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The European Union and challenges to democracy building in Africa

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Executive summary

This chapter examines the main challenges for democracy building in Africa, and how the present role of the European Union (EU) is perceived. Policy proposals and recommendations are presented which aim to address the gap between the EU's intentions and African perceptions in promoting democracy building. The chapter is based on consultations and research on the EU's role in democracy building in Africa conducted by International IDEA during 2008 and 2009.

The evolving relationship between Africa and the EU has reflected changes in the geopolitical environment, the rise of independence movements and the subsequent process of decolonization as well as the end of the Cold War. Since 1990, a renewed purpose and a drive to succeed in democracy building have been evident in Africa and African leaders have understood the link between developing democracy and the local context on which it must be based if it is to be sustainable.

The main challenges to democracy building in Africa must be seen in the context of colonialism and neo-colonialism. These produced administrative and institutional structures that were not conducive to the promotion of sustainable development and democracy building. The colonial powers left many African states with systems of authoritarian values and norms that weakened public administration and the education system – both essential for effective democracy building.

The alleviation of extreme poverty is Africa's biggest challenge. Linked with social and economic underdevelopment – in particular lack of food security, poor education and a lack of affordable and accessible health services – it contributes to the perception that democracy has not improved the livelihood of people in Africa. Democracy alone cannot address the multitude of Africa's challenges, including corruption. A holistic and multi-stakeholder approach is needed to address these challenges and support African democracy building.

The Africa-EU partnership offers considerable scope in this regard. In supporting Africa to become a real partner through the provision of capacity building and institutional infrastructure, the EU can assist with empowering the peoples of Africa, promote sustainable development and alleviate extreme poverty.

Introduction

> "During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if it needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."[1]

Africa and Europe are bound together by history, culture and geography. From a European perspective, Africa has never been the 'forgotten continent' – the concept so often used in contemporary politics to describe the African continent.

The relationship between Africa and the EU has evolved over time, reflecting changes in the geopolitical environment, the rise of independence movements and the subsequent process of decolonialization, as well as the end of the Cold War. These factors had an important impact on the relationship between Africa and Europe, and coincided with the accelerating pace of European integration. Although bilateral relations between individual EU member states and African states had been pursued for many years, the 1957 Treaty of Rome introduced the first 'formalized' relationship between Europe and Africa, which led to a series of beneficial and privileged agreements such as the Yaoundé Conventions (1963–1975), the Lomé Conventions (1975–2000) and the Cotonou Agreement (2000–2020) (Bradley 2003).

The EU has embedded democracy as one of the cornerstones of its relationship with Africa.

In recent years, international awareness of the situation in, and the challenges facing, Africa has significantly improved, and it is now widely acknowledged that Africa is an important partner when it comes to dealing with global problems. This growing significance of Africa in international relations and European policy discourse can be related, inter alia, to the potential consequences and risks of state failure, which were exposed by the attacks on the United States of 11 September 2001; increased geopolitical and economic interests in Africa; globalization; and the importance for the EU of transnational challenges such as migration and environmental concerns, including climate change (Bradley 2003). As a consequence, Africa has gained in prominence on the EU's external relations agenda, and has also presented the EU with an opportunity to improve its own capabilities in external relations.

Initially, the Africa-EU relationship, as reflected and manifested in the EU's relationship with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states,[2] was exclusively

[1] Mandela, Nelson R., Statement from the dock at the opening of the defence case in the Rivonia Trial, Pretoria Supreme Court, 20 April 1964, available at http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/rivonia.html

[2] The ACP group of states consists of 48 sub-Saharan African, 16 Caribbean and 15 Pacific states.

focused on trade. Based on the European Commission Communication of 23 May 1995,[3] the first formal introduction of the principle of democracy in relations with Africa was captured in the Lomé Convention IV bis (1995–2000), which provided the legal instrument for the EU's relationship with the ACP group. In expanding its relationship with the ACP group beyond trade and development cooperation, the EU included political dialogue as one of the pillars of the Cotonou Agreement.[4] Now, the ACP-EU political dialogue was centred on agreed essential elements (democratic principles, the rule of law and respect for human rights) as well as the fundamental principle of good governance, captured in article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement. In this way, the EU embedded democracy as one of the cornerstones of its relationship with Africa.

Since 1990, remarkable changes have occurred in Africa's political landscape. This systemic shift had a gradual trajectory, and at the dawn of the 21st century most countries on the continent had met the initial demand of multi-party democracy and embraced the idea of holding free, fair and competitive elections (Priser 2009).

Africa also made advances in finding common principles and values related to democracy building. To this end, the adoption of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) at the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Summit in Durban, South Africa, in 2002, and the 2007 African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance,[5] provided the framework for the inclusion of democratization and democracy building in policy frameworks and Declarations issued by successive EU-Africa Summits as well as EU policy and strategic orientations on Africa.

Context

From a legal and formal perspective, the EU's relationships with Africa are governed through the Cotonou Agreement, for sub-Saharan countries; the Republic of South Africa (RSA)-EU Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA); (European Union Official Journal 1999) the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and Association Agreements;[6] and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and ENP Action Plans, for North Africa. These agreements provide the EU with a long-term, albeit fragmented, framework for engagement, dialogue, trade and cooperation with Africa.

The first EU-Africa Summit, held in Cairo in 2000, set in motion a structured political dialogue between Africa and the EU. In 2005, the EU adopted the 'European Consensus' on development, which provided a common framework of objectives, values and principles that EU member states, the European Commission and the European

[3] European Commission, Communication of 23 May 1995 on the Inclusion of Respect for Democratic Principles and Human Rights in Agreements between the Community and Third Countries, COM(95)0216-C4-0197/95

[4] European Union, ACP-EU Partnership Agreement, signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000, ACP-EU Courier, Special Issue, Commission, Brussels, 2000

[5] African Union, African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, Addis Ababa, 2007

[6] European Union, Barcelona Declaration and Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, Brussels, 1995, see http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/external_relations/relations_with_third_countries/mediterranean_partner_countries/r15001_en.htm

Parliament support and promote, projecting the EU as a global player and development partner.

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Challenges for democracy building in Africa

Democracy building and development are at various stages and different levels in the African states. This makes it difficult to provide a homogeneous description and assessment of the state of democracy and democracy building in Africa.

Democracy building faces similar challenges in Africa to those faced in other regions of the world. Africa's relations with other global actors also have an impact on how democracy building is perceived in the context of the Africa-EU relationship. Africa is a diverse continent, and democracy building and development challenges are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, influenced by both factors unique to Africa and other factors.

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The main challenges to democracy building in Africa must be understood in the context of the slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism, which contributed to administrative and institutional structures that were not conducive to the promotion of sustainable development and democracy building. In addition, the colonial powers left many African states with a system of authoritarian values and norms that weakened public administration and the education system – both essential for effective democracy building. Nevertheless, as some African countries have shown, this past is not an insurmountable impediment to democracy building, and should not be used as an excuse for not moving forward.

Since 1990, a renewed purpose and a drive to succeed in democracy building have been evident in Africa, and African leaders have realized that historical explanations should be used to develop and create a home-grown framework and conducive environment that would allow for sustainable democracy building.

In the four years from 2005 to 2009 there were more than 50 democratic elections in Africa. The rise of democracy in Africa is not solely due to external influences, such as pressure from multilateral institutions and development partners. Africa cannot be

insulated from trends shaping the world, but its democracy movement was not imported from outside – it has its roots in African history. African nations are multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, multicultural and multi-religious (Odinga 2008). Democracy cannot have a uniform format in all the 53 African states – it must take different forms in different countries to reflect national variations and other local circumstances. Nonetheless, genuine democracy in Africa should be judged by a number of essential universal characteristics. It is possible to identify a number of endogenous and exogenous factors that influence the success of democracy building in African states.

Factors unique to Africa

A number of factors unique to Africa contribute to the challenges of democracy building on the continent. For example, the population is increasing in most African nations, which contributes to a greater number of jobseekers, some with poor education, entering limited labour markets. Urbanization is taking place at an alarming rate, and is exacerbated by the perceived urban/rural divide which favours urban areas in the utilization of development resources. The lack of sustainable management of the various demographic imperatives, including the non-provision of opportunities for young people and the rural population and limited action to address the socio-economic realities of underdevelopment, lie at the heart of the challenges of supporting democracy building, poverty eradication and sustainable development in Africa.

The alleviation of extreme poverty is Africa's biggest challenge. Social and economic underdevelopment, in particular food security, poor education and lack of affordable and accessible health services, contributes to the perception that democracy has not improved the livelihood of people in Africa. The provision and supply of basic needs are still the uppermost preoccupations of many African governments and their people, despite the obvious advantages that democracy building could bring to the promotion of sustainable development. Democracy alone cannot address the multitude of Africa's challenges, most notably corruption. Holistic and multi-stakeholder approaches are not always pursued to address the development challenges of the continent.

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Through the African Union (AU), Africa is in the process of empowering an institutional body that can represent the continent, and articulate its needs, views and positions on important issues with a 'single voice'. Furthermore, the African Union Commission has made advances and could play a similar role for African states to that played by the European Commission in the EU. However, democracy in Africa is still young, and integration on the continent is still in its infancy compared with the EU. In addition to low capacity and institutional deficits, these processes are slow due to the unwillingness of states to cede aspects of national sovereignty to the AU, and a perceived lack of political will to allow for enhanced continental integration, increased coherence in policy formulation, and empowerment of continental and regional organizations and institutions as well as the subsequent exercise of supranational powers. The existence of many overlapping regional integration organizations does not contribute to the establishment of a 'unified and single voice' for Africa, or to enhanced continental integration.

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Democracy building is an inclusive and holistic process that requires the active involvement of all actors, including non-state actors,[7] the diaspora and women, but in too many African countries the complementary role that they could play in promoting sustainable development and alleviating poverty is either marginalized or not adequately recognized. Non-state actors, the diaspora and women are indirect vectors for sustainable development and democracy building. Too often, they are seen as opponents to the policies and strategies of the government, and excluded from development processes, including democracy building. This situation impedes effective, inclusive and sustained democracy building, and also prevents the mainstreaming of democratization and democracy building in development policies and strategies (Mohamoud 2009).

Democratization and democracy building are still too often seen in many African states as just elections and electoral processes. A deepened understanding of democratization and democracy building by the people of Africa is not being promoted through education, and this prevents an acceleration of democracy building and sustainable development in many African states.

Education offers the potential to develop in the citizens of African countries a better understanding of democratization and democracy building and the likely impact on poverty alleviation and the promotion of sustainable development.

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People need to know that they have the right and duty to hold their governments accountable in order to contribute to the establishment of effective democracies in Africa. A deficit of people's power to hold leaders accountable, weak and fractured opposition parties and effective one-party states in some African states impede democracy building.

Other factors

In addition, a number of other factors contribute to the challenges of democracy building in Africa. Recent global crises in the financial system, food security and the energy sectors pose potential threats to democracy and democracy building. These events could lead to discontent and political instability in African states, even though it is commonly understood that African states are victims rather than perpetrators of these crises. These crises have significant implications for democracy and the democracy building efforts of the EU and other actors, given the likely future resource constraints. African states are, and will continue to be, challenged to manage economies in distress, and many will face new risks to democracy and the stability of fragile states (Lewis 2009).

The economic and financial crises will inevitably lead to a reduction in development assistance from the developed world, but the global nature of the crises makes it imperative to maintain support for political reform in and the democratic development of African states. Furthermore, in the present unstable global economic and financial

[7] For the purpose of this chapter, non-state actors are understood, in line with the Cotonou Agreement, to include the private sector, economic and social partners, including trade union organizations, and civil society.

climate, elections might also become a vehicle for competition over resources and conflict among groups and factions, which could further impede democratic gains and support for democracy building.

As noted above, the dialogue on democratization and democracy building between Africa and the EU is governed, inter alia, by the Cotonou Agreement, NEPAD and the APRM, the RSA-EU TDCA, the EMP Partnership and Association Agreements, the ENP and ENP Action Plans, and the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership and its related Action Plan. A number of international instruments, other bilateral agreements and conventions related to democratization and democracy building are also adhered to by African states. Africa has limited capacities and also institutional deficits for promoting democracy building in accordance with the principles, objectives and requirements of these agreements. Global actors need to understand this and promote coherence in agreements to avoid 'agreement overload'.

In the development of a continental strategy for Africa, the EU has to be conscious that a 'one-size fits all' approach to democratization and democracy building will not produce the expected results. Africa is diverse, and democracy building should be seen in the context of the continent's history and culture. The absence of a broadly and jointly defined definition of democracy, taking into account the context of country and regional distinctiveness, and the social and economic realities, does not support the expected diversified and appropriate approach, built on respect and true and real partnerships. There is a lack of flexibility and adaptation by the EU – key elements of a balanced and appropriate attitude that would allow for the joint development of strategies, policies and actions. The challenge is to find the right balance between the principles of democratization and democracy building that the EU subscribes to and those which are supported by African states.

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The EU should not see itself as the only partner to promote democracy building in Africa, but instead seek coordination and coherence with other actors. Africa has numerous global partners and the lack of established alliances with the EU as well as the promotion of cooperation with other global partners and actors could impede democracy building. Although it is the biggest donor of development assistance in the world, the EU's approach to democratization and democracy building in its relationship with Africa does not give due consideration to the approaches of others. The role of China in Africa must also be analysed and understood in the framework of Africa's evolution towards democracy in the past two or three decades.

The EU should not see itself as the only partner to promote democracy building in Africa, but instead seek coordination and coherence with other actors. Africa has numerous global partners and the EU could, through the establishment of alliances and the promotion of cooperation with other global partners and actors, further support democracy building in a coordinated and collaborative manner.

Perceptions of the EU's role in Africa

The EU is one of Africa's most important development partners. The role and prominence of the EU in Africa, and its commitment to contribute to the sustainable development of Africa and the alleviation of poverty, cannot be questioned. EU development

cooperation, including support for democratization and democracy building, has evolved and progressed substantially. This continuous progression and evolution, in conjunction with the true application of partnership principles, has led to a generally positive perception of the role of the EU in Africa.

When the role of the EU is assessed it should be done from the perspective of 'what Africa can do for itself with the support of the EU' rather than 'what the EU can do for Africa'.

It is generally accepted that 'Africa needs Europe and Europe needs Africa'. The EU has a role to play in democracy building in Africa, but when the role of the EU is assessed it should be done from the perspective of 'what Africa can do for itself with the support of the EU' rather than 'what the EU can do for Africa'. In Africa and Europe there are negative and positive perceptions of the role of the EU in Africa, despite the advances made in the past decade to subscribe to the principles of real and substantive partnership. This section focuses on African perceptions.

The EU's intentions are perceived in a range from neo-imperialist, paternalistic and self-centred to equality, preferred partner or friend (Kotsopoulos and Sidiropoulos 2007). Through its actions, including the application of conditionality based on Eurocentric human rights and democracy perspectives, the EU is perceived as promoting its own agenda without taking into consideration the development needs of Africa. Some EU actions, and the manner in which the EU positions itself towards Africa, are perceived as bordering on interference, interventionism, the application of double standards in formalized dialogue on democracy and human rights, and the perpetuation of dependency. Furthermore, EU rhetoric and intentions are sometimes far removed from reality and practice.

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Democracy building is a long-term, continuous process, and a committed and long-term EU engagement is necessary to embed and stabilize democracy in African states. Development aid conditionality, the perceived unilateral application of the article 96 provisions of the Cotonou Agreement related to so-called appropriate measures – for which read 'sanctions' – lead to a questioning of the EU's intentions, actions and long-term commitment in Africa, including of the type of partnership it supports. It is felt that aid conditionality is confusing and ineffective, reduces development assistance flows, and is contrary to the partnership principle. Conditionality is not an end in itself, and should be applied according to the wider context and key objectives of the relationship. Incentives for good performance, when appropriate, should be jointly developed based on benchmarking exercises which are jointly conducted. African non-state actors have expressed their reservations about conditionality measures linked to democracy building, especially when they are predetermined by the EU and perceived to be applied inconsistently (Fioramonti 2009).

Development aid conditionality and perceived unilateral action lead to a questioning of the EU's intentions, actions and long-term commitment in Africa, including of the type of partnership it supports.

The EU lacks coordination, coherence and consistency in its relations with Africa. This situation is perpetuated by the complex institutional framework of the EU, including the relationship between EU member states and the European Commission. Africa acknowledges that the EU has the ability to become a prominent global actor, but perceives that the political commitment and the political

will are still lacking. Within this paradigm, the EU is seen as a fragmented entity, without clear leadership and direction. The EU is seen as competing with other global actors and trying to emulate in a retroactive manner the commendable efforts of so-called competing actors.

Through the African Peace Facility (APF), the EU supports capacity building for the African peace architecture and AU peacekeeping efforts in a number of African states. For the EU, security cannot be excluded from development, and its support for the APF is conceptualized as part of the EU's development assistance to Africa (Makinda 2009). The EU is perceived as focusing excessively on conflict management in Africa to attain quick, highly visible but short-term successes, but not focusing on sustainable conflict prevention and its long-term advantages in relation to democracy building and sustainable development.

In Africa, there is a perception that Europe does not speak with a single and unified voice. EU institutions and member states are perceived as sometimes competing for relevance in African states; and the policy orientations and actions of EU institutions are not coordinated with those of EU member states, which results in policies that are not harmonized. (Leroy 2009)

The EU lacks coordination, coherence and consistency in its relations with Africa. This situation is perpetuated by the complex institutional framework of the EU, including the relationship between EU member states and the European Commission. The EU is seen as a fragmented entity.

The procedures, rules and bureaucracy of the EU are often seen as counterproductive to the objectives of development assistance, and as impeding the disbursement of development aid and the implementation of programmes and projects. Furthermore, they are seen as designed to benefit EU consultants and development operators, which in itself limits capacity building of African citizens and institutions (ACP Secretariat 2003).

A genuine question exists whether the Africa-EU partnership can be a real and equal partnership when one partner has superior resources, infrastructure and institutions. In positioning the AU and its institutional framework as representing the wishes and aspirations of the African continent, the EU has shown its commitment to support its partner, the AU and its institutional framework, in taking its rightful place. The EU, however, must be careful not to impose structures, institutional frameworks and working methodologies on the AU and its institutions that are impractical and not suited to the African context.

There is the perception that the current negotiations are not being handled in the context and spirit of the partnership principle and that the EU's rhetoric on African ownership and inclusive approaches does not always translate into practice.

In the context of the Cotonou Agreement, there is the perception that the current negotiations on regional Economic Partnership Agreements are not being handled in the context and spirit of the partnership principle. The inequality of the partnership was exposed in the 'harsh manner' in which the negotiations took place, without taking into consideration the views and perspectives of the developing partners – the ACP regions, including the four African ACP regions. Furthermore, no consideration was given to supporting existing regional integration processes in Africa, and different regional structures for trade are being promoted through EPAs. This might have a long-term impact on political and trade relationships between Africa and the EU, which in turn could affect the EU's

standing and capacity to promote democracy and democracy building (Fioramonti 2009).

Given the apparent capacity and institutional deficits in Africa, ownership of development initiatives and the partnership principle are both intangible and mutually reinforcing. There is a perception that the EU's rhetoric on African ownership and inclusive approaches does not always translate into practice. A real partnership is about two-way information and experience sharing. In Africa it is understood that adopting the EU model of combining economic advances, democratic governance and social stability can foster enhanced cooperation and partnership, including democracy building.

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A one-dimensional approach to democratization and democracy building is ineffective and counterproductive. The EU is perceived as not taking a holistic and inclusive approach in relation to development objectives and strategies, and in its relationship with partners. The mutually reinforcing nature of democracy and development is at times neglected in pursuit of EU interests, and to demonstrate the EU's adherence to principles established and commitments made at the global level which are in some cases not conducive to sustainable development or in the interests of African states. Development and democracy are interlinked and mutually reinforcing, and the perceived impatience of the EU and its unwillingness to listen to African views and perspectives do not enhance the partnership. An inclusive and multiple-track approach to development and democracy building, including conflict prevention measures, provides the best chance for success.

Policy recommendations and proposals for a changed EU approach

It is well understood that Africa needs to fulfil its promise, which would allow the continent to take a rightful place in its partnership with the EU. Africa needs to take full advantage of the EU's goodwill and declared commitment to enter into a partnership with the continent. From an EU perspective, it is clear that the usefulness of the ACP group in the context of the Cotonou Agreement is declining, and pronouncements made by senior European Commission representatives indicate that the group has served its purpose for the EU. Geopolitical changes, changes in the EU and the evolution of development assistance have pushed the EU to look at other options for promoting its external relations with Africa, and the 2010 statutory review of the Cotonou Agreement will be used to look at a new 2020 aid architecture in a post-Cotonou era (Manservisi 2009). The preferred arrangement for administering and channelling EU development assistance to Africa is through the AU, and now is the time for the continent to realize this. Africa is on the move. It is a 'work in progress' and the promise of prosperity will be attained when partners can build on home-grown practices and policies that are in the interests of African states and, indeed, the whole continent.

The policy recommendations and proposals below seek to address the challenges for democracy building in Africa, and to redress negative perceptions of the role of the EU.

First, the EU should – in consultation with Africa, and taking into consideration Africa's

diversity, history and culture as well as socio-economic realities – develop a broad understanding of democracy that will provide parameters and benchmarks for continued and future dialogue. Democracy building is a holistic concept, and the EU should go beyond the focus on elections and elections monitoring. In partnership with African states, the EU should investigate, inter alia, strengthening the pillars of democracy building, such as parliaments, local government authorities and the press, and focus on educating young people in the principles of democracy. It must recognize that democracy is a means to an end – the empowerment of people and improvement of their livelihoods; and that democracy building is continuous – there are no quick solutions. A long-term commitment to development, and the provision of predictable and consistent development cooperation, would allow African states to work in tandem with the EU to promote the jointly defined principles of democracy. The EU should not sacrifice the potential long-term benefits of its development cooperation for short-term economic gains and higher visibility.

Democracy building is a holistic concept, and the EU should go beyond the focus on elections and elections monitoring. It must recognize that democracy is a means to an end; and that democracy building is continuous. The EU should not sacrifice the potential long-term benefits of its development cooperation for short-term economic gains and higher visibility.

Second, the EU should focus more on conflict prevention through the APF, and on conflict prevention and support for effective early warning mechanisms in Africa. Presently, the focus of the APF is on conflict *management* and peacekeeping, rather than the *prevention* of conflict which should be the key objective. A shift of focus would contribute to sustainable development and a democratic culture, and in particular to democratic governance in the context of conflict prevention (Mpyisi 2009).

Third, the EU should be clear and transparent about its policy objectives, jointly develop implementation modalities with Africa (including review mechanisms) and allow for pragmatic ownership. Home grown initiatives should be allowed to shape democracy building, and assistance programmes must be designed that respect jointly agreed benchmarks for democracy derived from internationally accepted indicators. The EU should improve the coherence, complementarity, coordination (internally and externally) and consistency of its policy through the exchange of information between institutions, EU member states, third country partners and other global actors to address local needs in a structured and organized manner. The EU should establish partnerships with other external actors, which would allow for the pooling of resources to maximize the potential benefits of democracy building in Africa.

An improved EU Common Foreign and Security Policy architecture and ratification of the Lisbon Treaty would provide an overarching guide for an improved Africa-EU partnership, while also enhancing policy coherence. This will have a positive impact on democracy building in Africa, since it will signal a clear break with a past of personalized and historical ties, and signal a set of reforms that will reflect the ideological and pragmatic principles on democracy building shared across the EU (Kippin 2009).

Fourth, the EU's stated intention to change from a traditional donor-recipient relationship with Africa sets the stage for structured and effective dialogue among equal partners in the future (Herman and Davies 2009). The EU must continue to engage with Africa to build and strengthen the partnership, which should be mutually beneficial, based on reciprocity, predictability and consistency, and founded on mutual respect. It should provide the means for capacity building and institutional support

that will allow for the development of a credible, preferred and respected partner. A change in attitude in dealing with developing partners is needed – one that takes into consideration the needs and expectations of the partner. EU officials should be trained to have a better understanding of African cultures and of the critical needs of the African continent. It is vital to understand and address 'informal African politics', its structures and how these relate to strengthening democracy and development. More African thinking, perspectives and opinions need to be heard on the key challenges for democracy building and development in Africa, and to be taken into account by the EU.

The EU's stated intention to change from a traditional donor-recipient relationship with Africa sets the stage for structured and effective dialogue among equal partners in the future. A real partnership based on reciprocity, predictability and consistency, and founded on mutual respect will be better positioned to advocate and support democracy building.

A real partnership based on the above-mentioned principles, and with the application of tact, respect and modesty, will be better positioned to advocate and support democracy building.

Fifth, democratization and democracy building should be supported through inclusive dialogue, and the participation of all stakeholders should be encouraged. This means at the country, regional and continental levels. The EU should ensure that the necessary provisions are in place to enable the complementary role played by non-state actors and the diaspora in supporting democracy building, and continue to jointly define programmes and initiatives with Africa to further empower the role of women in democracy building. The advantages of the involvement of non-state actors and the diaspora are numerous: they can contribute to the promotion of a culture of dialogue between political and societal institutions; transplant knowledge, expertise and experience on democratic processes obtained in host countries to African states; and engage in lobbying, campaigning and advocacy activities (Mohamoud 2009). However, the EU should take care not to promote or support its preferred non-state actor partners and collaborators, but instead agree jointly with African governments on preferred non-state actor partners in African states.

The involvement of non-governmental actors in democracy building in Africa is important, and to this end the creation of a joint Africa-EU 'eminent persons group' could be contemplated.

In supporting the AU as its counterpart in Africa, the EU should not neglect the important role played in democracy building by regional integration organizations. Strong regional entities are necessary for the development of a continental institution that can promote democracy building as a continental imperative. Supporting democracy building in Africa means enhancing ownership, empowerment and 'bottom-up' development (Kippin 2009).

As a global actor the EU must demonstrate proactive and decisive leadership, built on the EU's competitive advantage. The EU should become the preferred partner of the developing world based on the principles of partnership, and not as a result of the amount of development assistance provided.

Sixth, as a global actor the EU must demonstrate proactive and decisive leadership, built on the EU's competitive advantage. The EU should become the preferred partner of the developing world based on the principles of partnership, and not as a result of the amount of development assistance provided and/or the rate of disbursement of funds. The current global environment calls for alliances, cooperation

and collaboration for democracy building, and the EU should take advantage of this favourable climate to pool resources for improved results in development and democracy building. The EU's visibility and presence are not ends in themselves, and it should remain focused on the bigger picture through improved, expanded and harmonized external relations.

There is a possibility that the Africa-China relationship might erode the trade advantage that the EU has in Africa, which in turn could minimize the EU's influence in Africa, given the fact that China attaches fewer conditions to its development assistance to African states (Fioramonti 2009). For the EU to further increase its prominence as a serious actor on the global stage, including in Africa, it should take the lead and convene a high-level meeting between African leaders and all the major actors in Africa (the USA, China, etc.) to jointly discuss sustainable development, including democracy building. The EU's focus should be on building partnerships for Africa that would allow coordinated policies, reducing the level of competition between other global actors and less focused on self-interest (Herman and Davies 2009).

Seventh, in many African states democratic institutions and processes might face renewed challenges in times of economic downturn. The EU's response to the economic and financial crises should be to maintain and even scale-up development assistance in the area of democracy building, in particular its support for elections, electoral processes and legislative development. A sustained focus by actors, including the EU, on democratic governance in Africa could contribute to mitigating the effects of the crises, and sustained democratic governance in African states could play a role in addressing the potential consequences of the crises (Lewis 2009).

Finally, there is a need to improve the communication of the European narrative, and to communicate the importance of democracy building to European and African citizens. This is needed to allow African citizens to build capacity and understand democracy building and its advantages, as well as to ensure that EU citizens are positively disposed towards continued funding for activities and initiatives related to democracy building in Africa.

Conclusions

There is a window of opportunity for the realization of Africa's potential to become fully integrated into the world economy, to enable it to exercise more political weight and purpose in the global arena, and to address its many deficits related to poverty and lack of sustainable development and democracy. Africa has so much to offer. It is the continent of opportunity but the extent of global challenges necessitates collective approaches from the developed and developing world. The transformation of the African Union Commission into the African Union Authority at the 13th African Union Summit in Sirte, Libya, in July 2009 is further proof of the desire of African leaders to establish a 'single voice' for Africa in the geopolitical arena.

The Africa-EU partnership has potential and promise. In supporting Africa to become a real partner through the provision of means to develop capacity and build the required infrastructures, the EU can assist with empowering the peoples of Africa, promote sustainable development and alleviate extreme poverty. This would be to the benefit not only of Africa, but also the world, which stands to gain from a continent that is

democratic, conscious of the fact that democracy building is a continuous process, and that it is making progress in its own development.

The EU has a commitment to Africa. It is a commitment derived not only from its long-standing relationship with the continent, but also from its pursuit of a global role, respected by the developing world, and in accordance with its stated objectives and purpose. It is in the EU's interest to build a real partnership with Africa that supports democratization and democracy building and promotes sustainable development.

Recent undemocratic practices in Mauritania and Madagascar have been fiercely condemned by the AU and African leaders, and these examples bode well for democracy building in Africa. Africa is key to the development of global democracy – a goal that should be pursued collectively. The Africa-EU partnership can contribute to this global ideal.

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