

Theme: Africa-Europe Relations

What must be the priorities to achieve a renewed partnership?

The relationship between Africa and Europe have, since time immemorial, been closely linked due to the proximity of these two giants: at their closest juncture the continents are 15km's apart at the Strait of Gibraltar. A history of colonial occupation, shared development interest and propinquity made these relations possible.

In our most recent history two major economic evolutions underpin the Africa-Europe relations, most notably from 1975 to 2000, and 2000 to the present day. The former period heralding the signing of the 1975 Lomé Convention and the subsequent introduction of non-reciprocal trade preferences, and the latter giving birth to the Cotonou Partnership Agreement providing a trade framework fenced around the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA).

In recent times the relationship between Africa and Europe have been deteriorating as Europe is losing great parts of its economic stake to emerging economies competing for share in the African market; the Chinese foreign policy to Africa, their global economic muscle and favourable interest between Beijing and the African Union (AU), as well as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) promoting inter-African trade under the largest free trade market in the world, are all hampering Europe's trade security. It remains Africa's largest trade partner, however noticeable changes are threatening this reality.

In addition to these considerations, one of the biggest reasons fuelling the deterioration of these relations, in part, is the mistrust Africans have towards Europe due to our colonial history and the occupation of France in West Africa to this day, as well as the treatment of African refugees in Europe and the EU's silence in this regard. These conditions provide breeding grounds for competing interests to capitalise on and develop more favourable terms of trade for Africa.

Africa is a sleeping economic giant and has the potential to rival global trading powers in a sustainable way ensuring continual development both in and around the continent. The restoration of relations between Africa and Europe should not only be considered on face value but requires deeper delving and confronting the scars of our colonial and brutal history, with the intention to build capacity to renew trust relations between these two areas.

Africa and Europe should embark on a mutual renewal program:

- a. that identifies the emotional discord between its people through establishing grassroots intervention to,
 - i. understand how colonialism disfigured the African identity and impacted generational traditions and beliefs,
 - ii. embark on a program to restore these systems and take accountability for generational inaction, and

- iii. start a repatriation program to return artifacts, colonial loot and property of significant cultural and traditional importance to reaffirm these new relations.
 - b. to redevelop the identity of both trading partners, individually and as a collective, to drastically challenge their symbiotic relationship with the idea of maximising mutual economic benefit, this would need,
 - i. both Africa and Europe to redevelop their value in the global trade community and respectively, towards each other.
 - ii. Europe should shed its paternal identity to Africa undermining African sovereignty legally regulated in the current economic trade agreements between the continents. This would allow Africa to re-establish its economic muscle and build local production capacity throughout the continent.
 - iii. Africa should shed its identity of a continent constantly in need of foreign aid, support and assistance, and embark on a continental campaign to strengthen local production and manufacturing capabilities;
 - this, in turn, will allow greater leeway to negotiate against the exports of raw materials to, and subsequent import of processed goods from Europe,
 - in addition, the exports of manufactured goods to Europe would significantly boost the fiscus of African nations due to the strength of the Euro to Africa exchange and greatly improve the livelihoods of the poor majority, and
 - prioritising bi-lateral trade and cross-continental economic stimulation allowing Europe's position to Africa to retreat from that of a superior force, promoting that of equal partnership.
 - c. that would allow for the full implementation of globally recognised trade principles, drafted as part of new trade agreements, and regulated by the World Trade Organisation, supported by the need;
 - i. for a shared partnership, shared value, common continental development and with the focus on strengthening domestic ties between African countries first, in respect of AfCFTA,
 - ii. to be centralised around human rights development, soft foreign policy between the AU and EU, and considering Africa's unity project as outlined in Agenda 2063, and
 - iii. to renegotiate current economic agreements considering AfCFTA and EPA's (Europe being able to afford the same economic independence to Africa as it is enjoying as part of the European Economic Area), and the removal of harmful clauses on non-reciprocal trade, the most-favoured-nation clause and the significant threat Europe poses to AfCFTA on a competitor scale in Africa, against African nations.