

An African participants perspective on the Conference on civil society and Joint EU- Africa Strategy

The European Centre for Development strategy in conjunction with Venro the Germany NGO platform organised a very successful conference on the EU – Africa joint strategy.

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This short article represents my views as one of the participants from Africa at this conference.

A joint EU- Africa strategy is a phenomenon that one would never have imagined a decade ago. More still a conference attended by a range of people from the two continents with the common purpose of shaping the joint strategy would be an unheard of thing even in the recent past!

Interactions between the two continents have always been shaped by the wielding of power and supremacy by European states and recently by Europe as a unified and powerful block of states. Since the slave trade era, through the raw material driven scramble for Africa to the recent EDF support programs, Europe has always sat with itself to formulate its strategies on Africa. It has also always implemented such strategies, with scanty contribution by Africa.

While the ramifications of the various historical and current episodes between the two continents have ultimately shaped the way the two view and engage each other, it is equally evident that such a modus operandi is unsuitable and unsustainable for both continents and hence warrants this new perspective.

In light of the above, the proposed joint strategy is undoubtedly both exciting and worrisome. It presents a rare opportunity for the people of the two continents not to be held perpetually hostage by the past experiences that have placed the two continents where they are. It presents the two peoples a moment to apply their ingenuity and creativity in collectively defining, refining and shaping a new vision that will deliver long lasting prosperity to the people of both continents. The key question that arises here is whether the two continents are adequately prepared and ready for this transformation and are prepared to pay the price!

Drafting negotiating and achieving a fully acceptable joint strategy places enormous responsibilities on the people of both continents, particularly the political leadership, to realign the manner in which the two continents have come to view and relate with each other. There is need to guard against using the strategy to pursue peripheral short term interests or “ hidden interests” Already the failure to provide to the Bad Honnef conference a draft of the strategy is a bad sign. EU as pioneer of this effort and also as the stronger partner in this partnership has to be extremely magnanimous, open, flexible and supportive in order to dispel the fears and mistrust of the weaker African partner.

Africa, on the other hand, has to equally rise to the occasion and marshal the inner strength it needs to effectively engage and partner. It is important that the AU and the entire leadership in Africa, strengthens and enforces internal systems of accountability, democracy and good governance within the continent. These in my view should be partnership givens rather than the central focus of the joint strategy.

In pursuing this strategy we should constantly remind ourselves that while an insensitively prosperous Europe presents an uncertain future for its self and Africa, in the same token an indigent Africa that is helplessly sinking in self pity and heaps blame on its northern neighbor equally presents an uncertain future for both continents!

Living at a time when this strategy can even be thought about, should be a privileged moment for all of us who have the chance to shape it to ensure that it works. The process and certainly the outcomes bestows on all of us an enormous responsibility and demands selfless commitment mutual respect, flexibility and an unwavering focus on the shared vision for the attainment of which posterity will judge us fairly.