

Europe and Africa's progress is inextricably linked given the proximity of the two continents, their historical ties, both political and economic, as well as their shared and mutually reinforcing interests. The European Union and Africa decided to establish a strategic partnership in 2007, and their vision was better articulated in the 5th EU-Africa Summit in Abidjan in 2017. This vision now needs to be fleshed out with concrete objectives and goals, and the establishment of implementation and follow-up mechanisms. It is hoped that the forthcoming EU-Africa AU Summit later this year will make those critical decisions and push the EU-Africa Partnership to a new level.

What does Africa expect from the EU-Africa partnership?

1. First and foremost, Africa aspires to boost domestic and European investment in the continent to create jobs and enhance development. It wants Europe to go beyond investment in the extractive industries and invest in manufacturing and infrastructure. Africa has, besides abundant natural resources, one of the youngest and fastest growing populations in the world, and the availability of such a large, adequately trained, and cheaper work force would be attractive for such investment, besides of course providing a huge market.
2. Africa wants open markets for its products in Europe to enhance equitable trade. It wants to encourage and strengthen intra-African trade by making the African Continental Free Trade Area a functioning reality, and aspires to eventually establish a similar free trade area with the EU.
3. Assistance in education and skills training, especially at the higher levels of science, technology, medicine, etc is another key priority for Africa. EU support for strengthening capacity for such training within the continent is a longer-term priority.
4. Violent conflicts have caused and continue to cause destruction and instability in much of the continent limiting access to finance for investment. Peace, security and stability are critical for investor confidence. Africa seeks EU support to enhance African institutional capacity for the peaceful resolution of conflicts without recourse to armed confrontation, and strengthening capacity to address the root causes of conflict.
5. Globally, Africa would want European partnership in protecting its interests and bargaining position with the rest of the world, particularly the superpowers. The need for continued economic, political and social development has demonstrated the weaknesses of our global institutions which are based on the principle of equality of all sovereign states, big and small. The devastating consequences of unbridled competition have however led to widening inequality and devastating violence. Particularly since the end of the Cold War, there has been a growing trend towards unilateralism in those countries that dominated global economic and thus political power, and the weakening of collective instruments such as the United Nations and other international institutions and mechanisms. The theory of equality of unequal states was premised on the belief that powerful countries would recognize and adhere to agreed common principles of collective decision-making has shown its limitations.

We are now facing yet again an increasingly bipolar world with, this time, the US and China being the two dominant competitors, and we are more likely to see competition between them

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growing more acute, threatening to dominate the global scene. Past experience demonstrates that when smaller and weaker states do not have much power to equitably influence collective development, the tendency is for them to push for the formation of regional associations/organizations as happened during the Cold War. This time around, the tendency would most likely be to develop more robust and lasting associations able to defend and enhance common interests. Africa and Europe have a good head start in that process, and their partnership would enhance their joint effectiveness to defend and promote their common interests.

Strategic partnership with Europe would not of course mean that Africa and Europe would not have similar relations with other entities in pursuit of shared interests. Africa has economic ties with China, the US and other continents besides Europe, and it would be in its interest to pursue and strengthen such relations as well. Building robust and holistic relations with Europe however only enhances Africa's overall bargaining capacity.

6. Besides the economic ties, the two regions have common political interests as well. The competition and clash of interest between the superpowers often threatens the interests of all others. Europe and Africa, because of their proximity and complementarity, because of their interest in freer competition and peace and security in their shared spaces, have reasons to closely collaborate. For instance, the Red Sea is an important highway for European trade, and its militarization with the presence of both US and Chinese military bases there can threaten Africa's peace and stability as well as Europe's freedom of navigation. Africa and Europe would thus have a common interest to work for the demilitarization of that zone, and securing freedom of navigation through collective agreement rather than leaving it exposed to the dangers of superpower competition.

Let me conclude by stating the obvious: The above mentioned African priorities in a partnership with Europe are more or less consistent with the EU strategy for Africa. But for any partnership to work and be sustained, it has to be based on mutual interest. What is Europe to gain from an Africa-Europe strategic partnership? I am confident Europe has done that calculation, but it needs to be spelt out, known and understood as fair and beneficial by the citizens of both continents for the partnership to be sustained and flourish. Africa will expect that. Hopefully the discussions that are underfoot in preparation for the next EU-Africa Summit that intends to define the strategy, objectives, goals and mechanisms for an EU-Africa partnership will also take this important aspect into consideration to make the partnership balanced, solid and lasting.



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