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Lisbon EU-Africa Summit: The Day after ... Prepared for real change of relationship?

Will the Lisbon Summit (to be held on 8-9 December) and the new Africa-EU joint Strategy bring substantial change in the way both partners handle their relationship? As a facilitator of the public consultation on the Strategy, ECDPM believes it is useful at this stage to start looking beyond the Summit and, without seeking to be comprehensive, to raise a small selection of issues that amongst others will deserve attention in 2008. By **Paul Engel** and **Marie-Laure de Bergh**

Seven years have passed since the first EU-Africa Summit took place in Cairo. In the meantime Africa, Europe and the international scene have all changed. New issues are now on top of the global agenda such as terrorism, migration and climate change. Africa has engaged itself on the path of continental integration with the creation of the African Union. An enlarged EU witnesses with a certain apprehension the emergence of “new” actors in Africa such as China, India and Brazil. In this new context, the Lisbon EU-Africa Summit next December has to live up to considerable expectation on both sides. Holding the Summit, re-opening the Africa-EU political dialogue at this level and agreeing a *joint* Strategy are already important achievements in themselves, but many observers are still wondering how the Summit and Strategy will make a difference.

* Will the Summit make a difference?

The proposed joint Africa-EU Strategy (see reference) to be endorsed at the Lisbon Summit commits both continents to a renewed long-term political partnership based on Euro-African consensus on values, common interests and four strategic

objectives. It seeks guidance from fundamental principles, such as the unity of Africa, the interdependence between Africa and Europe, ownership and joint responsibility, and respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law, as well as the right to development. The first Action Plan is intended to translate these commitments into eight priority partnerships on key issues: peace and security; democratic governance and human rights; trade and regional integration; Millennium Development Goals; energy; climate change; migration, mobility and employment; science, information society and space.

The joint Strategy is thus expected to provide a renewed overall framework for future EU-Africa relations but of course ‘the proof of the pudding will be in the eating’: the evidence of real change will come in the delivery. How are Africa and the EU planning to implement the Strategy’s commitments? The Summit will therefore need to provide the political push to move ahead and provide real impetus for the implementation. Three expected areas of change can provide some preliminary insights of the challenges that lie ahead: achieving a continent to continent relation-

ship, enhancing the consistency of EU policy towards Africa and ensuring better delivery of existing and new commitments.

*** Beyond a historically fragmented relationship**

The EU-Africa relationship has historically been fragmented into three agreements and policies: the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership with Northern Africa, the Cotonou Partnership Agreement for sub-Saharan Africa and the Trade and Development Cooperation Agreement with South Africa. Overcoming this fragmentation and entering into a continent to continent relationship can be considered as a major novelty of the Strategy. But in practice will the EU and Africa now be able to move beyond this fragmented relationship, which is in many ways a heritage of the post-colonial period, and open a new era in EU-Africa relations by further integrating the pan-African dimension into the existing cooperation framework?

To achieve this objective, it would seem essential to gradually make a number of reforms. A first useful step would be to set up a pan-African financial envelope beyond the existing national and regional envelopes. At present, the pan-African level is the only one which is not supported by a structured and predictable envelope that can be jointly programmed over time. Some EU support to the African Union already exists for instance through the African Peace Facility but it has so far been of an ad hoc nature and/or relating to a specific theme. There is no “continental indicative envelope” to be programmed over five years as it exists at the national and regional levels. As the joint Strategy is to be implemented at the continental, regional and national levels, it would be appropriate to have financial envelopes at all three of them. Such a pan-African financial envelope should logically be funded at the EC level from all three relevant geographical financial instruments, though mainly the European Development Fund and the

European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument, and potentially, as this is an Africa-EU Strategy, also with EU Member States bilateral funding.

Another step is in the area of political dialogue where the African Union should be integrated as a key interlocutor in all relevant dialogue fora. While this cannot be done overnight, the Strategy should be the appropriate framework to concretely move forward on this issue. Obviously, capacity constraints on the African side will also need to be addressed. A stronger African Union is one of the conditions for the success of this relationship and a more appropriate EU support mechanism could contribute to such a goal.

Consistency between the goals of this overall EU-Africa framework and Member States bilateral policies is another issue that will deserve further discussion. The concrete involvement of Member States remains an open question at this stage: beyond possible funding, will EU Member States support and gradually align their bilateral policy towards Africa to the objectives of the joint EU-Africa Strategy. For instance, the idea that is currently being floated of a ‘Mediterranean Union’ as a link between the EU and Africa: is there really a way in which this can be made compatible with the joint Strategy, which amongst its various goals seeks to support Africa’s continental integration?

*** Major weaknesses: Delivery, implementation, monitoring**

Many commitments are already on the table when it comes to the EU-Africa relations but one of the major frustrations of many actors involved is delivery. Although monitoring is certainly covered in the Strategy, the concrete mechanisms still have to be spelled out. Naturally, many questions still remain open: What will be the funding available to implement this Strategy? How will the various actors be concretely involved in the monitoring?

Will more inclusive and more political monitoring, evaluation and review systems ensure a wide debate on the implementation as well as the involvement of the various actors at all appropriate levels in Europe and Africa?

In short, the day after the Summit, once the EU and Africa have decided on their joint path forward, tough implementation challenges will remain. The Summit can provide the political impetus for the work and the joint Strategy an appropriate and useful framework, but it will require considerable commitment over time, on all sides and at all levels to ensure the objectives of the Strategy are eventually met.

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Reference:

* The joint EU-Africa Strategy has been approved by the EU-Africa Troika Ministerial on 31 October along with the first Action Plan:

<http://europafrica.org/2007/11/14/joint-strategy-and-action-plan/>

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