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Peace and security at the heart of the sixth Africa-EU summit on 17-18 February 2022

The international diplomatic agenda has recently been marked by a number of meetings prompted by current events involving tensions and consultations between member States. It is against this background that the sixth African Union (AU)-European Union (EU) Summit was held in Brussels. For two days, nearly 80 African and European Heads of State and Government exchanged views on a variety of subjects related to the strategic partnership between the two continents. The stated objective of this multilateral meeting was "to consolidate a renewed Partnership for solidarity, security, peace and sustainable and sustained economic development and prosperity for our citizens and for our future generations, bringing together our people, regions and organisations".

The topicality of peace and security issues around the world forced the holding of an informal meeting of EU Council leaders on the evolution of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis before the opening of the summit. Moreover, the Brussels meeting opened at a time when a

resurgence of unconstitutional changes as well as attempts at unconstitutional changes of government in Africa is perceptible (Burkina Faso, Guinea Conakry, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Sudan, Chad, Tunisia). Similarly, the resurgence of Islamist terrorism is undermining the stability of the Sahelian States, as well as their relations with their European military partners. Furthermore, security threats are increasingly transnational and complex, such as cross-border crime, cyber-attacks and hybrid attacks, and require global and concerted solutions.

The summit was held against a backdrop of mistrust of European influence in Africa, the desire of African governments to diversify their partnerships, and the diplomatic, military and economic offensives of non-European nations. This is the case of the Russia-Africa relationship revived during the Sochi summit on 23-24 October 2019, but also of the Russian breakthrough in Mali and the Central African Republic; it is also the case of the China-Africa partnership launched in 2000 and which culminated in the 8th forum

on Sino-African cooperation in Dakar on 29 and 30 November 2021; it is likewise the case of the Turkey-Africa relationship expressed at the Istanbul summit on 16 and 18 December 2021.

The joint declaration issued at the end of the recent African Union-European Union meeting in Brussels focuses on a *common vision for 2030*¹. It aims to set the tone for a renewal of relations between the two Unions, with a focus on peace and security cooperation.

Peace and security at the heart of Africa-Europe cooperation.

Throughout the EU-AU summits launched in Cairo in 2000, peace and security has emerged as one of the eight priority areas of action in the joint Africa-Europe strategy. The painful past shared by the Nations of both continents and their neighbourhood makes their geopolitical and strategic postures interrelated. Moreover, the global nature of the security threats posed by terrorism and cross-border crime, especially, heightens their impact on the stability of States and therefore requires an active partnership between these two States groupings.

European assistance is illustrated by the existence in 2022 of ten civilian and military missions and operations in Africa (Libya, Mali, Niger, Central African Republic and Somalia) within the framework of the European Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) as well as a substantial

financial package. Yet in 2020, the EU provided a contribution of €253.6 million to the joint G5 Sahel force to fight terrorism and improve regional security, as well as funding the African Peace Facility (APF) to the tune of €3.5 billion.

Thus, the fifth summit held in Abidjan on 29 and 30 November 2017 had enabled their leaders to reaffirm: "the need to strengthen the relationship between the AU and the EU and agree on the principle of developing, as soon as possible, a framework document that will enable them to strengthen their partnership in peace and security, taking into account the complexity of these threats and the need to address their root causes"².

During the interval between the Abidjan (2017) and Brussels (2022) summits, this desire for convergence of views between Africans and Europeans came up against the evolution of the European Union's philosophy on military assistance. Since 22 March 2021, the APF has been replaced by the new European Peace Facility (EPF). Established in 2004, the APF aimed to strengthen the continent's institutional capacities in the field of peacekeeping and peacemaking. It supported multilateral peace operations led by regional organisations, under the aegis of the African Union. Its activities extended to civilian actions such as the financing of African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) institutions³, mediation assistance and non-operational military activities in support of peace.

¹ Sixth European Union-African Union Summit, Final Declaration: A Shared Vision for 2030, URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/54411/final-declaration-fr.pdf>, accessed on 12/03/2022 at 9:28 pm.

² Fifth African Union - European Union Summit, Declaration: Investing in Youth for Accelerated Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development, URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/54379/33>

[573-pr-sc21052_e - final_decl_5th_au-eu_summit.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/54379/33), accessed on 15/03/2022 at 9:06pm.

³ A. Sarjoh Bah, E. Choge-Nyangoro, S. Dersso, B. Mofya et T. Murithi, The African Peace and Security Architecture : a Handbook, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and African Union (AU), 2014, URL : <http://library.fes.de/pdf>.

The EPF on its part is intended to become a tool through which the European Union will finance military activities of an operational nature which it might either undertake directly or support indirectly. Thus, the EPF will enable the EU to provide military equipment to partners, including lethal equipment, to militarily support a single State or a regional organisation within the framework of bilateral cooperation and to extend its action beyond Africa. With the envisaged increase of the European military assistance budget, the EPF is expected to receive close to EUR 715 million per year. The creation of the EPF also separates the military-operational cooperation competences of the Council of the European Union from the civil cooperation competences of the European Commission.

This philosophical and institutional evolution, for taking place within the framework of intra-European discussions exclusively, provoked reactions within African public opinion⁴. Two aspects in particular are at stake: the centrality of the African Union in the European military assistance system in Africa and the predictability of the European Union's financial commitments to peace operations under the aegis of the African Union. In the first case, the latter could be partially called into question with the implementation of the EPF insofar as this tool opens the way to bilateral or regional actions by EU countries, possibly without the seal of the African Union. In the second case, since 2017 (with the sudden reduction of its financial contribution to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)), there is a fear that the European

Union will unilaterally and unexpectedly reduce its financial commitments, under the pretext of reducing the dependence of these operations on external aid and pushing African countries to become more involved in order to guarantee the viability of these African operations.

The announcement, just a few hours before the opening of the summit, of the withdrawal of the French operations Barkhane and Takuba from Mali heightened security concerns in the Sahel region. Beyond the direct consequences of this withdrawal, uncertainty now surrounds the sustainability of other missions supported by European States in this country plagued by jihadism, notably the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), whose mandate expires on 30 June 2022, and the European Union Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali), whose mandate is due to end in May 2024.

The ambition of this 6th AU-EU summit is therefore to allay the fears raised by recent institutional and operational developments. It is also about renewing and strengthening cooperation on peace and security within the framework of the APSA, and in line with the 2018 AU-EU Memorandum of Understanding on Peace, Security and Governance. This instrument was designed to combat instability, radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism, by addressing the root causes of conflict and tackling the whole conflict cycle through the integrated approach.

Both organizations pledged to pursue their support for African-led peace support operations, and the ongoing discussions on the use of UN-determined contributions for

4 F. Santopinto, " La nouvelle Facilité européenne pour la paix : réactions africaines ", Boutros-Ghali Peacekeeping Observatory, November 2021

UN Security Council authorised operations, as well as the implementation of the African Union human rights compliance framework in this context. They also intend to intensify their security cooperation, including in the field of cyber security, and to keep promoting the rule of law and respect for human rights and international humanitarian law in a multilateral approach.

Consolidating a strategic partnership beyond peace and security in search of tangible results

One of the ideas that emerged persistently since the preparation of the summit is the need to finally achieve tangible results in order to move beyond the "declaratory Euro-African convergence". For the time being, according to the President of the African Union Commission, there is a "real gap between the discursive formulations and the factual, practical and real transformative effects" of this convergence between Europe and Africa⁵. The hierarchy of priorities is thus torn between the needs of Africans, for example, to access funding for the growth of their economies, and the interest of Europeans to ensure that political and ecological models are taken into account in the projects and programmes they support. In fact, the African option is to focus on the effective and efficient implementation of current projects, while the European view

favours the definition of new programmes. The distension of relations between Europe and Africa is aggravated by the divergences on the role of Africa within multilateral bodies and in trade circuits, on international justice and especially on international mobility. Therefore, the promises made in the joint declaration are meant to be reassuring.

With regard to fair and equitable access to vaccines and more broadly to medicines, for example, this summit was an opportunity for the EU to reaffirm its determination to provide Africa with at least 450 million vaccine doses by mid-2022. Taking into account the adverse macroeconomic effects of the Covid-19 crisis mainly on the continent, participants also expressed their support for a common framework for debt relief beyond debt service suspension initiatives. One of the main announcements of the summit was the channelling of half of the investments mobilised by the EU in its "Global Gateway"⁶ strategy to Africa. This investment package of at least €150 billion is intended to support the EU-African Union Joint Vision 2030 and the African Union's Agenda 2063⁷. On the thorny issue of African migration to Europe, Euro-African cooperation in the coming years should focus on finding lasting solutions for asylum seekers, refugees and vulnerable migrants seeking international protection. In addition, the AU-EU-UN Tripartite Task Force⁸ should be re-launched. On the

⁵ Speech of H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat Chairperson of the African Union Commission at the Sixth Africa-European Union Summit. Share: February 17

⁶ The Global Gateway Strategy of the European Commission and the EU High Representative is a new European strategy to develop smart, clean and secure digital, energy and transport links and to strengthen health, education and research systems worldwide. It is the EU's contribution to closing the global investment gap. The

ambition of Team Europe (EU institutions and Member States) is to mobilize up to €300 billion of investment in these sectors between 2021 and 2027

⁷ African Union, Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, URL: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36204-doc-agenda2063_popular_version_fr.pdf accessed on 13/03/2022 at 9:52.am.

⁸ This working group was set up by the AU, EU and UN in 2017 with the aim to rescue and protect the lives of migrants and refugees along the migration routes, particularly in Libya

importance of multilateralism in the current troubled international environment, Europeans and Africans pledged to work more closely together in multilateral fora to "reduce global inequalities, strengthen solidarity, promote international cooperation, fight and mitigate climate change, improve delivery on global public goods".

In conclusion, it appears that the few years that separate us from the next summit will be decisive in assessing the efficiency, sincerity and scope of the Euro-African dialogue. Beyond governments' vision, youth, intellectuals and civil society in Africa expect more from the implementation of the promises made at the Brussels summit.

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