

Evolution and Prospects of the European Policy in the Mediterranean

Beyond the Neighbourhood: Africa and Europe in the New Global Geopolitical Order

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Africa (and Europe) in the 21st Century: The Century of Africa?

The global geopolitical order is in a phase of profound transformation. Since the era of bloc confrontation and the Cold War, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the demise of the Soviet empire, the world evolved towards a clear hegemony of the United States. This unipolar world is now being rapidly replaced by an organization of power on a global scale that has yet to take shape. It is clear that China's unstoppable rise is leading to a confrontation for hegemony between China and the United States. But the world of the future will undoubtedly be somewhat more complex than a simple division between two blocs, one led by the United States with its European allies and the other, as yet undefined, led by China together with other authoritarian countries, especially Russia, plus a few minor epigones. Beyond the two great world leaders at loggerheads, there is a very large portion of humanity that has its doubts and is asserting its claim for a reform of the international order that would provide greater opportunities for its economic and social development, while at the same time allowing it to make its voice heard, also politically, in a transformed international arena. This is the emergence of a broad movement that is heir to what was, in the era of bipolar confrontation, the so-called Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), created at the Bandung conference in 1954, in which African countries, as they gained independence, were always a fundamental part.

The new movement, which the BRICS claim to lead and unite, has in common this intention of establish-

ing new rules of the game with regard to economic distribution and the distribution of power on the international stage, mainly by reforming the United Nations system, and the Security Council in particular. The current composition of the Council, and especially the veto power of the five permanent members and the limited number of total members – 15 in all, reflects the relative weight and balance of power prevailing in 1945. At that time, there were 51 founding countries of the United Nations, which now has 193 members. It also calls for the reform of the Bretton Woods system, which sets the rules of international economic governance through the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), heir to the former General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

It is worth remembering that, although the origin of the BRICS lies in the group formed in 2003 by India, Brazil and South Africa (IBSA), Russia and China's rapprochement to the group came later. The first meeting at ministerial level was in 2006 and their entry into the group, formalized with the first BRIC summit organized by Russia in Ekaterinburg in 2009, lent it a very different character from its initial intentions. The BRICS grouping has been a huge success and there is a queue to join. But, as we shall see, with China and Russia at its head, it would be misleading to say that it truly represents a non-aligned Global South. And even less so in its relations with Africa.

What is not clear is the place that the different parts of that portion of humanity that we once called the Third World will occupy in the new global system. Especially if the new middle powers such as Brazil, Turkey, India, or the Nigeria of the future, regardless of whether or not they form part of the BRICS, will succeed in creating a truly *multipolar* world. Today there is a very large and heterogeneous group of countries located on different continents, generally members of

what in UN jargon is still known as the Group of 77, formed in 1964 and now numbering 134 countries, with very different positions and interests on the international stage. In particular, it is not clear what role Africa and African countries will play. But it is certain that Africa will have a weight of the utmost importance in this world that is yet to be defined. And it is also clear that Africa's future in this century will depend to a large extent on the Africa-Europe relationship.

Africa is not a homogeneous group of countries. Because of its size and the variety of its climatic and environmental conditions, its different historical trajectories and the conditions of its recent history, Africa is a heterogeneous continent which is traditionally divided into five major regions. However, it also has certain characteristics, and above all certain hopes for the future, common to all its components, which are seeking to find their rightful place in the world.

In addition to the fact that by 2050 it will represent 25% of the world's population, there are other aspects that are key to the role Africa is to play this century and which arouse the ambitions of all the major powers. It has mineral reserves of strategic importance to industry, both civil and military, for instance. In the political arena, Africa also plays a major role in the concert of nations. The votes of the 54 African member states at the United Nations General Assembly are of inestimable value and are heavily courted by all the major powers. As if this weren't enough, some parts of Africa's geography are of strategic global importance for world trade as in the Horn of Africa.

At the same time, it is also clear that Africa faces grave problems of instability, wars, poverty and serious governance deficits. To illustrate this with a single figure, consider that, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), capital flight from Africa through illicit channels amounts to 88.6 billion dollars, or 3.7% of Africa's GDP. This figure is much higher than the annual official development assistance (ODA) it receives of 48 billion dollars, or its annual foreign direct investment (FDI) of 54 billion dollars.

For Europe, Africa is not just the neighbouring continent with which it has shared a controversial history. Africa and Europe also share the present and above all the future. In the new globalized world, Europe will be the first to share in Africa's progress as well as its problems. We can safely say that Europe needs Africa as much as Africa needs Europe. To take a simple example, Europe has an ageing and declining popula-

tion while Africa has an expanding young population that will represent 40% of the world's youth by 2030. In Europe today, the population under 15 years of age represents 16% of the European total, while in Africa it is 41%, and 47% of Africans are under 18 years of age. On the other hand, the population over 65 years of age represents 21% of the total in Europe, while it barely reaches 4% in Africa. All projections for the future indicate that Europe will need millions of young people of working age to contribute to the maintenance of the pension system, the European welfare state and the level of economic activity. Meanwhile, millions of young people in Africa will try to find work with mixed fortune. We are therefore certain that migratory tensions will persist, even if we know that both Africa and Europe will need a transfer of population to maintain their economic and social balances, however much the populist parties of the European extreme right preach xenophobia and discrimination. Europe, however, will also share with Africa the consequences of instability and the possible succession of conflicts, wars and the spread of terrorist movements. Over the past 20 years, through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the EU has devoted enormous effort to building a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership aiming to integrate its North African and Middle Eastern neighbours into a shared area of progress, though with mitigated results. Beyond this neighbourhood, Europeans are discovering the urgent need to also devote a huge effort to integrating the rest of Africa into this shared world, since it is clear that, whether they like it or not, the future of Europeans and Africans will be likewise shared.

Africa: Between Development and Instability

For decades, too many decades, the African continent has been the continent of hope. But the fact is that between 1960 and 2000 Africa has seen four coups d'état per year. During the early years of the newly independent African states, the prevailing condition was still the bipolar confrontation between the Soviet bloc and the West, confronting each other in peripheral countries, as in Africa, where they fought country by country for hegemony. As the balance of nuclear terror prevented direct confrontation between the two superpowers, proxy wars prevailed, outside the central arena of confrontation between NATO

and the Warsaw Pact. In the north of the continent, Arab countries established authoritarian but stable regimes. This was not the case in the rest of Africa. The most notorious were the crises and wars in the Congo in 1960-65, and the coups d'état that set up regimes declaring themselves Marxist in Congo Brazzaville in 1968, Somalia in 1969, Benin in 1972 and Ethiopia in 1974. In the wake of the Portuguese Carnation Revolution of 1973, civil wars also broke out between Marxists and anti-Marxists, supported by the respective blocs, following the declarations of independence of the former Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau. With the new administration of President Ronald Reagan in the United States as of 1981, the American doctrine had more decidedly come to use all means to support opposition groups wishing to fight against the Marxist regimes in Africa.

The problem is that, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1979 and the dissolution of the Soviet bloc, the end of the ideological confrontation did not bring Africa a decrease in instability. Quite the contrary. In recent years, we can even say that conflict has tended to increase rapidly. Power struggles, misrule and corruption, now without the ideological disguise, have in many cases made African societies' efforts toward economic and social development extremely difficult. Hopes for progress have thus encountered a difficult path. Whereas in 1970, Africa's share of the global GDP was 2.5% and its population accounted for 10% of the world's, it has remained fairly stable at 2.7% today, despite its share of the world's population having risen to 18%.

During the 1980s, Africa's annual GDP growth remained stagnant at 2.6%, very low for supposedly developing countries, and in the 1990s it reached 3.1%. These were the years of austerity imposed by the structural adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, still painfully remembered by African countries and the rest of the developing world. In the 2000s, growth reached a promising 5.2%, which was greeted with jubilation by all the international economic organizations, only to fall sharply at the end of the decade, due to the strong impact on Africa of the international economic and financial crisis that had begun in the United States in 2008. In the following decade, Africa's economic growth was limited to 2.4% per year, although it has rebounded in recent years to reach 3.4% in 2024.

The nature of the BRICS' trade and investment exchanges with Africa is much more similar to the reviled colonial or neo-colonial tradition than to an attractive, profitable South-South egalitarian relationship

All studies on the subject conclude that the results and performance, which certainly differ from one country to another, are due to better or worse governance, the crisis of the state, corruption and confrontations; or worse, instability, violent confrontation and war.

The year 2010 marked a turning point regarding instability and proliferation of conflicts in Africa. During the Cold War, confrontations and power struggles were cloaked in secular ideological clothing, between revolutionaries and rightists, supported by the superpowers of each bloc. Since 2001, the phenomenon that began in 1979 with the Khomeini Revolution in Iran has gradually spread to Africa. The expansion of revolutionary Islamic jihadism, which had already had such serious episodes in Africa as the decade of terror in Algeria in the 1990s, exploded with enormous expansive force since the invasion and war of the United States and the international coalition against Iraq in 2003. It first took hold in the countries of the Middle East. After the failure of the Arab Spring, it jumped from the cruel civil war in Syria to other countries in the region. Russia's involvement in the Syrian civil war from 2014 onwards decisively tipped the balance in favour of the victory and rehabilitation of the Bashar al-Assad regime against the modernizing movements and against the jihadism of the Islamic State (IS)/Daesh and the epigones of al-Qaeda. As they leave Syria, Islamic fighters are moving to Africa, especially to Libya, and from there to the countries of the Sahel and Africa as a whole. Thus, such groups have arisen as al-Shabaab in Somalia, which formally joined al-Qaeda in 2012; Boko Haram in Nigeria, created as early as 2003; Islamic State (IS)/Daesh, which moved to Africa after its defeats in Iraq and Syria; and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), among others. This is the same path followed by Russia's Wagner mercenary troops. After finishing their work in Syria, they have expanded in parallel in recent years from Libya through the

Sahel countries, usually with Russians and jihadists fighting on opposing sides. They sustain or attack the regimes that have been succeeding each other to the rhythm of the coups d'état across the Sahel belt, from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean.

The most recent series of coups begins with the one in Mali in 2020. The series continues with those in Chad, Guinea and again in Mali in 2021 and in Burkina Faso and Guinea Bissau in 2022, followed by new coups in Niger and Gabon in 2023, in what UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called an *epidemic of coups*. The tragic series adds to the chronic instability and state of civil war in Sudan where, after such serious episodes as the Darfur conflict in 2003 and the final war and secession of South Sudan in 2011, the 2019 coup deposed the President and 30-year dictator Omar al-Bashir. Successive coups and civil wars in Sudan thereafter are producing one of the world's most serious and neglected humanitarian crises. In all cases, French, US and UN military forces have been forced to leave the country.

Africa in the Global Geopolitical Confrontation

The first casualty of Israel's war and destruction of Gaza following Hamas's terrorist attack have been the Palestinians. But certainly, the second casualty of Israel's disproportionate reaction is Europe's and the US's relations with the Arab world and the new *Global South* in general. The repercussions of the Gaza war added to the clear gap that had already been perceived, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, by the lack of support from most countries of the South for Ukraine versus the European and US efforts to defend it. But this disaffection of the formerly-called Third World countries with the West is certainly nothing new. Since the 1950s, the entire traditional Non-Aligned Movement had used anti-Western, anti-imperialist rhetoric in the face of the former colonial powers and economic and often military pressure from the United States. But what is now taking place in Africa, and especially in the Sahel belt and the francophone countries of sub-Saharan Africa, is a repudiation of the West and especially of France. It is the result of the repeated frustration of their expectations of progress and, to a large extent, also a reflection of the internal political tension in France and the construction of what is perceived as fortress Europe,

which rejects immigrants from Africa and the rest of the developing countries. Added to this are the effects on the Arab world and African countries of the US's unconditional support for Israel and the lukewarm reaction of Europeans, especially Germany and also France, to the cruel massacre and destruction of Gaza, which the whole world sees every evening in shocking television images. The contrast with Europe's impressive financial and military support for Ukraine could not be greater.

France's traditional presence in its former colonies is in crisis. The *Françafrique* that was managed for so many years by the elusive and effective Jacques Foccard, *Monsieur Afrique*, as Secretary General for African and Malagasy Affairs at the Elysée Palace under Presidents de Gaulle and Pompidou, clearly seems, so many years later, to be coming to an abrupt end in the Sahel. In Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, the military juntas, harassed by Islamist jihadism from the north and by multiple secessionist movements, especially the Tuaregs in Mali and the Tubu in Niger, have decided in recent years to break with France and entrust their security to Russia and its Wagner mercenaries. The latter have now been directly taken over by the Russian Defence Ministry, renamed Africa Corps and commanded by intelligence officers. France had to withdraw its troops from Mali in August 2022, ending the ten-year Operation Barkhane of counter-insurgency military cooperation. In February 2023, France also withdrew its troops from Burkina Faso, and in September of the same year, it withdrew its ambassador and part of its military from Niger, practically expelled along with those of the United States, which accepted the termination of its agreement to occupy the Agadez base. For the time being, France has concentrated its troops in Chad, while Burkina Faso went so far as to expel French diplomats.

Russia had been absent from Africa since the Gorbachev era, when it had abandoned earlier Soviet expansionist ambitions in its attempt to reach an understanding with Europe and the United States. Even more so after the fall of the Soviet Union. Putin, however, took a major trip to Africa as early as 2006, on the occasion of his first rapprochement with the BRICS, proclaiming that Russia was returning to Africa. But the steady increase in Russia's current presence in Africa began in 2014. After the invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing sanctions and diplomatic isolation, Russia again found the possibility of new

alliances in Africa. Moscow could present them by linking them to the Soviet tradition of support for independence movements and against the US-led Western imperialists of the time. This renewed Russian presence was facilitated by the *pivot to Asia* since the Obama presidency and the US withdrawal from Africa under President Donald Trump. Russia sees its growing presence in Africa in the perspective of its global ambitions, as well as being an important asset for combating the diplomatic isolation and sanctions imposed since its invasion of Crimea and even more so with the war in Ukraine. In October 2019, Putin convened the first Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi. Forty-three of the 54 African heads of state were present. Putin co-chaired it with Egyptian President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi.

In recent years, Russia has established military and intelligence cooperation agreements with countries in fragile situations, whose leaders would like to free themselves from the democratic and human rights conditionality attached to cooperation with Western powers. Russia has become the leading arms exporter to Africa. Today, Russia accounts for 44% of total arms imports in Africa. Other suppliers, far behind it, are the United States (17%), China (10%) and France (6.1%). Since 2014, Russia has been pushing a hyperactive anti-Western narrative with extensive disinformation campaigns on social media and in the public opinion. Russia Today RT-Africa TV is popular across the continent, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. According to the narrative inspired by Russian networks, Europe and the US propose a false democracy, branded as neo-colonialism, which serves no purpose for the people, while Russia stands for justice – social justice and justice between countries, both of them against “the rich” of the West.

In recent years in particular, Russia has been filling the vacuum left by France and the United States, which were ousted largely at Russia’s instigation. The new generation of African dictators appreciates being free of the conditionality of Western aid, and they are consolidating their power and strengthening themselves with the protection of the Wagner mercenaries. The latter offer them both military and personal security protection, as well as “political” protection through disinformation campaigns, propaganda and manipulation of public opinion. The deal basically consists of military protection and training agreements, plus the supply of arms in exchange for the

rights to exploit the wealth of natural resources such as diamonds, gold and other metals, as well as “political” and diplomatic support, bilaterally and in international forums. The succession of military coups and the establishment of dictatorial juntas in the Sahel in recent years is a perfect illustration. In April 2024, Russian mercenaries from the Africa Corps arrived at the Agadez military base in Niger before the US military personnel had finished withdrawing. People in the streets were still hailing them as Wagner militia. China’s growing presence, which is incomparably larger than that of Russia, has been the most important development in the last two decades on the African continent, where it had become Africa’s largest trading partner by 2009. China’s spectacular economic growth since 1980 is certainly the most important global phenomenon in recent history. In its foreign policy and worldview, Africa occupies a place of preference for China. Firstly, for economic reasons, but also, fundamentally, for deeper geopolitical reasons, in its opposition to the United States and the West, claiming a fundamental role as the world’s leading power, which China aspires to be in the short term, or at least on an equal footing with the United States.

In contrast to Russia’s military-focused approach, China’s approach is primarily economic. China’s total trade with Africa rose from 40 billion dollars in 2005 to 250 billion by 2022. Twenty per cent of sub-Saharan Africa’s exports go to China, with 16% of imports coming from China. Since 1995, China’s official position has been to link aid, investment and trade. Since launching its Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, China has focused its cooperation on long-term credit financing for transport networks, ports, roads and railways, dams and electricity distribution, mining and all kinds of industrial, health and administrative infrastructure. The African Union’s headquarters in Ethiopia was built by China, as well as many emblematic projects, such as the Great Mosque of Algiers, with China not only providing the capital, but also thousands of Chinese technicians and workers to carry them out. In 2018, the leaders of all 54 African countries took part in the Beijing summit during the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. Finally, China opened its first overseas naval military base in 2017 in Djibouti, in the Horn of Africa, opposite the entrance to the Red Sea, through which all of China’s foreign trade with European markets flows and close to its natural gas and oil supply routes from North

Africa and the Middle East. Various reports indicate that it plans to set up another one in an Atlantic country in West Africa, close to the oil deposits in the Gulf of Guinea, or in Namibia. In any case, it already has half a dozen heavily Chinese-invested civilian ports and two majority Chinese-owned ports in Nigeria and Cameroon. It has also concluded several cooperation agreements on security and military training in recent years.

African countries believe that the application of the most-favoured-nation clause to EU products puts them at a disadvantage when negotiating important new opportunities with third parties

A basic principle of Chinese foreign policy is non-interference in internal affairs. Therefore, a characteristic of Chinese cooperation and aid or financing, as is the case with Russian aid, is non-conditionality. This is especially appreciated by all African governments. In contrast, European or American aid is always conditional on clauses regarding the promotion or safeguarding of democracy and human rights, or the promotion of civil society institutions. The efforts of both China and Russia over the past 10 years have been enormous in attracting African countries and societies to their alliance and worldview, in a configuration in which the motto would be “*The West against the rest.*” In recent years, the battle is being won by China and Russia against the United States and the West globally, but, on the ground in Africa, primarily against Europe.

Africa and the BRICS

The BRICS are often presented as a great alternative for the reconfiguration of the international order into a multipolar system in which the countries of the Global South can find their way forward on an equal footing. But the BRICS are a group of countries that are vastly different from each other, with interests that do not always coincide and are sometimes in conflict.

Despite their progressive rhetoric, they conceal very different realities, especially because of the enormous weight of China and Russia and their special characteristics as large countries with ambitions to become major powers. It is therefore important to closely follow the evolution of the BRICS group and, especially, the opportunities and the advantages or disadvantages it may represent for African countries.

Firstly, the enormous and growing weight of the enlarged BRICS is noteworthy, with the addition of Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Ethiopia to the original countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). The enlarged BRICS+ group now accounts for 46% of the world’s population and 36% of global GDP calculated in terms of purchasing power parity. This already exceeds the aggregate GDP of the G7 group of advanced countries, which, with 10% of the world’s population, holds 30% of global GDP. Moreover, the forecasts are that by 2050 the GDP of the BRICS as a whole will reach 50%, while the G7 group is expected to account for 20%. The BRICS countries control 54% of world oil production, more than 50% of natural gas reserves and 40% of coal reserves, in addition to their reserves of critical and strategic metals for the energy transition and new technologies.

The BRICS present themselves with a progressive rhetoric, taking advantage of the fact that it is not they but the countries of Europe as former colonial metropolises, as well as the United States, that are the reviled imperialist hegemonic powers. The BRICS share demands for respect for the sovereignty of young states, non-interference and a rejection of conditional access to credit or international aid. Their call for a new international system focuses on the reform of the UN Security Council and the Bretton Woods institutions, with a particular rejection of the dollar as the international currency. Among their achievements are the creation of the New Development Bank, based in Shanghai, and the Contingent Reserve Agreement as an (not yet very successful) alternative to the balance-of-payments financing traditionally offered by the IMF. The question is whether the BRICS approach is credible and whether its potential international role is beneficial for African countries. The first problem is China’s excessive weight in the group. China represents 70% of the overall GDP of the BRICS, and its GDP of 18 billion dollars (2022) is incomparable to India’s 3.4 billion, Russia’s 2.2 billion, Brazil’s 1.9 billion or

South Africa's 420 million. Secondly, the nature of the BRICS' trade and investment exchanges with Africa is much more similar to the reviled colonial or neo-colonial tradition than to an attractive, profitable South-South egalitarian relationship. China's exports to Africa are 95% industrial products, while African exports to China are 90% primary products. Investment flows, as seen in the conception and actual implementation of China's *Belt and Road* projects, are clearly located along the access routes to the natural resources that the Chinese economy needs, and the transport routes to its main markets. Finally, the pace and direction of the BRICS group's expansion clearly suggests an attempt to constitute a large geopolitical bloc led by China and Russia, which seeks to attract all the countries of the Global South in order to oppose the leadership of the United States and Europe. It thus seems clear that the BRICS group, with its dominant countries of China and Russia, is driven by the economic, political and geostrategic interests of these would-be hegemonies rather than by values, in contrast to the former Non-Aligned Movement, when the struggle against colonialism was still real. Africa therefore needs to calibrate its alliances so that they respond effectively to its needs for development and job creation, and for political progress towards governance based on democracy and the construction of inclusive and progressive societies.

The Difficult African Unity: The Road to Regionalization

Pan-Africanism has long-standing roots stemming from the influence of the Enlightenment and black abolitionist movements in the slavery era. After various countries gained independence, overcoming the differences between visionary federalist proposals for the African continent, such as Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah's proposal for a Union of African States, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was formed in Addis Ababa in 1963, at the instigation of the great African personalities of the time, such as Nkrumah himself, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere. In the early years, the OAU and its Liberation Committee were notable for continuing the struggle for independence, including actively supporting insurgents in Namibia, Angola and

Mozambique, as well as opponents of the apartheid regime in South Africa or the segregationist regime in Rhodesia, the future Zimbabwe. The OAU's aims were, first of all, to work for peace and security on the African continent, for which it established a very active Peace and Security Committee and prepared a Charter on Democracy, Elections and Good Governance, which remained largely on paper. Secondly, the OAU advocated the economic development of African nations through their progressive economic integration. Finally, it was also one of the OAU's major aims to bring Africa's voice to global governance bodies, especially the UN and its various institutions.

Growing dissatisfaction with the OAU's limited progress in achieving these goals eventually led to its transformation into the African Union (AU) in 2000, with a greater degree of both ambition and pragmatism than the previous OAU. Like the European Union, the AU has put in place a set of institutions such as the Pan-African Parliament, based in southern Africa; the Peace and Security Council, with 15 members representing the different geographical regions of the continent; the African Court of Justice and Human Rights, based in Tanzania; and the African Union Commission, based in Ethiopia.

An unforeseen aspect was the creation of *regional economic communities* across the African continent, sometimes with overlapping membership between them. Finally, the OAU itself, through the 1991 Abuja Treaty, put forth the progressive creation of the African Economic Community, with the aim of promoting and coordinating the creation of free trade areas and economic cooperation schemes in Africa. The African Continental Free Trade Area finally came into force in 2021. The AU has also recognized eight of the more than 12 regional economic communities that had been created, which are the fundamental blocs of African regional economic cooperation and integration, with which the EU has signed Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). The most active and consolidated are the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In the case of North Africa, its partnership agreement with the EU is the Barcelona Process's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, implemented through the European Neighbourhood Policy South. African integration, both at the regional and continental levels, has a dual economic and political significance, both of which are of enormous importance. Economi-

cally, the percentage of internal trade between the countries on the continent represents a tiny share of each country's foreign trade. The pattern inherited from colonial times continues to prevail, with exports centred on raw materials such as minerals, hydrocarbons and timber, exported to Europe, China and other countries outside the continent. In contrast, African imports are mainly industrial products, refined energy components and foodstuffs. Trade between African countries themselves, which represents only 3% of their foreign trade, has a much higher percentage of manufactured products. It is therefore clear that, although infrastructure and traditional economic organization link each African country with the outside of the continent more than with other countries in the area, a clear path to economic progress and job creation is the promotion of African trade integration, which would facilitate industrialization and a rise in the value scale of exports, with the consequent creation of employment and activity in the countries.

It is worth noting that, in the Africa-EU Strategy adopted in 2007, one of the priorities identified is to promote regional integration. It is somewhat ironic that the EU is thus making amends for the colonial legacy of its Member States, which traditionally linked the economies of their colonies to their respective metropolises. In Europe's own experience, integration has been the method for advancing economic growth through the creation of larger markets, which also allows for the consolidation of peace and understanding between peoples. And this is the EU's model, which it also proposes to its partners in its international cooperation programmes, especially on the African continent.

The European Union's Africa Policies

The EU has been pursuing two separate policies vis-à-vis the African continent. With the Arab Mediterranean countries, including all those on the northern shores of Africa, as noted above, the EU has developed the Euro-Mediterranean Policy, starting in 1995 with the Barcelona Process and implemented since 2005 through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). This is an association process that aims to progressively include the Mediterranean partner countries in the European single market. The 1995 Barcelona Declaration envisaged the construction by 2010 of a

large free trade area (FTA) including all EU countries and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Partners, plus a series of agreements with each country and the Mediterranean regions to promote their modernization and development. The lack of agreement between the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries to make mutual concessions prevented the creation of such a large FTA, which was replaced by a plurality of free trade areas negotiated between the EU and each of the Mediterranean partner countries willing to agree and sign a bilateral association treaty. On the other hand, relations with the rest of Africa have been organized through the successive Yaoundé, Lomé and Cotonou agreements, and financed fundamentally through the European Development Fund (EDF), already created in 1957 via the Treaty of Rome establishing the EEC, but which was not included in the Community budget. We are now witnessing the start of a new phase in Euro-African relations, in which cooperation with the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS, formerly ACP) has been integrated since 2021 into the Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027) and, in particular, into the EU's Global Europe: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). This has replaced all the EU's previous international cooperation instruments, including both the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), which applied to Mediterranean partners, and the European Development Fund, which financed cooperation with OACPS countries.

The Yaoundé Conventions of 1963 and 1969 did not, of course, aspire to include African countries in the European internal market. They were based on preferential trade and development aid agreements between the European Economic Community (EEC) and the then six member countries, with 18 sub-Saharan African states. The fledgling EEC inherited and extended the preferential relations and agreements of its member states, and especially France and Belgium, with their former African dependencies. The four Lomé Conventions, covering the period 1975 to 2000, expanded the geographical base to 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, adding former British dependencies as well as new European Member States. The Lomé Conventions represented a step forward in conceiving free trade agreements as an instrument of cooperation to promote the industrialization and diversification of the econo-

mies of the South, within the framework of the economic, social and cultural development of the OACPS countries. The revision of the Lomé Conventions during the 1980s coincided with the height of the debt crises and neoliberal policies. The *Washington Consensus*, implemented by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and also the EEC, included aid not only on the condition of financial and economic reforms but also, and especially by the EEC, on the condition of democratic governance and respect for human rights. It was the Cotonou Agreement of 2000 that clearly introduced African regionalization processes into Euro-African negotiations. The EU was to negotiate with each of the four regions identified in sub-Saharan Africa, with which Economic Partnership Agreements would be signed. The idea was to definitively go beyond traditional neo-colonial and trade relations, mainly with the metropolises, to also promote intra-African trade relations and prioritize the inclusion of African countries in globalization.

The functioning of the Cotonou agreements has nevertheless been heavily criticized. Firstly, African exports to Europe still consist almost exclusively of raw materials, oil and gas, minerals, metals and agricultural or forestry products 14 years on, while Africa imports capital goods and foodstuffs from Europe, with an increasing share of imports of industrial, consumer and transport products from China. The EU clauses have been considered overly demanding and ambitious in relation to African countries' real capacities to promote their industrialization in the face of European and international competition with progressively liberalized imports, with many of them still classified as *least developed countries* (LDCs). African countries also wish to be able to broaden their choice of trading partners, which is why they believe that the application of the most-favoured-nation clause to EU products puts them at a disadvantage when negotiating important new opportunities with third parties. The African continent's overall trade with Europe, which was a quasi-monopoly of the metropolises in colonial times, still accounts for 32% of Africa's foreign trade, amounting to 250 billion. This is unbalanced, since Europe's imports from ACP countries account for less than 3% of its total imports, a percentage that has halved in the last 40 years. Growing trade with China now accounts for 16% of Africa's foreign trade, while trade with the United States is now limited to 6% of the continent's foreign trade.

Africa and Europe: New Perspectives

In recent years there has been a clear acceleration and even, to a certain extent, a paradigm shift in EU-Africa relations. Since the adoption of the Cotonou Agreement in 2000 and the Joint Africa-EU Strategy in 2007, the African situation has evolved considerably. The increase in conflict, both in the Sahel and in Central Africa, plus the stampede caused by the flight of a large part of Syria's population due to the war, which produced the great migratory crisis of 2015, led to a new awareness in Europe of the need to relaunch Europe's relations with Africa. In North Africa, the failure of the Arab Spring and the return to the traditional authoritarian systems, most clearly exemplified by the new regime of General al-Sisi in Egypt, were witnessed with perplexity. In the Sahel and Central Africa, some of the foundations of the traditional European presence had begun to crumble, leading to the current serious crisis of the French and American military and political presence in the Sahel countries and, to a certain extent, in the other French-speaking countries. On the other hand, there was a rising awareness of China's growing influence, economic but also increasingly political and even incipiently military, as well as Russia's growing presence through its Wagner mercenaries, now *Africa Corps*. Europe has finally responded by launching a comprehensive programme to renew its relations with Africa. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen identified 2020 as a turning point in Africa-Europe relations. Firstly, because of the profound change brought about by the merger of all previous international financing and development aid instruments by the European Union into the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), and because of the allocations included in the EU's *Financial Perspectives 2021-2027*. The NDICI has a budget envelope of 79.5 billion euros for the 2021-2027 period, almost half of which is earmarked for Africa.

Secondly, the new Joint Communication by the European Commission and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell to the European Parliament and the Council, "Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa," published in March 2020, and the agreements adopted at the Sixth AU-EU Summit held in Brussels in February 2022 justify the turning point indicated by President von der

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Leyen. Finally, the new dimension of the European strategy towards Africa would be highlighted by the Global Gateway Programme to promote European cooperation in favour of developing countries around the world. The Global Gateway Programme aims to mobilize, together with member states, financial institutions and the private sector, up to 300 billion euros in investment for infrastructure and projects across the developing world, of which 150 billion euros is planned for Africa. It is evident that the EU Global Gateway is intended to be Europe's response to China's Belt and Road Initiative, clearly revealing the geostrategic motivations behind the European Global Gateway.

For North Africa, the lines of action were already made clear in the February 2021 Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "Renewed Partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood: A New Agenda for the Mediterranean." The accompanying document specified the preferential areas of work and principles of action, and also envisaged funding for Mediterranean partner countries, which would come from the Global Gateway. The same was true for sub-Saharan Africa, through the new 2017 Europe-Africa Strategy and the agreements of the Sixth AU-EU Summit in 2022. It should be stressed that there was finally a truly significant change in terms of available European funding. At last, significant figures were being discussed, since the 150-billion-euro investment over seven years would provide an annual average investment of more than 20 billion euros, which could already have a clear, positive impact on the development of African countries. The programme is to be developed through the Team Europe scheme, to be implemented jointly and in partnership by the European Commission, the member countries and their development cooperation agencies, plus the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The preferential areas of action are: digital transition; climate change and en-

ergy transition; transport and infrastructure; sustainable growth and job creation; health, with a special provision for the availability and even local production of vaccines; and education and research, investing especially in quality education for girls, women and vulnerable groups. The core principles that are to guide the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package are democratic values, good governance and transparency, partnership among equals, environmental sustainability and the ability to catalyse private sector investment and activity. The Global Gateway is fundamentally inspired by the United Nations 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As indicated in the 2020 Joint Communication, "Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa," the Euro-African partnership should pay particular attention to cooperation for peace and security, cooperation on migration and mobility, and the joint commitment of the European Union and the African Union and their member states to multilateralism, especially through the coordination of possible joint positions in international bodies, in particular the United Nations. This fulfils the call for a *more geopolitical* European Union and a European commitment to *effective multilateralism*.

African countries are seeking a greater degree of freedom to establish relations that could be beneficial to them with new partners previously not present in Africa. In particular with China, for its trade and investment potential, and also with Russia for those who want to buy local armed protection. They also want to open up to other partners such as Brazil and India, which are particularly attractive because of their shared awareness of belonging to the Global South (controversially symbolized by the BRICS), which does not want to join either of the two blocs aspiring to hegemony. In reality, however, none of these alternatives offers the same advantages as the European Union, which remains the leading trading partner, the leading provider of productive direct investment that generates employment, the source of transfers from migrant workers living in Europe to their families in their countries of origin, and the one that can offer them a partnership that integrates them more profitably and in a stable manner with the part of the world that is most complementary to them in the global context. The problems are not few, but it is in the interest of both Africans and Europeans to work towards this common project.