

IMPACT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE: WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF EU – AFRICA RELATIONS?

The EU and Africa's African Union held their sixth summit on 17-18 February 2022: a week later Russia invaded the Ukraine. In the short-term, European focus shifted from Africa but increasingly EU officials and member states are looking towards Africa. The EU seeks to step up cooperation with some African countries to help replace imports of Russian natural gas and reduce dependence on Moscow by almost two-thirds in 2022. The EU has also revised its list of critical minerals, which it is members seek to guarantee supply chains. This article assesses the evolution of EU-Africa relations, particularly since December 2007 with the launch of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. The EU's Africa focus is increasingly more strategic, and coherent, this is still not the case for Africa whose common interests towards Europe remain fragmented although the launch of the continental African Free Continental Trade Area (AfCTA) is a positive development. Looking forward it will be reinvigorated trade and investment that needs to become the heart of Africa-EU relations if this partnership is to prosper – not security, aid and counter-migration that has framed past EU focus.

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The European Union's partnership with Africa has gradually evolved over the last twenty years. The EU is still Africa's principal partner for trade, development, and humanitarian assistance. Although Africa's share of European trade and investment is globally in comparative decline, the continent's strategic importance for Europe is increasing, mainly because of concerns over energy and mineral security, supply chain overstretch, counterterrorism and migration.

Over the last twenty years, many other nations have also been turning their gaze to Africa, which has made the continent more compelling to the EU. Europe, and its former colonial powers, used to enjoy certain privileged access to Africa, but this is no longer the case. Beyond the European institutions, there has been growing interest in Africa among EU Member States in recent years. This is naturally the case with historical partners such as France, Portugal, Italy, and Spain, but not exclusively. Germany, for example, has made a clear pivot to Africa under Angela Merkel, as attested by the launch of the "Marshall Plan with Africa" and "Compact with Africa" initiatives in 2017. Other EU countries are showing an interest in Africa as well: about 10 of the 27 Member States now have their own Africa strategy, and several others are drafted theirs. France has dominated EU thinking on Africa and continues to play a leading role.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has heightened Europe's strategic assessment of Africa for this reason, and already since February, there has been increased diplomacy by the EU27. The EU seeks to step up cooperation with African countries (especially in the western part of the continent, such as Nigeria, Senegal, and Angola) to help replace imports of Russian natural gas and reduce dependence on Moscow by almost two-thirds in 2022. The EU has also revised its list of critical minerals, which it is members seek to guarantee supply chains. For example, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) produces roughly half of the 7.1 million metric tons of total global reserves of cobalt accounting for 70 percent of overall production of the metal, according to the most recent statistics.

The African continent is also home to numerous rare earth deposits, especially in eastern and southern nations like South Africa, Madagascar, Malawi, Kenya, Namibia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Burundi.

Antimony	Hafnium	Phosphorus
Baryte	Heavy Rare Earth Elements	Scandium
Beryllium	Light Rare Earth Elements	Silicon metal
Bismuth	Indium	Tantalum
Borate	Magnesium	Tungsten
Cobalt	Natural graphite	Vanadium
Coking coal	Natural rubber	Bauxite
Fluorspar	Niobium	Lithium
Gallium	Platinum Group Metals	Titanium
Germanium	Phosphate rock	Strontium

Source: EU Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/raw-materials/areas-specific-interest/critical-raw-materials_en

So how has this partnership evolved, what is becoming strategic and how will this partnership development in this era of increased geopolitical rivalry?

The Spine of Africa-European Relations

The Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) has been the spine for Africa-European relations since it was adopted at the Lisbon summit in December 2007.¹ The ambition was to have a long-term strategic framework under which bilateral relations would progress.

The priorities of the JAES at its inception were codified under four Strategic Framework features:

- Peace and Security: Promoting a Safer World.
- Governance and Human Rights: Upholding our Values and Principles.
- Trade and Regional Integration: Raising Potential and Using Opportunities; and
- Key Development Issues: Accelerating Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

¹ See, Kell, Fergus, and Alex Vines, ‘The evolution of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (2007-2020),’ *The Routledge Handbook of EU-Africa Relations* (2020): pp.105-121.

In identifying these broad objectives, particularly within the economic realm, the JAES inevitably duplicated many of the commitments made under the Cotonou Agreement and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) for Sub-Saharan and North African states, respectively).² Nonetheless, the prominent inclusion of a priority area on peace and security did add a new dimension to formal Africa-EU relations. Moreover, it is essential to note that the JAES also explicitly called for ‘the progressive establishment of a Pan-African financial support programme’ to support continental initiatives. While the JAES detailed ambitious goals under each of its four strategic framework headings, the impetus for specific policy initiatives would be further defined by cyclical devices and involve a multitude of financial instruments. The first of these, the EU-Africa Action Plan (2008–2010), outlined eight priority partnering areas for the time frame. It began with a partnership on Peace and Security that called for enhanced dialogue, predictable funding for African-led Peace Support Operations (PSOs) and the operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The second partnership pertained to Democratic Governance and Human Rights; and the third to Trade and Regional Integration. The fourth partnership focused solely on enhancing collaboration on the MDGs, and the fifth and sixth dealt with cooperation on Energy and Climate Change, respectively. The final two partnerships encompassed a range of clustered issues in Migration, Mobility and Employment; and Science, Information Society and Space.

This proliferation of strategic and financial objectives is undoubtedly a testament to the momentum generated by the Lisbon Summit of 2007 and the long and genuinely shared exercise of consultation and drafting that preceded it. However, progress on implementation largely failed to match this aspiration for change – partly due to a lack of high-level political traction on both sides to push forward with the complex and challenging partnership and a growing disengagement from EU member states. The follow-up summit in Tripoli in 2010 was characterized by ‘a much more cautious note and realistic mood, with less high-level representation’³ Although the 2010 summit introduced the theme of Investment, Economic Growth and Job Creation, it served primarily to reaffirm the initial eight priority areas and retained these largely intact for the Second Action Plan (2011–2013).⁴ In addition to this limited and uneven progress on specific sectoral objectives, however, the extent to which policies have reflected a truly continental partnership of equals is open to question.

² A. Adebajo and K. Whiteman, (eds) *The EU and Africa: Eurafrique to Afro-Europa* (Hurst & Company, 2012).

³ D. Helly, “The EU and Africa since the Lisbon summit of 2007: Continental drift or widening cracks?”, *South African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2013): p. 137–157.

⁴ Africa-EU Partnership (2010) “Joint Africa EU Strategy: Action Plan 2011–2013,” [online]. https://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/sites/default/files/documents/03-jeas_action_plan_en.pdf

There have been some efforts to evaluate the progress of the JAES, Action Plans for 2008-10 and 2011-13 and more recently the roadmap 2014 -17 adopted at the 4th Africa-EU summit held in Brussels, April 2014. Changing Africa though has meant that although the critical objectives of the original strategy remain valid, recent developments indicate that the JAES needs updating, particularly after the AU adopts its Agenda 2063 and because of other EU initiatives, such as its Global strategy, several regional strategic frameworks (the Horn and Sahel and Gulf of Guinea maritime security) and its strategic partnerships (with South Africa and the AU).

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Summits

Policy about the evolving Africa – EU summits is concentrated around meetings. These summits are the apex of political dialogue between Europe and Africa and there have been six of them to date: Cairo (2000); Lisbon (2007); Tripoli (2010); Brussels (2014); Abidjan (2017) and Brussels (2022).

The sixth EU-AU summit in Brussels (in February 2022), resulted in African and European leaders agreeing on a joint vision for a renewed partnership that emphasized solidarity, security, peace, and sustainable economic development. In practice, this offered an Africa-Europe investment package of €150 billion; the provision of 450 million vaccine doses to Africa by mid-2022; enhanced peace and security cooperation; an enhanced migration and mobility partnership and a commitment to multilateralism.

There has also been a summit in Valletta on migration and asylum in November 2015. But between summits dialogue is limited. The securitization of the migration agenda and divergences over human rights and international criminal justice have reinforced the African perception of a one-way conversation and have overshadowed progress in other areas such as climate change and environment and agriculture, food security, and as the environment.⁵ The recent Brussels summit tried to put a stronger emphasis on investment and green finance through Europe’s Green Deal.

⁵ T. Amare and P. Melly, “Can Africa and the EU Forge a Partnership of Equals?” Chatham House Expert Comment, (December 2017). <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2017/12/can-africa-and-eu-forge-partnership-equals>

Still, Africans argued they were not widely consulted, and that this initiative partly reflected EU protectionism. This might be partially true, but the Russian invasion of Ukraine has changed further European thinking about Africa -sharpening strategic thinking in several capitals despite immediate focus being on the eastern neighborhood and Ukraine.

There has been a better EU record with the operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) supporting the African Standby-by Force (ASF) and other ad hoc military commitments, such as the AU mission – the African Union Transitional Mission in Somalia (ATMIS – ex AMISOM) in Somalia and until recently the G-5 Sahel. The primary implementing tool for the Africa- EU peace and security partnerships were the African Peace Facility, with more than €2.1 billion allocated to it since its creation. This has been replaced by the European Peace Facility (EPF) – which has committed funds to ATMIS; the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the EUTM in Mozambique. Following the precedent of the Ukraine crisis, it remains to be seen whether the EU will become more amenable to transferring lethal aid to Africa.

The EPF is an off-budget instrument aimed at enhancing the Union’s ability to prevent conflicts, build peace and strengthen international security, by enabling the financing of operational actions under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) that have military or defense implications. It replaces and enlarges, starting 2021, the former financial instruments in this area, namely the Athena Mechanism and the African Peace Facility. There remains still a concern of an over-reliance by Africans on European funding for security and an urgent need for increased capacity building and ability to self-fund essential peace and security commitments.⁶

Migration

There are areas where both continents are in broad agreement, such as tackling climate change or fighting terrorism in the Sahel and the Horn. However, migration, – has been a critical driver for the EU’s new call for strategic partnership with Africa – and is a difficult conversation. Currently, 70 to 80 percent of African migration occurs within the continent, but outward migration is growing fast.⁷ This had become a primary concern for European countries.

The EU had not been prepared to accept all informal economic migrants from Africa.

⁶ European Commission “The European Peace Facility,” (February 2022), https://ec.europa.eu/fpi/what-we-do/european-peace-facility_en

⁷ OCHA, “African Migration Trends to Watch in 2022,” (20 December 2021), <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/african-migration-trends-watch-2022>

But for African governments, agreeing to cooperate in migrants' return home had become a matter of enormous sensitivity. Africa's population is also projected to double by 2050 and is young – 60 percent of the African population is currently below 25 years of age – and frequently unemployed. Despite enjoying fast economic growth in the past decade, African economies have failed to create the volume of jobs needed to offer these young people a financial future. Unless this is remedied, there is fear among EU governments that Europe will become a destination of choice for most African outward migration as Africa's closest neighbor.

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Both the AU and EU acknowledge that more needs to be done to provide Africa's young people a real future. The European Development Fund has been an essential source of funding, but development aid alone will not be sufficient. Private sector investment to complement official aid will be vital to creating the necessary quantity of jobs and will require the emergence of a more robust and more dynamic African private sector.

The reality is that much of the Africa-EU relationship is still about EU donated money. However, Brussels policymakers and some European leaders recognize the need to move the EU's relationship with Africa away from the ‘traditional’ donor-recipient dynamic, towards a genuinely fresh and respectful relationship. Changing this outdated mentality is tough especially as the EU continues to set the agenda and often fails to consult its African partners regularly. EU politicians are also under increasing domestic pressure to be acting against uncontrolled migration.

The arrival of the new European Commission in December 2019 – heralded as the ‘geopolitical Commission’ by incoming president Ursula Von der Leyen (saw a resurfacing of expectations for its relationship with Africa.⁸ Early signs

⁸ U. Von der Leyen, “Speech in the European Parliament Plenary Session,” Strasbourg, (27 November 2019): p.7. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/president-elect-speech-original_1.pdf

pointed to renewed EU emphasis in this respect, with including the appointment of Jutta Urpilainen to the new role of Commissioner for International Partnerships (replacing the previous development commissioner title) and a trip to Addis Ababa marking the first foreign visit of the new term of office, alongside repeated promises to develop a new ‘comprehensive strategy for Africa’.⁹ A formal extension of the Cotonou Agreement until December 2020 soon followed, with Urpilainen keen to push through negotiations before focusing on the continental level and a scheduled sixth EU-AU summit in Brussels in October. In March 2020, the Commission released a joint communication: *Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa*.¹⁰ The document outlined five core partnerships for a new strategy: green transition and energy access; digital transformation; sustainable growth and jobs; peace and governance; and migration and mobility. If it aimed to pursue a less paternalistic tone than previously, then by this metric it succeeds in avoiding the tired promise of a ‘partnership of equals’ and appealing to ‘respective interests’ not simply mutual ones.¹¹ However, while pursuing a less overbearing approach and capturing relevant interests is commendable, the document contains virtually no discussion of the precise instruments and financing mechanisms by which the final strategy might be implemented.

Meanwhile, the road to finalizing an agreement at the sixth AU-EU summit became increasingly bumpy: punctuated by further delays and revisions to the external action component of the 2021–2027 EU budget and stunned by the shockwave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Though a new long-term budget was eventually agreed in July 2020, a significant proportion of proposed external action spending increases were cut or dropped – including the geographic allocation for sub-Saharan Africa, which will remain broadly constant with 2014–2020 levels).¹² By September, ongoing disruption due to COVID-19 had forced the postponement of the EU-AU summit until 2021 and again to February 2022, despite suggestions that it might continue in a virtual format.

Over the past two years, the EU has developed various tools to improve its relationship with Africa. The March 2020, “Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa” was a building block. Twenty months later, President von der Leyen launched the

⁹ F. Kell and D. Kurtagic, “Can the New European Commission Deliver on its Promises to Africa?” [online], Chatham House, Expert Comment, (4 December 2019). <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/can-new-european-commission-deliver-its-promises-africa#>

¹⁰ European Commission, “Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa,” *JOIN 4 final*. Brussels, (9 March 2020). https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/communication-eu-africa-strategy-join-2020-4-final_en.pdf

¹¹ B. Byiers, “The EU and Africa: Should, would, could . . . but how?,” *ECDPM blog*, (16 March 2020), <https://ecdpm.org/talking-points/eu-and-africa-should-would-could-but-how/>

¹² Anita Käppeli and Mikaela Gavvas, “The EU’s New Budget: Europe’s Recovery at The Expense of Its Long-Term Ambitions,” *Center For Global Development*. (2020).

Global Gateway, a strategy to boost EU ties with the world. Notably, the Global Gateway organizes the financing of infrastructure projects in Africa, thus giving substance to Europe’s stated ambitions. The EU’s new trade policy and the *Strategic Compass*, a white paper that aims to define the Union’s security and defense outlook for 2025-2030, also serve to assert Europe’s position globally, particularly regarding Africa. Beyond these strategies, the wide range of European financial instruments is now grouped into a single Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), adopted in June 2021. The creation of “Team Europe” - which unites the European Commission, the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), as well as the Member States along with their development agencies and financial institutions for development – was a further steppingstone. The objective was to achieve greater coherence in EU Africa strategy.

This uncertain global context is precisely why a more cohesive framework for Africa-EU relations is desperately required. Major reconstructive efforts on both continents in the coming years will ultimately be served best by an approach that eschews fragmentation and bureaucracy – while in turn, newly introduced cooperative mechanisms may be consolidated under broader circumstances of upheaval. For example, as a response to the Covid crisis, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, suggested that Africa can offer a strategic alternative to China to diversify and shorten key supply chains to Europe).¹³ For a strengthened and modern partnership to emerge in the post-Cotonou context, African member states must recognize that their rhetoric regarding an equal partnership is at odds with a simple reversion to the familiar North-South development cooperation model of the ACP. At the same time, the EU, with the onus on DG DEVCO, must look to present greater clarity of intention and unity beyond the outdated ACP framework and previous convoluted proposals for a ‘hybrid’ solution.¹⁴

Post-Cotonou

On 3 December 2020, the EU and the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) reached a political deal on a new agreement that succeeds the Cotonou Partnership Agreement. Marking the end of the negotiations, the ‘post-Cotonou’ agreement was initialed on 15 April 2021. The agreement will include a common foundation at ACP level combined with three regional protocols for

¹³ J. Borrell, “The Post-coronavirus world is already here”, *ECFR Policy Brief*, (30 April 2020), available at: https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/the_post_coronavirus_world_is_already_here

¹⁴ A. Medinilla and J. Bossuyt, “Africa-EU relations and post-Cotonou: African collective action or further fragmentation of partnerships?” The European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), Briefing Note 110. Maastricht: , (March 2019). <https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/BN-110-Africa-EU-relations-post-CotonouAfrica-EU-relations-and-post-Cotonou-african-collective-action-fragmentation-partnerships-ECDPM-March-2019.pdf>

Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific, focusing on the regions' specific needs.¹⁵ This Agreement still must be approved, signed, and ratified by all the parties, will cover a large number of areas, ranging from sustainable development and growth to human rights and peace and security and is designed to reflect the different needs of the partnership with the three regions – the “three-plus-one structure” intended to take into more outstanding account the individual needs of the three partner regions.

Once in effect, the Agreement will serve as the new legal framework and guide political, economic, and cooperation relations between the EU and 79 members of the OACPS for the next twenty years. This new post-Cotonou treaty must be ratified by all 27 EU states.

Hungary in May 2002 signaled that it would not approve this new agreement because it would bring more migrants into the bloc, according to the country's foreign minister. The treaty does allow for some legal migration for African, Caribbean, and Pacific citizens to the EU through visas and family reunification.

Hungary's nationalist prime minister Viktor Orban, who rejects EU efforts to share out refugees across the bloc, has objected to some of the terms of the post-Cotonou agreement, which aims to help the mostly former colonies of EU nations.

The original Cotonou Agreement was adopted in 2000 to replace the 1975 Lomé Convention. It was concluded for 20 years. It aimed to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty and contribute to the gradual integration of the ACP countries into the world economy.

Conclusion

At its adoption in Lisbon in 2007, the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) was envisaged as the spine of a continental partnership of equals between Africa and Europe, built around co-ownership of a broad plan to overwrite the donor-recipient dynamic of the past. While its original objectives remain valid, changing realities on both sides have buffeted the strategy ever since its inception: from the new institutional initiatives of Agenda 2063 and the EU's Global Strategy to external developments such as the migration crisis. Despite recent updates working to streamline priority areas and integrate a greater focus on the contentious topics of demographic change and migration, the overall trajectory of the JAES has been hindered by fragmentation and overambition, illustrated by a highly uneven record of delivery on key objectives.

The sphere of peace and security is perhaps the most advanced link facilitated by the

¹⁵ European Council, “Cotonou Agreement,” (2021). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/cotonou-agreement/>

partnership. The APF has helped the AU become an essential player on the African continent even while delays continue to operationalize APSA and the ASF. This area of cooperation looks likely to remain at the center of any future partnership, considering increased African contributions via the new Peace Fund and following the EU's implementation of a new instrument, the European Peace Facility (EPF), from 2021 onwards. Worth €810.5 billion, the EPF replaces and expands the APF mechanism, providing more predictable funding and increased support for capacity-building initiatives.¹⁶

On trade and economic issues, the partnership has been plagued by setbacks; but African ownership of the Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) provides much-needed impetus to the integration agenda, surpassing the protracted EPA negotiations. Although the more recent mobilization of the European External Investment Plan (EIP) shows some awareness of Africa's stark demographic realities and an attempt to move away from 'traditional' donor-recipient relations, the financial relationship overall remains highly imbalanced at the continental level, as well as divided across different regional groupings within Africa. As outgoing President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, touched upon the promise of an EU-Africa free trade agreement during his final 'State of the Union' address in September 2018.¹⁷

Overall, the notions of equality and shared ownership so central to the JAES at its inception have remained more of a vision than a reality, with much of the continental relationship still heavily reliant upon EU-donated money. On crucial issues such as migration, the EU has continued to set or initiate the agenda and often fails to regularly consult its African partners – a problem exacerbated by its proliferation of bilateral strategies with individual African states and the use of multiple financing instruments. Negotiations on a successor to the Cotonou Agreement and a new comprehensive approach offered an opportunity for a genuine reset of relations, but they have been repeatedly obstructed by disunity and confusion on both sides. Until such fragmentation is decisively addressed, the continent-to-continent partnership of equals envisaged for the JAES more than a decade ago will remain far from fruition.

The future direction of the Africa-EU partnership will largely be shaped by any agreement that replaces the Cotonou Accord, which expired finally in 2021. However, in the negotiations, African leaders were fragmented, contributing to the

¹⁶ European Union External Action Service, "European Peace Facility – An EU off-budget fund to build peace and strengthen international security", Brussels, (13 June 2018), https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/46285/european-peace-facility-eu-budget-fund-build-peace-and-strengthen-international-security_en

¹⁷ "EU's Juncker eyes free trade pact with Africa," *Reuters*, 12 September 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-eu-juncker-africa-idUKKCN1LS0C0>

problematic birth of this new treaty. These talks learned from the troubled recent history of negotiation over Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and groups of developing countries. Still, lingering African suspicions over European good faith and differing European visions over future EU-Africa relations have thrown a shadow over it.

Despite the challenges, reinvigorated trade and investment will become the heart of Africa-EU relations. It is only through supporting private sector growth and scaling-up of African businesses that the volume and quality of jobs needed to address Africa's unemployment challenge can be addressed. Success on this front minimizes the outflow of economic migrants to Europe, but it would also help draw the poison of decades of one-sided donor-recipient relations and move the relationship towards a genuine partnership. It is also in the strategic interest of Europe, needing to diversify its mineral and energy supplies but also shorten its supply chains. Africa and its multilateralism will become increasingly important for the EU and other European neighbors.