2008, p. 8

The range of challenges facing Africa is daunting: a third of its children are not at school; corrupt and undemocratic governments are commonplace; 28 sub-Saharan countries have been at war at some point since 1980; and famine and disease each year claim thousands of lives. From being a net food exporter in the 1970s, Africa is now heavily reliant on imports and on emergency food aid, with 42 African countries permanently dependent on imports. Africa is the only region in the world where crop yields per hectare have remained stagnant. In short, many African countries are among the world's poorest, least developed and worst governed countries, subject to more than their fair share of natural/humanitarian disasters and savage civil and cross-border conflicts.

But Africa is changing; the relative prosperity of some African states, such as Ghana and South Africa, demonstrate that a better future is possible. In some countries, such as Botswana and Mauritius, democracy has taken root; in others significant progress on governance has been achieved. The natural resources of Africa – not least oil and gas – have made it a place of interest (and potential conflict) for developed and developing nations alike. As Africa develops stronger regional and sub-regional organisations, such as the African Union, it has growing potential to be a more significant actor on the international stage. Sub-regional organisations, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADEC) and the East African Governmental Development Organisation (EGAD), are of increasing importance within Africa. The closeness of Africa to the European continent means that what happens in Africa can quickly impact on EU Member States – as has been seen with refugee movements in recent years and piracy off the coast of Somalia.

### **EU-Africa Political Relations**

When the European Economic Community was created in 1957, 43 sub-Saharan African countries were still under European colonial rule. Whilst most of Africa was de-colonised in the 1960s, the process of political change continued until the end of white minority rule in South Africa in 1994.

From the outset of its existence, the EU set about building a close relationship with African countries, most of which had been colonies of European states. This relationship took shape in the form of the Yaoundé, Lomé and then Cotonou Conventions.<sup>5</sup> In the early stages the contents of these conventions was mainly focused on trade (including preferential access for bananas and sugar), stabilisation of commodity exports and aid. Gradually other areas of policy were incorporated, including human rights, democracy and assistance over peace-keeping operations. Since its establishment, the African Union, and its institutions have become an additional focus for EU-Africa co-operation.

The development of African institutions, such as the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), created new opportunities for dialogue as well as a growing sense that Africans were taking responsibility for their own problems.

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<sup>5</sup> South Africa is a contracting party to the Cotonou Agreement but not all its provisions apply to South Africa because of the 1999 free trade agreement between the EU and South Africa

The EU's response was the 2005 Strategy for Africa – a first attempt at taking a holistic view of the African continent and its relationship with the EU. The focus in 2005 was still on accelerating African development – partly reflecting the fact that EU aid to Africa had tripled over the 20 years from 1985 to 2005 and constituted 60 per cent of the overseas development aid to Africa – and the need to accelerate progress towards the UN's Millennium Development Goals. But as the strategy also acknowledged, a new generation of African leaders, the development of regional economic communities within Africa, as well the creation of the AU and NEPAD, all suggested that a fresh approach was needed. The enlargement of the EU was also a relevant development as a partnership involving 27 EU Member States has the potential for greater impact than a partnership with the earlier, much smaller, EEC.

In the event, the Strategy for Africa lasted only until a longer-term EU-Africa Strategic Partnership was agreed in 2007. The importance of the partnership lay in it moving beyond development issues – and solely African issues – to provide for wider engagement. It was also a step-change in that it established the three principles of African co-ownership, co-management and co-responsibility with the EU in the partnership. This broader relationship also acknowledged the growing interest in the international community in tackling the problems of Africa (for example, through the G8 and subsequently with the establishment of the G20). The Lisbon Declaration, which announced the new partnership, talked of developing “a partnership of equals” that would overcome the “traditional donor-recipient relationship”

The EU-Africa Partnership is due for review in 2010, when an EU-Africa Summit (the third such meeting) will be held. The Commission has already produced reports assessing progress on the agreed programme of work for the period 2008-10.

The Partnership works through eight sub-groups or programmes, themselves referred to as “strategic partnerships”:

1. Peace and security
2. Democratic governance and human rights
3. Trade, regional integration and infrastructure
4. Millennium development goals (MDGs)
5. Energy
6. Climate change
7. Migration, mobility and employment
8. Science, information society and space.

The remainder of this paper looks at some of the areas covered by these strategic partnerships but it is important to remember that most development assistance is provided to individual countries, whether through the EU or Member States.

### **Peace & Security**

The peace and security strand of the partnership reflects the need to strengthen the capacity of both the EU and the African nations (operating through the African Union in

most cases) to carry out peace-keeping, and occasionally, peace-making operations. The premise on which this is based is that peace and security is essential for the development of stable societies and sustainable development. While the United Nations remains the lead body in dealing with conflict and security issues in Africa, both the EU and the African Union have been authorised to act in support of Security Council resolutions.

A regular dialogue takes place between the EU and the AU's Peace & Security Council but the range of actors involved in this work goes much wider and involves the African states themselves. EU Member States and the EU as such are often involved in specific projects or missions, including supporting security sector reform in individual states.

As part of this work, the EU is supporting the African Union in developing a warning mechanism to alert the world to the possibility of a new conflicts breaking out in Africa and in creating and sustaining an African standby force able to respond to such situations. This standby force has some similarities to the EU's own standby forces being developed under the auspices of the ESDP.

The first ESDP military operation outside Europe took place in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2006, when the EU deployed a small military force to the DRC, and back-up forces to neighbouring Gabon, to support the UN force already in the DRC in maintaining peace during the presidential elections there. The EU has had other missions in DRC but of a civilian nature, concerning police and justice modernisation.

The EU provided substantial financial support for the African forces working under a UN mandate in Darfur (in Sudan) between 2004-07 and later provided its own ESDP military force to work in support of what became a joint AU/UN force sent to respond to the spill over of violence from Darfur into Chad and the Central African Republic in 2007-08. The EU has also provided significant resources to the AU peace mission in Somalia. And the EU deployed its forces' naval assets to deal with the problem of piracy off the Horn of Africa.

### **Democratic Governance & Human Rights**

This strand of the partnership's work is not just about establishing good governance in Africa, strengthening human rights and civic institutions, it is also about the EU and African countries working together in international fora on common positions on these issues. Given the turbulent history of post-colonial Africa, and the perception amongst some Africans that democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights are an alien concept, this is probably the most difficult area of joint working. It is hoped that progress can be made by strengthening African initiatives, such as ensuring that the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance is widely ratified and implemented; and in adopting and ensuring compliance with the African human rights peer review mechanism

### **Trade & Infrastructure**

The EU, the largest trading partner for almost every country in Africa, has a trade deficit with Africa (€38 billion in 2008), importing energy (mostly from North Africa), agricultural products and textiles from the continent. As the economies of many African countries get stronger – GDP growth in Africa in 2007/08 was 10.5 per cent per capita, compared to just

0.8 per cent in the EU - the partnership seeks to support the development of African business so that it can meet international standards in terms of quality and safety.<sup>6</sup> This process will help to improve market access for African goods by providing African countries with the capacity to develop and enforce the kind of standards expected by customers.

The partnership is also trying to help the process of African economic integration, enabling regional economic communities within Africa, and the putative African Economic Community, to become free market zones.

Poor infrastructure is a contributory factor in Africa's relative economic under-performance; it is estimated, for example, that half of all crops produced in landlocked Uganda's fertile regions never reach market<sup>7</sup>. The EU Infrastructure Fund for Africa has been addressing this problem – alongside other international institutions such as the World Bank – for some time. An EU-African Infrastructure Partnership was signed in 2007 and the strategic partnership in the field of trade and infrastructure is now charged with implementing this. Infrastructure investment is not just needed in areas such as energy generation and transport but in the provision of clean water – lack of clean water remains a major cause of disease in humans and water shortages generally contribute to low crop yields. External investment is not without controversy however; the willingness of some countries to provide funds for the development of agriculture (for example) has raised concerns as to investors' motives.

### **Millennium Development Goals**

The EU and its Member States are major contributors of the funds and other resources necessary to enable African countries to make progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In addition to supporting the international drive to encourage industrialised countries to meet the UN target of spending 0.7 per cent of GNI on overseas development aid (an EU supported goal since at least 2005), the partnership lays particular stress on supporting African nations to reach the food security, health and education targets within the MDGs. To do this, African countries must have the programmes and the capacity to deliver once aid has been provided.

### **Energy & Climate Change**

Energy was the subject of an existing dialogue – not least because of the importance of existing oil and gas supplies from Africa to several EU Member States – even before the new partnership. The dialogue has been expanded so as to support the scaling up and modernisation of Africa's energy infrastructure with the aim of ensuring energy security for Africa and Europe.

The hope in the field of climate change is that the EU and Africa can agree common positions on the key issues. As Africa will be seriously negatively affected by global warming and the EU is a major producer of greenhouse gases, this is an ambitious goal. A joint EU-Africa declaration on climate change in 2008 identified considerable areas of agreement, building on existing agreements but the kind of international agreement that both sides wanted by the end of 2009 was not achieved at Copenhagen in December 2009.

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<sup>6</sup> Georgios Xenellis, *Africa-EU: economic indicators, trade and investment*, Eurostat, Statistics in Focus, Issue 98/2009, 21 December 2009, p. 2

<sup>7</sup> 'Invest more in Africa's roads', Madeleine Bunting, *The Guardian*, 9 April 2009

As the effects of climate change begin to be felt in Africa – the UN forecast in 2006 that up to 70 million people in Africa would be at risk from rising sea levels alone, with tidal flooding already an issue in the Horn of Africa – mitigating the consequences of such change will be increasingly important. There is a danger that financial assistance will be diverted into emergency aid to deal with the consequences of erratic weather, lower crop yields and land disputes.

### **Future Developments**

The assessment of the EU-Africa Partnership published last year by the Commission identified important examples of progress in meeting its objectives. They included the significant progress in improving African capacity to deal with conflict through what is known as the African Peace & Security Architecture, with the likelihood that the African Stand-by Force will become operational in 2010. Approximately €1 billion have been made available by the EU for the peace and security work.

Progress has been less satisfactory in the fields of governance and human rights, despite some countries, such as Ghana and Senegal, having shown that democracy can work in Africa. Whilst there have been fruitful initiatives in this area (such as election observers), what the report calls the “delicate and political nature” of the issues involved requires a “pragmatic approach”. Critics will see this as a reluctance to criticise the slow progress towards good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law in Africa. The failure of the Southern African Development Community to take a robust stand against the loss of democracy and the rule of law in Zimbabwe is an oft-cited example of this problem.

There has been more success in trade, where economic partnerships have been established in four regions, with funding from the EU and a clear programme of work. Training in measures to ensure that African food crops meet sanitary rules, aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises, is now underway and complements national initiatives in this field. But the biggest benefit to improved trade would be a global trade agreement in the Doha (development) round which would improve trade access for African goods and cut agricultural subsidies in the developed world.

There are many other examples of successful outcomes from the EU-Africa Partnership but this is a relationship intended to be for the long-term and progress is likely to be slow in some areas. The lack of progress in the most politically sensitive fields of governance and human rights makes it harder for the EU to justify its financial support for other aspects of African development.

The EU's relationship with the African Union is valuable and growing; the AU is a key forum for improving the effectiveness of pan-African co-operation and in raising the standards of governance. The regional organisations within Africa are also important and have considerable potential.

From the EU perspective, the Partnership is not simply about African development; it is also part of strengthening European influence in an unstable part of the globe that borders the EU. Nor is the EU the only actor competing for African attention, let alone African natural resources. China in particular is making a determined effort to access Africa's considerable and oil and mineral resources. That growing Chinese involvement in Africa has already had uncomfortable consequences for EU Member States (for example, over China's initial reluctance to condemn Sudan over Darfur). Chinese investment in African infrastructure

projects is estimated to have risen from less than \$1 billion a year in 2001-3 to at least \$7 billion in 2006 (it may have fallen back since).<sup>8</sup> Chinese trade with Africa also increased sharply over the same period and continues to rise. China's involvement with Africa is now a factor in EU-Chinese relations as well as in the EU's relationship with Africa.

Other players are involved too. The United States provides development assistance to 47 sub-Saharan countries in Africa and its aid agency, USAID, has bilateral missions in 23 of them. Like the EU, the US seeks through its aid programmes to bolster democracy and the rule of law, stabilise fragile states and support economic and social development. US aid to Africa increased four-fold during George W Bush's presidency to \$4 billion a year, with major pledges in terms of additional aid for tackling AIDS/HIV over the longer-term. President Obama – the first African-American president – has indicated that he will make Africa a greater political priority but he has continued the US emphasis on the need for better governance and an end to conflict in Africa.

The United Nations is heavily involved in Africa, and not just in peace and security issues. The World Food Programme works in many African countries, both as a provider of emergency food programme but also in longer-term projects designed to improve food production. Other UN agencies are similarly active.

The EU's development aid to Africa in the period 2007-13 is very large at around €17 billion per year (including contributions from Member States) and due to increase to €25 billion a year from 2010, but it is hard for outsiders to judge how effectively it is spent<sup>9</sup>. No doubt some of it has fallen victim to corruption, but nonetheless, EU aid has been vital in strengthening the capacity of the African Union and in tackling countless development and humanitarian problems.

For all these reasons, EU-African relations are likely to grow in importance of the next decade. Given the policies of the Chinese and others, the EU's contribution is an important element in ensuring that African countries neither become failed states nor fall entirely under the influence of authoritarian countries. This is an important UK interest.

**March 2010**

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<sup>8</sup> Vivien Foster *et al.*, *Building Bridges: China's Growing Role as Infrastructure Financier for Sub-Saharan Africa*, World Bank, 20 October 2008, pp. xii, 73: [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2009/04/13/000333038\\_20090413020329/Rendered/PDF/480910PUB0Buil101OFFICIALOUSE0ONLY1.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2009/04/13/000333038_20090413020329/Rendered/PDF/480910PUB0Buil101OFFICIALOUSE0ONLY1.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> The decision to increase aid to Africa to 50 per cent of the EU's overall development assistance, was taken at the June 2005 European Council as part of a wider initiative to increase the proportion of GDP spent on development assistance: see European Council, *European Council 16 and 17 June 2005 – Presidency Conclusions*, 15 July 2005, p. 9: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/85349.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/85349.pdf)



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