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EU's Africa Foreign Policy after Lisbon

Conference Report
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By Mélanie Cathelin

This conference is the third of a series of events on "Ensuring peace and security in Africa: Implementing a new EU-Africa partnership" launched in 2009 by the IAI, Chatham House and the EUISS. The first two conferences examined the EU/Africa cooperation on security in the light of the EU-Africa Strategy that was adopted in 2007[1]. The aim of the 2011 conference was to analyse the current state and prospects for EU foreign policy in Africa in the post-Lisbon environment.

A number of key questions were deliberated, such as: What lessons can already be drawn after almost a year of implementation of the European External Action Service? How are EU regional strategies designed and implemented in a post-Lisbon environment? Will the EU increasingly speak with one voice in Africa and will policy coherence towards the continent be enhanced?

This conference addressed these issues through the examination of concrete case studies (country and regional specific, as well as thematic policies). Four cross cutting issues were analysed in each case study:

1. EU Coordination both at an inter-institutional level (within Brussels organizations) and between the EU delegations / representations and Brussels organizations.
2. Priorities and interests articulated in EEAS policies between Member States.

[1] (http://www.iai.it/pdf/Convegni/Africa-EU_091007-9.pdf) http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Meetings/Meeting%20Transcripts/271010summary.pdf

3. The relevance of regional (AU) and sub-regional (RECs) frameworks for the EU Africa foreign policy

4. Engagement with other international actors and organizations

The conference opened with a key note address by Nicholas Westcott, EEAS Managing Director for Africa, on European Relations with Africa[2].

Towards EU regional strategies in Africa? The Sahel and beyond

The situation in the Sahel is characterized by a complex web of interrelated issues that deeply affect the prospects for security and development in the region. Terrorism was identified as one of the biggest challenges for Sahel countries and their partners, in particular **Al-Qaida Islamic Maghreb islamique** (AQIM) was analyzed as the driving engine of insecurity in the Sahel.

The EU has recently designed a regional strategy for the Sahel, which was adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council on the 25th of October 2011[3]. The European Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel can be considered as the first deliverable of the EEAS in Africa, jointly with the European Commission, and as such represents a real step towards greater coherence for EU action in the Sahel, and in Africa in general. The aims of this session were:

- Analyse EU policies in the Sahel in the context of the implementation of the Strategy.
- Foster debate on the conditions required for the increased efficiency of EU policies in this region and beyond.

1. Challenges of coherence for EU policy in the Sahel

The EU Strategy seeks to promote an holistic and comprehensive framework for EU action in the Sahel. One of the key themes of the Strategy is that security and development are inseparable: the Strategy therefore aims to address a wide range of issues, including development, governance, rule of law, and the prevention of further radicalization.

The Strategy also contains important institutional innovations such as the creation of a Task force and the appointment of a regional coordinator. These innovations allow EU actors to engage in a long-term process of consultation with both Member States and African and international partners. In addition, the coordinated use of various EU instruments to enhance procedural coherence is foreseen. Some Member States have already expressed their willingness to coordinate their policies with the EU action in the Sahel.

Nevertheless the Strategy still suffers from conceptual and procedural shortcomings that need to be addressed. Panelists underlined the complexity of the link between development and security in the Sahel. Concern was expressed that the pursuit of security objectives, through the fight against terrorism, illegal and criminal activities, such as smuggling and trafficking, might jeopardize EU development goals for the region. These activities exemplify the structural fragilities of

[2] Nicholas Westcott, « A New Framework for European Relations with Africa », 18 October 2011, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2011/181011_fr.htm

[3] http://eeas.europa.eu/africa/docs/sahel_strategy_en.pdf

the Sahel states, while bearing obvious risks for regional stability. The threat posed by the amount of weapons missing as a result of the Libya crisis was noted. Moreover, the economic informal networks generated by trafficking activities are crucially important for populations largely deprived of access to public services and jobs. Alternatives to existing sources of livelihood need to be found for those populations. Meanwhile, the capacity of the Sahel states to maintain some kind of social and political inner balance, despite major fragilities, should not be underrated.

2. Which Framework of Action?

Political dialogue between the EU and its Sahel partners is the key to a successful implementation of the strategy. Such a dialogue must rely on mutual interests, in order to foster ownership of the strategy by the Sahel states. There is also a need to reflect upon the appropriateness of the existing framework of action of the Strategy.

The Strategy focuses primarily on countries that are most affected by insecurity – Mali, Mauritania and Niger. However, given the interconnectivity of terrorist threats, political dialogue should be encouraged within a larger framework. It was for instance noted that the EU should be careful not to sidestep strategic actors such as Nigeria in the implementation of the Strategy.

The appropriateness of the ECOWAS framework was also discussed. The organization is facing major leadership issues. Despite these challenges, it still has an important role to play on at least two levels. First, ECOWAS can offer a better platform of political dialogue with key / difficult players, notably Algeria. Second, ECOWAS is an important partner for the EU in the fight against drug trafficking.

The EU should also reflect upon the necessity of engaging in a political dialogue with other countries such as Morocco, Egypt and Libya and the conditions under which this could take place. The upcoming Global Forum against Terrorism that will be held in Morocco will provide a good window of opportunity.

Eventually the Strategy will have to remain as flexible as possible in order to adapt to the evolving situation on the ground and the implications of the Libya crisis – notably arms circulation – for the region. Further research is required that examines the possible evolutions of AQIM into a proto-state as well as its sources of financing.

Engaging with emerging regional players: Nigeria, South Africa and Ethiopia

This session's aims were to firstly elucidate the EU rationale for engaging with specific African powers and secondly to unpack the term "emerging regional players". This was achieved through an analysis of the current prospects of EU relationships with these countries.

1. *Living up to mutual expectations: the need for clearer engagement from the EU*

There is no doubt that Nigeria, South Africa and Ethiopia are established *regional players* in Africa, given their size, GDP, and military capacity. However, they differ in the way they assert their *power*, both regionally and internationally. These differences impact in several ways on their relationship with the EU.

Among the three countries, only South Africa appears to be in a position to exert a real *power of influence*, due to its diplomatic network and relative economic strength. Both Ethiopia and Nigeria encounter difficulties when asserting their role of regional powers.

Despite geopolitical advantages,[4] Ethiopia has arguably been punching below its political weight on the regional scene, one of the most difficult neighborhoods in Africa. Ethiopia's role is also weakened by domestic conflicts and constitutional issues. In Nigeria, the elite's incapacity in producing effective public policies, the unsolved federalist issues, as well as ongoing (in)security challenges[5] have precluded this country from projecting power on a sustainable basis.

Given this context, the point was made that the EU should not overwhelm these regional leaders. South Africa now faces difficulties in meeting expectations in the field of peace and security due to overstretched peacekeeping resources.

The EU should rather work on reducing the gap between engagement and expectations. In Ethiopia and Nigeria there is a need for EU support in terms of civil society, governance and democratization. It is in the EU's interest to be able to rely on key partners for the implementation of its African policy – the Libyan and Ivory Coast crises have for instance shown the benefits of a greater partnership between the EU [and the US] and Nigeria. A strategic dialogue should be conducted with Ethiopia, and the current "Nigeria-EU Joint Way Forward" should be boosted.

The EU and South Africa have been committed to a strategic partnership since 2007. The September 2011 Summit also helped explicate major achievements such as the establishment of a Human Rights Dialogue. EPA progress remains uneven given South Africa's suspicions that it might jeopardize regional integration. Serious divergences remain on peace and security issues, namely Zimbabwe and Libya[6]. In addition it was noted that the EU relationship with South Africa requires serious clarifications and greater consistency from the EU.

2. *Engagement with other international actors: cooperation or rivalry?*

The need for a rejuvenated dialogue with these countries must be taken seriously for three reasons. Firstly Africa's geopolitical importance is increasing, as indicated by the growing interest of powers like Brazil, India and China in the continent. In this regard, the recent admission of South Africa to the BRICS group marks a compelling change, which could potentially jeopardize/lower its relationship with the EU, despite the fact that the EU remains the biggest trade partner of South Africa.

Secondly the current economic crisis in Europe might reduce its capacity for influence in Africa in general, and in particularly in these strategic countries.

Finally, the EU is often perceived as lacking consistency and credibility. In the Horn of Africa for instance, the EU is perceived as being aligned with US anti-terror policies, despite its important contribution in development and humanitarian aid. This lack of credibility is compounded by the considerable fragmentation of EU policy in Africa, and the difficulties for Europeans to "speak with one voice", particularly in regions

[4] Ethiopia is by its size and population the largest country of the Horn of Africa. Its capital hosts the headquarters of the AU, therefore placing the country at the heart of international diplomacy. Ethiopia is also a close ally of the United States in the "war against terror'".

[5] For more details, see Mélanie Cathelin, "Post-elections Nigeria: Democracy at a Turning Point?", Africa Briefing Report, 9 June 2011, http://www.obsafrique.eu/?p=1847.

[6] Huge divergences have been noted on the vote of the 1973 resolution, leading Thabo Mbeki to state that South Africa felt « deeply betrayed by the West » on the Libya file.

like the Horn which are characterized by strong bilateral relations and Member States engagement. In this regard, the fresh EEAS falls short of well established Member States diplomatic apparatus.

3. ***The disconnect between interests and values: a fatality?***

The disconnect between EU values and interests was highlighted as another factor undermining the coherence of EU policy in Africa. The EU is often reproached for protecting its own (for instance trade) interests at the expense of the "common values" discourse that it preaches. Particular corrective efforts should be undertaken in the realm of multilateral political and economic governance, where European states are often perceived as acting as "free riders".

Closer attention should be paid to the quality of EU-Africa engagement in multilateral forums, and the EU should utilize its power to increase African participation in these areas, notably within the UN Security Council.

Meanwhile, the EU should encourage the promotion of shared values among African countries, and a better coordination of African positions. The idea of an "African G5" was suggested, which would include Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, South Africa and Angola, in order to lessen potential rivalries on political and security issues – as was the case between Nigeria and South Africa during the management of the Ivory Coast crisis – and to facilitate dialogue with non-African actors.

Democratization after the elections: Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe and Kenya

1. ***EU's democracy promotion efforts: a mixed result***

A brief overview of the situation in DRC, Kenya and Zimbabwe illustrate the mixed results that have been achieved so far after a decade of democracy promotion efforts. Both the DRC and Kenya appear to be "stuck in transition". Democracy remains embryonic In the DRC despite the rhetoric of success surrounding the 2006 elections. In Kenya, after the euphoria following the end of Moi's despotic rule in 2002, disillusion kept growing and reached a climax during the heavily 2007 disputed polls. Contrary to expectations, Kenya's leadership seems to have endorsed the same habits of its autocratic predecessors, and state power has been captured by the most radical elements of certain ethnic groups. 2011 elections will be a real test for the consolidation of the fragile Kenyan democracy. As for Zimbabwe, the country has been experiencing growing tensions and low intensity violence, despite the 2008 Global Political Agreement that was supposed to put an end to years of collapse under the ZANU PF government.

Which assessment can be made of EU efforts in favor of democracy promotion? The first thing to be noted is the diversity of the EU's engagement in these countries. The EU is for instance considered the godfather of the Congolese 3rd Republic, a fact that contrasts heavily with its relative disinvestment since 2006. In Zimbabwe, targeted and restrictive measures introduced by the EU in 2002 in protest against the escalation of violence have shown mixed results. ZANU PF leaders have used the process to increase internal support. Since June 2009, the EU has attempted to create a new relationship with Zimbabwe, but no agreement is in sight. In Kenya, the EU has been praised for the critical role it played during the transition period – EU monitors

were the first to call the 2007 elections fraudulent, although it is arguably still walking a fine line between over exposure and quiet diplomacy. In so doing it risks compromising its backing for democratization and human rights.

Second, it should be noted that in the DRC and Zimbabwe, the EU is dealing with **particularly difficult players, which constitute serious obstacles for an effective political dialogue**. In the DRC, Europeans face difficulties in gaining access to decision-making circles when exerting pressure on Congolese authorities. This has been translated into a "schizophrenic approach" of the EU in the Congo: the EU has for instance been deeply involved in the election monitoring, through its ***European Union Observer Mission*** (EUOM), but remained silent when the DRC government decided to change the Constitution in order to favor incumbents.

In Zimbabwe, the power sharing agreement is arguably a mere façade: ZANU PF has proceeded to share political posts, but not amongst key organizations like the police or the army. The EU has been supporting some of the institutions resulting from the GPA, such as the national electoral commission and the human rights commission. These efforts are hampered by ZANU PF's continuous grip on these bodies – most of the staff are former ZANU PF appointees. As a consequence, the EU had to craft **imaginative strategies** to reach the people of Zimbabwe. Through the "humanitarian +" approach, the EU is currently reshaping its support to NGOs, international organizations (World Food Programme for instance), and regional institutions (SADC[7], AU).

As elsewhere, the EU is facing important **coordination challenges** on at least two levels. First, between the EU and its Member States: in the DRC for instance, the need for Security Sector Reform (SSR) is widely recognized as being key for the reconstruction of the Congolese state and rule of law. SSR has however being the subject of numerous bilateral and EU initiatives, which are not necessarily aligned. Second, the EU policy in these countries is driven by multiple objectives which often conflict with each other and undermine EU democracy promotion. The point was made that the EU's commercial objectives should be better coordinated with its overall objectives of democratization and human rights protection.

2. Some lessons learned

- A shared concern was expressed that "elections only are not enough": democracy promotion goes beyond election monitoring. In Kenya it was noticed that the monitoring process should have started at the earliest possible date. Even though individuals do matter, the EU should also foster institutional changes, which should avoid the kind of disillusion that it faced in Kenya in 2008.

- Support to civil society appears to be crucial: the EU should aim at a better inclusion of local civil society. However, a thin line exists between impartiality and the risk of being perceived as biased by the ruling elites.

- On those issues, the EU should seek to engage with other external actors in order to promote democratic change. The "Friends of Zimbabwe" Group should for instance be opened to other countries like China and India. The same can be said about the DRC:

[7] For now the right of SADC to be part of the monitoring team for the next elections in Zimbabwe has been disclaimed by ZANU PF. It was noted that the EU has played a very positive role in its assistance to the SADC secretariat, so as to develop SADC capacity in elections monitoring.

China should be included for a broader reflection on the DRC.

- The EU should develop **better benchmarks** to assess the effectiveness of democracy promotion efforts and political dialogue. There are currently no systemic 'lessons learned' processes, and this is a problem.

- With reference to this last point, attendees debated the establishment of a European Endowment for Democracy, notably for local civil society organizations. Questions were raised whether this programme would be limited to North Africa[8].

Crisis response and lessons learned: the cases of Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau and Somalia

Although their contexts vary considerably, these three case studies present an interesting test case for the EU's crisis response policy. They have been the site for the implementation of a variety EU instruments, from crisis prevention to military response and containment, through electoral monitoring and "post-conflict" intervention / state reform. This session aimed at exploring the possible ways of ameliorating the EU's crisis response mechanisms. The following lessons were drawn:

- The need for **a more flexible approach** for the EU was emphasized in all three cases studies. The EU is often depicted - along other international actors – as adopting a standardized response and as insensitive to the political and cultural contexts. It was noted that in Somalia for instance, the adoption of a security frame – dominated by the piracy and counterterrorism agendas – at the expense of a political one (although in line with EU support to the Djibouti process), has led to a misunderstanding of Somalia's problems. This has seriously impaired the effectiveness of the EU's crisis response whilst explaining the failure of prevention of the current food crisis. The tendency to create new institutions, rather than focusing on existing – particularly local – ones is another key factor of ineffectiveness[9].

In Guinea Bissau, the point was made for a **more imaginative application** of policy coherence on development, notably to reward early signs of positive developments and behaviours.

The need **to craft alternative strategies**, and to adopt a less technocratic approach was also acknowledged with reference to the electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire in particular, and more broadly to election monitoring in Africa. The EU has made an important financial and technical contribution (€8 million) to the organization of elections in Côte d'Ivoire, alongside deploying an EU observation mission. However, this contribution was acknowledged as being too limited in scope: the EU should instead consider expanding its support to Elections Management Bodies, or certification processes. However, these are very sensitive issues.

- Effective crisis management mechanisms require the development of a **more comprehensive strategy** as the starting point for any kind of EU's engagement. The timing of SSR intervention should for instance

[8] See OSI – Brussels, "How Could a European Endowment for Democracy Add Value?", Discussion Paper, September 2011, http://www.soros.org/initiatives/brussels/articles_publications/publications/eed-paper-20110927/eed-paper-20110927.pdf

[9] This point should be put in perspective with the recent roadmap signed between the TFG and Puntland's authorities. The EU is now looking for new ways of supporting the local structures in Puntland.

be reflected upon: in Côte d'Ivoire, the security issue (role of the police during the electoral process) and the problem posed by the reform of the army, which was split among several antagonist groups, should have been dealt with separately and well ahead of the election process. Participants also widely referred to the need for the EU to conduct **regular 'lessons learned' exercises on EU policies**.

- As elsewhere, EU action is constrained by **the difficulty encountered when relying upon trustworthy interlocutors**. A careful balance needs to be found between incentives and disincentives for effective EU engagement in those countries[10].

- In some cases, the EU lacked the **human capacity** to effectively respond to and manage crises. In Guinea Bissau, the local EU staff did not fully manage to influence crisis dynamics. In Somalia, the EU's lack of intelligence on land – 95% of Atalanta's intelligence sources are open ones – constitutes a serious impediment for the effectiveness of the EU's naval mission.

- In all three case studies, the EU has faced **difficulties in coordinating its activities with other actors**. In Guinea Bissau, tensions between EU and UN approaches undermined wider collaboration.

- The EU's management policies require a strong **reinvigoration of political leadership**. The EU needs to be more assertive in the conduct of its policies. In Côte d'Ivoire, one of the challenges for the EU was to square its role with French foreign policy. The EU has effectively responded to the post-election crisis, through its ability to maintain international interest in the Ivory Coast and via the application of sanctions. However, the EU never fully endorsed the role of a pivotal diplomatic player: Despite being a large donor and despite its sanctions, the EU limited itself to rather apolitical development initiatives. While the EUSSR missions in Guinea Bissau achieved to some extent real progress, it must be noted that the missions suffered from a serious problem of leadership. In Somalia, the anti-piracy efforts of the EU have been constrained by a lack of consensus between EU member states about the use of force and rules of engagement. The prosecution of those pirates apprehended by EU forces constitute another important challenge to EU action as 90% of the suspects are released. These issues would require the nomination of a single coordinator for piracy – on the model of the EU action in the Sahel[11]. Broadly speaking, leadership and coordination issues would be better addressed through the designation of a EUSSR for the Horn of Africa[12].

Conclusion and prospects for change

One of the questions raised concerned the scope of changes in EU Africa foreign policy

[10] The case of Puntland was cited, where leaders of this region have been directly benefiting from piracy linked activities. Some positive changes have however been noticed, and Puntland authorities are now much more open to cooperation on piracy issues. In Côte d'Ivoire, it was noted that SSR programs are unlikely to succeed given the degree of mistrust between the warring parties.

[11] See Damien Helly, "Lessons from *Atalanta* and EU counter piracy policies", EUISS Seminar Report, June 2011, http://www.iss.europa.eu/activities/detail/article/lessons-from-iatalantai-and-eu-counter-piracy-policies/.

[12] Following its adoption of the EEAS Strategy for the Horn of Africa on the 14th of November, the Foreign Affairs Council nominated a Special representative for the EU in the region. His/her main tasks will be twofold: to coordinate the EU response to the crisis in Somalia on the one hand; and to draft and implement a coherent EU strategy on piracy.

since the launch in 2009 of the Africa EUISS/IAI/Chatham House conference cycle. It was argued that the EU still has difficulty choosing between realism and idealism, as illustrated by the contradictions between its commercial interests on the one hand, and its development objectives on the other. EU foreign policy towards Africa is still constrained by structural issues that have not yet been properly addressed, like lack of flexibility and remaining multiple centres of political leadership spread among EU institutions and Member States. The most important is the definition of European common interests and priorities in Africa. It was also noted that the question of who represents the EU is still an issue, despite efforts to convey "one message", if not with not with one voice. The need for political leadership was again stressed, in order to foster broader coherence for EU action in Africa.

Some major improvements have nonetheless been noted, such as the setting up of new tools of action for the EU in Africa, through the creation of the External Action Service. Efforts are also being made in terms of better coordination and adjustment. To that extent, the design and implementation of regional strategies, like the ones on Sahel and the Horn, indicate some positive prospects that security, development and political issues in Africa will be addressed in a more substantial and effective way. Particular efforts should be undertaken towards lessons learned and best practices exercises, in order to design, in Brussels as much as in African capitals themselves, more targeted approaches to deal with the diversity of African interlocutors and the complexity of African politics.