The relationship between the European Union and Africa is deeply rooted in history, but has long been limited to the sole issues of trade and development cooperation through the Yaoundé and subsequent Lomé partnership agreements between the EU and the Africa-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) group of states. Since the 1990’s, EU-Africa relations are becoming increasingly politicized and secularized, as was apparent in the two last Lomé agreements and the latest document between the EU and Africa, the Cotonou Agreement, signed in 2000. In addition, the first EU-Africa Summit held in 2000 in Cairo extended the scope of cooperation between both continents by broadening the framework of political cooperation. The EU-Africa Summit in April 2014 marked the last gathering between the two continents. Therefore, it is necessary to take stock of EU-Africa relations following the agreements of the Summit.

From Yaoundé to Cotonou: Setting up Trade Relations between the EU and the ACP

A more institutionalized relationship between Europe and African countries developed especially in the area of trade leaving aside forms of political cooperation as essentially the former colonies were not in favor of a new regime with their former colonial powers. Trade goods between the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries on the one hand and the members of the European Community (later European Union) on the other hand, has been subject to a specific regime as early as in the 1960s, i.e. very soon after most of the ACP countries became independent. From the association agreements of Yaoundé I and II between the European Communities and former French colonies in Africa (1963-1975), throughout the successive ACP-EU Lomé Conventions (1975-2000), unto the recent Partnership Agreement signed in Cotonou (2000), specific trade regimes have been jointly agreed upon by the parties, as part of package including financial aid, and, to varying extents, political dialogue. However, as already indicated, a strategic dimension for the relationship between the EU and Africa was missing until early 2000.

The Joint Africa-EU-Strategy (JAES): Objectives and Priorities

Taking the lessons learnt from the first Africa-Europe Summit in Cairo in 2000, it became obvious that the partnership should be framed in a strategic document comprising the visions and expectations with regard to the relations between the two continents. As a first attempt, the European Commission took the initiative and subsequently the European Council adopted the first EU Strategy for Africa in 2005. This strategy aimed to improve EU relations with Africa and was supposed to be governed by the principles of equality, ownership and partnership. However, directly after the launching in 2005, the strategy was heavily criticized for a lack of African ownership and involvement of Africa in the creation of the strategy. Several African leaders expressed concern that the European Union had not consulted them on the EU Strategy for Africa, and that any strategy should be jointly developed and owned by both Africa and Europe. Their concern was that the EU Strategy for Africa had a European bias (Twyuschik and Sher riff 2009, 2). After a long discussion and major consultations, both EU and AU jointly started to prepare a new strategy that would adjust the deficiency of the earlier one. Both sides committed themselves to a cultural shift in their relations, new ways of relating to and engaging each other in the world (Mangala 2013, 23).

In December 2007, the second Africa-EU Summit took place in Lisbon adopting a landmark document “the Africa EU Strategic Partnership. A Joint Africa-EU Strategy” (JAES). The objective of the JAES and its first Action Plan (2008-2010) is the establishment of a much more overtly political relationship than had been the case through Lomé, Cotonou, or the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Bach 2011: 40). The JAES is a vision for a long-term relationship between Africa and Europe in which the two should come together in a shared framework for stronger collaboration on a new strategic level. This shall include peacekeeping and established thematic partnerships between the two organizations.

The stated aim of the strategy is as follows: “The purpose of this Joint Strategy is to take the Africa-EU relationship to a new, strategic level with a strengthened political partnership and enhanced cooperation at all levels. The partnership will be based on a Euro-African consensus on values, common interests and common strategic objectives. This partnership should strive to bridge the development divide between Africa and Europe through the strengthening of economic cooperation and the promotion of sustainable development in both continents, living side by side in peace, security, prosperity, solidarity and human dignity.” (JAES 2007, 2).

The Joint Africa- EU Strategy identifies four main objectives of the long-term strategic partnership:

i) to reinforce and elevate the Africa-EU political partnership to address issues of common concern (peace and security, migration and development, and a clean environment); ii) to strengthen and promote peace, security, democratic governance and human rights, fundamental freedoms, gender equality, sustainable economic de-
velopment, including industrialisation, and regional and continental development in Africa, and to ensure that all MDGs are met in all African countries by the year 2015; ii) to jointly promote and sustain a system of effective multilateralism, with strong, representative institutions, and the reform of the UN system and other key international institutions, and to address global challenges and common concerns; iv) to facilitate and promote a broad-based and wide-rang-
ing people-centered partnership which should involve nonstate actors in order to create conditions to enable them to play an active role in development, democracy building, conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

To meet these objectives the strategy aimed to guide the implementation of the following ‘strategic priorities’:

1. Peace and security: Promoting a safer world, e.g., through strengthening the AU’s role in conflict prevention, management, resolution and peace building. Both, the AU and EU share the same security challenges, such as international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and organised crime as well as new challenges, such as climate change and environmental degradation. Therefore, both organizations have to work together and seek to promote multilateral, regional and national instruments by exchanging information, law enforcement and institutional capacity building and judicial cooperation. Both will also join forces for contributing to lasting solutions for crises and conflicts in other parts of the world (JAES 2007, 4-7).

2. Governance and human rights: Upholding our values and principles. The promotion of democratic governance and human rights is at the core of the Africa-EU dialogue and partnership. Political and economic governance should be strengthened. Africa and the EU will also work together on a global level and international fora, including in the UN Human Rights Council, for the promotion and protection of human rights (JAES 2007, 7-9).

3. Trade and regional integration: Raising potential and using opportunities. The improvement of economic governance and the investment climate are essential elements to build Africa’s economic strength and allow Africa to move away from continuous donor support and find its place in global markets. The improvement of Africa’s productive capacities as well as the promotion of fair trade forms the basis. (JAES 2007, 9-11).

4. Key development issues: Accelerating the progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In this section, agreement was reached that African countries need to sustain economic growth and equitable social development, and both Africa and the EU have to boost their investments, better focus their policies and deliver on the promises made (JAES 2007, 13).

Following the assessment of Ölund, the goal of the strategy is long-term, but to facilitate its implementation, short-term action plans are developed to specify what should be done in between summits. Yearly progress reports are also conducted by the European Commission and the Secretariat of the Council and the African Union Commission (Ölund 2012, 18). The operational plan is based on eight partnerships approved by both partners. These are:

- Peace and security;
- Democratic governance and human rights;
- Trade, regional integration and infrastructure;
- The Millennium Development Goals;
- Energy;
- Climate change;
- Migration, mobility and employment;
- Science, information society and space. (Ibid)

However, the JAES did not fully meet its expectations. It failed to transform EU-Africa relations along the lines of its stated goals of a partnership of equals going beyond institutions, but established a framework for new forms of cooperation that marks rather a step than a great leap forward in EU-Africa relations (Sherriff and Kotsopoulos 2013, 313).

**The EU-Africa Summit 2014**

To reflect the importance of their partnership, the JAES calls for the organization of EU-Africa Summits of Heads of States and Governments every three years alternatively in Africa and the EU. These Summits should take stock of the progress made the implementation of commitments made and provide political guidance for further work. In the period between the Summits, leaders of major EU and AU institutions should meet on a regular basis to review progress and provide political guidance to the partnership (JAES 2007, 21). The fourth and most recent EU-Africa Summit took place in Brussels on 2-3 April 2014 to discuss the future relationship between the EU and Africa relations and to foster the cooperation under the general theme of “Investing in People, Prosperity and Peace”. The conditions in the forefront of the Summit were not the most favorable ones as the European side was occupied with the consequences of the economic and financial crisis and thus many European stated did not consider Africa as a key priority. Furthermore, it was immediately before the elections to the European Parliament and thus the forming of a new EU leadership. The Summit produced three documents, i.e. a political declaration, a roadmap for 2014-2017, and a separate declaration on migration. In general, the Summit marked a change in relations between Africa and Europe. The main rationale behind the summit underlined the intention to change the continental narrative away from crisis management and a donor/recipient relationship towards economic development and to put the partnership on a firmer and more equal footing (Suutarinen and Benlloch 2014: 1).

The Summit was well attended on the European side as well as on the African except the withdrawal of South Africa’s Jacob Zuma and the non-issuing of a visa for the wife of Zimbabwe’s President Robert Mu-
Africa. Emphasis was also put on the issues of migration, mobility and employment. The serious social and human impact of irregular migration should be effectively tackled in a comprehensive way, including by addressing its root causes and among other means by ensuring an effective and concerted return policy between countries of origin, transit and destination (Declaration 2014, §52).

Evaluating the outcomes of the Summit, it becomes obvious that the Summit’s main focus was on peace and security as well as sustainable economic development whereas democracy, human rights and governance played a minor role. Does this mark a shift to new realism in the relationship? It can be witnessed that Africa-EU relations can more easily be based on key areas of cooperation such as peace and security but in new forms of cooperation among equals, such as economic interests. Fears were expressed by some that the summit could be a “missed opportunity” by overly focusing on these economic issues in the partnership and avoiding discussion on the sensitive political issues. However, it was felt that both the declaration and the new roadmap make ample reference to the governance, democracy and human rights agenda and that these essential elements in the partnership will not be downgraded in the hierarchy of priorities. The summit emphasized the strategic and interest-driven nature of the partnership by focusing primarily on the peace and security and economic components of the partnership. However, what really counts at the end of the day are concrete results in key areas that positively affect both continents.

Which future for the EU-Africa relations?

Since the end of the Cold War, Europe has been the major and almost exclusive partner for Africa. This exclusivity is now challenged by the emergence of new global players, such as China, Brazil, India that are becoming more and more interested in setting up economic relations with Africa.

Regarding prosperity, both sides agreed on policies, together with social partners, that will create jobs and stimulate environmentally sound, inclusive, sustainable and long-term growth on both continents (Declaration 2014, §23). The Summit stressed the importance of good governance at the highest level and of a conducive international environment including the international economic and financial institutions as elements contributing to the achievement of sustained and inclusive development and economic growth. Both sides are determined to adopt, in Paris in 2015, a fair, equitable and legally binding Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Special attention was paid to the need to improve the business climate in order to make it favorable for attracting internal and foreign investors and for existing businesses, including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which have a particularly vital role in job creation (Declaration 2014, §35). Moreover, the EU and concerned North African countries are also committed to continue bilateral negotiations for Deep and Comprehensive Free-Trade Areas (Declaration 2014, §41). Concluding the chapter on prosperity, it was agreed that it is time to shift the relationship from aid to trade and investment as agents of growth, jobs and poverty reduction (Declaration 2014, §43).

On the third main topic, people, human rights were highly put on the agenda in the forefront of the African Human Rights Year in 2016. Both sides committed to pursue their efforts towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 and underlined the need for a coherent approach which embraces the three dimensions of sustainable development – social, economic and environmental – in a more balanced and integrated manner, based on peace and security, and demographic, responsive and accountable institutions (Declaration 2014, §47). The Summit also stressed the need for higher education for development and called for the promotion of student exchange programs between the two continents and within the Commonwealth and Defence Policy (CSDP) by using its comprehensive approach and by considering the lessons learnt out of the various operations in the framework of CSDP in Mali, Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and the Central African Republic (Declaration 2014, §12). Furthermore, there was agreement on jointly combating security challenges, such as international terrorism, organized crime and the proliferation of WMD, but also non-traditional challenges, such as climate change, water, energy security and cyber security. Maritime safety and security including piracy were also high on the agenda.

The Summit itself underlined in its declaration the commitment by both sides to the objectives of the JAES and called for a new momentum for the partnership (Declaration 2014, §2). It acknowledged that Africa has achieved significant progress in democracy, governance and human rights which however remains to be consolidated (Declaration 2014, §4) and stated that both continents are still facing huge challenges. However, people should remain at the heart of partnership as it was stated in the general theme of the Summit (Declaration, §7).

With regard to peace and security, the Summit underlined the necessity of both as essential prerequisites for development and prosperity and both parties confirmed their commitment to peace and security on both our continents in conformity with the aims and principles of the United Nations Charter. The Europeans committed themselves to continue their efforts to enhance African capacities in the field of peace and security through the range of means of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) by using its comprehensive approach and by considering the lessons learnt out of the various operations in the framework of CSDP in Mali, Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and the Central African Republic (Declaration 2014, §12). Furthermore, there was agreement on jointly combating security challenges, such as international terrorism, organized crime and the proliferation of WMD, but also non-traditional challenges, such as climate change, water, energy security and cyber security. Maritime safety and security including piracy were also high on the agenda.
Furthermore, because of the economic and financial crisis in Europe, the EU and its member states are inward looking and seem to neglect its partnership with Africa.

Is Europe losing its prime position with regard to Africa? Without a doubt, the relationship between the two continents has also become more complex in the light of the emergence of key players besides the EU who are expanding their economic links with the African continent and the individual African countries. However, the EU and Africa share a common agenda and especially in the area of peace and security there is broad consensus on the ultimate objectives; both entities believe that Africa itself should have the capacity to ensure the security of the continent and the EU shall provide support and assist the African partners in building up their security capacities. However, on a political level also the recent EU-AU Summit in 2014 has clearly shown that cooperation between the EU and Africa is mainly based on economic centered topics and thus leaving the pressing security issues a subordinated position although the key challenges in the relationship include peace and security, terrorism, migration and drugs-trafficking.

Therefore, the question needs to be raised whether the European side has been able to fully understand Africa’s priorities and interests. The EU’s stated ambition to treat the African continent as a strategic partner coexist with policy orientations that negate those objectives as those contribute to the treatment of sub-Saharan Africa as a ‘distant abroad’ of Europe. This repeatedly points to the need for the EU and its member states to clarify and co-ordinate what European side needs to keep close links to Africa regarding issues such as migration, trade and global governance questions. From an institutional perspective, it would be particularly important to give consideration to the reactivation of the joint troika meetings and sectoral ministerial meetings as well as regular joint expert/senior officials meetings. As Barrios and Vines therefore rightly conclude: “This 4th EU-Africa summit has, overall, done no harm and probably some good, and should be seen as a stepping stone on the path to a deeper, more comprehensive bilateral relationship” (Barrios and Vines 2014, 2). In order to achieve this goal, more pragmatism and stronger coherence on the European side might help to move the Africa-EU partnership into a more strategic relationship of two natural partners.

In fact, a more honest discussion of the core interests of both continents is needed. In a multi-polar world where there is an increasing interest to engage with a more attractive African partner, the EU should clearly stress its value added vis-à-vis other potential partners. Europe and Africa still do need each other. Africa on the one hand partly depends on Europe for development, FDI, trade and investment, capacity-building, peace and security and building institutional resilience. Europe on the other hand needs to keep close links to Africa regarding issues such as migration, trade and global governance questions.

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