

# High-Level Special Dialogue on Energy & Climate: Leading the way to the 6th AU-EU Summit

## CONTEXT

The Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) aims to build a real, inclusive and transformative partnership between Africa and Europe. The 6th AU-EU Summit foreseen for February 2022 represents a significant milestone in which to break new ground towards our shared future.

To facilitate an open and frank dialogue on key, often contentious, issues between our two continents, AEF is organising three high-level “Talking Africa-Europe” specials focusing on the priority issues of Climate and Energy (January 20), Migration and Mobility (January 27) and Vaccine Access and Equity (February 3).

These special editions build on the 2021 ‘Talking Africa-Europe’ dialogues, that brought together a host of diverse voices from city mayors, youth representatives, EU and AU Commissioners, as well as civil society and business leaders to open up and deepen the space for discussion on the future of this crucial relationship

## YouTube links

- [English broadcast](#)
- [French broadcast](#)

## Speakers who joined

Contributors included:

**Thierry Breton**, European Commissioner for Internal Market

**Charles Michel**, President of the European Council

**Ambroise Fayolle**, Vice-President at the European Investment Bank (EIB)

**Tanja Gönner**, Chair of the Management Board at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

**Mo Ibrahim**, Co-founder of the Africa-Europe Foundation and Founder and Chairman of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation.

**Wanjira Mathai**, Vice-President and Regional Director for Africa at the World Resources Institute (WRI)

**Damilola Ogunbiyi**, CEO and Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All (SEforAll) and Co-Chair of UN-Energy

**Benedict Okey Oramah**, President and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the African Export–Import Bank (Afreximbank)

**Mary Robinson**, Co-Honorary President of the Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF), Chair of the Elders

**H.E Mr. Macky Sall**, President of Senegal and forthcoming Chairperson of the African Union starting in February 2022

**Vera Songwe**, Executive Secretary at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

**Frans Timmermans**, European Commission Executive Vice-President for the Green Deal

**Laurence Tubiana**, CEO of the European Climate Foundation (ECF)

**Kandeh Yumkella**, Co-chair of the AEF Strategy Group on Energy, Member of Parliament in Sierra Leone, and former CEO of Sustainable Energy for All (SEforAll)

## Summary based on the media communique

The first of the three high-level “Talking Africa-Europe” special dialogues organised by the Africa-Europe Foundation ahead of the incoming 6th AU-EU Summit took place on 20 January.

Coming less than three months after the COP26 in Glasgow, the debate focused on energy and climate,

*“There is a gap between how Africans look at the joint issues of climate and energy and how our European friends look at them. We need to close that gap if we want to make progress” [4:39]* said

In 2019, the entire population of the EU, accounting for just under 445 million people, had access to electricity, while just over half (54.7%) of the 1.3 billion people living in Africa had access. Almost 600 million Africans remain off-grid, more than 1.3 times the population of the EU. There are also stark inequalities within the African continent, and within African countries, when it comes to access to energy. Egypt for example has 100% coverage, while South Sudan has 6.7% coverage. All 27 EU member states have full coverage.

**Mo Ibrahim**, Co-founder of the Africa-Europe Foundation and Founder and Chairman of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation.

“I sincerely hope that the summit will be an opportunity for a new paradigm, approach and alliance for Africa and Europe,” [6:56] declared **Charles Michel**, President of the European Council. “We want more prosperity in Africa and Europe, taking into account the global challenges: climate change, the digital evolution, energy, infrastructure, health, and all other challenges.” [7:56]

*“African economies are polluting the least, but we are the most affected by the aftermath of climate change,” [13:45]* said **Macky Sall**, President of Senegal, and incoming Chair of the African Union. He went on to argue on the need to look at the substance of the issues to make a real step forward by the time of the summit. *“We should not put additional injustice on the shoulders of Africa by no longer subsidising fossil fuels, as was decided at COP 26.” [14:10]*

*“Together with Europe, we need to come up with a joint strategy that will be climate-friendly but also takes into account the level of development of African countries.” [15:33]*

In 2019 **Africa accounted for 17% of the global population but just 3.4% of global energy consumption, while the EU, representing 5.8% of the global population, accounted for 10.4% of global energy consumption.**

This meant that, in per capita terms, **someone living in the EU in 2019 consumed on average nine times as much energy as someone living in Africa.**

*“The green transition should be at the heart of our cooperation agenda for the next 10 years, and of course we have different starting points,” [23:08]* said European Commission Executive Vice-President for the Green Deal Frans Timmermans.

Responding to the concerns raised about Europe refusing to fund gas projects in Africa, the Executive Vice-President said that the EU considers gas to be a *“bridge to climate neutrality, but only if it replaces coal and if investments are hydrogen ready.”* [23:50]

He mentioned the *“incredible improvement in competitiveness of wind and solar energy technologies”* [24:30] in the last decade, highlighting how much cheaper they had become, and said the European Commission will bring to the summit a *“concrete offer to support energy access for the next decade”*. [26:18]

*“With the Africa-EU Green Initiative, which will be announced at the summit, we want to focus on clean energy access. We also want to build the right environment for private capital to support large scale investments in renewables”*. [26:24]

*“The first thing we need to do is to listen to Africa when it comes to its energy needs,”* [32:15] said European Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton. He agreed with President Sall on the need for a common strategy in the field of energy and said that Europe and Africa *“need to go along the same pathway”*. [32:58]

Commissioner Breton also highlighted the role of companies, stating that technological innovations will be needed, and that Africa may require €100 billion a year to fund electrification.

The ensuing discussion between various experts from Africa and Europe touched on the debate around subsidising fossil fuels, specifically gas, in Africa. But it also highlighted the need to identify “just” energy transition pathways, compatible with climate, but also with the need to fight poverty and inequality. It also noted the need to include health dimensions – such as the women and children death-toll from “unclean” cooking solutions. The need to find relevant ways to solve the current difficulties in accessing finance in Africa were mentioned several times.

**Damilola Ogunbiyi**, CEO of Sustainable Energy for All (SEforAll), co-chair of UN Energy, and former CEO of Nigeria’s Rural Electrification Agency, highlighted the fact that almost a billion people do not have access to clean cooking in Sub-Saharan Africa and that energy poverty kills 10 million Africans every decade.

*“We are talking about asking countries to go on an energy transition - that is a full electrification of the entire economy - when these countries still want to achieve access to energy, industrialisation, and a better future for their people. For that to happen, gas has to be part of the transition. It is not one or the other: we need to supply adequate clean cooking; we have to supply gas to integrate as a baseload for renewables. Renewables don’t just happen magically.”* [40:17]

Ogunbiyi argued that there is a lot of misconceptions about gas, but it has to be part of energy transition plans. *“I’m against people saying they will not fund any fossil at all... I’m for people saying we will fund projects as long as it’s part of an energy transition plan and you see a pathway to net zero.”* [41:15]

Without South Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa is responsible for only 0.55% of the current global greenhouse gas emissions. If this whole region were to be powered by gas to get people out of energy poverty, emissions would rise by 1.6%.

*“We should have the EU being consistent in particular in preparation of COP 27 on the real support of each African countries’ energy transition plans. There is no silver bullet, no size fit all. Every country has its own resources and the potential of developing them. The EU has to support these plans.”* [45:55] said Laurence Tubiana, CEO of the European Climate Foundation (ECF).

Closing the event, Mo Ibrahim highlighted Africa is *“not against green technologies”* [1:40:56] but argued it is *“morally indefensible”* [1:42:47] that Europe is *“wallowing in gas”* [1:42:05], some of which comes from Africa, yet it refuses to fund gas projects in African countries.

*“If we want to deal with climate change, the most effective solution will be market-led,”* he said. *“We need to price carbon, that’s what changes behaviour, and I hope the EU and AU will come up with a clear proposal at next month’s summit.”* [1:43:10]

[Synthesis report outlining facts and figures in relation to climate and energy in Africa and Europe](#)