



Belgian platform

Seminar report

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The Europe-Africa strategy: between vision and reality

Organised by:

The Cotonou Working Group from CONCORD, the European Confederation of Development and Relief NGOs, and the Belgian National Centre for Development Cooperation (CNCD) on behalf of the Belgian platform

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Introduction

The seminar was introduced by Mr **G rard Karlshausen**, European affairs officer with the CNCD and President of CONCORD's Belgian platform

Goals of the seminar

Following the communication by the Commission, Parliament and Council on the Europe-Africa strategy, there has been a great deal of reflection within CONCORD around a number of fundamental issues to do with relations between the EU and Africa.

Our first question is: why the need now for a Europe-Africa strategy, when the EU already has two major agreements with Africa – the MEDA policy on North Africa and, above all, the Cotonou Agreement, which concerns all the sub-Saharan countries (with South Africa, which has a rather special status). What is the point of this EU strategy for Africa? What are, in fact, its political intentions? If we compare it with these agreements, what is gained and what lost by this strategy, which has become the reference framework for all the activities the European Union wishes to conduct with the sub-Saharan countries and with Africa as a whole?

At CONCORD's general assembly last year we held a workshop on this issue, and the idea came up of organising a seminar in Brussels for CONCORD members and other people interested in reflecting on these important issues in the context of a campaign organised by the Austrian NGOs around the European Union presidency. In June, the platform of Austrian NGOs, which is represented here, is going to hold a major conference on this European Union-Africa strategy. To prepare well for this conference, and to feed into it, various proposals emerged for organising workshops in Africa and also in Europe. One has been held in Bratislava, and one in Germany, and we felt that within CONCORD (we were thinking in particular of the Belgian platform), to contribute to this dynamic, it would also be worthwhile spending a day meeting and discussing our critical reactions (both positive and negative) to this European Union strategy on Africa.

The key paper for this reflection is, obviously, the *famous communication* from the Commission to the Council, the Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee, *EU Strategy for Africa: Towards a Euro-African pact to accelerate Africa's development*. There are also other key papers, which we refer to when presenting the workshops you will be taking part in. But there are also other interesting papers at your disposal: the Council's opinion, which sometimes goes farther and is more incisive on certain points in relation to the strategy. And there is a memo we received, which is a plan for implementing the Europe-Africa strategy drawn up at a recent Euro-African meeting in Addis Ababa, containing some really concrete proposals and also some very vague, general ones, which the EU would like to implement in the coming months.

Today's aim is to formulate questions and recommendations on this strategy, which we will compare at the end of the day with the views of the Commission's representatives. These reflections and recommendations will also contribute to the Vienna conference in June.

The workshops

We worked in the following four workshops:

- 1. The political pillar: governance and political dialogue in the strategy**
- 2. The strategy's economic and trade pillar**
- 3. The strategy's social pillar: development assistance and the MDGs**
- 4. The strategy's emerging themes: peace, security and migration**

The first three parts correspond to three relatively distinct parts in the Commission's communication, while the last workshop deals with transverse issues. The workshops highlight a number of issues that already feature in the Cotonou Agreement. So there are several questions we might ask: what are these issues doing in the strategy? What is the point of them? What is affected by them?

I. The issues involved in the EU strategy for Africa

Presented by Ms **Denise Auclair** of CIDSE (International Cooperation for Development and Solidarity) and Caritas Europe.

1. Before the strategy

Relations between the EU and the different regions of Africa existed well before this new EU strategy: the Cotonou Agreement and the MEDA neighbourhood policy on North Africa. It is important to underline that these agreements co-exist with the new strategy.

2. Why a European Union strategy for Africa?

The **goals** of the Europe-Africa strategy consist mainly in achieving the millennium goals (MDGs) and supporting the promotion of development, security and good governance in Africa.

The situation in 2005, which **put the priority on the millennium goals** (MDGs) prompted development officials to meet a need by creating a special strategy for Africa in order to achieve the millennium goals. There was also a need to improve coordination between donors, and with the EU's new member countries, in order to improve consistency and have one single strategy for working together. Furthermore, it is particularly worthwhile having **new partners in dialogue** where the **continental and pan-African** levels will be brought out. With this new entity in Africa, the EU has decided to enter into a dialogue with the African continent.

Although the EU is the primary donor in Africa, and a trading partner, the strategy between the EU and the AU (African Union) remains **not very visible** in Africa. The EU, faced with the Japanese, Chinese and American strategies in Africa, is therefore concerned to promote its own one.

The EU's approach in Africa is based on a "policy mix" which links development with its trade policy, its foreign affairs and security. In this context, a second EU-AU summit is expected in July 2006.

3. How do things stand now?

Following the disclosure of the Commission's papers, the Council's conclusions and the Parliament's report, the final shape of the strategy was approved in December 2005 at the European Council meeting. This attached great importance to the strategy.

Despite the plan for implementing the strategy ("implementation matrix"), the Austrian government feels there is a need to list the priorities for the different elements in the strategy. Furthermore, up to now, no contributions to the strategy have been made by European or African civil society. There is a process for consulting regional bodies in Africa, and the African Union. At government level, the Austrian government, as part of its presidency, will hold a meeting in Vienna with the African ambassadors to present the strategy to them, because there seem have been some communication problems between the AU and African governments. This will be an opportunity to inform them further about the new EU strategy for Africa.

4. What is new in the strategy?

Going beyond the existing agreements, the strategy contains new themes:

- *peace and security*: more support from the EU to the AU in a crisis
- *human rights and governance*: support for the African Peer Review Mechanism at continental level

- *development assistance*: through a 50% increase in assistance. Under the 10th EDF, a special package will be submitted to governments
- *support for economic growth and trade*
- *investment in people*: more dialogue on migration, support for education, etc.

5. The strategy's challenges: several different players and instruments for the same commitments?

To take up the challenges in the strategy, there are different players and instruments. The Council and the Member States, who have their own policies on Africa; the Commission, consisting of DG DEV and RELEX. The latter has several instruments, notably financial ones: the European Development Fund and instruments for development, neighbourhood policy and stability. But we wonder: do all these players share a consensus on implementing the strategy? Civil society also wonders whether the strategy provides convincing ways of tackling the obstacles to development currently hindering Africa. Will it help the development of the poorest people in Africa?

6. Some questions about the priorities in the strategy

- **Security**: what can the strategy do in terms of crises and conflict prevention?
- **Governance**: will the strategy increase the accountability of donors, or citizens?
- **Resources**: the strategy puts the emphasis on aid and aid effectiveness, yet there is no common EU approach to Africa, in particular through debt cancellation – ?
- **Trade**: there is a strong emphasis on infrastructure, production capacity, growth, etc. – ?
- **Social**: a sector that contains elements of the millennium goals for better human development: is it a sector or a final goal? Where are the voices of Africans in the international institutions?

II. The workshops

Workshop 1: The strategy's political pillar: governance and political dialogue

The political pillar affects a number of areas, in particular political dialogue, good governance, respect for human rights, peace consolidation and conflict prevention.

We appreciate the ambition to have a strategy that covers all of Africa through the African institutions. We have some questions about this pillar of the strategy, however, and some proposals to make.

Our questions:

1. Re consistency in political dialogue

How can we have a political dialogue that treats Africa as one entity when we have cooperation agreements that divide the continent into three? For the moment, political dialogue is conducted with a Commissioner, the Development Commissioner, who does not agree with the Commissioner for External Relations. So there are discrepancies between the political dialogue being conducted with North Africa in the context of MEDA, the neighbourhood agreements, and the political dialogue with the ACP countries. How can relations with Africa be handled through a newly thought-out political dialogue when the inevitable effect of the EU's instruments is to chop Africa up into pieces, without responding to this new situation?

2. Re the application of the strategy

How will this strategy be applied? What monitoring will there be, how much transparency, and what role will civil society have? How will thinking on the relationship between the strategy and the existing agreements be reflected in the different political intentions: what financing will there be, and what political activities? For example: having pan-African financing and the policies of Member States.

3. Re political dialogue

What shape will this dialogue take, given the existing agreements and the fact that the strategy does not specify what form it should take? How is it planned to handle difficult cases, such as Zimbabwe?

What is the Commission's definition of the concepts of "governance and good governance"? What do they involve? How will this "governance" be put into practice?

4. Re the present situation

Further to the latest ministerial meeting, and with the Commission's communication on governance and infrastructure expected in July, we would like to know what stage the Commission is now at in relation to governance, aside from the implementation memo. Has the Commission other news, current information...?

Our recommendations:

1. We call for greater involvement by civil society in designing and implementing the strategy.
2. We call for briefing meetings, such as those already taking place under the EPAs.
3. We call for more information for civil society, especially in Africa.

4. We recommend giving greater support to the African Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
5. We call for greater inclusion of civil society in the programming of the 10th EDF.
6. We call on civil society in the North to support civil society in the South more, at the level of implementation and information.
7. We call for greater support for the African Union.
8. We call for greater consistency between the EU's institutions, and governments, and in the EU's general policy on the African Union – in other words, an end to the contradictions that currently exist between the neighbourhood policy (MEDA) and the policy on sub-Saharan Africa.
9. We call for a better policy for development assistance.

Workshop 2: The strategy's economic and trade pillar

Within the framework of this second pillar, the Europe-Africa strategy sets itself the aims of economic growth and the regional interconnection of African trade. The trade liberalisation being promoted, however, is in contradiction with the goal of reducing poverty. There is actually no guarantee of the alleged virtuous circle of economic growth.

Investment does not generally benefit the poorest sectors of the population. The liberalisation of services poses new risks for those living most precariously, in terms of access to vital resources such as water and energy. Major infrastructural projects are liable to reinforce an outward-looking market orientation. Agriculture, for its part, is accorded few concrete proposals. And finally, no new financial mechanisms are identified, which raises the question of the use of existing tools such as the EDF or investment facilities.

Our questions:

1. Re consistency between the pillars

As the strategy is divided up into three pillars, this raises the question of the consistency between them, and how they interact. How does the Commission see this interaction between the different pillars? Between the goals of economic growth and social development, for example, what arbitration of interferences is planned?

2. Re the added value contributed by the strategy

This strategy appears primarily to be a means the European Union is adopting in order to be consistent with itself. What it is is first and foremost a strategy, not a partnership in the true sense. As this type of space is, moreover, already provided under the EPAs, we wonder about the added value contributed by this new strategy, which is primarily a tool for diplomacy rather than cooperation.

3. Re the financing mechanisms

What financial tools are envisaged for implementing the strategy with? If new ones – what are they, and what will they consist of? If, on the other hand, they are tools that are already available (EDF, investment facilities, etc.), how will they be apportioned and what will be the implications of this for the financing of the existing agreements?

4. Re the involvement of social players

What mechanisms are envisaged for involving the social players? Would this not be a good opportunity for improving existing processes for participation by non-State players (NSAs)?

5. Re the new conditionality

The economic performance criteria (sufficient liberalisation) will undoubtedly influence the political choices of the African States. In this regard, it would be particularly worthwhile to consider the experiences of the new Member States. What guarantees, in terms of improving the rights of their population, would be given to African States that agreed to such conditionality?

6. Re the private sector

What integrated plan is envisaged for the development of African entrepreneurship? At the 2006 Business Forum, it would be worth having both vertical integration (within key sectors: agriculture, tourism, etc.) and horizontal integration (between different sectors).

7. Re the role and position of the African Union

Given the AU and EU's unequal appropriations capacity in the negotiating processes (experts, officials and technicians), what aids should be given to the AU? The experience of the new member States could help in devising a system for exchanging experiences for research, training and education.

8. Re infrastructure

The partnership for major infrastructural work raises the question of the awarding of public procurement contracts when the market has been thus liberalised. What guarantees could be given to ensure that the contracts awarded will be of benefit first and foremost to the local population and the vibrancy of the local economy?

The Task Force set up to deal with infrastructure currently consists of the EIB and European operators. The reality is that while in theory all candidates have access to the infrastructure market, in practice only the major operators win the contracts.

In addition, there are still question-marks hanging over environmental issues in relation to the implementation of these major infrastructural works.

Our recommendations:

1. We call for greater consistency between the different pillars of the strategy.
2. The concept of partnership requires the creation of spaces for real dialogue on how to design the strategy.
3. We call for further explanation of the financial tools envisaged for the implementation of the strategy.
4. We call for greater involvement by the social players, so as to have greater transparency in the programming and consultation exercises.
5. We call for the rejection of any new economic conditionality.
6. We ask for the two evaluation processes planned for the end of 2006 (APE and Europe-Africa strategy) to be linked. This would be a good opportunity for rectifying certain inconsistencies and for taking existing evaluations into consideration.
7. The strategy should take more account of informal economies.
8. Observation/training missions for African countries could be envisaged. Generally speaking, Europe-Africa cooperation should be incorporated better into education and research, in the spirit of programmes such as Tempus, for example.
9. We call for inequalities and the environment to be borne in mind when the strategy is being implemented.

Workshop 3: The strategy's social pillar: development assistance and the MDGs

This pillar deals with the relationship between the EU's African strategy, development assistance and the millennium goals (MDGs). To begin with, we need to take into account the links between this strategy and the Cotonou Agreement. In addition, we think the role of civil society should be stressed. The implications for the programming of the 10th EDF also need to be considered.

We would therefore like to see specific references to the commitments made at international conventions and at the major United Nations summits, such as those in Copenhagen and Beijing.

We mainly discussed three topics: the MDGs, conditionality and development assistance. Below are some questions and recommendations that emerged in this workshop.

Our questions

1. Re the millennium goals

Does the strategy add value to the MDGs (in terms of education, infrastructure and health)? Is it a step forwards or backwards?

2. Re conditionality

Does the increase in political conditionality in the strategy not constitute an obstacle to development? We wonder about the impact of this conditionality on development. We think that the EU should not just give Africa financial resources. We think, in fact, that the needs of African countries should instead be discussed with the local communities, the local authorities and the players involved in cooperation.

3. Re development assistance

In terms of aid, what extra does the strategy bring to Africa? What are the implications for development assistance?

Is debt relief taken into account in the strategy? We think that debt relief and debt cancellation should not count as aid, as they do at present.

Our recommendations

1. Programming should be brought into line with African national and regional action plans and the programmes and policies they propose.
2. Concrete mechanisms should be introduced for ensuring the participation of ALL development players and, in particular, special steps should be taken to ensure the participation of marginalised people such as women, children, people with disabilities and the elderly.
3. The EU should promote a spirit of participation and partnership in the practice of cooperation and in the language used.
4. The impact of the conditions imposed by the EU on people (especially the most vulnerable) should be rigorously examined before these conditions are introduced. The EU should commit itself to taking the real needs of the people into account.
5. The strategy should take account of innovations in the financing of assistance, such as taxes on plane tickets, together with new sources of financing which have the advantage of being more predictable and make long-term planning possible. This could help raise awareness of development cooperation among people in the North.
6. The Commission should reaffirm the importance of universal primary education.
7. In secondary and third-level education, the strategy should introduce systems for halting the brain drain.

Workshop 4: The emerging themes: peace, security and migration

Where security and migration are concerned, the first thing to note is that the response given in the strategy is perhaps not the most appropriate one for dealing with genuine concerns and fundamental questions. For example, migration is primarily a development problem – it is about creating the conditions for true development – and not a question of “hard” security. Poverty aggravates insecurity. The hierarchy of priorities is not clear, and we cannot see which one will receive most support and resources.

Two positive aspects were underlined: the recognition of the role of migrants in development; and the fact that the strategy provides the potential for developing a more consistent approach in the field.

Our questions

Two cross-cutting issues – ownership and participation – were also discussed:

1. Re participation by civil society

Participation by civil society is one of the prerequisites for the success of the strategy. The issues of security and migration provide an opportunity to relaunch the debate on civil society's participation, as they are:

- issues that touch closely on people's lives, and have an influence both on the choices made by societies and on development;
- problems common to both the EU and Africa;
- an opportunity to reflect on what the concepts of security and migration really mean.

2. Re a joint strategy

At the moment, the strategy does not answer the questions raised by Africa, being more of a response to European interests. So how could we arrive at a common strategy – what steps are necessary? The strategy will not succeed unless people know about it and contribute to it, and unless there are opportunities for discussing the approaches and the different visions. For example, on migration it is evident that, although it should be a joint strategy, the EU does not propose to change its internal policies. That would mean changing the visa policy, for example, and also redefining the diaspora's place in Europe.

3. Re the risks

The workshop also heard the same “we're fed up” chorus heard at the World Social Forum in Bamako (i.e., fed up with EU policies). This also poses legitimacy problems for the African governments that negotiate with the EU. Might the EU not be undermining its partnership with Africa instead of strengthening it – actually doing the opposite of what it is seeking to achieve?

Our recommendations

1. Migration and security cannot be addressed without the participation of civil society, still less that of the organisations concerned. There needs to be real democratic debate with the people of Europe and Africa.
2. The European Union must prevent these issues from becoming a new conditionality. They may be one of the elements in political dialogue, but priority must always be given to promoting development.

3. The migration and security elements of the strategy must not siphon off resources allocated to development financing.
4. The role of the African diaspora in Europe should be clarified and appreciated: mechanisms should be introduced to allow its genuine participation in the development goals supported by the strategy.
5. On these topics, as on others, the European Union must conduct a debate that really is from the perspective of a Euro-African partnership – in other words, it must also envisage putting its own security and migration policies on the table.

III. Reactions from the European Commission (DG DEV)

The various questions and recommendations emerging from the four workshops were discussed with the Commission members invited for the seminar. We had also invited representatives of the African Union, hoping to hear their point of view, and we regret their absence from the seminar.

Following the plenary session debate between NGOs and the Commission, we received some responses and commitments from the latter. The Commission representatives in charge of this matter were Ms Cecilia Thorfinn and Messrs Rob Rozenberg, Alfonso Pascual and Pieter Bangma.

Summary of the Commission's replies

Two major points recurred throughout the discussions: on the one hand, the fact that the Europe-Africa strategy is not a joint one but rather a European strategy for Africa. At the same time, real participation by civil society is far from assured, even though issues such as governance, security and migration, for example, affect people directly (not forgetting trade and development, which have already been on civil society's agenda for a long time despite the fact that the participation spaces provided for in the Cotonou Agreement, for example, have not been working properly). Added to this is a widespread concern to increase the consistency between the strategy's various elements to promote development, and the consistency between the strategy and existing agreements. In their replies, the Commission representatives often shared participants' questions and attempted to respond to them by mentioning a series of commitments the Commission would like to make:

1. The Commission undertakes to improve its consultation with the pan-African institutions.
2. The Commission undertakes to improve and highlight mutual exchange in its cooperation with Africa - in other words, to improve its capacity to analyse, in particular, governance in the ACP countries, so it can identify more easily the governance-related needs, aims and results sought or achieved by African countries.
3. The Commission would like to play the role of facilitator to get governments to participate: giving timely information that is appropriate to the context.
4. The Commission undertakes to provide further explanations on the financial procedures and instruments.
5. The Commission undertakes to take the review of the EPAs into account.
7. The Commission undertakes to step up political dialogue with its partners.
8. The Commission undertakes to include the diaspora as a source of development potential (e.g., financial transfers by migrants, etc.).
9. The Commission undertakes to agree to participation by civil society on the issue of governance.
10. The Commission undertakes to bear in mind the capacity of civil society and other institutions, in particular when revising the strategy.
11. The Commission undertakes to increase its support for the African Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

1. Reminder of the origins of the strategy

The strategy began in October 2005 with the Michel Plan. Its added value is the pan-African level, which makes it possible to draw up a work plan for the whole of Africa and to improve the country strategy papers.

2. Reviewing the strategy

The Commission explained that it was organising a review of the strategy in December. It added that this would be not just words, but a genuine analysis of how the strategy was being implemented.

At this review, the Commission would make links with other reviews, such as, for example, those of the Cotonou Agreement and the millennium goals (review of financing, whereby 10 million euro a year would be allocated to the continent of Africa). The links would be made with the different aspects of the agreements: as regards consistency and the social, political and economic aspects.

3. Participation by civil society

The Commission feels it is important to give more consideration in the strategy to civil society's contribution. According to its representatives, the Commission would like to invest two million euros to boost this participation. The representatives reminded the seminar, however, that it was not the Commission that had to ensure this cooperation. The Commission had to play the role of facilitator in order for governments to get their own civil societies to take part. They added that modules had been set up to provide information on the procedures for participation and on the financial instruments available.

4. Political dialogue and governance

The Commission would like to improve its political dialogue with its African partners and civil society. It would like to underline mutual exchange in its cooperation with Africa. This means improving its analytical ability, in particular as regards governance in the ACP countries, to enable it to identify more easily the African countries' needs, goals and results where governance is concerned.

The Commission defines governance and good governance as follows: *"the ability of the State to serve its citizens. This ability manifests itself in several ways – in the service component, adopting the policies necessary for the country's development, the component of good management and the transparent management of financial and other resources, and an ability to meet the needs of the people and to be held responsible to its citizens"*.

By governance is meant not conditionality but reform to good governance, which remains a discussion topic for development policy.

5. Consistency

For the Commission, as for NGOs, the question of consistency remains a concern and discussions on it are under way. The Commission would like to increase policy consistency in the various departments of the EU institutions, in governments, etc. It indicated that this included in programming and the political dialogue with its partner governments. In addition, improved consistency entailed giving support to national services and organisations, to boost the effectiveness of cooperation with its partners. The Commission also recognised that African institutions had a similar need to seek consistency at different levels: as regards agriculture, social development, political institutions, gender issues, etc.

6. Financing

The Commission was proposing a policy framework for intervention with reference to the 10th EDF. The aim of this proposal was to facilitate coordination between Member States and the Commission. There would be no special funds for the implementation of this strategy: the largest amounts would come from the country allocations.

7. Implementing the strategy

Moving beyond abstraction, the country strategy papers would make it possible to check whether the strategy had been implemented well and whether it met the needs of African society, for example by solving the problems of migration, combating racism, etc.

8. EU support for the African Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

The Commission recognised the importance of the African ECOSOC and wished to support it further.

9. Links with the existing agreements

In terms of **making links** with the existing agreements, the Commission was taking the review of the EPAs into account in its interim reports and would submit them to the Council on the African strategy. The Commission considered that the reviews should indeed make the links between the strategy's different pillars and aspects by taking consistency on board. It also specified that the next paper to be published on the strategy would contain a more succinct summary than the first memo.

10. Migration and development assistance

A new way of looking at the diaspora had been introduced (by the French, some ten years before) into cooperation with Africa. The idea was to involve the diaspora in the development of their country of origin. There were different projects on this, for example to allow members of the diaspora to go home and teach in schools or universities for a few months and then, when they had returned to Europe, to resume their work there. Other current projects related to the financial transfers made by the diaspora with the support of African and EU governments.

To do this, it would be necessary to negotiate with the African countries where the money would be spent, because it was part of the total national appropriation which should first be considered at this level. This needed to be looked at for each country individually. In West Africa, for example, the ministers for the diaspora were following a very active policy of keeping up links, involving their citizens. Other countries regarded the diaspora as enemies, and would have nothing to do with them. There was no one solution, but the Commission would use this powerful potential for development.

The visa issue was certainly a crucial one. If the diaspora wished to participate in the development of their countries of origin, people must be able to go and come without fear. The Commission would like procedures to be relaxed, but some Member States were resisting strongly.

Conclusion

The UE-Africa strategy is not a substitute for Cotonou or the MEDA agreements. It is an additional instrument, whose effectiveness will have to be judged, as it can try to make up for a number of the deficiencies in these agreements. It must certainly not be a backward step. It puts the emphasis on new debates which did not yet exist at the time when the existing agreements, such as migration, security, etc., were introduced.

We will be able to judge in the coming months, in particular during the programming period of the 10th EDF. We will also be able to judge how well civil society and the institutions can work together and create real spaces for participation in order to make this strategy an instrument with positive results for the development of Africa. In particular, in the coming months we will have to see whether this European strategy for Africa is really going to develop into a joint strategy.

In this context, the Finnish presidency is going to propose a road map for progressing towards a joint strategy. We will see how such a strategy can also involve joint work with civil society – issues such as migration, security, etc. are ones that primarily affect civil society.

The end-of-year review should be coupled with an evaluation of the negotiations on the EPAs and a series of other reviews. In the coming months it will be important to see whether we take this opportunity to ensure that civil society South and North, with adequate resources, have a chance to make of this a joint strategy, reinforcing the spirit of partnership and ownership that are fundamental to agreements such as the Cotonou Agreement.