

**A STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP EU-AU.  
A JOINT VISION FOR A COMMON SECURITY**

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### **A strategic partnership EU-AU. A joint vision for a common security**

*In a global context of high complexity, the relationship between Europe and Africa has recently faced some security challenges. Although the EU-Africa or EU-AU summits seek to contribute to strengthening strategic cooperation between organisations, it has not been very successful. This article, based on a documentary analysis and the need to respond to the challenges of the future points to a need to have a joint vision of security problems and seek joint, integrated, and strategic solutions. The biggest challenge for the future of the EU-AU relationship will be to build a genuine strategic partnership and collaborate on a joint vision that contributes to improving the capacity for a joint response to emerging security problems affecting the Euro-African area.*

Keywords: Europe, Africa, strategic cooperation, African Union, European Union, security

### **A parceria estratégica EU-UA. Uma visão conjunta para uma segurança comum**

*Num contexto global de elevada complexidade, a relação entre a Europa e África tem enfrentado, recentemente, alguns desafios securitários. Apesar de as cimeiras EU-Africa ou EU-UA procurarem contribuir para um reforço da cooperação estratégica entre organizações, esta não tem tido grande sucesso. Neste contexto, o artigo, baseado numa análise documental e na necessidade de responder aos desafios do futuro, aponta para uma necessidade de adotarmos uma visão conjunta dos problemas securitários e procurar soluções conjuntas, integradas e estratégicas. O maior desafio para o futuro na relação EU-UA será construir uma verdadeira parceria estratégica e colaborar na adoção de uma visão conjunta que contribua para melhorar a capacidade de resposta integrada aos problemas securitários emergentes que afetam o espaço euro-africano.*

Palavras-chave: Europa, África, cooperação estratégica, União Africana, União Europeia, segurança

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*We will prioritise strengthening the EU-Africa partnership on security and defence in an integrated, comprehensive and coherent approach, particularly in the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea, focusing on capacity-building, in cooperation with the UN and other multilateral organisations.*

Programme for the Portugal's Presidency of the Council of the European Union (1 January to 30 June 2021), 2020, p. 36

Africa and Europe are tied together by history, culture, geography, and languages, and also by a common past, present, and future. Europe and Africa share and promote a community of values, mainly: the respect for human rights, gender balance, freedom, equality, solidarity, justice, the rule of law, and democracy.<sup>1</sup> These common values are presented in the main international agreements and in the constitutive texts of the respective main organisations – the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU).

Since the historic first Africa-EU Summit held in Cairo in 2000,<sup>2</sup> where Portugal had a key role in the organisation (represented at that time by the Prime Minister of Portugal, António Guterres, as President of the European Council, and where our partnership was reinforced through the role of the main institutions with a new and challenging strategic dialogue), considerable changes have taken place on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea.

External global transformations and internal reform procedures have been introduced since then, and efforts have continued on both continents to address conflict resolution and crisis management. At the same time, integration procedures on both continents have accelerated. First, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) has been transformed into the African Union with its socio-economic programme and security changes, and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) created a focus on sustainable development. Second, the European Union has nearly doubled in number of countries, boundaries, and size and started the process of expanding the Union and adjusting this “geographic evolution” (Boidin, 2020).

<sup>1</sup> ACP/EU (2000). Partnership Agreement between the members of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States, of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States, of the other part, signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000. Official Journal L 317 of 15/12/2000, European Union. ACP/EU (2019).

<sup>2</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Africa-EU Summit took place in Cairo (Egypt) on 3-4 April 2000, under the aegis of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the European Union. It was the first meeting at the continental level between European and African leaders. With the adoption of the “Cairo Declaration”, leaders expressed their commitment to come together to give a new strategic dimension to the global partnership between Africa and Europe, in a spirit of equality, respect, alliance, and cooperation. The Africa-EU Strategic Partnership was therefore conceived and formulated at this first meeting and designed to become the formal political channel through which the EU and what will become the AU dialogue and organise their cooperative relations (European Commission, 2022).

Finally, the world has also changed: new international and global challenges have emerged, like terrorism (a major global security concern after the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001) and piracy (more recently), globalisation has speeded up, and the world has become increasingly interdependent, interconnected, interrelated and much more dangerous.

In response to these global changes, cooperation between Africa and the EU has rapidly developed and diversified. Both continents have developed political approaches, strategies, and policy documents to guide their cooperation for the last decades (Carbone, 2020).

However, it is now time for these two neighbours to become strategic partners, with their rich and complex history, to build a new, better, and much stronger partnership that builds on their new identities and renewed institutions, capitalises on the lessons of the past and provides a solid framework for mid/long-term, systematic, strategic, and well-integrated security cooperation. There is now a need for a new phase in the Africa-EU relationship, a new strategic partnership, and a joint Africa-EU strategy as a political vision and roadmap for the future cooperation between the two continents in existing and new areas and places.

This was part of the last summit African Union-European Union where heads of state or government of the member states of both organisations met in Brussels on 17 and 18 February 2022 for the sixth European Union-African Union summit (European Council, 2022a; European Council, 2022b).

EU and AU leaders have set out a sort of joint vision for a renewed partnership. The main goals of the strategic partnership are sustainable and sustained solidarity, security, peace, and economic development, and prosperity for the citizens of the two Unions, bringing together people, regions, and organisations (Amare, 2020).

This new partnership aims to promote common priorities, shared values, and international law, as well as to preserve common public interests and goods. This includes the defence of human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women, the rule of law, actions to preserve the climate, environment, and biodiversity, also sustainable and inclusive economic growth and the fight against inequalities... but does not mean to have a common view and a common approach for the security problems faced at the Euro-Africa region.

## **We need a shared vision to build a better Security Joint Strategy**

The first draft of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES, 2007) was launched at the Africa-EU Summit in Lisbon in 2007 (where Portugal had also a key role in the

negotiations) and sets out the intention of both parties to move beyond a strategic donor/recipient relationship towards mid/long-term cooperation on jointly identified, mutual and complementary interests (Faleg & Palleschi, 2020).

The purpose of the ongoing joint strategy is to take the Africa-EU relationship to a strategic level with a reinforced political partnership and enhanced cooperation in all main domains. The partnership is based on a Euro-African general consensus on values, shared interests, and common strategic objectives.<sup>3</sup>

This joint venture should strive to link the development divide between Africa and Europe through the strengthening of economic-financial cooperation and the promotion of sustainable development in both continents, living side by side in tie cooperation in peace, security, prosperity, cohesion, and cooperation.

This joint strategy, which will provide an overarching mid/long-term agenda for Africa-EU cooperation, will be more focused on security cooperation and sustainable development. It will be implemented through successive and well-built short/medium-term Action Plans and improved political dialogue at all levels, causing a specific and substantial outcome in all areas of the partnership, mainly in security cooperation and economic partnership.

This strategic partnership and its further development will be guided by the essential principles of the unity-diversity of Africa as a whole, interdependence between Africa and Europe, strategic ownership, joint responsibility and respect for human rights, democratic principles and rule of law, as well as the right to development and security... as part of the same coin. In this context of a new framework for cooperation and a shared future, both partners also commit themselves to enhancing the coherence and effectiveness of existing agreements, policies, strategies, and instruments for cooperation.

The partnership will still be governed by a reinforced political dialogue, hopefully, co-management and co-responsibility in a strong strategic “bimultilateral cooperation”<sup>4</sup> and towards multiple issues. Issues based on burden-sharing and mutual accountability, solidarity and mutual confidence, equality and justice,

<sup>3</sup> Council conclusions on Africa. Brussels, 30 June 2020 (Council of the European Union, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> We know that frameworks or models of cooperation are multidimensional and strategically adaptable to the contexts of International Relations. There are, however, two typically stratified forms of cooperation: bilateral and multilateral. The first (bilateral) is one that directly involves the states and that establishes a biunivocal relationship of the meaning and flow of cooperation, being able to integrate diverse frameworks and areas of cooperation and obeying a logic of compromise between the cooperator and the recipient of the cooperation in which the cooperating state is also the one who defines the strategies, priorities and amounts or services to be allocated. In turn, multilateral cooperation develops in regionalized or globalized contexts, involving organisations or associations of countries, in an integrative and multidimensional synergy, where countries cross their interests in a supranational platform that integrates, optimizes, and energizes cooperation, in the sense of first of all corresponding to the wishes of the member states and, on the other hand, to the purposes and objectives for which it was created, obeying a logic of rigid strategic frameworks and too stratified in the form and manner of conducting cooperation, thus hindering adjustments, or the response to situations of opportunity that can only be achieved with bimultilateral cooperation (Bernardino, 2014).

common and human security, respect for international law and agreements, gender equality and non-discrimination, and, not least, a mid/long-term approach with a real and strong political commitment.

Europe and Africa need to have a shared vision to reinforce and elevate the Africa-Europe political-strategic partnership to address issues of common interest, like security and development, as mentioned. This includes strengthening institutional ties and addressing common challenges using a common and more dynamic vision. In that sense peace and security problems (like terrorism and the different sources of traffic), migration and sustainable development, and a green environment strategy and a blue strategy for the sea and oceans management will be the main areas of that strategic cooperation.

To this aim, both sides will treat Africa and Europe as one and upgrade the AU-EU political dialogue to empower a strong and more sustainable continent-to-continent partnership, where the AU and the EU are the key tools for this strategic mid/long-term cooperation.

Both organisations also need to strengthen and promote peace, security (including maritime security), democratic governance and human rights, social freedoms, gender equality, sustainable economic development, industrial development, and better national-regional and continental integration in Africa.

It means to ensure that all the main development goals are met in all African countries/regions by the end of this decade. It means also that the regional economic communities<sup>5</sup> have the power to develop a more dynamic and strategic cooperation among the nations and link with other partners and actors in the continent.

The joint vision also intends together to promote and sustain a system of a real bimultilateralism, with a strong representation from Europe and Africa, and to promote more legitimate institutions, starting with the reform of the Security Council of the United Nations (CSUN) system and of other key international institutions.

We all know that the world is more dangerous than ever. Regional crises and internal conflicts persist as complex societal problems in today's world. The search for integrated solutions and the search for more security and development as a key element for social sustainability has become one of the main objectives for states and organisations. In this context, it is important to reflect on the need to have a new approach to the relationship between these actors... because complex problems require integrated and more far-reaching solutions.

<sup>5</sup> The Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and other organisations involved in the EPA negotiations are ECOWAS, UEMOA, ECCAS, CEMAC, COMESA, SADC, SACU, EAS, EAC, and IOC.

Bimultilateralism points the ways for this new strategic dialogue in the context of International Relations and is a new way of addressing contemporary armed conflicts, emerging as an innovative approach to analyse and better respond to the new challenges of the emerging global order (Bernardino, 2019). This may also be the paradigm for an innovative foreign policy between Africa and Europe.

The bimultilateralism, in that regard, makes the strategic approach between the EU and AU and the countries on both continents. It's the way to enlance strategic cooperation among all and make the right alignment between what countries are doing for cooperation (in all domains) and organisations.

Europe and Africa might also need to address global challenges and common concerns such as human rights (including children's rights and gender equality), a fair and dynamic economy, migration, pandemic management, climate change, sustainability, terrorism, and the proliferation of the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons.

The Joint Strategy intends to facilitate and promote a broad-based and wide-ranging people-centred partnership. The AU and the EU will empower non-state actors emerging from society, and create better conditions to empower them to play a strategic role in development, democracy, conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict reconstruction procedures.

Both organisations will also promote universal approaches to development procedures and make this joint strategy based on a joint vision of a more permanent platform for changing strategic information, increasing participation, and strong mobilisation of a broad spectrum of civil society actors in Europe and Africa (Bossuyt, 2017). A permanent ongoing dialogue with civil society, the private sector and local stakeholders on issues covered by this joint vision will be a key factor to ensure the full execution.

## **How to achieve in the EU a joint vision for security with Africa**

Africa and Europe must develop a joint vision as part of a joint strategy for EU cooperation with Africa. We must see and face the same risk and treat it from the same angle. We must build common programmes and develop a more connected analysis and planning process to meet these fundamental objectives.

Africa and the EU will need to jointly address a huge number of key political-strategic challenges that are essential for the success of the new partnership.

According to this view, in the context of the joint vision, the term non-state actors shall be understood as comprising the private sector, the economic and

social partners including trade union organisations, and the civil society in all its forms according to national characteristics.

This new approach comprises:

- Start to work together and create a common forum and syndicates towards gradually adapting relevant policies and legal and financial agendas, as well as relevant cooperation instruments and mechanisms, to the security and development needs and objectives of the strategic partnership, and to set up a framework that better addresses main concerns.
- Promote more correct images of Europe and Africa, in place of those that are dominated by traditional negative stereotypes and that ignore the positive developments in the last years on the two continents, mainly in Africa.
- Build on good experiences and lessons learned from previous relationships where successful mechanisms and instruments have been applied in specific areas and learn from failings in other areas. Develop a positive and strong relationship based on lessons learned from the past.
- Recognise and support Africa Organisation's efforts and leadership to create helpful conditions for social and economic sustainable development and the effective execution of supported-partner development plans and programmes and, in this context, underscore the relevance of all African political commitment and responsibility to promote peace and development.
- Move away from a traditional relationship and forge a real partnership characterised by equality and the pursuit of a common vision based on a common strategy and a common Action Plan with the same goals and a shared budget.
- Promote a mutual understanding between the histories and cultures of the two continents and promote the systematic use of Africa-Europe shared cultural and social heritage and our cultural diversity, as well as the right to accept the diversity between Europe and Africa.
- Ensure that bimultilateral relations, multi-dialogue and strategic cooperation between one or more European and African countries and regional organisations contribute to the achievement of the objectives set out in a new and more dynamic joint strategy for security and development.
- Integrate into the Africa-Europe agenda common challenges and responses to the main global challenges and reinforce our strategic dialogue and cooperation in the multilateral context.



All these aspects, more or less, well known, must be part of this new vision. But the African Union and the European Union have to bear in mind that we can only achieve the main objectives if this new strategic partnership is owned by all stakeholders, including civil society actors, and regional authorities, and if they are actively supporting the plans to improve security and development on both sides.

## **A new strategic framework for a new strategic vision**

We know some of the main objectives of the “old” mid/long-term partnership. It set the framework and was put in place in the following areas: peace and security, good governance and human rights, economic trade and regional integration, and sustainable development (Hauck & Tadesse, 2020).

Saying that, the implementation of this new strategic partnership, based on a common vision and shared strategy, shows why the principle of policy logic for sustainable development will be applied by both African and European partners by recognising and helping interactions and some complementarities between political and strategic levels of decision while ensuring that measures taken in one policy area do not undermine all (Naiga, 2022).

To achieve these mid/long-term objectives, the AU and the EU will need to take concrete actions and make significant progress, not only in the common vision but also in sharing some strategic inter-related priority areas like peace and security.

Due to their common history and shared experience, Africa and Europe understand the importance of peace and security as requirements for political, economic, and social sustainable development.

On this basis, the two continents have built the basis for positive cooperation based on the need to promote holistic and strategic approaches to security, about conflict prevention and think about long-term peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction, linked to good governance and sustainable development, with a more dynamic view to fighting the root causes of regional conflicts.

Under the leadership of the AU, the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) is making its way. African peace-making, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding mechanisms are being reinforced at the continental, regional, and national levels (Deneckere & Knoll, 2016).

The EU will remain a key partner for African countries and regional organisations to help create conditions for lasting peace and stability in the continent

through a mid/long-term capacity-building programme for the various structures like the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the Panel of the Wise, the Africa Peace Found (APF)<sup>6</sup> and the African Standby Force (ASF). This support will, moreover, aim at facilitating the implementation of other relevant AU instruments and programmes to ensure coherence with wider international efforts.

Supporting and funding African-led peace operations is another great task and must be a solution to the commitment of the EU in Africa. The APF has made during the last decade a substantial contribution and is a good example of how partner support can complement and strengthen African funding for African-led peace operations, including from the AU Peace Fund.

Nevertheless, experience over the past decade has shown that additional financial support is needed, together with sound and accountable management tools. The EU is devoted to taking action towards creating a sustainable funding mechanism, building on the experience of the APF and EU Member States' bilateral donations, as well as on the purpose of Africa to increase strategic resources from within the African continent.

Although today's global environment has created a new set of opportunities to enhance international peace and security cooperation, it has also come with new and even more complex security challenges, the paradox of a world of increasing interdependence, and close links between all aspects of security that can only be addressed through a high level of cooperation and commitment on the international environment.

Multicomplex issues like transnational organised crime, international terrorism, mercenary activities, and human and drug trafficking, as well as the illicit trade in natural resources, which are a major factor in triggering and spreading conflicts and undermining state structures in Africa, are of particular concern to the security cooperation and central of this new joint view.

Furthermore, Africa and Europe (AU-EU) will work together on all these aspects and seek to develop the adoption of bimultilateral cooperation, focus on regional and national instruments, and support the implementation of commitments made in the past.

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<sup>6</sup> The Africa Peace Found (APF) has made a substantial contribution during the last decade and is a good example of how partner support can complement and reinforce African funding for African-led peace operations, including from the AU Peace Fund. However, experience over the past years has shown that additional financial support is urgently needed, together with accountable management systems. The EU is committed to moving further establishing a predictable and sustainable joint funding mechanism, building on the experience of the APF. We need to create and implement a new mechanism to provide predictable, flexible, and sustainable funding for peace operations undertaken by the AU, or under its authority, by the African regional organisations, always with the consent of the UN Security Council (African Union, 2023).

This paradigmatic cooperation, which will include matters relating to counterterrorism, criminality, all sorts of traffic, and piracy on the sea, will take place through the exchange of strategic information, law enforcement, and even more institutional capacity building and close judicial cooperation. These are the four main axes for the new joint vision between AU and EU.

Moreover, over the past years, an increased number of new human security challenges have emerged in Africa, relating to critical issues such as climate change, environmental degradation, water management, and the increase of pandemics (like we have now with Covid-19) (Borrell, 2020).

There is an urgent need for Africa and Europe to deepen their cooperation in the security challenges involved and jointly work on common and integrated responses that could be formulated towards this joint vision, and work together with the international community to identify in each situation the strategic partners.

In the context of regional conflict and crisis, local instability, severe national democratic problems, and/or institutions related to bad state governance or state incapacity, the AU and the EU must have a common dialogue intended at reaching a common joint understanding and agreeing on programmes that could be taken in cooperation.

The security and defence cooperation based on an EU-AU joint vision could help both sides of the Mediterranean Sea to better understand the complexity of the situation and foster a strategic solution for the next decade's security dilemmas.

## Conclusion

Africa and the EU must together build another level of strategic relationship for security and defence. Both organisations need to build a joint vision for the main security problems and implement joint strategies with common plans and much better synchronization. Both organisations need to support the mutual strengthening of education, the economy, and security and development for the next decade.

The AU and EU will also need to work together to support the democratic process in Africa, support the regional institutions, and build together a common economy fully in line with the standards of globalization... together we are stronger...

Africa and Europe shall implement their new strategic partnership through a new institutional architecture, which allows and promotes intensive exchange and dialogue on all issues of common interest. The strategic partnership associ-

ated with the new vision will involve a substantial number of institutional and non-institutional actors in Africa and Europe at continental, regional, national, and local levels, with a bigger and central role of the AU and the EU.

The African Union and the regional African organisations must be the centre of gravity for strategic cooperation with Africa.

The AU and EU working as partners will place greater value on the role of their continental organisations in enabling this new partnership and ask them to work more closely together. Including through more regular dialogue between parallel AU and EU institutions, in the preparation and follow-up of decisions and meetings. The frequency of these meetings at all levels will have to be enhanced to take forward the joint vision and develop in a better sense the main objectives of the bimultilateral Joint Strategy.

The new joint vision, which provides an overarching mid/long-term policy framework for AU-EU relations, will be implemented through Action Plans that will be built on the operational part of this new joint strategy and cover proposed priority actions for two years. The Action Plans will allow heads of state and government to, regularly, assess the successes and failures of implementation in key areas and, if necessary, provide new political impetus based on joint vision assessments and joint strategies.

The future of the security and defence cooperation between the AU and the EU, among other areas, must be joint and more dynamic and based on bimultilateral cooperation, because together we can build a better future for Africa and Europe.

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