EuroDefense Observatory 36

EU-Africa relations

Background

EuroDefense Observatory 36, on EU-Africa relations, is a new Observatory in the framework of the EuroDefense associations network.

It was created on the occasion of the online Council of Presidents of 22 June 2023, and confirmed by the Council of Presidents that took place in London, on 13 November 2023.

The Observatory started its activity immediately after, with representatives from ED-France, ED-Portugal (chair) and ED-UK,

It was agreed that it would focus on the following main questions:

1. the relationship between Europe and Africa - complementarities, mutual interests and problems;

2. the current African Security situation and its impact on European Security

3. the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA);

4. EU-African Union (AU) cooperation - needs and criteria

5. other external Actors (i.e. UN, NATO, US, Russia, China,...) also active in the field of African Security.

The present report addresses the two initial questions.

The relationship between Europe and Africa

When one tries to adequately outline the Europe-Africa relationship, an array of aspects need to be taken into account. First of all, geography, as the geographic proximity of the two continents is a key factor. This leads to good, and sometimes not so good, interactions and perspectives, as well as a number of interesting possibilities, and also of challenges. History has

increased that closeness, namely through the connections that developed during the European colonial presence in Africa.

One issue to bear in mind is that, with the recent exception of Britain, all the former imperial powers are member states of the EU. This implies that those nations pay considerable attention, and contribute expertise to the EU debate and policies related to Africa. As well as to building and maintaining the EU relationship with the AU. A constructive way of dealing with this common past is to extract from it shared knowledge, values and experience, and cultural affinities. This will be more productive if it can transcend any bitterness associated with the colonial past (that ended at least five decades ago), and its legacy.

However, the emerging African public opinion is developing a great deal of skepticism and mistrust towards the objectives publicly displayed by both. the EU and the AU.

Another factor is that Africa shall not be rightly taken as an homogeneous entity. The differences in geographic conditions, culture, traditions, political, security and social and economic development, recommend a more subregional approach. Without undermining the necessary connection with the AU as a whole, this approach is being wisely followed, in particular by the EU.

There is a natural complementarity between Europe and Africa across various dimensions. In the current context economics and demography are extremely pressing issues. One important consideration is the unequal nature of this complementarity.

African economies are effectively evolving towards a consumption-oriented model in response to the growing assertiveness of the African middle classes. As they move away from the former extractive economic models, an ongoing and indisputable reality is that Europe continues to need raw materials and minerals from Africa,as well as energy resources (oil and gas). The Russian aggression against Ukraine has intensified this European need for energy resources, and added to that a need for food and agricultural goods, particularly grain.

Security and stability are clearly indispensable for sound economic relations, including foreign investment.

Another pressing issue is the European need for labour and the existing demographic imbalances between Europe and Africa. Europe has a declining population, whilst the global demographic boom is taking place in Africa. It is expected that in 2100, 42% of the world population will be African. Europe evidently needs workers, and a huge number of Africans, particularly younger people, are unable to find jobs, dignified living conditions and a purpose for their lives in their own countries. These circumstances indicate that African demographic pressure is having a significant impact in Europe and that this is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. The divergent birth rates of the two continents supports this scenario.

The demographic imbalance could theoretically be viewed as an issue on which it would be easy to find common and mutually beneficial ground. But that has not been the case thus far. There are many obstacles and difficulties, in particular related to social and cultural aspects, including religion, but also linked to security concerns.

One legitimate conclusion is that the inevitable economic and demographic European-African relations requires a more intensely cooperative approach, which may have a positive impact on security for both, Europe and Africa.

The current African security situation and its impact on European security

The African continent is faced with an array of security challenges, generating an overlapping and mutually reinforcing web of violence, and insecurity, and hampering the development that Africa so desperately needs.

Not neglecting the fact that they overlap, we can try to present these security challenges in a decreasing order of intensity. For that purpose we prioritized four.

First, the Jihad threat that spreads across the continent. Currently more influenced by the Daesh than by AlQaeda. There is a *quasi* continuous "Jihad arc" from Senegal to Mozambique, through the Sahel, Central Africa

and the Horn of Africa, and spreading towards the Gulf of Guinea. In almost all the regions of Africa, with the relative exception of the Northern region, Jihadi groups are on the rise, bolstered by poverty, weak national and regional institutions, and the drawdown of multinational peace missions.

Second, enduring armed rebellions and civil wars. In several states, like Sudan, Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia or Somalia, irregular armed factions (in some cases "warlords") are contesting the legitimacy of the respective national governments and/or exerting control over significant parts of the territory, on the basis of political, ethnic or economic arguments. Challenging the state's monopoly on violence, these type of actors can lead to extremely violent conflicts, one exemple being the Tigray crisis, the world deadliest conflict in 2022. At the same time this situation favours the presence of Actors, Russia and China being the more prominent, committed to undermining Western and European values and influence.

Third, organised crime and associated insecurity. A diverse set of actors profiting from trafficking (people, arms, drugs, …) and racketeering are active in regions where the weakness of state institutions create vacuums of power. The Sahel is an obvious and particularly worrying example of this phenomenon. Although not usually captured in statistics about conflict and security, ande even if we may not speak of an existing "master plan" for that purpose, it is a fact that organised crime groups and terrorist groups help each other through finance and armed protection.

Fourth, inter-state cross-border conflicts. Even if the number of inter-state wars is rather limited, there are frequent disputes for various reasons. One being the access to resources (Egypt vs Ethiopia). Other is the protection of cross-border minorities (DRC vs Uganda/Rwanda). Another reason results from the artificial and incongruous borders inherited from colonization (Berlin Conference, 1885), although African states subscribe to a general attitude of avoiding to reopen such "Pandora boxes", the exception being the partition of Sudan into Sudan and South Sudan (2013). It cannot be excluded that these numerous inter-states rivalries at different levels of

activity, can flare up into major confrontations, including between sovereign states.

While for most of the post-Cold War period, all these factors have existed, the overall trend was towards positive improvement. Nowadays, however, a new set of circumstances has led to a continent wide resurgence of insecurity and conflict, suggesting a possible reversal of decades of political, economic and social progress, and of relative Peace.

It is clear that a number of destabilizing effects is aggravating the instability of the African continent. Regrettably, the also increasingly unstable world order favours African instability.

The mix and addition of unresolved regional tensions, non-democratic governments, poor or illegitimate institutions, predatory economic models and human rights abuses, are generating a favourable ground for aggrieved populations with nothing or very little to lose, that can be easily leveraged by populist leaders, rebel armed factions and terrorist and criminal groups. Recent factors such as climate change, displaced populations, and extreme scarcity of resources are leading to the disruption of many previously existing economic and social regional and subregional organizations, thus rendering cooperation with external actors, among them the EU, significantly more difficult, if not inpossible. The practical dismantling of G5 Sahel is a clear example of this process.

At the same time, in a continent with relatively less structured collective life, the many conflicts that currently exist in the world, foster a temptation to solve problems by the use of force.

This coincides with a loss of influence of most former colonial powers, as the result of a mix of clumsy diplomacy, the persistence of hidden national agendas, double standards and less effective security assistance

This situation is affecting the cooperative role performed by the UN and the EU, and, indirectly, also the role of the AU, leaving the field open for other players, such as Russia, China, Turkey, UAE and others, whose options and perceptions are different and sometimes even opposed to the formerly prevailing European and Western principles and values. This very relevant topic will be further examined by the Observatory.

The growing insecurity on the African continent has several serious implications for Europe. Four of them justify being particularly highlighted.

First, a terrorist threat to European societies, of which we may not totally dissociate the large diasporas of African countries on European territory

Second, instability threatens economic cooperation and international commerce, as it decreases confidence and trust, increases the security cost of trade, and limits opportunities. But African insecurity also generates detrimental consequences for trade outside of the continent, through piracy (the Gulf of Guinea being currently the hot spot for that illegitimate activity) and threats to the freedom of navigation in coastal waters, as well as by limiting the availability of certain raw materials.

Third, organized crime and trafficking targeting Europe, with negative effects to society security in the European continent. As already stated these activities benefit from areas where the vacuum of power offers "sanctuaries", and are facilitated by poor state control in the southern margins of the Mediterranean Sea.

Fourth, the impact of unregulated migrations, generating humanitarian needs and security challenges. The origins of this process are primarily situations of exclusion in Africa – either political, economic, social or environmental exclusion, or exclusion resulting from conflicts and other violent situations. The fact is that this process has political consequences, fostering tensions and political extremism in Europe, and undermining democratic values in the European societies.

Even if they may seem to be more intense in the European southern region, the fact is that all these negative repercussions of the worrying insecurity emerging from the African continent affect all EU members states, without exception, as well as the UK.

Europe, and namely the EU, needs to find adequate and constructive responses to them, while simultaneously dealing with equivalent, although different, security challenges on its northeastern border.

It is the proper integration of these two realities that today defines the framework of European security.

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