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Ahead of the 2021 EU-Africa Summit, Africa Looks East Once Again

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The upcoming EU-Africa Summit is expected to roll out a remodelled version of the inter-continental partnership. However, since “market for partnerships” on the continent continues to expand, particularly with non-Western states, the success of any major joint EU-Africa undertaking (in green transition, digital transformation, etc.) will depend on its attractiveness in comparison to the UAE, Turkish, Indian, Chinese, Russian or Japanese alternatives. In this regard, the EU policy proposals must be assessed from the perspective of an African leader who navigates between various partnerships, initiatives and projects, and calculates their weight, relevancy, seriousness of commitments, money allocated, and strings attached.

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The scope of EU interest in Africa is now centred around green and digital transformations, economic growth, governance and mobility (as set out in the EC communication *Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa*, March 2020) as well as security and multilateralism (the EU Council's *Conclusions on Africa*, June 2020) and the impact of COVID-19. Since the last Africa-EU summit in Abidjan (2017), the U.S. has been disengaging and the UK has been focused on completing Brexit. The UAE and other Gulf States, Turkey, India, China, Russia and Japan have, meanwhile, been increasingly able to accelerate policies on many of those, and related issues.

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“Equal” Partnerships

- The EU would be more convincing in describing the desired EU-AU relationship as “fair” rather than maintaining the fiction of equality between the EU and the AU. To boost its credentials, it will have to counter the Russian and Chinese anti-EU narratives, while also being more open to the inclusion of Africa within global decision-making bodies.

In the run-up to the sixth [EU-AU summit in Brussels](#), originally scheduled for 28-29 October 2020 and now moved into early 2021, the EU has built its narrative around the idea of a “partnership of equals.” This contrasts with the obvious asymmetries in power, role in programming and budgeting for joint projects between the EU and Africa. “Equality” narratives by some other partners are arguably more convincing. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, promotes an African-Indian partnership as a union of developing regions, of equal populations (1.25 billion people each) sharing a common colonial history and a future based on south-south cooperation. With the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia and China increasingly portray the EU as a post-colonial force in Africa hoping to influence African sentiments. China and the UAE, both rapidly developing, successfully present their own recent routes out of poverty as something the growing African economies can relate to.

Under-representation in global decision-making processes is where Africans, understandably, see inequality. The EU hasn't considered supporting the bid by the AU and key African states to join the reformed United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In contrast to that, since the 2016 meeting in Banjul (Gambia) before the sixth TICAD aid conference (equivalent to a Japan-Africa summit), Japan has been officially supporting Africa's representation on the UNSC,¹ while Modi used his July 2018 speech to Uganda's parliament to stress that reform of the UNSC would be “incomplete without an equal place for Africa.”² Turkey has made similar statements. In the same spirit, the now postponed Dubai Expo 2020 offered for the first time space for an AU pavilion and exhibits from all of its member states. India and African states (such as Nigeria) jointly seek a greater say among the troop contributing countries (TCC) within the UN bodies.

¹ A. Starchenko, *Challenging China's Dominance: Japan's Grand Strategy for Africa*, 2019.

² MFA (India), 25 July 2018.

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Big Money, Few Formalities

- The EU's more flexible financial approach adopted in relation to COVID-19 will have to be maintained as the norm if it doesn't want to see Gulf States or China cementing roles as key game-changers in Africa. Broadening the scope of the overly securitised and migration-oriented EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF) would be useful in narrowing this gap. The EU can also set frameworks for pairing with deep-pocketed nations such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, in funding projects of mutual interest in Africa.

While the EU remains Africa's biggest aid provider, its formal constraints made it problematic to release large sums of money when urgent need arose. The COVID-19 pandemic offered impetus to modify the approach, and the EU now uses debt relief extensively and allocates more resources for emergency spending. Still, Africa's other partners capitalised on their ability to react rapidly and generously in recent years. In June 2018, two months after Abiy Ahmed's rise to power in Ethiopia, the UAE provided the country's central bank with \$1 billion to alleviate foreign currency shortages. Not surprisingly, it was the Emirati and Saudi-strengthened influence over Ethiopia that enabled them to sponsor the breakthrough in Ethiopia's relations with Eritrea, which won Ahmed a Nobel Prize. After the downfall of Sudan's Omar al-Bashir in April 2019, it was only the UAE with Saudi Arabia who offered help immediately with a \$3 billion pledge. The Sudanese factions currently look to the Gulf³ as the only feasible option for funding implementation of its October 2020 peace deal with the government, which would require \$7.5 billion over 10 years. In Somalia, Turkey has spent \$1 billion on aid since 2011 and won greater recognition and political leverage than other (nominally bigger) donors thanks to its approach. It responded quickly to local requests and handed aid directly to the Somali authorities, making the process, by EU standards, almost costless.⁴ The Chinese pro-government Jack Ma Foundation followed a similar path. In March 2020, when Africa had just over 400 COVID-19 cases, it started providing basic equipment to all but one (Eritrea) of the continent's states, using the ad hoc partnership with the AU and Ethiopian Airways.⁵

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A Connected Africa

- EU assistance in implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) should focus to a greater extent on connectivity, where Europe is lagging behind its Middle Eastern (ME) and Asian competitors. There is also a potential for synergy between the goals of the EU and the scope of the Indian-Japanese Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) proposal. Refilling it with content can help to diversify the global supply chains from China and ensure equal third-party access to foreign-developed infrastructure. The EU could also open up more to African businesses in Europe.

The EU sees beginning of operationalisation of the AfCFTA, scheduled for January 2021, as offering new economic opportunities. But it has not been very active in the area of connectivity, which is increasingly important in the context of the continent's growing ties to the global economy. Some notable exceptions include the European Development Fund's support for the One Stop Border Post (OSBP) programme developed since 2009 to ease border traffic on key trade routes within the continent.⁶ Undoubtedly, Africa looks east more than towards Europe as it seeks to narrow the

³ *Sudan Tribune*, 13 August 2020, www.sudantribune.com.

⁴ M. Wasuge, *Turkey's Assistance Model in Somalia*, The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 2016.

⁵ *The Africa Report*, 13 June 2020.

⁶ *One Stop Border Posts Make Their Way in Africa*, The Africa-EU Partnership, 12 September 2013, www.africa-eu-partnership.org.

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infrastructural development gap. After years of Chinese investments in roads and railways, the African states' focus has shifted towards seaports and logistics centres. The growth of the UAE's foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa (in 2016, with \$11 billion, it was the second biggest country investor⁷) is largely connected to the expansion of Dubai's quasi-private logistics giant DP World. It developed, among others, a port and economic zone in Senegal's Dakar, and is close to opening a new port in

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Somaliland's Berbera, which could handle 30% of Ethiopian exports.⁸ While not free from criticism for alleged market domination, DP World is set to stay in Africa, due to its role in implementing parts of the UAE's strategic vision for a post-oil period, where Africa is key for its security projections and food production. Japan supports similar port developments in Djibouti, Mombasa (Kenya), Nacala (Mozambique) and Toamasina (Madagascar) as part of its Connectivity Initiative within the Free and Open Indo-Pacific policy, declared by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2016 in Nairobi (Kenya).⁹ A week after the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing in May 2017, India and Japan jointly announced the AAGC, their Africa-oriented counterproposal which aims to bring together the Indian approach to aid and Japanese finance for quality infrastructure.

While the UAE as a country has the most flights to and from Africa,¹⁰ the Dubai port is becoming a dominant hub for African exports and re-exports thanks to its location on the route into Asia. In 2019, there were some 21,000 African companies based in the Emirate, around the Dubai Multi Commodities Centres (DMCC).¹¹ Its Tea Centre became the world's largest re-exporter of tea, processing more than 50,000 tonnes per year (approx. 60% of the global stock).¹² For African producers, it became a key intermediary in reaching global markets, particularly due to the availability of blending and packaging facilities. DMCC now wants to repeat this model with the 2019-established coffee centre (with a capacity of 20,000 tonnes annually),¹³ which could absorb Ethiopian and other African coffee production, with cocoa and peppers to follow. Turkish Airlines connects Istanbul with a record 60 African destinations.¹⁴ This is unsurprising due to Turkey's support for African business mobility. Regulations for the continent's citizens in terms of residency and running businesses from Turkey are more relaxed than the EU's.

Accelerating the Digital Transformation

- To increase its competitiveness in this area, the EU could, following the example of the UAE, form a special fund for supporting European investments in the African tech sector.

The EU seeks to empower African tech developers through initiatives such as the Africa-Europe Innovation Partnership, EAIP (expiring in March 2021), which connects tech incubators with European counterparts. From the African perspective, similar ME and Asian states' proposals are equally good. On the sidelines of the 2019 Africa Tech Summit in Kigali, the Dubai Chamber of Commerce, which has five African regional offices, hosted an exercise to match start-ups ("Chamberton"), which later morphed into the GBF Mentorship Programme. It now offers African start-ups, preferably tech-oriented, guidance from the Emirati business leaders, along with access to investors and policymakers.¹⁵ India would utilise its Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) in a similar

⁷ *FDI Intelligence 2017*, <https://www.fdiintelligence.com/>.

⁸ L. Signé., *What the United Arab Emirates can teach resource-rich countries in Africa*, Brookings Institution, 19 December 2019, www.brookings.edu.

⁹ Free and Open Indo-Pacific, MFA (Japan), www.mofa.go.jp.

¹⁰ Global Business Forum-Africa, official video, www.youtube.com.

¹¹ "Business opportunities expanding for Africa," *Euronews*, 06 December 2019.

¹² "The World's #1 Free Zone," *STiR*, 09 April 2019.

¹³ "Dubai's DMCC in talks with major coffee traders for new coffee centre," *Reuters*, 18 February 2019.

¹⁴ "Turkish Airlines to fly to Malabo, its 60th African destination," *IOL*, 19 February 2020, www.iol.co.za.

¹⁵ H. Buamim, "Africa's trade bloc is a massive opportunity for UAE businesses," *Arabian Business*, 05 September 2019.

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manner. During the seventh TICAD (2019), Japan committed to utilise the JETRO Start-up Cooperation Promotion Desk to match African start-ups with Japanese companies,¹⁶ in what seems to be part of a strategy to fill Japanese business with skilled African manpower and subcontractors. In February 2020, the UAE announced a \$500 million Consortium for Africa, a new scheme for Emirati businesses to invest in African digitisation or youth-led companies.¹⁷ It would eventually seek to tie them to Dubai as a financial hub for Africa. The port emirate's pursuit of this status involves digitising corporate business in Africa. For example, the Dubai branch of the bank Citi has made its treasury and trade solutions (TTS) cash management and trade services available in 16 African countries.¹⁸

Climate Resilience and Sustainable Habitat

- With climate change becoming a priority area in EU-Africa relations, the EU will have to make sure that its efforts are coordinated, complementary and not-overlapping with any existing third-party formats. The EU could consider closer cooperation with Japan on a number of projects.

In recent years, climate issues have risen to the very centre of the EU outlook on Africa. From the African perspective, joint projects should complement and not compete with new partners' ongoing activities in this field. After identifying extreme weather phenomena as a growing threat in Africa, Japan now shares its know-how with 20 of continent's states in reducing risk related to natural disasters in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. It also provides satellite monitoring of forests in 43 African countries to prevent uncontrolled deforestation through its Forest Early Warning System in the Tropics (JJ-FAST). Yokohama and Shibushi share their waste management models with cities across the continent through the African Clean Cities Platform (ACCP).¹⁹

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To reduce the continent's food security problems related to climate change, the Coalition for African Rice Development (CARD) was formed in 2008 upon Japan's initiative. As a donor group working with African (and international) institutions it now covers 32 African states. Phase 2 (2019-2030) of CARD will assist in reviewing and improving national rice development strategies in each partner state, to double rice production in Africa to 56 million tonnes per year.²⁰ While the Gulf States' approach to farming in Africa remains controversial, due to excessive farmland acquisitions and focus on exports to the Gulf, they nevertheless invest heavily in improving productivity in agriculture, mostly in Ethiopia and Sudan.²¹

With the construction of the Renaissance Dam by Ethiopia, and possible similar mega-projects in Tanzania and the DRC, nuclear energy seems a potentially less environmentally impactful alternative. Russia's Rosatom aims to build power and research reactors in many African countries, including Nigeria, Uganda, Ethiopia and Zambia,²² while India seeks to work with Russia in this field. Nuclear technologies are set to be among the leitmotifs of the second Russia-Africa summit in 2022.²³ So far,

¹⁶ VII TICAD - Summary of results, MFA (Japan), September 2019.

¹⁷ "UAE Unveils USD 500 Million 'Consortium for Africa'," Expo 2020 Dubai, 10 February 2020.

¹⁸ "The Treasury and Trade Solutions Network," Citi, www.citibank.com.

¹⁹ www.africancleancities.org.

²⁰ www.riceforafrica.net.

²¹ UAE Security Forum 2019: Reshaping the Future of the Horn of Africa, The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, 13 February 2020.

²² History of Cooperation, Rosatom Africa.

²³ RIA Novosti, 22 October 2020.

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38 African states have joined the India-led International Solar Alliance (2015), designed as a platform to support India's partners in developing clean energy sources.

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Education and Capacity-Building for Growth and Soft Power

- Stimulating healthy growth by competence-building could become a more prominent soft power tool for the EU, as envisaged by the ME/Asian experience. It could be useful to expand the geographical scope of the EU neighbourhood-oriented European Training Foundation into Africa.

The EU considers skill-raising to be key for building opportunities in Africa, as reflected in the EU Council's *Conclusions*.²⁴ Still, the current number of Erasmus+ scholarships (8,555 African students and staff in 2019²⁵) is slightly lower than a parallel offer from China, which secured scholarships for 12,000 African students for 2021/22.²⁶ ME and Asian partners have developed some educational and vocational specialities which cut across EU policies. Turkey focuses on the expansion of its state-controlled Maarif Foundation network in Africa. It now runs some 150 Turkish-staffed educational establishments, mostly secondary schools, on the continent,²⁷ winning the support of local agents for its policies. India's Pan-African e-Network for distance learning (PAeNP, operational since 2009) is one of the biggest and most successful projects of its MFA. Its second edition (2019–2024) consists of e-VidyaBharti, 500 online courses, mostly in technical subjects, including highly desired AI and big data for 4,000 African students, as well as 15,000 virtual scholarships to study remotely at India's top universities, as well as e-ArogyaBharti, offering ongoing medical education for African doctors and paramedics.²⁸

Every year, China's Human Resource Development Cooperation (launched in 2000) provides short-term free training in China for some 10,000 African officials such as technical civil servants, more senior clerks and ministerial-level senior officials. They are given courses, mainly in agriculture and development policies (although often of questionable relevance) at China's top universities, state institutions and private companies.²⁹

In 2017, Japan launched the Africa Kaizen Initiative, a formal platform to transfer its work ethos (*kaizen*) to improve work quality and productivity in Africa. To date, 18,000 companies (hiring 280,000 people) in 25 African countries have received *kaizen* training.³⁰ ABE Initiative 3.0 seeks to train 4,000 industrial professionals before 2025. Like African students in Japan, they would be assisted in finding employment in Japanese companies.

²⁴ *Council conclusions on Africa*, Council of the European Union, Brussels, 30 June 2020.

²⁵ *Erasmus+: EU boosts participation of African students and staff in 2019*, EC, 12 September 2019.

²⁶ "China surpasses western government African university scholarships," *Financial Times*, 23 June 2020, www.ft.com.

²⁷ www.turkiyemaarif.org.

²⁸ *Official Launch of e-VidyaBharti and e-ArogyaBharti Project*, MFA (India), 19 October 2019.

²⁹ H. Tugendhat, D. Alemu, "Chinese Agricultural Training Courses for African Officials," *World Development*, vol. 81, May 2016, pp. 71–81.

³⁰ 2020 Africa Kaizen Annual Conference, concept note, 22 July 2020.

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Health and the Mitigation of the Impact of Diseases

- The EU could build on some of the successful practices of the ME and Asian states, particularly the Indian experience in tele-medicine, to foster the resilience of African health systems.

COVID-19, which is likely to be a major focus of the Brussels summit no matter when it takes place, has exposed the urgent need for a holistic and complementary approach to healthcare in Africa. In epidemiology and microbiology, Russia left a fair footprint during the Ebola crisis (2014–2016), when the Rusal company built in Guinea what is arguably West Africa’s most advanced scientific clinical diagnostic and training centre.³¹ With tele-medicine, India provides free medical consultancy, thus helping to overcome shortages of qualified doctors. The AU considers India’s experience as relevant and applicable in African countries, as highlighted in the 2019 MoU with Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) for cooperation in health services, diagnostics and manufacturing capabilities for drugs.³² Japan’s 2019 TICAD summit committed to extend health insurance to three million Africans and train 26,000 people in healthcare,³³ probably under the Africa Health and Wellbeing Initiative (AfHWIN), newly launched by the inter-ministerial Cabinet Secretariat Office. Turkey has succeeded in bringing advanced medical infrastructure to conflict-ridden zones such as Sudanese Darfur and Somalia.

COVID-19 has exposed the urgent need for a holistic and complementary approach to healthcare in Africa.

Conclusions

The COVID-19 crisis brings both risks and opportunities as the EU seeks to rebuild its partnership with Africa. The EU must double its efforts to scrutinise, and, if needed, adapt to ongoing initiatives and plans of African states’ new partners. The COVID-related postponement of the Turkish and Indian summits with Africa, originally planned for April and September 2020, reversed the sequence of the major events rolling out new Africa-oriented policies. The EU-AU Brussels summit is now likely to be held before other meetings. Therefore, instead of reacting, the EU would need to anticipate some ME and Asian states’ plans to assure the relevancy of the renewed EU-AU partnership. The pandemic shouldn’t overshadow the Brussels summit agenda in the way that migrations dominated in Abidjan. That approach would give leadership in formulating adequate long-term Africa policies to non-Western players.

If achieving comprehensive improvement is to be the ultimate goal of EU policies regarding Africa, the EU should cooperate more with ME and Asian partners by forging thematic alliances, particularly in relation to climate, new technologies, health and capacity-building.

³¹ A. Arkhangelskaya, “Russia-Africa: dilemmas and opportunities for the EU,” EUREN Brief, 14 January 2020, p. 4.

³² Speech by MOS at the 15th CII-EXIM Bank India-Africa Project Partnership Conclave, MFA (India), 24 September 2020, www.mea.gov.in.

³³ VII TICAD, *Summary*.