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"Europe-Africa: the indispensable partnership"

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Europe-Africa: the indispensable partnership

Excellencies, Professors, Students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the dawn of the 21st century, the world is changing under the combined influence of the globalisation of the economy and the "multi-polarisation" of power.

This new multipolar world poses a challenge to the Western world as a whole.

Nowhere is this more true than in Africa.

Africa is evolving and changing more than many other regions of the world.

Africa is once again being courted by all the global powers, with the United States and China leading the way.

It is no longer regarded as a "burden", but as an opportunity, a "new frontier".

My argument before you tonight is the following.

- In today's changing world, Africa has become the playground of a new Great Game;
- It is not just a Great Game about getting access to natural resources;
- It is also about Power politics and competing models of development, notably in relation to the more assertive Chinese foreign policy;

- It is therefore key for Europe to revisit and review its relationship to Africa, not only in relation to development but also in relation to interests and values.
- The strong interdependence between Europe and Africa calls for a new partnership ; what I call "the **indispensable** partnership".

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The renewed interest in the continent of Africa is centred on three sets of challenges: 1/ economic challenges, 2/ strategic and security challenges, and 3/ challenges over power.

1/ Economic challenges:

The *increasing globalisation of the economy* is reflected in the greater than ever determination of the economic powers to access the vast resources of the African continent.

The *new geopolitics of energy and mineral resources* have brought about another "rush" to Africa because the continent has the biggest reserves of base metals and rare minerals which fuel industrial growth and the rapid expansion of new technologies - Africa accounts for 90% of the proven world reserves of platinum, cobalt

and chromium, and more than 60% of reserves of manganese and coltan. And with 12% of the world's oil reserves, Africa has taken on strategic importance in the race for oilfields and in the diversification of the sources of supply

2/ Strategic and security challenges:

Africa has also become a theatre of ***global strategic challenges***, whether they relate to the fight against poverty and its side-effects such as migration or key security issues in relation Islamic terrorism, nuclear proliferation, illegal trafficking or failing states which threaten peace and stability.

As home to large Arab and Muslim communities, Africa – and in particular the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa – is in the firing line of Middle East political and security turmoil and of the stand-off between the jihadist movement and the war on terrorism.

3/ Challenges over power:

The United States is back in force in Africa as part of its "global strategic vision".

The US sees Africa as a means to carry out its energy diversification policy: indeed, within two years, Africa should account for 30% of its oil supply, against 16% at present.

The US is also taking a bigger stake in mining activities in central Africa.

It regards the continent as one of the frontlines in the war on terrorism, which largely explains the creation in February 2007 of a strategic command for Africa, AfriCom, which will become operational in 2008.

Regarding *China*, its foreign policy has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past fifteen years, becoming more assertive in its formulation and global in its remit.

In terms of **power and influence on the international level**, China's ambitions have increased in step with its thirst for resources and raw material and export markets to feed its economic development.

It also claims and looks for legitimacy as a major power and as the main challenger to the US hegemony.

In pursuing these goals, China has been quick to consider Africa as a strategic partner.

Africa-China trade has increased five-fold over five years to stand at more than 50 billion dollars in 2006. The EXIM (Export-Import) Bank, the financial arm of Chinese foreign policy, is planning a portfolio of 20 billion dollars in investment in Africa over the next three years to finance the construction in record time of roads, railways, oil and gas pipelines – infrastructure covering the whole of the continent.

China has now become Africa's number three trading partner before the UK and is now quickly catching up with France and the USA.

Trade and economic ties between China and Africa are backed up by an intense diplomatic and political activity.

In 2006 the FOCAC (the *Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*) brought African and Chinese leaders together for the third time since 2000. Official visits of Chinese leaders in Africa and African leaders in China have now become part of the diplomatic ritual.

China is also seeking to portray itself as a "responsible global actor" in Africa by taking part in United Nations' peacekeeping operations there (1000 Chinese soldiers are deployed in Africa).

More importantly perhaps for our argument, China clearly professes a policy of total non-interference in African political governance and is actively seeking the support of African countries in the UN debates and multilateral processes.

Is all this good or bad for Africa ?

Given Africa's significant needs, the economic rise of China in Africa should certainly be welcome.

By bringing more money, more technical assistance, more investment in critical sectors such as infrastructure, and by buying raw materials, China is contributing significantly to African growth.

Moreover, Chinese assistance is seen by Africans as being cheaper, quicker and less restrictive than the development assistance from traditional donors.

However there is the other side of the coin.

- First and foremost : the Chinese funds flowing to Africa are **business deals** which benefit Chinese enterprises and China's own development interests, notably in respect to natural resources exports to China.

They are loans and therefore potentially a liability for the partner country's future, even though conditions are said to be favourable.

- Secondly, the **“hands-off” approach** China takes, under the principle of non-interference, leaves it in the hands of African governments reaching real development results, with China taking little interest in whether these development outcomes actually benefit the people and help fight poverty.

While openly enthusiastic about Chinese presence in Africa, many African political and economic leaders start to question the purpose of Chinese policies.

There is a growing feeling that the proclaimed "win-win" deal between Africa and China is not always made on fair terms.

There is a growing concern that while Africa is trying to emancipate itself from the Western dependence it

might soon be replaced by a new Chinese neo-colonialism hidden behind the proclaimed "South-South solidarity".

Where does Europe stand in the African "Great Game" and how does it respond to China's rise in Africa ?

Europe occupies a *unique position vis-à-vis Africa*, by virtue of its geography of course, but also by virtue of history which has left us a common multifaceted legacy: there are the languages we share and the common, sometimes painful memory of the colonial period; there are the cultural exchanges; and then there is the role of the diasporas.

Economically, Europe is not only Africa's biggest trading partner but, above all, the biggest importer of African agricultural produce.

Europe accounts for 68% of the value of foreign direct investment in Africa.

But the other unique factor that strengthens these ties is the steadfast support shown by Europe over 50 years as the leading donor of official development assistance, assistance in the form of grants and not loans.

However, *Europe does not appear to be taking advantage of its unique position.*

There are a number of reasons for this.

- There is the *attitude of the Member States* fraught with colonial heritage and the power.
- *Afro-pessimism* is still too prevalent in Europe, not just in the circles of power, but in public opinion too. Africa continues to be regarded as a "problem".
- In counterpoint to this perception is the moralising, charitable approach that ultimately provides a blinkered view of the relationship with Africa.

For their part *the Africans are taking a much more assertive and demanding attitude towards Europeans.*

The Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade, though he has made some very critical and sometimes unjust remarks about Europe, recalled in November 2007 the importance of Europe and Africa's *"forging a common destiny by laying the foundations of a real alliance based on what we share"*.

The truth is that **Europe remains the most valuable partner for Africa.**

- First, the relations that Europe has established with Africa under the ACP Agreement constitute a model of regulated globalisation, based on solidarity and support for economic opening.

- Second, relations between Europe and Africa are not based on the immediate, sectoral interests of traditional power relations.

The EU's approach is unique in that it is a "global soft power" which relies on laws, rules and example both in its approach to development and growth and in its approach to security.

- Third, Europe and Africa need each other and have a common interest in joint action to meet the challenges and seize the opportunities of globalisation.

Europe is better placed than anyone else to help Africa to get exceptional added value from its immense natural resources through an economic and commercial dynamic profitable to both continents and through support for the emergence of local processing companies.

As to Africa, it can always count on a partner which will not drag it into big power rivalries or push it into forms of development that do not correspond to its basic interests.

The challenge facing Europe therefore is to change the nature of its relationship with Africa, to radically reform the partnership between Europe and Africa.

That is what the European Commission started in 2005 when it proposed its strategy for Africa and stated its desire to make Africa one of the top priorities of the EU's external action.

The new Europe-Africa Partnership

There are three main components to the new Europe-Africa partnership which has been cemented last December at the EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon.

- ***One, a renewal of the principles of our relationship*** on the basis of a balanced sharing of responsibility between partners with equal rights and duties.

We must change the donor-recipient patterns of behaviour.

Together, we should be able to engage in a more honest, a more open political dialogue, including on thorny and dividing issues, where each party assumes its responsibilities.

- ***Two, developing our relations around an ambitious, operational agenda.***

The Joint Strategy and Action Plan adopted by the EU and Africa at the Summit embodies this approach.

It proposes:

- *A comprehensive partnership that goes beyond development and which is operational.* Our partnership is backed up by an Action Plan for 2008-2010 structured around eight strategic partnerships):

1. Partnership for Peace and Security
2. Partnership for Democratic Governance and Human Rights
3. Partnership on Trade and Regional Integration
4. Partnership on the Millennium Development Goals
5. Partnership on Energy
6. Partnership on Climate Change
7. Partnership on Migration, Mobility and Employment
8. Partnership on Science, the Information Society and Space

- *A comprehensive partnership that goes beyond institutions* and that includes civil society, the social partners and the private sector).

- *And a comprehensive partnership which enables us to define jointly our common interests and to make a joint case for them in international institutions and frameworks*, giving us greater potential influence.

The other aspect of this outwards projection will be to put Africa more systematically on the agenda of our meetings with the EU Strategic Partners.

Here I am obviously thinking of China, but not exclusively. The last EU-China Summit in November 2007 acknowledged the importance of dialogue and cooperation between China and the EU on Africa.

- ***Three, a new, modern approach to development in Africa.***

Only growth, which produces wealth, can reduce poverty effectively and sustainably and achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Development aid should be a way of supporting African countries' development strategies, not of imposing our charity and our view of development. In other words, Aid is never an end in itself. It should be seen as an investment to support home-grown development.

At the urging of the European Commission, the EU has thoroughly revised and modernised its development policy, of which Africa is the leading beneficiary.

from the quantitative point of view, the EU took an unprecedented decision to allocate 0.56% of its GNP to development aid by 2010 and 0.7% by 2015.

It also pledged that half of the extra €20 billion thus allocated would go to Africa. And we are on track to do this.

Qualitatively, the Commission has mobilised the Member States to make a better ***division of labour*** so as to avoid spreading aid too thinly or leaving "aid orphans". What we need is what I call ***donors' governance***, something which is vital if African countries are to manage development aid efficiently.

Can we speak of effective aid if, for example, in Tanzania there are no fewer than 600 health projects, each with a budget of less than a million euro, most of them to combat HIV/AIDS, whereas this scourge calls for coordinated action?

We clearly have the responsibility to avoid a plethora of different approaches, dispersal of resources and an array of tools and conditions.

The counterpart of this donors' governance is improved *governance on the part of African countries*. Development, poverty reduction and security depend to a great extent on states being able to perform their essential public duties such as providing access to health, education, justice and administration, being able to guarantee and protect individual rights and fundamental freedoms, and manage wealth responsibly and impartially in order to ensure its equitable redistribution.

The European Commission has put governance at the heart of our 10th EDF.

Our objective is to support and encourage states which want to embark on reform.

We offer additional financial resources to those which take this option, resources I have named the “*incentive tranche*”, which totals **€3 billion**.

The Summit of Lisbon and the underpinning joint EU-Africa Strategy have breathed new life and a new spirit of Lisbon is our relationship. It reflects a more mature and modern relationship adapted to our times and the challenges of the 21st Century.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me conclude by stating an important principle and a basic truth: Africans are in the driving seat of their development and African governments are accountable to their people for their development aspirations.

T.E. Lawrence put it very eloquently: "Better to let them do it imperfectly than to do it perfectly yourself, for it is their country, their way, and your time is short."

I thank you for your attention.

(2460 words)