

# Part 1

## Priorities Perpetuating Subjugation: the Sixth EU-African Union Summit

Following the conclusion of the sixth EU-AU Summit in Brussels, how the priorities for policymakers reflect an underlying deficiency in the inter-continental 'partnership' that will continue to undermine attempts for a relationship of equals for the foreseeable future.

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RETHINKING **SECURITY** IN THE 2020s SERIES – COMMENTARY

*By Ben Lowings – Political Analyst*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

European Union and African Union leaders met in Brussels for the sixth EU-AU Summit on 17 and 18 February 2022. Delays relating to the global COVID-19 pandemic had pushed this Summit back from 2020 as initially planned. This means

that it is nearly five years since the fifth Summit that took place in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire during November 2017. The then-EU Council President Donald Tusk said<sup>1</sup>:

*“As you know, the European Union is Africa’s biggest partner and closest neighbour. Its biggest investor, its biggest trading partner, its biggest provider of development aid and humanitarian assistance as well as its biggest contributor in peace and security. And this summit demonstrated our determination to reinforce our partnership even more.”*

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Similarly, during the press conference at the conclusion of the sixth Summit, European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen said<sup>2</sup> that Europe wanted to be Africa’s ‘partner of choice’. So, during the time since the fifth Summit, what has happened with European-African relations? What has happened to this ‘partnership’?

## 2. DIFFERING PRIORITIES BETWEEN CONTINENTS

Frankly, while there may have been several impressive and important initiatives that were implemented and high-level dialogues initiated in private, a few key, high-profile decisions have unfortunately demonstrated the type of attitude that Europe still has towards African partners. The response to COVID-19 has been telling in this regard. European nations have systematically hoarded and outbid for vaccinations for their own citizens, often over-buying beyond their needs, and leaving the minimal remains for their African counterparts. Oxfam, for example, suggested that Europe has disposed of more COVID-19 vaccination doses than it has sent to Africa at the start of 2022.<sup>3</sup>

Under pressure from European pharmaceutical companies, the EU has resisted<sup>4</sup> waiving intellectual rights (TRIPS) for vaccinations, which could help drive increased global manufacturing of both vaccines and therapeutics. Furthermore, while the world has been expected to be united in its research and reporting into the virus, when South Africa identified the now prevalent Omicron variant, Europe responded by immediately restricting travel to the country and its neighbouring States. South

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2017/11/29-30/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://video.consilium.europa.eu/event/en/25306>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/eu-set-bin-25-million-more-vaccine-doses-it-has-donated-africa-year>

<sup>4</sup> <https://african.business/2022/02/trade-investment/will-eu-au-summit-reshape-europe-africa-relations/>

African President Cyril Ramaphosa spoke of the risks of a 'health apartheid' against Africans in December 2021. He said<sup>5</sup>:

***“Given that it was our own African scientists who first detected the Omicron variant, it is also a slap in the face of African excellence and expertise.”***

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The dismissal of African expertise and experience in general is nothing new to international politics. While the EU has taken steps to set the record straight, including by funding the new African Medicines Agency, vaccine manufacturing in Africa, and the WHO Tech-Transfer hub, this continued negative attitude demonstrates the core hypocrisy at the EU's purported claims<sup>6</sup> to move from 'a donor-recipient relationship' to a true 'partnership'.

From the outset, the difference in priorities between the EU and AU shows either a lack of understanding, willingness to understand, or wilful ignorance of the realities for both. For instance, the EU continues to prioritise action on climate, with its assistance with African initiatives such as the Great Green Wall<sup>7</sup>. But, as articulated by African Union Chair and Senegalese President Macky Sall<sup>8</sup>:

***“African economies are among those that are polluting less but we are the part of the world that is affected the most by the aftermath and the consequences of climate change. So we should not add some injustice on the shoulders of Africa by no longer subsidising fossil fuels as was decided in Glasgow [COP26], because there's a real difficulty for the African countries.”***

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The use of fossil fuels is but one discrepancy regarding economic priorities. The overall attitude of the framing of financial investment is also difficult. The EU has announced a new set of initiatives regarding financial investment into Africa. For instance, the 2021 Global Gateway<sup>9</sup> initiative is meant to streamline European

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<sup>5</sup> <https://english.alarabiya.net/coronavirus/2021/12/02/South-Africa-s-Ramaphosa-slams-COVID-19-health-apartheid->

<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/communication-eu-africa-strategy-join-2020-4-final\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/communication-eu-africa-strategy-join-2020-4-final_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.greatgreenwall.org/about-great-green-wall>

<sup>8</sup> <https://african.business/2022/02/trade-investment/will-eu-au-summit-reshape-europe-africa-relations/>

<sup>9</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en)

investment into foreign nations, including into Africa, for specific sectors such as digital technology, climate, transport, health, and education. The Global Gateway targets is a positive step towards breaking away from the donor-recipient model, as it re-aligns EU investment with what African partners have been calling for, namely infrastructure and connectivity. While targeted investments can, and are often, successful at boosting key sectors, much more needs to be done, both in terms of mobilizing new finance on top-of the EU's existing long-term budget, and also revisiting EU trade and agriculture policies that undermine Africa's potential competitiveness. The fifth AU-EU Summit failed to meaningfully address both issues.<sup>10</sup>

This is not to criticise the EU solely for this decision. The AU for their part does continue to use these Summits as a tacit way to ask for money, and it is estimated that Africa has a \$285 billion financing gap in dealing with the pandemic. President Sall himself acknowledged this<sup>11</sup>:

***“We hope to leave Brussels with a renewed partnership, but I hope that when going to Brussels we will see a nice envelope on the table of the Europeans, because let's put it bluntly: We need money.”***

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Granted, many sectors in African nations do require substantial investment for them to realise their potential. The question we need to pose is how to leverage this new finance so that it's creating self-sustaining economies and health systems, instead of dependency. It is more obvious that for the EU, the promise of economic investment is tied to the promise that African nations do more to securitise their borders, which is evident with the EU's continued focus on migration and security challenges, suggesting an underlying fear of the spill-over of 'African problems' into Europe.

### 3. FINDING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

Instead, there could be ways to promote the European-African partnership without falling into these repetitive narrative traps. Rather than the often-infantilising language that talks of African potential and opportunity without specifying what that potential is, AU-EU leaders should set out specific mutually pragmatic priorities. For

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2017/11/29-30/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://african.business/2022/02/trade-investment/will-eu-au-summit-reshape-europe-africa-relations/>

example, on education, in addition to promoting more economic investment, perhaps also identify that there is clear and proven African expertise in several areas, and so the partnership could look for more effective ways to cooperate between European and African universities. While the Erasmus+ initiative is a continues to be a good launchpad for student exchange programs, more could be done to streamline educational exchange beyond this, including the increased possibility for Europeans to access African universities. Policymakers could also look for easier and more effective degree recognition between the two continents as a standard, rather than having the continued risk of people's skills being undermined due to bureaucratic constraints.

On security, indeed there are ongoing armed conflicts across the African continent, including in Libya, Ethiopia, and Mali, while military coups, such as in Sudan, continue to plague the continent. The EU does have an incentive to help these nations find peaceful solutions, but how can Europe this be reconciled with the EU's current approach of sending arms to end conflict? EU High Representative, Josep Borrell has said<sup>12</sup>:

***“We have to silence the guns, but in order to silence the guns, unhappily we need guns... We are not going to stop the terrorists from killing people just by preaching. We need arms. We need military capacities, and that's what we are going to provide, to help provide our African friends, because their security is ours.”***

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Considering the sheer level of mobilized money available from the EU on this theme, it is unfortunate that the combined European expertise has concluded that increased arms sales is the most innovative and effective solution here when evidence<sup>13</sup> shows that increasing weapons in a conflict is not usually effective at stopping that conflict.

On general economic development, the EU and AU could instead promote business cooperation such as easier mechanisms for European businesses to partner with African businesses with lower tax and duty requirements. A positive step was the fact that such mechanisms were partly included in the joint investment platforms, namely the Investment Package, announced at the Summit. In addition, policy

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/dd29eb4d-1fc0-4123-ada1-290c4c63d966>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

decisions could promote African investment into European business and emerging technologies rather than merely framing this as a one-sided relationship. The creation of transparent, harmonised, and safe African legal and regulatory frameworks, to attract investments included by the private sector, should also be a priority here. Finally, more efforts should be put into reforming the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) or on making substantial concessions to support African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTFA).

On migration, rather than pumping money to African nations in an attempt to stop their people from leaving whilst securitising European borders, there could be an impetus to make fair, legal pathways for migration. Namely, having fair conditions based upon educational requirements for areas such as study and job opportunities, while importantly making sure that people are aware of these possibilities instead of them attempting perilous illegal migratory routes, such as the often-deadly sea route from war-torn Libya across the Mediterranean Sea.

The challenge for all these suggestions is that they are predicated upon the idea that the EU and AU both want to move towards an actual fair partnership of equals, with mutual expectations and opportunities. Unfortunately, the uneven power dynamic between Europe and Africa is deeply entrenched despite efforts to redress this balance, and the maintenance of this status quo is often comfortable for some European interests such as migration control. Having said this, AU leaders also need to do more to push for equal respect and dignity in negotiation, because a continued preoccupation with how much money Europe can promise to them will continue to keep them in this position of recipient. For now, it is unlikely there will be any significant changes to the partnership at this Summit, but unless radically new ways of framing the discussion emerge, these problems are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

## Part 2

# Business As Usual for Migration: The Sixth EU-African Union Summit

Some interesting initiatives have been agreed upon during the Summit regarding migration and mobility that, if rightly implemented, could mutually benefit both continents. However, they hardly signal a paradigm shift in the traditional donor-recipient relationship between Europe and Africa.

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RETHINKING SECURITY IN THE 2020s SERIES – ANALYSIS

*By Yasmine Akrimi – North Africa Analyst*

### 1. UNDERSTANDING INSTABILITY AND (IM)MOBILITY WITHIN AFRICA

There is a fundamental fact that is hardly taken into consideration when it comes to African migration: more Africans are moving within Africa than from Africa to Europe. It is hence of equal importance to support African states in strengthening both development and mobility. The first portion of the AU-EU Joint Communiqué<sup>1</sup> seems to principally address European interests. The focus on “preventing irregular migration, enhancing cooperation against smuggling and trafficking in human beings, supporting strengthened border management and achieving effective improvements

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/54412/final\\_declaration-en.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/54412/final_declaration-en.pdf). All subsequent citations are from the same document.

on return, readmission and reintegration” falls within a logic of reinterpreting long lasting local and regional mobility and migration patterns as dangerous, both for African and European states.

The externalization of European borders in Africa has technologically modernized and militarized border management, threatening visa-free mobility, border economies and freedom of residence in the continent. The AU-EU Communique’s language surrounding support for “strengthened border management” signals a continuation of the disruption of historically diverse mobility patterns, which in turn stifles regional economies.

Unable or unwilling to develop their interior regions and borderlands since independence, several African states have tolerated informal mechanisms of income-generation, particularly smuggling, as to limit risks of instability. This uncultured form of economic development allowed the state – through law enforcement – to maintain control over neglected territories through trade monitoring and mediation, and municipal taxation of the markets where the contraband goods are circulating.

Recently, internal conflicts and European pressure have shifted the perspective regarding porous frontiers, now considered as signaling a lack of sovereign territorial control and overall regional vulnerability. Western militarized approaches to border management flourished, supported by significant western training, equipment, and money.

Smuggling has historically played a role in keeping borders safe. Security forces relied on residents to provide information on unfamiliar or dangerous goods or people. Westernizing border management bears consequences both vis-à-vis efficiency and the livelihood of entire communities. Small-scale smuggling networks are becoming unviable and abuse by security forces has increased, resulting in impoverishment, grievances, and protests. In this sense, the EU-AU’s will to address “the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement” passes by a careful attention to the fragile balance between modern border securitization and citizens’ livelihoods.

Harsh border management has not proven to prevent terrorism either. Although most governments and international institutions systematically link smuggling to terrorism, in reality the nexus is rare. Association with terrorism is harmful for a smuggler’s business – intimately linked with one’s livelihood – as security forces’



laxity regarding contraband mobility transforms into a crackdown if terrorism is at stake. Radicalization is more likely to stem from economic marginalization, lack of political representativity and the security apparatus's abuse, all of which are exacerbated by border militarization.

## 2. WAYS FORWARD FOR EFFECTIVE COOPERATION

The announced Africa-Europe investment package, estimated at around 150 billion euros, aims to focus on investment, health, and education, specifically supporting public and private investment, as well as a green transition that considers African states' interests. Education is supported by programs like Team Europe Initiative on Youth Mobility for Africa, which, through "helping to strengthen Africa's higher education space and promoting the continent as a study destination for African students, can support African continental integration". Programs as such can specifically address "the challenges posed by the brain drain" and invest "in youth and women". If these investments go beyond a donor-recipient relationship, they can represent a promising first step towards a balance partnership.

The collaboration between the AU and the EU also offers a unique frame to focus on encouraging circular labor migration in mutually beneficial sectors, per instance by promoting regular migration avenues through the EU's talent partnerships, diaspora expertise and remittances for development.

When considering enhancing "pathways for legal migration", Europe should seriously listen to the AU's concerns about African migrant workers' conditions while the AU should understand European worries regarding pressures on public services in receiving countries. With the EU's push for a larger cooperation between its border agency Frontex and African states, the AU and the EU should discuss a clearer definition of the agency's own role in protecting migrants. Only in this way will "promoting voluntary return and facilitating sustainable reintegration of returned persons" and "strengthen(ing) asylum systems with a view to providing adequate reception and protection for those entitled, as well as work on their integration" succeed.

Perhaps one of the most important opportunities for cooperation is mobility within Africa itself. Although the EU supports the AU's free movement protocol, it continues to heavily invest in measures that constrain the movement of Africans both inside and outside Africa. Europe should rather focus on efficiently supporting and

improving existing mobility patterns within the African continent. Aiming for a better economic and geographic African integration passes through an attentive look at local or regional initiatives, such as the African Continental Free Trade Area. Here, support is a keyword as it is crucial to respect African states ownership of the free movement agenda.

Ultimately, the AU-EU's Summit did not signal a fundamental shift in the unbalanced interests between the two continents, although some promising initiatives have been announced. This is hence a call for coherence as a fine balance must be reached between the EU's will to implement restrictive migration measures and the AU's regional commitment towards the free movement of Africans.

## About the BIC

The BIC is an independent, non-profit, think-and-do tank based in the capital of Europe that is committed to developing solutions to address the cyclical drivers of insecurity, economic fragility, and conflict the Middle East and North Africa. Our goal is to bring added value to the highest levels of political discourse by bringing systemic issues to the forefront of the conversation.

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This project takes critical aim at yesterday's approaches to security and defence, with a view towards developing proactive solutions to the evolving nature of insecurity and hybrid warfare. The series has three overarching themes, namely "New Geopolitical Landscape in the MENA Region", "Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention" and "Transnational Challenges to Water and Energy"



## Authors

Ben Lowings and Yasmine Akrimi



 @BICBrussels  @bicrhr  BIC

 [www.bic-rhr.com](http://www.bic-rhr.com)  [info@bic-rhr.com](mailto:info@bic-rhr.com)

 Avenue Louise, 89 1050, Brussels, Belgium  Tel:+32 027258466