

Statement from the AEF High-Level Group of Personalities Meeting of 8 June 2022

At a critical juncture for the Africa-Europe relationship, the Africa-Europe Foundation High-Level Group (HLG) met on June 6th to discuss the implications of the war in Ukraine for the Africa-Europe Partnership. At a time when both continents are rocked by the successive crises of the pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine, as well as the increasing severity of the climate crisis, questions of the value of the Africa-Europe Partnership are being asked on both sides of the Mediterranean.

The HLG is convinced that a deeper Africa-Europe partnership is the right vehicle to address these cumulative challenges, and hope for a swift end to the Ukraine crisis. The momentum generated after the recent AU-EU Summit in Brussels must be utilised to give our Partnership a stronger voice internationally.

The war in Ukraine in particular highlights the pressing need for Africa to play a greater part in global multilateral fora. The recent meeting of the Chair of the African Union Presidency with the President of Russia to push for the unblocking of the Odessa port is an example of the significant role the AU could play both as a broker and player in discussions with powers not necessarily aligned with Brussels or Washington.

Despite this, the AU is virtually non-existent in the multilateral system. The UN, World Bank, IMF, and G20 all recognise and engage with the European Union to a greater or lesser extent, but the African Union is either merely granted observer status or represented through member states such as South Africa. With Africa now hosting almost 20% of the global population, AU countries accounting for more than one quarter of UN members, and the aim of the AU to become the third largest economy globally by 2063, there is a pressing need to rectify this.

The AEF and its High-Level Group supports the request for the African Union to become the 21st Member of the G20, given the relevance for Africa to take a more active role in the global crises that are shaping the continent's destiny.

Alongside an enhanced role for the AU on the world stage, the HLG call for greater effort from both continents to listen to one another, in order to understand the reasons for potentially diverging approaches to challenging issues. The reaction in Europe to the votes of African states at the UN on the condemnation of the invasion of Ukraine and the sanctioning of Russia demonstrates the work we still have to do to create this understanding and build a partnership based on trust.

The HLG stress that the visit to Sochi of the Chair of the African Union Presidency must be followed by urgent action from Russia and Ukraine to free the 20 million tons of grain trapped in the port of Odessa. With other key supplying countries such as India forced to restrict exports due to extreme weather, freeing stock stuck in Ukraine can reduce the immediate threat of famine faced by millions already impacted by the global pandemic and ongoing climate crisis.

However, whether the grain is released or not, the sharp rise in prices of food and energy over the past months will only continue as the medium-term impact of the war in Ukraine is felt during the harvest and winter seasons, and millions more across Africa and Europe will

be plunged into food and energy insecurity. Just as the pandemic highlighted the existing flaws in the architecture of global health, the conflict in Ukraine has brought to the fore the structural flaws in global food systems – commodity prices had already been rising before the jumps caused by exogenous shocks over the last two years. Increasing global trade in food supplies has been mooted as a solution to the food crisis, but Africa and Europe should use this crisis to build interdependent food sovereignty. The HLG emphasise the importance for both continents to address this crisis as partners.

Following the partnership model for creating vaccine manufacturing capacity in Africa, the HLG calls on the two continents to share stocks of key materials for fertiliser production with a view to strengthen food systems across the continent. The planned Africa-Europe Global Gateway Investment Package acknowledges this to a degree, but greater attention and support for countries that are phosphate-rich such as Morocco and Togo can expedite the production of fertilisers, somewhat reducing dependency on Russia. Equally crucial to food sovereignty is the production of staples such as cereals – currently more than one-third of wheat consumed in Africa is produced in Russia and Ukraine. Investing in the wheat production capacity of the continent, as well as diversifying the staple supply to include other grains such as millet, will support both Africa and Europe in reducing dependency on food imports, and also improve conditions for rural habitants across Africa.

The global ripple effects of the conflict have further underlined the need to reconceptualise security, beyond military power. A human security approach assessing fundamentals such as access to energy, food, and healthcare, should be prioritised when designing policies to create lasting peace. Improving connectivity and mobility is key to supporting the provision of these fundamentals, and greater regional integration is one avenue that can strengthen connectivity to underpin energy, food, and healthcare.

The AEF HLG is committed to deepening and enlarging the dialogues between our two continents and creating spaces to exchange frankly and openly with one another, especially around issues where we may diverge. We believe that the Africa-Europe Partnership must take root and develop beyond only the institutions, and involve stakeholders across sectors to identify concrete areas to work together to face the challenges of today, and of tomorrow.

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