BRIEFING

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A Comprehensive EU Strategy for Africa

Political Dialogue: Governance, Security and Migration

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A Comprehensive EU Strategy for Africa Political Dialogue: Governance, Security and Migration

ABSTRACT

Much has changed since the creation of the Joint Africa-European Union (EU) Strategy in 2007. The developing world has been changing fast. Development policy and practices are also transforming, albeit at a slower pace. The divide between emerging economies and 'fragile states' is increasing. This is also the case in Africa. As not only Africa, but also the EU-Africa relationship is changing and evolving into new dimensions, there is clearly a need to develop a new European strategy, constructed on the basis of an emerging continent. Africa is home to the youngest population in the world and some of the world's most fragile states. However, it is also a continent with emerging markets and more effective governments. This brief aims to clarify how well the new Strategy must manage to mainstream a European approach to Africa that considers both the inter-continental dialogue and the diversity of development on this emerging continent within the fields of governance, security and migration. As the COVID-19 has turned into a pandemic, the brief also suggests that the new European strategy must reflect this development and the European Parliament should closely monitor the situation as it discusses the Strategy.

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1 Introduction

As not only Africa, but also the European Union (EU)-Africa relationship is changing and evolving into new dimensions, there is clearly a need to develop a new European strategy, constructed on the basis of an emerging continent. Africa is home to the youngest population in the world and some of the world's most fragile states. However, it is also a continent with emerging markets and more effective governments. Moreover, it has started to crack the code of state building. How and to what degree Africa will be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic remains to be seen. We do not know yet how widely the virus will spread on the African continent, but what we do know is that the outbreak already has an enormous negative effect on the world economy. Africa is far more integrated into the world economy today than what was the case during the financial crisis of 2008 and is therefore much more exposed to the negative externalities that this will create. The new European strategy must reflect this development and the European Parliament should closely monitor the situation as it discusses the Strategy.

This briefing aims to clarify how well the new Strategy must manage to mainstream a European approach to Africa that considers both the inter-continental dialogue and the diversity of development on this emerging continent. The European Parliament should also consider the role of Member States in its discussion of the Strategy. In this regard, it is important to note that several Member States are currently also reviewing their Africa strategy and relationship to the continent. This includes not only important states in this regard such as France and Germany, but also small yet active and eager states such as Estonia. The success of a new EU Strategy will, therefore, not only depend on EU-Africa relations that reflects the diversity of the continent – Africa is not a country, and the African Union (AU) is not the EU – but also on intra-EU co-ordination with its Member States on a current or future profile for the African continent.

As the diversity and difference between African states increases, so the relationship between the EU and Africa will continue to evolve into new fields and partnership models. This is underlined in the new Strategy's focus on partnerships for green transitions and energy, digital transformation as well as sustainable growth and jobs. These are important pillars for a renewed EU-Africa relationship that is future-looking, but how this agenda for the future will be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic must be considered. However, political dialogue on questions concerning governance, security along with migration and mobility will also remain important dimensions in new emerging EU-Africa relations.

Concerning security, this briefing will in particular consider the EU's involvement in the Sahel, including a thorough focus on EU operations in the peace and security realm. The Sahel brings international concerns about security, terrorism and migration which has pushed the region to the very fore of the EU foreign policy agenda. Consequently, this briefing will evaluate how the EU responds to current security risks and what appropriate work-sharing arrangements should exist not only between the Union and its Member States, but also its relationship with the AU and relevant regional bodies such as the G5-Sahel and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Some parallels will be drawn with the EU's approach to the Horn of Africa where similar security predicaments are at play in some Horn countries (see Council of the European Union, 2011).

Questions of governance are closely related to security issues in Africa. Democracy and human rights have been integral elements within the EU's foreign policy. This is also reflected in European Parliament resolutions (see for example European Parliament, 2017a) that called for an intensification of the political dialogue on democracy and human rights. This should also apply to the next step in EU-Africa relations. However, the current bifurcation of African development leaves the Union with the challenge of developing an approach to democracy and human rights in Africa that is context-sensitive as it must be relevant both for the developing states in Africa as well as the fragile states of, for example, the Sahel. This is a challenge, but it becomes even more of a challenge when one considers a recent backlash towards more repressive governments in some African countries. This means that the Union must fine-tune the

instruments in its toolbox in order to be a relevant and efficient promoter of human rights, including the rights of religious and sexual minorities as well as civil society and a liberal public sphere.

The question of migration and mobility will continue to inform and influence EU-Africa relations. The briefing will not only review the Commission's proposal on migration and mobility, but also discuss the degree to which this proposal and current programming in place can have the potential to align interests that at times vary considerably and cause friction as well as political conflict in this field of policy. This is another issue that has been the subject of much debate in the European Parliament (see for example European Parliament, 2017b).

The African responses to the new Strategy have varied, but comments given during a late February 2020 high level meeting between the EU and the AU in Addis Ababa suggest that while the EU-Africa relationship stands firm, there are still differences that will continue to mar intern-continental relations. Some AU officials made it clear that they do not need to be lectured on European values, while other AU representatives singled-out questions concerning international criminal justice, sexual orientation and identity, the death penalty and the centrality of the AU in African crisis response as possible points of political disagreements. Thus, there are issues in this relationship that must be treated carefully (see also Marks, 2020).

There is, however, a new alarming issue that will substantially affect both the EU, Africa and the inter-continental relationships, and that is the COVID-19 outbreak. Europe is currently heavily affected, while in Africa the pandemic is still in its infancy (at least with regard to detected cases). This will be a heavy burden on national governments, the EU and the AU. This means that the Strategy and the EU-African relation may become less of a priority as governments and intergovernmental organisations try to combat the virus. However, as the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General recently warned (UN, 2020) – this is a global pandemic. If the virus gets stuck in poor and fragile states without working health systems, this means that the virus will eventually return to places that have effectively stopped the spread. In this regard, there is a fellowship of destiny between Europe and Africa. Thus, while Europe may think it has enough with itself right now, this is not the time to neglect the relationship with Africa, but to strengthen it as part of Europe's fight to halt the COVID-19 outbreak globally and to protect itself. This line of thinking is also reflected in recent communications from the European Parliament. A joint statement from the chairs responsible for external policies in the European Parliament on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the EU's external action recently called for concerted EU action. In parallel, they stated that the Union could 'not forget the fact that the impact of COVID-19 on the weakest – including the least developed and in fragile, crisis and conflict-ridden countries – may be devastating' (European Parliament, 2020). This is an issue that the European Parliament would do well to follow-up on.

The briefing will be book-ended by a conclusion that sums up main findings, puts forward some main points for discussion and discusses the degree to which the Strategy is able to consider the inter-related nature of the Strategy's main pillars, as questions concerning governance and security also have important ramifications for development, humanitarian aid, climate change together with trade and investment – and *vice versa*.

The context: EU and Africa

Much has changed since the creation of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy in 2007. The developing world has been changing fast. Development policies and practices are also transforming, albeit at a slower pace. The divide between emerging economies and 'fragile states' is increasing. This is also the case in Africa, where a process of economic and political bifurcation is taking place. While parts of Africa are in the process of growing out of underdevelopment, reflected in increasing income per capita as well as political stability, other countries are falling behind. Some countries also seem to degenerate into permanent conflict zones. These are the fragile states of Africa, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia and

countries located in the Sahel, characterised by weak and illegitimate governments, little state capacity, low levels of institutional autonomy together with numerous violent conflicts and insurgencies. The challenges facing by these countries are further exacerbated by rapid population growth and immense vulnerability to climate change effects (Bøås and Fjeldstad, 2020). These countries will be extremely vulnerable to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

This situation appears like a far cry from what we find in the more effectively governed parts of the continent, where governments have started to crack the code of state-building, by not only having a relatively steadfast monopoly on the use of violence, but also more systematic means of revenue collection by developing systems for taxing enterprises and ordinary citizens. Although this picture captures only the broad development trajectory of contemporary Africa, what we are currently witnessing is the dual face of state-building. The features of these two broad groups of African countries are different, but what unites them is a similar challenge of state-building in its most basic form by facilitating (Bøås and Fjeldstad, 2020):

- the enablement of legitimate and firm control by the government on the monopoly of coercion,
- the ability to collect revenue needed to maintain state stability, and
- the gradual increase of state legitimacy through the establishment of sustainable social contracts between the state and its citizens.

Regarding more fragile African states, the question is how to start this process. In the more effectively governed countries on the African continent the challenge is how to maintain the current level of success which will be sufficient to generate an adequate momentum to restrain possible backlashes. In both cases, Africa needs external support and partnerships, and the current COVID-19 pandemic will make this even more needed. The EU is in an ideal position to be Africa's preferred partner for trade, development and security, but this is a position that will not come automatically, as Africa's increasing economic potential is attracting interest from many players on the global scene. This is most evident with regard to the parts of Africa that are experiencing economic growth, but a similar trend of actor proliferation can also be witnessed in niche security markets (The Economist, 2019). One example is Russia's approach in the Central African Republic that includes barter arrangements as well as the presence of the Wagner group (a private Russian security company with close links to the state) (Hauer, 2018; Cafiero, 2020).

The Commission addressed this aspect in its most recent communication to the European Parliament and the Council (see European Commission, 2020a). The EU should certainly be in a privileged position as Africa's largest trade and investment partner. In 2018, total trade in goods between the 27 EU member states and Africa was worth EUR 235 billion. This represents 32 % of Africa's total and it compares favourably both to EUR 125 billion for China (17 % of Africa's total) and EUR 46 billion for the United States of America (USA) (6 % of Africa's total). EU Member states are also the most important source of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) to Africa. In 2017, they had FDI stock in Africa worth EUR 222 billion – more than five times either the USA (EUR 42 billion) or China (EUR 38 billion). The EU is also manoeuvring to become the main supporter of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) with EUR 72.5 million to be mobilised by the end of 2020 (European Commission, 2020b).

Concerning the provision of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Africa, the EU and its Member States are also at the forefront. In 2018, they provided EUR 19.6 billion – 46 % of the total which Africa received. With regard to humanitarian assistance, the EU and Member States combine to form Africa's leading donor. Since 2014, the European Commission alone has allocated more than EUR 3.5 billion for humanitarian relief in Africa and the EU is currently preparing its next long-term budget. If the Commission's proposal is accepted, the new EU external funding instrument for the period 2021-2027 would have a global scope, but over 60 % of the funds available would benefit Africa (European Commission, 2020; AU-EU, 2019).

All of this should be advantageous to the EU in continuing to deepen its engagement with Africa in identifying mutual benefits and interests. However, there are also a number of challenges. Africa is not a single country and while what has been communicated so far by the Commission emphasises partnerships, it is mainly in the form of a continent to continent relationship. What this means given the different types of African countries still needs to be defined and operationalised in a context and conflict sensitive manner. In issue-areas such as the transition to a green economy and digital transformations, it is possible to foresee at least a relatively smooth policy dialogue with the more mature, developing African countries. However, in regard to issues-areas such as peace and governance that would include questions concerning multi-party democracy, individual political rights and gender equality, the potential for political differences to come to the fore is much more evident, and AU representatives has already made it clear that they do not need or want to be lectured on European values (see Marks, 2020).

Migration and mobility is clearly another possible contentious issue where interests are not necessarily easily aligned. Africa is the most youthful continent in modern history and while this is a continental trend, it is most dramatically evident in the more fragile states such as Mali and Niger in the Sahel. In Niger, for instance, each woman gives birth to 7.2 children. This extremely high birth-rate could see its population of about 22 million almost triple to 63 million by 2050, while in Mali the comparable figure is 6.23 children per woman which without some sort of checking would bring the current Malian population of approximately 18 million towards and possibly above 50 million as we approach 2050. The crucial question is what will be the livelihood of over 60 million Nigeriens and 50 million Malians? What jobs will be available? Will there be enough fertile land available to feed this population? These are the crucial questions and in this regard, it is not easy to find any answers or even references in the Commission's current communications. Nonetheless, it is certainly evident that this will be a defining issue not only for Africa, but equally for the future of EU-African relations. Managed migration and mobility between Europe and Africa will never be of the magnitude needed to have much effect on the demographic realities that will materialise, and a global economic recession caused by COVID-19 could lead to new waves of migrants heading north towards Europe.

Political dialogue: governance, peace and security as well as migration

The EU is still the preferred development partner for most African countries. Despite the much hyped growth in China-Africa relations and the fact that countries from other world regions have either shown a greater interest in Africa (e.g. India and other Asian countries) or have returned to the continent (e.g. Russia), the EU and Member States are still Africa's main donors and trading partners.

China's increased role in Africa has been heavily discussed over the last decades. However, it is important to keep in mind that this relationship is not entirely new. China is a long-established diplomatic partner with several African countries; a relationship that in some cases dates to African struggles for independence or was cemented just thereafter. China is not a completely new actor on the African continent. What was new was how China's role changed with the growth of the Chinese economy. The new strength of the Chinese economy and its need for natural resources to sustain its growth propelled China into a new role as leading investor in Africa. What China wants in Africa is, therefore, not so different from what other geopolitical actors are in search of (see also Hanauer and Morris, 2014):

- Access to natural resources, particularly oil and gas. Africa has become China's second largest source of crude oil, and Angola is its third largest supplier.
- Markets for Chinese goods, increasingly important, but this has also become a controversial issue as China has flooded some African markets with cheap products, leaving national producers without much of a market.
- Political allies in world affairs, in the UN system and elsewhere.

- Global stability: China wants stability and has increasingly come to see African conflicts as a potential threat to its economic interests in the word stability. This is one important reason which explains why Africa has increased its contributions to UN peacekeeping in Africa and to the AU.

As such, there should not be much of a mystery to China's involvement in Africa. It is yet another world power that attempts to increase its access to natural resources, market shares and political influence on the continent. However, China is attempting something really difficult: to combine an almost unprecedented commercial diplomacy with its political rhetoric of non-intervention (see Albert, 2017; Wu, Alden and Staden, 2018). China's claim of being another type of donor – a donor that provides aid without any conditionalities – may have won China some new government allies. However, the power imbalance that emerges in political and economic relations between relatively small African economies and China is increasingly recognised on the African continent as a challenge for African governments. China is also increasingly experiencing an exposition to the same criticism as other large external players in Africa. Political opponents do not see the Chinese principle of non-intervention at work, but Chinese aid and loans that arrives timely to support a government that is becoming unpopular. Civil society groups have become critical of China's influence over regimes that they believe are turning authoritarian, and labour unions complain about Chinese companies that use imported Chinese labour and Chinese managers that do not respect African workers' rights, leading at time to a criticism of China being just another exploitative neo-colonial actor, albeit without a colonial past. Thus, the new EU strategy and approach should take into account that (1) China will remain a large and influential actor in Africa, but (2) China is increasingly seen as and behaving like any other world power that seeks influence, resources and market share.

Recently, there have been some concerns that the COVID-19 outbreak would open up new spaces for Chinese influence in Africa. It is correct that China has stepped up its health diplomacy in Africa, creating online resources to share its experience, donating protective masks and testing equipment. The Chinese billionaire Jack Ma has also distributed 20 000 testing kits and 1 000 protective suits to each of the 54 states in Africa. Thus, as the United States is struggling to come to terms with the outbreak and Europe itself is hit very hard, it may seem that China has found another angle to increase its influence. However, this is far more complicated. In Africa as well, China is vulnerable to the criticism that its own negligence and censorship contributed to making COVID-19 a pandemic (Procopia, 2020). Claims are emerging that equipment sent from China are second hand, defect or counterfeit. This plays into popular pre-existing sentiments among the African population concerning the general quality of Chinese goods sold in Africa. Thus, in some countries like Ethiopia, with a visible Chinese presence, the popular rumour mill is working overtime with narratives about COVID-19 having been brought to the country by the Chinese (see Kelly, 2020). This is, of course, unfair, but all these elements show that China met difficulties in its attempts to step up its health diplomacy to gain more influence in Africa, and some of these difficulties cannot be easily overturned. China's current health diplomacy in Africa should be followed carefully and analysed, but the European Parliament should not jump to conclusions on this issue already. Rather, the European Parliament should consider how the Union could support African initiatives. It is true that African health systems are weak, with a limited capacity to deal with a pandemic: hospitals are few, the number of doctors per 100 000 citizens is low, and there are few intensive care units equipped to deal with lower respiratory tract infections. However, with the establishment in 2017 of the AU's Centre for Disease Control (CDC), the continent is institutionally more equipped to deal with a situation like COVID-19 than in the past. Strengthening the capacity of the AU's CDC is a pertinent issue that the European Parliament should support as a part of EU's approach to COVID-19 in Africa.

This suggests that while China in Africa may be a challenge to the EU, it is not an essential threat as there is a solid foundation for the deepening of EU-Africa relations. This is also the case in potentially more controversial fields such as governance, peace and security along with migration. However, this is a political dialogue that will be extremely demanding. Initially, the EU's norm-based external policies that at least rhetorically tend to emphasise universal values lead to a feeling among several governments in

Africa's more mature developing countries that the EU and Europeans have a tendency to lecture them (Omolo, 2019). If the EU is serious in its wishes for a partnership approach to Africa, it needs to find a way of balancing its norm-based approach with the pragmatism of a mutual partnership where even difficult issues can be discussed frankly without threatening the very basis of the relationship. In that case, the role of the European Parliament's inter-parliamentarian delegations for relations with African countries could be strengthened, and in particular the Delegation for Relations with the Pan-African Parliament.

The EU and Member States must be prepared to deal with African counterparts who rightly point out that they represent some of the fastest growing economies in the world with an equally rapidly rising middle class. This means that parts of Africa are no longer of interest to the world merely as a place to secure raw materials and sell cheap consumer goods. It is also increasingly becoming an attractive market for higher value-added products (Bright and Hruby, 2015). For several African countries ODA is of much less importance than it used to be (AfDB, 2017) and this in combination with the new interests in African markets has clearly improved the bargaining position *vis-à-vis* external actors, the EU and Member States included. This is one side of the external coin representing the bifurcation of development in Africa to which the EU and Member States' needs to show sufficient sensitivity.

The other side of this coin concerns fragile African states that represent important development potential, but also security partners for the EU. Countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger are some of the poorest and weakest states in the world. The fragility of these states is associated (to varying degrees) with instability, chronic violence, humanitarian crises and large-scale migration or displacement. As the key provider of ODA, humanitarian assistance and missions which are supposed to increase resilience to conflict, this confronts the EU with huge challenges. The lack of an institutional response capacity in these countries makes it difficult for EU interventions to succeed. This is obvious in the case of Mali and points to what we may call the 'fragility dilemma' (Bøås, 2019). This dilemma manifests itself in two different, but related ways.

Firstly, a state such as Mali is in desperate need of international assistance. However, it will be difficult to make traditional donor assistance work effectively there. The institutional and administrative response capacity is low, which means that there is only so much external aid that these countries can effectively absorb. Secondly, given that these countries are in such severe need of external assistance, one could be forgiven for thinking that an important donor such as the EU should have considerable influence there; but that is not necessarily the case. This is the fragility dilemma's other dimension. For example, in Mali most donors quickly become frustrated with the government and government leaders are often heavily criticised by members of the donor community for incompetence, mismanagement and their toleration of corruption. However, this does not necessarily lead to anything more than vocal criticism, simply because the donors see no real alternative to the regime in power. What this means in effect is that being defined as a 'fragile' state can be a bargaining asset when dealing with international donors, if they see no clear and credible alternative to those in power and position (see also Bøås, 2019). Handling the issue of fragile states in the Sahel poses a tremendous challenge for the EU as it seeks partnerships for peace and governance. Furthermore, this will also impact on its effectiveness in achieving partnerships on migration and mobility, as the most frequently used transit-migration routes towards Europe cross through the Sahel.

2 Security

The security situation in Africa illustrates the bifurcation of development that is taking place on the continent. Parts of Africa have become much more peaceful. Long-lasting civil wars such as the one in Angola have come to a conclusion. The Mano River Basin conflict zone that almost ripped apart small coastal West African countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone and also threatened to spill over into Ivory Coast and Guinea is a thing of the past (Bøås, 2015). While DRC has managed transition through the ballot-box with the loss of former President Kabila's favourite and the coming into power of opposition leader Felix Tshisekedi on 24 January 2019, the December 2018 presidential election was controversial. Martin Fayula was seen by many observers as the real election winner and as a result eastern provinces such as North Kivu continue to be 'powder-kegs' (UN News, 2019). Somalia is also still in a situation of insecurity and political precarity that constitutes a common security challenge for neighbouring countries, and for the AU and EU (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The crucial role of the Somali conflict as a wider security predicament was pointed by Council Conclusions on the Horn of Africa (see Council of the European Union, 2011) and this remains valid today.

However, the new conflict zone of Africa is to be found among the administratively weak and politically fragile states of the Sahel (Bøås, 2017, 2018, 2019). The Sahel confronts EU policymakers with a whole range of serious challenges: fragile states, poverty, refugees and migrants, Transnational Organised Crime (TOC) and jihadist insurgencies (Bøås, 2019) and it has been somewhat of laboratory for EU crisis response (see Bøås and Rieker, 2019). The question of state stability in the Sahel is, therefore, more prominent on the international agenda than it has ever been, with the magnitude of international assistance and interventions in various forms at an unprecedented level. The Sahel is therefore not only a valid case it itself, but it also has ramifications for EU operations in the field of security elsewhere in Africa.

While this situation is most evident in Mali, increased international attention and subsequent efforts by way of military and security approaches to crisis prevention are also present elsewhere in the Sahel. In Mali, the conflict that erupted in 2012 led to military interventions by France (first Operation Serval and later Barkhane), the African Union (AFISMA) and the United Nations (MINUSMA). These various international initiatives have also been supported by the deployment of an EU police-force and rule of law mission (EUCAP-Sahel) as well as an EU military training mission in Mali (EUTM). Only EUCAP-Sahel alone will spend over EUR 130 million in Mali and Niger between 2018 and 2021 (European Commission, 2019; EUCAP Sahel Niger, 2019). Despite all these efforts, the situation on the ground has gone from bad to worse. The conflict has spilled over from Northern Mali both to the centre of the country and over the border to Burkina Faso. Consequently, the EU and other concerned members of the international community fear a spill-over to other neighbouring countries such as Niger.

This is an unprecedented and unwanted turn in the EU/Sahel relationship. Historically, the EU did not have to pay that much political attention to this region. The EU's connection was largely defined as a traditional donor-recipient relationship. Politically, the Sahel was seen mainly as a neighbouring area to Europe that could be left to France, the former colonial power, to sort out if needed. This has changed a lot as European concerns for the combined challenge of Jihadi-inspired insurgencies, transnational organised crime (TOC) and transit-migration has pushed the Sahel to the very top of the Union's foreign policy agenda and caused a huge shift in the engagement of the EU and its Member States (Stambøl, 2019). What this new relationship between the EU and the Sahel illustrates is, therefore, how security concerns have also come to determine the formulation and implementation of other EU foreign policies, development assistance included (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2019). This has consequences in that the Union needs to apply a better level of understanding as it seeks to make peace and security a pillar of its partnership with Africa.

Currently, security sector reform (SSR) constitutes the core of EU efforts to assist Sahel countries, to protect and restore state authority and to improve their border management. While the EU as a traditional provider

of ODA and humanitarian assistance has been present in the Sahel for a long time, the new programmes have a much stronger emphasis on SSR than hitherto. There may be good reasons to increase SSR assistance to Mali, Niger and other states in the Sahel. Nonetheless, the EU needs to ask itself not only what the Union as an external stakeholder believes that these countries need, but also what the balance should be between the priorities of external stakeholders such as the EU versus what is most important for the people that live in this region. The EU wants fewer northbound transit-migrants and the elimination of what Europe understands as a potential global terrorist threat, but this may not necessarily be the main priority for inhabitants of the Sahel. The youthful inhabitants of the Sahel (50 % of the Malian population is below the age of 18) are more concerned with the immense pressure that local livelihoods have come under lately and what this means in terms of their aspirations for better lives. The fact that conflict has become worse during the last seven years despite large-scale interventions by the EU, France and the United Nations should suggest a critical rethinking of external interventions that have increasingly taken a narrow security first approach (Bøås, 2018). This is very much needed as what is currently taking place in the Sahel is a multi-dimensional crisis that cannot easily be reduced to the challenge of Jihadi-inspired insurgents and northbound transit migration. This is an issue that needs much more critical reflection as the Union prepares to operationalise its new Africa Strategy. Moreover, it is a process that should start in close consultation with African partners and relevant regional organisations.

Sahel, the EU and regional organisation

The importance of regional organisation and integration is mentioned in the Commission (2020) communication on the new Strategy, but only as means to forward economic integration at regional and continental levels. This is a pity as it represents a failure to recognise that in Africa some of the most important contributions of regional organisations have not been in the field of economic integration (the level of intra-regional African trade is still quite low), but within the field of security (see Franke, 2009). This is, therefore, an issue-area well-suited for improved partnership between the EU, the AU and regional African organisations.

The potential and even need for improved collaboration with regard to regional security is illustrated by the precarious security situation in the Sahel, that is further exacerbated by the almost total absence of any functional regional arrangement that covers all the core Sahel countries. In contrast to the regional war zone that developed in the Mano River Basin during the late nineties, the Sahel has no clear regional body (i.e. ECOWAS), or a clear regional hegemon (i.e. Nigeria). The few regional bodies and communities that do exist are either dysfunctional or are severely hampered in their ability to execute policy by the old rivalry between Algeria and Morocco (Bøås, 2018), a situation unlikely to change in the immediate future.

This is the main reason why the EU encouraged by important Member States as France and Germany are placing considerable emphasis on a new regional arrangement, the G5 Sahel. This new regional body, created in 2014 by the leaders of Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso, will formally work to strengthen regional co-operation on security and development, aiming to identify common projects that focus on infrastructure, food security, agriculture and pastoralism as well as national security – important issues that host some of the root causes of conflict in this region.

External stakeholders in search of a regional framework have expressed considerable interest in the G5 Sahel initiative and it could become a new functional framework for security and development co-operation in the Sahel. However, if this is to take place, external stakeholders such as the EU need to realise that a regional arrangement is rarely more than the sum of the member states and the member states in question here are all relatively weak. Thus, alongside institutional support for the G5 Sahel, state capacity must also be strengthened in the member countries. This is not impossible, but it will be a slow and difficult process, with several setbacks likely. This is evident from the EU and international community engagement in Mali since 2013.

The danger, though, is not only that this process will be rushed by external stakeholders (who want to see swift results on the ground), but also that too much emphasis will be placed on narrow security parameters and far too little on development aspects of the G5 Sahel agenda. The EU seems particularly interested in the development of a police component within the planned G5 military force (Stambøl, 2019). Thus, external stakeholders such as the EU – who will have to bear most of the cost – are mainly interested in the G5 Sahel as an arrangement to put more 'boots on the ground'. Moreover, these 'boots' will be directed mainly toward the external priorities of improved border control, in order to reduce northbound migration flows and combat those defined (by the same external stakeholders) as jihadist terrorists – and thus a threat to global security. That would further contribute to turning the Sahel into yet another front in the global war or terror.

It is in the light of such priorities that we should interpret the pledge of half a billion dollars for a G5 Sahel military force. As Reuters (see Carbonnel and Emmott, 2018) reported from the meeting that took place in Brussels on 23 February 2018: 'The European Union, which believes training local forces will allow it to avoid risking the lives of its own combat troops, doubled its contribution to EUR 116 million'. Accordingly, there is every reason to be concerned that if this goes through, the G5 Sahel contribution will be framed by the same narrow security parameters as other ongoing EU and international community initiatives, at the expense of the G5 Sahel's development agenda, which at least contains some promise of tackling the real root causes of turmoil in the region. The EU pledge of support for the Sahel is thus in fact a pledge of support for European political stability and not necessarily for sustainable investment in a peace, reconciliation and development agenda for the region. This is an issue that the EU needs to rethink and rethink quickly if the goal is to achieve a more genuine partnership with Africa that embraces a larger development and security agenda that, while not ignoring hard security components, places more emphasis on a human security approach to the multidimensional crises that still exist in parts of Africa. This is evident in the chronic conflict zones of Eastern DRC, Somalia and increasingly also in the Sahel. Thus, a certain rethinking of current approaches is needed and the EU should take advantage of the work with the Strategy and link it to ongoing revisions of the Sahel and Horn of Africa strategies. If a new approach is not developed, the fragile, conflict-prone states and regions of Africa could find themselves navigating an increasingly chaotic myriad of international assistance programmes and SSR/military interventions. In such a quagmire, neither the EU as a donor nor the recipient countries would have the experience or know-how to manoeuvre new 'security and development' architecture. The EU should be aware that little is yet known about the (un)intended consequences that so many new policies and programmes could have on the ground in some of the world's most administratively weak and politically fragile states.

3 State-building: governance, democracy and human rights

Few questions have been more debated over recent decades in academia and development policy circles than state-building (see for example, Boone, 2003; Herbst, 1996; Migdal, 1988). Most of this literature has, though, been concerned about questions to do with the monopoly on violence, the issue of controlling borders together with the establishment, effectiveness and legitimacy of the legal system, than with the need for revenues to pay for such public services. The new EU Strategy is unfortunately not an exception. It states that 'Good governance, effective and inclusive economic, social, education and health policies, equal access to basic social services, equal access to fair redistribution of resources, equal access to justice and open and inclusive societies foster peace and security and act as a foundation for jobs and growth, attracting investment' (European Commission, 2020: 12). This may very well be the case, but how do we achieve those objectives.

The EU, as with other international donors, has tended to address this by providing money and resources in the expectation that this will lead to better state institutions and good governance, which will in turn reduce officials' perceived need for predation. However, research shows that such an approach simply does not work very well, particularly in the weakest and politically most fragile countries (Bøås, 2015; Fjeldstad,

2014; Hillbom and Green, 2019). At best, it provides an artificial life-support system that, while preventing outright state collapse, offers no opportunity for sustainable development. Rather, the key, long-overlooked element regarding weak and fragile states is fiscal capacity; that is, the ability to generate and manage government revenue domestically. This is the key to state-building, as the ability to collect the revenue needed to maintain state stability could under the right circumstances gradually increase the state's legitimacy through the establishment of sustainable social contracts between the state and its citizens. Unfortunately, the issue of partnerships for improved fiscal capacity and the establishment of functioning tax regimes is as yet not even mentioned in the Strategy. This is an opportunity missed, as not only are African countries increasingly interested in this issue-area and actively seeking partnerships as well as dialogue with external stakeholders, but it is also no longer a secret that Africa is losing substantial amounts of revenue through tax evasion and avoidance. According to a High-Level report issued by the African Union and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2020), the continent loses EUR 44 billion in illicit financial flows annually. This also includes resources lost due to tax evasion and avoidance efforts by European companies.

Taxation is, therefore, not only an integral part of the governance agenda that the EU seems to ignore in its quest for a new model of partnering with Africa, but it could also become an important pathway towards addressing other items on the governance agenda. It is an issue that African countries are increasingly interested in and they are not looking to China in this regard, but to European countries for assistance and partnership. This is an opportunity the EU should not miss as on an abstract level, the EU and African countries may be 'committed to promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms globally' (European Commission, 2020: 12). However, in the actual, detailed political dialogue on these issues, controversies often occur. While the quality of government – defined as the ability to plan, implement and analyse policy – has improved in most of Africa over the last decade, it does not mean that democracy defined as individual political and human rights has improved equally. Rather, some of the fastest growing economies in Africa seem in the short to middle-term to be developing politically along an alternative trajectory. This trajectory may best be defined as 'electoral authoritarianism', a type of political rule, where elections are held regularly and in line with the constitution. However, whilst there is no open electoral fraud, the entire political system is heavily bent in favour of the incumbent party and often the president.

These regimes grow in confidence due to their: (a) continued ability to rule; (b) impressive economic growth rates, combined with a certain success in delivering on the economic part of the Sustainable Development Indicators; (c) relatively reduced dependence on ODA from the EU; and (d) ability to replace aid from the EU with support from other and less demanding sources (e.g. China). This means that the EU needs to either find new instruments in its toolbox or fine-tune existing ones in order to promote dialogue on human rights and democracy issues. The time that the EU could lecture, dictate and see results from its instructions (if this ever was the case) belongs to a bygone era. With regard to the more mature and stable developing states of Africa, the EU needs to find a strategy of political dialogue that would also be of interest to the regimes of these countries. Addressing taxation and illicit financial flows as a core governance issue of sustained partnership could potentially be an important inroad for the discussion of issues concerning social contracts that would also have to include questions concerning political participation and freedom – in other words the human rights agenda in full. In these processes the European Parliament's Standing Inter-Parliamentarian Delegations for Relations with African Countries and the Delegation for Relations with the Pan-African Parliament could play an important role as it offers a potential for entertaining a frank, but also more informal dialogue.

4 Migration and mobility

The European Commission (2020, 13) rightly points out that 'demographic trends, the aspiration for economic opportunity and political stability, flight from crises and conflicts, and adaptation to climate change and environmental degradation, all means that the levels of migration and forced displacement will continue to pose both challenges and opportunities for our two continents'. Similarly, the Commission is also correct in its argument that well-managed migration and mobility can have a positive impact on countries of origin (for example remittance from the diaspora in third countries), transit (provide employment) and for destination countries (an aging Europe in need of a trained workforce in healthcare and other labour-intensive sectors). The question is how do we achieve results? How do we form a partnership concerning an issue where not only are European-African interests difficult to align, but the topic of migration is also an issue that tends to polarise both Member States and their respective electorates?

This is an issue-area where answers are faint and often amount more to wishful thinking than concrete policies that can be realistically implemented. It may be that the Union would be better served by undertaking a critical examination of existing practices in collaboration and partnership with the AU and concerned AU Member Countries. If so, the Sahel would be the place to start.

Since the 'European refugee crisis' of 2014-2015, policies implemented by the EU and individual Member States in the Sahel have reduced the number of migrants transiting through the region towards Europe. However, the sustainability of this approach should be questioned as it may also increase domestic tensions in politically fragile and administratively weak states, leading to increased pressure on political and social systems that are already struggling to stay afloat. The case of Niger is intriguing in this regard as it has become an integral part of externalising European migration management that has yielded results as the number of transit migrants is significantly reduced, but the same approach may have a number of other unintended consequences.

The EU concern about large-scale migration through the Sahel is not new. It started, albeit modestly, with the Cotonou-process of 2000. In Mali, migration management concerns have been part of the country's relationship with the EU since 2006 (see Lebovich, 2018). Mauritania also received considerable attention from the EU, led by Spain, from 2006 to 2009 as migrants travelled in small boats from the Mauritanian coast to the Canary Islands (see Fuchs, 2006; Bøås, 2017). Thus, neither migration itself nor EU attempts to manage migration in the Sahel are new phenomena. Irregular migration from Africa through the Sahel towards Europe has been taking place for decades during which the numbers of people transiting have waxed and waned.

However, the immense increase in the number of crossings during 2015 and 2016 through the Central Mediterranean Route did represent something new. This is the route that connects the Sahel and North Africa to Italy. According to Frontex (2017), the total number of migrants and refugees arriving on Italian shores and ports were about 40 000 in 2013, whereas this figure climbed sharply to approximately 154 000 in 2015 and peaked at over 181 000 in 2016. For most of the people who travelled the Central Mediterranean Route, Niger and Mali were the preferred transit countries. This was because many of these migrants originate from other ECOWAS member states, and as part of the ECOWAS Treaty, citizens of these member countries have the right to passage through all ECOWAS states. Thus, these citizens should be free to move all the way to the borders of Algeria and Libya. This is a right that the EU in effect has tried to undermine in Niger through encouraging the government in Niamey to introduce a new law on human smuggling.

In Mali, the city of Gao located along the northernmost bend of the Niger River was the main transit hub as it could be reached both by car and by boat, while Agadez emerged as the key transit hub in Niger. Gao had formerly been about as important as Agadez as a transit migration hub, but with the outbreak of

hostilities in Mali during 2012, preferences changed quickly as most migrants and refugees preferred to travel through relatively peaceful Niger rather than taking the risk on the war-affected area of Gao.

Thus, as the EU at least temporarily had succeeded in shutting down the Eastern Mediterranean Route through its agreement with Turkey, the Union started to search for new and innovative ways in which new as well as existing policies and programmes could be utilised to reach a similar sharp reduction in arrivals to Europe along the Central Mediterranean Route. The EU found a solution in the shape of EUCAP-Sahel, the European Trust Fund for Africa, and similar programmes that either already had a focus on security sector reform and improved border management or could be redefined for such a purpose.

This has consequences for the EU (see Stambøl, 2019; Bøås and Rieker, 2019) and for countries in the Sahel that are confronted with an EU, that to a larger extent than previously is pushing a new architecture of migration management as the main issue in its relation with the states of the Sahel. This is well argued and illustrated by scholars such as Brachet (2018), Cassarino (2018), Lebovich (2018), and Frowd (2020), who through detailed empirical analyses have improved our understanding of the changes taking place and how they have affected the relationship between the EU and countries in the Sahel. However, what has happened in the past and is still happening today not only has important ramifications for the EU and its external relations with the states of the Sahel, but may also have huge implications on the ground in the region's politically fragile and administratively weak states. As Julien Brachet (2018) has shown, the transport of migrants has been intimately connected to local economies and livelihoods and disrupting this economic activity will have consequences not just for local populations but may also transform informal migrant facilitating activities to proper transnational crime.

Thus, while the EU has tried to achieve some kind of intervention, in fragile states across the Sahel such as Niger, a transit migration hub like Agadez is transformed into a quasi-European border post. While this strategy has had some success – if success can be measured by fewer migrant arrivals on European shores through the Central Mediterranean Route – this initial success is not necessarily sustainable. The main reason for this is that, as with all other external stakeholders, the EU struggles to find the balance between narrow security concerns and a larger developmental agenda where military security is but one part of a larger equation (Bøås, 2019). In abstract terms, the EU knows what is required: the states of the Sahel need stability, transparency and legitimate institutions that can extract revenue from taxes, fees and duties to deliver economic development, services and make their countries more resilient to climate change effects (see Fjeldstad, Bøås, Bjørkheim and Kvarme, 2018). The EU at least in theory is also aware that its policies in such a fragile political environment as the Sahel should be context and conflict sensitive (Bøås and Rieker, 2019). The problem for the EU is how to achieve this in fragmented, conflict-prone societies where the very idea of the state has eroded, if not completely vanished. This takes place in a situation where the due diligence agenda of 'do no harm' quickly comes into conflict with the European regimes' other key interest, namely to reduce northbound migration as much as possible before these migrants reach Mediterranean shores.

The challenge that this constitutes is also obvious when we consider the track-record of the EU and international community at large in assisting state building efforts in fragile states. More often than not these efforts fall short of achieving their stated objectives and at times even make difficult situations worse, leaving countries on an artificial international life-support system. This may prevent total state collapse, but it certainly does not represent a sustainable path to recovery, stability, reconciliation and development. The EU and international community struggled with this even prior to the refugee and migration management crisis of 2014-2015, but the new and narrower focus thereafter has made it that much harder to imagine other and more sustainable solutions. This suggests that the current approach that seems to give priority to immediate EU interests in the long run may achieve the opposite effect. It would certainly not be without irony, albeit a tragedy to Niger, if an unintended consequence of externalising European

migration management contributed to undermining the stability of the regime that Europe depends upon for this purpose.

Thus, in order to bring about a real break with current practices and find the pathway to a partnership model with Africa that includes managed migration and mobility, the first step must be to conduct a much closer dialogue with the AU, regional organisations like ECOWAS, and relevant AU Member Countries. This must focus on what types of joint interests can be clearly defined in an issue-area that in practice far too frequently brings about a zero-sum game.

5 Conclusion

Africa and Europe exist in close geographic proximity and there are deep historical ties between the two continents. This is a doubled-edged sword for the EU as it is about to transform the Union's relationship with Africa into a partnership model based on a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa. The EU is Africa's most important partner for trade and investment, ODA and humanitarian assistance, but importantly EU Member States also have a history as former colonial masters. This is not a history easily forgotten in Africa and it is repeatedly brought to the fore, as for instance France is currently experiencing during its current military engagement in the Sahel through Operation Barkhane, which is increasingly being met with popular resentment. This is a consequence of local people not seeing any improvement in the security situation, but rather experiencing a deterioration. Similar issues came to the fore when AU representatives stated that they neither needed nor wanted to be lectured on European values. The EU should not drop its normative agenda of human rights, democracy and good governance, but it must be fine-tuned to the context and linked to issues of common interests. This brief has suggested that conversations on tax regimes and social contracts could be a useful vantage point.

As the EU seeks to transform its relationship with Africa, and thereby also Africa's relationship with Europe, it is ever more important that this is based on real dialogue. Dialogue with key African stakeholders such as the AU and important Member Countries, but also internally. EU Member States' interests are not necessarily completely uniform. Individually Member States also have economic and political interests in Africa and African stakeholders are very much aware of this. This means that if the new Strategy is to bear fruit, it must be based on internal EU co-ordination as well as close dialogue with African partners.

As this brief has tried to testify, there is substantial potential to take the EU-Africa relationship to a deeper level of engagement, but there are also several major hurdles that need to be overcome. Some are of such magnitude that it will take time, as interests are not easily aligned, if at all possible, in the short to medium term. The basic situation remains, though, that there are two continents in need of each other. The EU is a trade, investment and development partner that Africa still cannot do without, while the EU needs Africa both as a potential important emerging market and as a source of strategic natural resources. The EU and Africa also need each other in terms of security. The close geographic proximity to the Sahel means that too much trouble in this region will eventually also have ramifications for Europe. The US geopolitical interests lie elsewhere, China has no interest in stepping into this role and Russia can operate only in niche security markets. Accordingly, from an international community's point of view, it will be the EU and Europe that has to take the lead. If the COVID-19 pandemic really starts to spread in Africa, this will be even more the case. Europe and Africa are tied to each other geographically and historically and the outcome of the current pandemic will leave its mark on the EU-Africa relationship also in the field of governance, security and migration. In the best-case scenario, Europe is able to beat back the worst consequences of the virus and the EU, in close collaboration with the AU, regional organisations and African governments, are able to assist Africa to do the same. If this becomes the case, a new stage will be set for an even deeper agenda of inter-continental dialogue, ranging from the difficult issues of migration and security to global governance. In the worst-case scenario, Europe has enough with itself; prolonged struggles to fend off the pandemic in Europe lead to a severe economic recession, skyrocketing unemployment and political

instability. Thus, Africa is left to fend for itself mainly, or seek support elsewhere to combat the pandemic. This is a situation where China will attempt to step forward. This will not be the end of EU-Africa relations, but it will make it different and weaker as such a scenario will leave both continents much weaker than they were when the process of making the new Strategy started. As these processes are unfolding, no answers can be given, but the European Parliament cannot ignore what is going on in its deliberations on the Strategy. Issues and outcomes must be openly debated, and this is a time when Plan A, also needs a Plan B and a Plan C.

However, no matter the outcome of the above, the EU-Africa relationship will move forward. However, as this brief has pointed out, the degree to which the new Strategy will succeed in deepening engagement towards a more mutual partnership will also, independently of the COVID-19 pandemic, very much depend on how well the EU is able to: (a) combine a continent to continent approach with a context-sensitive approach that caters for the diversity that current bifurcation of Africa contributes to – Africa is not a country and the AU is not a co-ordinating body to the degree that EU is; (b) find pragmatic pathways to political dialogue with the more mature and self-confident developing states of Africa – identifying platforms of partnership based on joint interests will serve a norm-based agenda better than being seen as a 'lecture in European values' ; (c) prepare better conflict-sensitive strategies for Africa's more fragile states; and (d) acknowledge that the question of managed migration and mobility will continue to be difficult and controversial while simultaneously critically reviewing current attempts at migration management in the Sahel that may prove unsustainable in the long run. The long-standing relations established by the European Parliament through its delegations with African counterparts could play an important role in the dialogues that will be needed and the European Parliament should actively seek new and innovative ways of deepening its engagement with a wide range of relevant African partners, beyond African parliamentarian counterparts, civil society, but increasingly also business organisations.

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