AU-EU 2021 SUMMIT: CONSENSUS AND TRICKY ISSUES
The first Lisbon Talk of 2021 focused on controversial issues of the EU-Africa Agenda of negotiations for the next AU-EU Summit.

The discussion panel was formed by Tanya Cox, Director of CONCORD, European NGO confederation for relief and development, Christine Hackenesch, Regional Coordinator Africa, German Development Institute, Faten Aggad, Senior Expert on AU-EU Relations and it was moderated by Clara Carvalho, Lisbon Club General Assembly Vice-President and former AEGIS Chair.

It focused on addressing the importance of this Summit for the African Union, the negotiations that are going ahead and the priorities in the European Union and African Union in particular the so-called Green Deal.

The European Union - African Union Summit was expected to happen somewhere in the first semester of 2021 having initially been scheduled for 2020. There was some expectation that the Summit could happen during the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union as it was during the 2007 Lisbon Summit that the joint Africa-EU strategy was launched. However, the EU-AU Summit was postponed due to agenda issues and, at the moment, it is unclear when it will take place.

Christine Hackenesch believes that green transitions are certainly a very important topic and a priority for EU-Africa cooperation. In her view, there is huge potential in closer cooperation between the EU and the African Union on green transitions because both sides can find common interest but it is also where they actually have to learn and can learn together.

It is definitely not an area where the problems are on one side and the other side has the solution, but it is something where both continents may foster a different type of partnership and close cooperation.

Of course, it must be acknowledged that Europe and Africa come to this debate from very different angles. The EU has historically been a large CO2 emitter: the European Green Deal is a very ambitious project for Europe to reduce and to abolish CO2 emissions by 2050 and it surely needs international partners in order to implement this project. Africa can have a key role even if it has different needs: more than 400 million people in Africa currently still do not have enough access to electricity and so there is a huge demand for support. African countries historically have contributed almost nothing to global warming so it is also a question of historical responsibilities. Christine Hackenesch highlights that green transitions demands should be higher for the EU side when compared to the African side.

China has announced that it will move towards carbon neutrality towards 2060. The USA will have a new presidency that is going to come back to the Paris agreement which means that there will be huge economic transformations which poses the question of what is Africa's global role and gives an opportunity to position African countries differently in the global debate.

Fatten Aggad states that climate change is an important topic for the partnership.

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All African countries are signatories of the Paris Agreement, so the commitment is very strong despite their historical limited contribution.

Fatten Aggad reminds that the Green Deal is obviously an EU tool for its own economic recovery but is much more ambitious than the target set in the Paris Agreement and there is potential tension when it comes to Africa. The Paris Agreement introduced safeguards for African countries, the developing or the traditionally non-large polluters in the world, by acknowledging the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. In the Green Deal those safeguards are dropped indirectly which would have potential ramifications on Africa, for the carbon tax can be very harmful in terms of trade between the two continents.

Tanya Cox highlights that the ambition that the EU has to improve the situation goes beyond climate and climate change. The European Green Deal was an important part of the strategy that the EU drew up with Africa back in March 2020. It is too soon to say whether they are necessarily departing from the multilateral agreement and multilateral system of the Paris Agreement. The real question isn’t whether the European Green Deal would be good or would be helpful, but rather what it entails, who is in the driving seat, and what are the motives of this strategy. It should be ensured that the perspectives of the African nations are also included in whatever joint efforts are going to be made going forward to address climate change and environmental degradation.

Christine Hackenesch points out that it is a matter of fact that there will be implications for international partners and it is indeed a very important question to ask how can these ramifications be managed in a way that they don’t have negative repercussions and implications in particular for least developed countries. There is also a different perspective one can take on the Green Deal which is that it also entails opportunities for African countries depending on what their interest is. The Green Deal is not just about climate and CO2 emissions but it is also about electromobility, for instance, where the EU will depend on raw material imports coming from African countries which will foster a new debate of value addition and the value chain.

Fatten Aggad remarks that from a resource perspective it is precisely the trap that African countries are trying to get out of. Ideally, the continent should not be exporting raw materials at the same level that it is doing now. Under the Green Deal there is an entire component on creating a certain level of European autonomy when it comes to access to natural resources, which she agrees that can be a leverage but also a risk of perpetuating this dependency of exports.

The EU could play a supportive role and shift where it invests its money into renewable energy and in supporting infrastructure development so that Africa can produce clean renewable energy.

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Another important aspect raised by the speakers is the necessity of working together with local partners.

Tanya Cox points out that local civil society understands the needs and the gaps of the people in the local communities. She goes further saying that local authorities, local associations, local employer associations need to be brought in as well. If local consultation does not happen, and partners do not work on issues together, this partnership won’t go very far. The idea of local is very important and it does not mean only those who are in the capitals, spreading the dialogue to other towns.

Underfunding is a problem, but other factors also should be accounted, such as civil liberties, the freedom to speak out freely, the process of consultation namely regarding the languages spoken in the communities. It is not just a question of funding, but of awareness raising and accountability as well. This is a process that should be done looking into local associations before building programmes and use the funding in the most efficient and effective manner.

Europe and Africa need to look for different governance mechanisms and structures, but also a different mindset driven by the idea of addressing common problems, joint solutions and opportunities rather than oneside solving the problem of the other side. For example, ensuring a space for fluid and systematic dialogue not just in summits or ministerials meetings, but enhancing systematic dialogue at all levels, such as a joint governance structure in the African Union.
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