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European Perceptions and Responses
to the Chinese Challenge**

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As elsewhere, China's rapidly increasing involvement in Africa over the last few years has drawn significant attention in Europe. The reasons for this are not hard to identify. Firstly, European countries, along with the US and Japan as well the international financial organizations in which they have large stakes, considered themselves to be the main players in Africa's external relations. Secondly, there was a widespread sense of incredulity that a rising superpower should show a keen interest in a continent that large parts of the European public regard as hopeless on account of its widespread poverty and wars.

Horrible conflicts and South African apartheid aside, it is hard to think of any Africa-related phenomenon that has received as much attention by the public, the media and political circles in Europe over the past decades than China's involvement in Africa. As is usual within the European Union, assessments and responses were not uniform, oscillating between sometimes shrill alarmist views and more balanced accounts that reflected the difficulties to grapple with China's largely unexpected return to Africa.

This paper examines European representations, perceptions and responses to China's challenge in Africa. The difficulty lies in the fact that neither Europe and nor the European Union are homogenous entities. Interpretations and responses come from the national governments and agencies of EU member states as well as from institutions of the European Union such as the parliament, the Council and notably the European Commission.

This paper argues that opinions and assessments about China's engagement with Africa have significantly evolved within a relatively short period of time. A discernable and distinct European response has yet to take shape which would seek to engage China over Africa. Certainly the most remarkable consequence of the China-Africa embrace is that it has contributed to re-ignite a tremendous amount of European interest in Africa itself. One can argue that it is an element of perceived strategic competition which, at least to some extent, is driving Europe's more recent attempts to engage Africa, a trend most obviously evidenced by the symbolic politics of the European Union – Africa Summit in Lisbon in December 2007.

European-African Relations in Transition

The end of the Cold War marked the at least temporary end of European strategic interests on the continent. But even before 1989, European policies towards the continent were weak and inconsistent. As an institution, the European Union restricted its relations

with Africa largely to development policies. Throughout the 1980s, Europe failed to put its relations with Africa on a new and sustainable footing, instead discharging primary responsibility to the Bretton Woods institutions, thereby supporting policies of structural adjustment that by and large have had disastrous consequences for much of the continent.

In the early 1990s, Africa lost more and more in importance as European attention was absorbed by economic opportunities in Asia and even more importantly by the enlargement of the EU to eastern Europe. Nonetheless the same decade saw some policy changes towards Africa. The EU inconsistently placed emphasis on the promotion of democracy and human rights while the issue of Africa's socio-economic development, including its trade relations with Europe, were never properly tackled.¹ As a result, structural imbalances between the two regions have prevailed. To this day the lofty rhetoric of a new African-European partnership has failed to address the question of how a partnership between such fundamentally unequal partners may come into being.

Starting in the mid-1990s, European policies towards Africa underwent another shift. With a series of violent conflicts erupting in Africa, the concept of conflict prevention came to occupy center stage. In practice, however, it was obvious that the European Union was both unwilling and unable to demonstrate that it was serious about the prevention and resolution of conflicts in Africa. Following the Rwandan genocide in 1994 both the UK and France were only increasingly reluctant to get involved in African conflicts. Belgium, for its part, decided that it would no longer send national troops into former colonies. With a few exceptions, handling Africa's crises was more than ever declared to be the responsibility of the United Nations, and even Africa itself. This was not only due to a lack of interest. The European Union quite simply did not dispose of a common foreign and defense policy, as was evident by its inability to cope with the unfolding crisis in the Balkans, its close neighborhood.

Nor were the member states of the European Union drivers of an active policy towards Africa. Europe's largest state, Germany, was never a big player in Africa in the first place and concentrated much of its focus on eastern Europe.² For their part the UK and France were undergoing a lengthy process of introspecting their long-standing ties to their former colonies. Africa was not considered a political priority of British foreign policy up until Prime Minister Tony Blair's second term in office.³ In France, signs were pointing to disengagement from Africa.⁴ In 1994, the government took the decision to devalue the hitherto French-backed Franc CFA currency. This sent shockwaves through Africa and was probably the single most important act of rupture taken by any former colonial power.

All of this indicated that Africa lost more and more in strategic importance, a fact barely concealed neither by French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin's awkward call for 'neither indifference nor interference', nor by Tony Blair's later declaration that Africa was 'the scar on the conscience of the world', an assertion which once more relegated the continent to humanitarian concerns. The fact of the matter is that European states had identified greener and more important pastures elsewhere in the world since 1989. Between 1985 and 2006, Sub-Saharan Africa's share in the foreign trade of the EU

member states has declined from 3.2% to less than 1.4%. This was to a large extent the result of the decline that hit Africa's trade with its most important European partners, the UK and France. British trade with Sub-Saharan Africa fell from 3.7% in 1985 to 2.3% in 2006, while the region's share of French external trade fell by more than 50% from 5.2% in 1985 to 2% in 2006. As revealing is the share of Sub-Saharan Africa's biggest economies, South Africa and Nigeria, in the trade with the EU, which has risen from 48.4% in 1985 to 55% in 2006.⁵

Since the turn of the century there are signs that European-African relations are taking another turn. First, this was due to the growing awareness of new international security challenges (terrorism, failed states, internal and regional war) has drawn some European attention back to Africa and its war-torn states, especially in the wake of terrorist attacks in the US and later Europe.⁶ Second, and more importantly, growing European involvement in Africa was caused by the European Union's efforts to bolster its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and its European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) in an attempt to position itself as a global player in world politics.⁷ This was most evident in the deployment of a European military intervention force to Bunia (Operation Artemis, DR Congo) in 2003, a decision that was primarily a response to the fall-out between 'old' Europe and the US over the war in Iraq and American claims that the EU was neither able nor willing to take on international responsibility.

Following Operation Artemis, a string of decisions were taken that had also a direct bearing on African security. Firstly, France and the UK, later joined by other European countries, launched an initiative for the creation of so-called Battle Groups, rapid intervention forces that were primarily to support UN peacekeeping missions in Africa. Secondly, the European Union set up the African Peace Facility, a financial instrument to fund capacity-building programs and support for peacekeeping missions by Africa's regional organizations.⁸ Thirdly, the EU sent another mission to the DR Congo (EUFOR RD Congo) in 2006, which was the first truly European military intervention ever conducted by the EU autonomy from NATO.⁹ Moreover, the EU deployed two 'civilian' missions to support security sector reform in the DR Congo (EUPOL and EUSEC) and in 2007 decided to conduct a bridging military operation in Eastern Chad and North Eastern Central African Republic (EUFOR Tchad/RCA) as part of international efforts to tackle the crisis in Darfur.¹⁰

However, it is doubtful whether these security-centered policies can form a viable basis for a new partnership between Europe and Africa. On both accounts Africa is more of a subject of concern or even a by-stander. As a number of observers have noted, the CFSP and ESDP are instrumental in establishing the European Union as a significant international actor and Africa has come to play a major role in proving this point.¹¹

In summary, and although not the only factor, the European Union has increased its engagement with Africa over the last couple of years. This has been largely driven by developments that were linked to internal dynamics, notably ESDP, rather than dynamics in Africa itself.

European Perceptions

At least initially, European perceptions of China's engagement with Africa have been fairly, sometimes extremely negative. The media, politicians and civil society organizations have echoed a number of concerns that have become part of the standard canon by which Westerners in general perceive China's relations with Africa. In economic terms, China stands sometimes accused of economic exploitation. Given China's heavy emphasis on natural resources, it is argued that China-Africa relations are at best unequal relations which constitute a one way street for Africa and diminish its prospects for economic development. In political terms, China's principle of non-interference into the domestic affairs of other states is disparaged as an irresponsible 'see no evil' approach which is bound to undermine human rights and democracy in Africa and European efforts to promote these values as for example in Darfur and in Zimbabwe.¹²

Rather than reiterating the well-known litany that China's growing involvement in Africa has provoked, in the remainder of this section four selected problems are identified that have been voiced by European observers and politicians here and there. Firstly, resentment towards China's engagement in Africa is strong in cases where European budget support leads to situations where the money is used by African recipient countries to finance operations by Chinese firms. While this is understandable, European donors are hardly in a position to criticize the choices being made by African governments. In recent years, European donors themselves have advocated the budget support as an instrument of development policy. Arguing that budget support enhances local ownership and enables recipient governments to set their own priorities, Europeans can hardly fall back behind this approach, unless they were to admit that development aid should also be in their own economic interests. For this would imply that the notion of untying aid by providing budget support would be abandoned again. If Chinese companies are cheaper and more effective in putting these into practice (e.g. constructing infrastructure), it is perfectly legitimate that African governments use Western donor money for that purpose.

A second source of concern is that China itself has become a major donor in Africa. Given that a number of European countries still provide development aid to China, this raises a number of questions, i.e. should European development assistance for China continue? Can a country be an aid recipient and a donor at the same time? The resulting confusion has practical implications. For example, China is a signatory to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness of 2005, an agreement which commits countries to increase efforts in harmonisation and alignment in order to enhance the quality and impact of aid. The declaration is to increase the accountability of donor countries vis-à-vis recipient countries. China has signed the declaration understanding that it is a recipient country and seems to be reluctant to accept obligations that derive from the fact that it is also a donor country.¹³

A third issue revolves around European concerns that African countries could accumulate new debts vis-à-vis China.¹⁴ Especially in development circles there is some level of frustration that China is providing African countries with loans at the very

moment that Western donors, including European countries, have granted African countries extensive debt relief.¹⁵ One EU official in Zambia even decried it as an ‘absolute scandal’ if the country were to take loans and therefore incur debts vis-à-vis China.¹⁶ This view is a variation of the discourse that posits European countries as benevolent actors whose actions and intentions are undermined by China. At any rate, it is by no means clear that new debts will have negative impact on Africa’s development perspectives.¹⁷

A fourth and perhaps the biggest problem Europeans detect in China’s policy towards Africa is its preference for bilateral relations. Inasmuch as the European Union is in the process of bolstering cooperation with its counterpart, the African Union, and other African regional institutions such as NEPAD, it expects others to do the same in order to promote multilateral institutions in Africa and to enable them to tackle critical issues (development, peace and security, regional cooperation etc.). Accordingly, and with specific reference to the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC), the European Commission has observed: ‘Deliverables – and negotiations – are strictly bilateral, the FOCAC is simply a Forum to announce the aggregate results and will not establish a new structure of cooperation in Africa. It does not provide an impulse for multilateral cooperation or better African coordination. Indeed, the process lacks proper monitoring and accountability.’

On closer inspection, these concerns are not very coherent and barely support the generally skeptical views that dominate the debate about Sino-African relations. For they are either hypocritical (on the use of budget support) or paternalistic (on debt and debt relief). The argument that probably carries the biggest weight concerns China’s bilateral approach towards Africa. This says more about the European Union than about China. Within the European Union ‘effective multilateralism’ has become the catchword for the best way to tackle international and global challenges. No doubt in part because the European Union has served as a role model for the institutional set up of the African Union, the European Union perceives itself as a close and indispensable counterpart. Accordingly, support is geared towards enhancing the institutional capacities of the African Union to deal with the region’s numerous problems. China’s preference for bilateral relations and its only lukewarm engagement with the African Union is therefore perceived as problematic in so far as it is situated outside the current mainstream.

By the same token, there is so far little evidence that China may be willing to play by the multilateral rules that the European Union wishes to establish as internationally recognized norms.¹⁸ This concerns, for example, the development complex and issues like the untying of aid, the preference for grants rather than loans, a concerted approach to debt and debt relief, donor coordination and aid effectiveness. Likewise, China’s habit to provide credit lines to African countries in return for concessions and mining contracts to exploit natural resources is also in contradiction to and threatens to undermine the norms that European and other donors have agreed upon as was for instance the case in Angola.

As a preliminary conclusion, European concerns about international norms of governance revolve around fundamental principles of international politics that go far beyond China's approach to the African continent. There is indeed a growing awareness in Europe that China's rise as a global superpower poses significant challenges in terms of its accommodation into a global order of things that hitherto was largely defined by Western countries. With very few exceptions, such as Darfur, these are worries that clearly supersede possible concerns related to the comparatively narrow context of Sino-African relations, even more so as Europe has every interest to cooperate as closely as possible with China, including economic reasons.

...and Responses

When examining European reactions to China's dynamics forays into Africa, one can distinguish Europe's responses to China over Africa from the adjustments of Europe's own policies towards Africa.

Africa

As argued in the preceding section, a sober analysis suggests that there are few reasons for European nations to cast China as a significant challenge or even rival in Africa. And yet there is ample evidence that discourses to that effect figure prominently in present-day debates in Europe about Africa. Be it in national parliaments, within the institutions of the European Union, in the media or in academic circles, no contemporary discussion in Europe on Africa fails to make reference to China's engagement in Africa. Although not necessarily coherently formulated, the thrust of most opinions seems to suggest that Europe needs to step up its involvement with Africa if it does not want to lose its influence in Africa, or the region altogether, to China. Precisely why should this be the case is rarely fleshed out.

While it is true that some Africa-related issues such as migration and energy interests have more recently been associated with European interests in the region, public debates on Africa have not ushered in a coherent long-term vision for European-African relations. To this extent, the renewed interest in Africa is better described as a reflex that is triggered by China's strong presence in the region. Debates about the apparent necessity to hold a European-African summit in Lisbon in 2007 were rather revealing in this regard. For example, a number of European leaders, including the German chancellor Angela Merkel and EU Commissioner Louis Michel quite explicitly justified the need to hold the summit by reference to China. Given that China had organized a much publicized Africa Summit in Beijing in 2006, Chancellor Merkel argued that Europe and Africa needed to hold one too, thus confirming the view of a EU official who stated that 'the Africa-China summit in particular has been an alarm bell for some.'¹⁹

Six years had passed since the first and then last European-African summit (Cairo in 2000) and there had been hardly any serious voices making the case for an urgent

summit. There was one attempt in 2003, but this plan collapsed over the summit participation of Zimbabwe. Given EU sanctions against the country, the British government had successfully argued that a participation of Zimbabwe was out of question. In response, African governments argued for their part that the exclusion of Zimbabwe was not acceptable and the summit did not take place. Not so in 2007. European leaders who advocated strongly for the summit prevailed over the UK's unchanged position on the divisive Zimbabwe issue. While privately agreeing with the British government, they now argued that European-African relations should not be allowed to be taken hostage by the regime of Robert Mugabe.²⁰

This was not the only sign of Europe's 're-discovery' of Africa. Also in 2007, the German presidency had unexpectedly put Africa on the agenda of the G8 summit in Germany. While short on concrete results, the heads of the G8 members countries, including the UK, France and Germany, reconfirmed the aid pledges of the G8 summit of Gleneagles in 2005 which had been held under the presidency of the UK. Furthermore, in late 2005, the European Union adopted a Africa Strategy, aimed at giving the EU a 'comprehensive, integrated and long-term framework for its relations with the African continent.'²¹ This was followed by a Joint Africa-EU Strategy (The Africa-EU Strategic Partnership) which was approved at the Europe-Africa summit in Lisbon in December 2007.²²

Again, the case for both the summit and the Joint Africa-EU Strategy was rather abstract and therefore not entirely convincing. The purpose of the Joint Strategy, for example, was 'to take the Africa-EU relationship to a new, strategic level with a strengthened political partnership and enhanced cooperation at all levels. The partnership will be based on a Euro-African consensus on values, common interests and common strategic objectives.'²³ It is definitely not far-fetched to argue that the European Union's perceived 'need for a new phase in the Africa-EU relationship' was not disconnected from China's dynamic inroads into Africa. According to Luis Amado, the Portuguese Minister for Foreign Affairs, 'the void created in strategic relations between the European Union and Africa is obviously being exploited by other global players that have very important strategic interests in the continent in order to make large-scale movements into the continent. And we understand this. It's obviously in China's interests.'²⁴ Similarly, EU Commissioner Louis Michel described the summit and the partnership as 'urgent', admitting that Europe was 'late' to respond to changes in Africa and its relations with the outside world.²⁵

Whether EU-Africa summits, henceforth to be organized every three years, and the Joint Strategy will succeed in giving Europe a sharper profile in Africa remains to be seen. It will depend on the added value that a strategic partnership might bring to African countries. True, the European Union's Official Development Assistance (ODA) accounts for 60% of total ODA flows going to Africa. But as recent years have amply demonstrated, being the most important external donor of African countries is not sufficient to successfully compete with other emerging powers, including Brazil, India, and of course China. In the long run, the importance of development aid will decline both in view of the fast increasing private financial flows to developing countries, including

Africa, and due to African dissatisfaction over disbursement regulations, conditions and the unpredictability of aid flows.²⁶ This will not only affect the European Union but also the international financial institutions in which its member countries have important stakes.²⁷

China

China's engagement with Africa has led the European Union and its member states not only to construe responses to Africa itself but also to China, even though it needs to be said that concerted reactions have emerged slowly and belatedly. In so doing the Europeans have encountered two problems. Firstly, precise knowledge and information on China's policy towards Africa is still very limited. This is true for all of its aspects, including the institutional set up of China's Africa policy and the responsibilities within the Chinese administration. As Hillary Benn, the UK's minister for international development observed: 'It's not always easy to know whose door to knock, who's in charge of this.'²⁸ A second problem was related to the overwhelmingly negative comments on China's Africa policy in the West, which did not go unnoticed in Beijing. Chinese officials, at least in public statements, have used a mixture of offensive-defensive rhetoric when talking about their involvement in Africa. Still, attempts to hold talks with China have been made and a number of European countries have held regular bilateral meetings with China on Africa or are interested in establishing such dialogues (i.e. UK, Netherlands, Belgium).²⁹

More important, the European Union has sought to engage China in a dialogue on Africa. At the ninth EU-China Summit in Helsinki (September 2006), several references were made to Africa. Both sides 'stressed the importance of their relations with Africa, and stated their commitment to work together in favour of Africa's peace, stability and sustainable development.' They also agreed to pursue a 'structured dialogue' on Africa and to 'explore avenues for practical cooperation on the ground in partnership with the African side, including with the support of NEPAD initiatives and with the aim of attaining the Millennium Development Goals.'³⁰ Signs of good will were not sufficient to conceal fundamental differences. While European Union 'reaffirmed its attachment to the principles of good governance and human rights', the Chinese side 'emphasized the upholding of the five principles of peaceful coexistence, in particular the principle of non-interference into others' internal affairs.'³¹

A month later, in October 2006, the EU Commission set out its strategy towards China in the communication 'EU-China: Closer Partners, Growing Responsibilities'.³² It took stock of EU-China relations in the context of China's re-emergence as a global economic and political power and signaled the EU's desire intensify its engagement with China. The communication also stressed that increased responsibilities and expectations should go hand in hand with China's stronger influence and position in the world. Outlining cross-cutting issues where deeper cooperation with China may be sought, the document made several references to Africa. As regards energy security, the European Commission called for efforts 'to improve transparency and reliability of energy data and

the exchange of information aimed at improving energy security in developing countries, including Africa.’³³ In relation to development policies, it advocated a ‘structured dialogue on Africa’s sustainable development’ between the EU and China. In a barely veiled criticism of China’s development policies, it called for ‘transparency on the activity and priorities of both sides, providing a basis for full discussion; and support regional efforts to improve governance in Africa.’³⁴ In addition to these areas, Commission officials have also raised good governance in Africa as a possible issue of cooperation, arguing – unconvincingly – that governance is not an ideology driven concept.

For the time being, the fate of such appeals and rhetorical commitments to cooperation remains open. However, it is clear that the initial flurry caused by China’s dynamism in Africa is abating in Europe. It is now widely accepted that China has put itself on the Africa’s map for good. This sense of inevitability has also introduced some realism into European decision-makers. For the moment at least, there can be little doubt that Europeans are in greater than China to discuss Africa, even more so since European comments about China’s involvement on the continent oscillate between paternalism, envy and admiration, and pure and simple China bashing. As a result, it is now widely accepted that seeking to engage China in a dialogue and ultimately in cooperation in and over Africa is the only feasible option.³⁵ Most government and EU officials also seem to believe that relatively soft issues such as development hold the greatest promise to embark on cooperative efforts with China rather than putting hard issues on the table that are likely to bring to light conflicts over interests and approaches.

This pragmatism may not be unjustified. For it seems that the Chinese government was rather surprised by the interest and often fierce criticism that its involvement in Africa has stirred in Europe and elsewhere. There are indications that China seeks to dampen Western, and to some extent African, furor as is evident by a number of recent official declarations and justifications. The most important signal has been China’s greater flexibility towards the conflict in Darfur, if only because it is caring for its reputation and is coming to accept its growing international responsibility as a rising global power.³⁶ For these reasons, China may even be interested in exchanges about views, approaches and policies with Western states, at least in the field of development. According to Lancaster, the Chinese government has begun to ‘engage directly with foreign aid agencies to learn from their arrangements and processes and tentatively, to collaborate with them.’³⁷

Conclusion

For two reasons it is difficult to identify a consistent European response to China’s involvement in Africa. First, there is no unanimous assessment about the Chinese impact on the continent. Second, and more important, a coherent and determined response would ultimately presume that the Europeans have a sense of what their interests in Africa are and the kind of engagement that such interests would require.

The initial impulse of Europeans to see China as a challenger and even as force for bad in Africa has given way to a more sober analysis, which recognizes that China is not necessarily a direct competitor of Europe. This is certainly true for the economic realm where European and Chinese companies generally target different sectors and niches. As mentioned above, concerns persist, but for the most part these are not insurmountable. There is some hope in Europe that in the long run China will adapt to Western approaches and rules rather than the other way around. To this extent the recent remarks by the head of the European Investment Bank (EIB) that Europe would need to lower its own standards seem to be a rather lonely view.³⁸ At this time therefore, it seems unlikely that Europe will join a 'race to the bottom' in terms of its policies, values and standards to keep up with China's dynamic inroads into Africa.³⁹ In addition, more recent criticism of China coming from Africa itself will no doubt reassure Europeans skeptics who tend to see China as a competitor. Only ill-informed observers would see Africa's embrace of China as a zero sum game.

True, the period since the end of the Cold War, when Europe and the US were the foreign powers that dominated Africa's external relations is rapidly drawing to a close.⁴⁰ But this does not imply that African countries will turn their back to Europe or that there will be an Africa without Europeans. Europe is still Africa's most important trading partner and donor and the long-standing historical linkages between the two continents are far too intertwined to be effaced by China. Such a reasoning would also misread Africa's history of extraversion with the outside world.⁴¹ And it fails to recognize that Africa's overtures to China are a politically and economically sensible strategy to diversify its hitherto limited international relations and hereby to maximize its resources and leverage.

As for Europe's own relations with Africa, it is probably correct to say that the Chinese factor has contributed to a renewed European interest in Africa. But it is far from obvious that Europeans have a clear sense about their interests and objectives in Africa and what the relations between the two regions should look like in the future: "...the unexpected Chinese-African alliance unveils a blind spot of the West's relation with Africa. The West has always tended to make Africa only the subject of its own aspirations, initially its economic ones, later also its political ones. China, by contrast, takes the continent serious to the extent that it involves Africa into an exchange determined by interests. In the long run, Europe will probably have to follow the Chinese example by building relations with Africa based on interests".⁴²

The bold question of why Africa should matter to Europe awaits yet a compelling answer by those advocating a stronger re-engagement with the continent. The only point observers can agree upon is that Europe does not need a neighboring continent ravaged by conflict, disorder and diseases, if only because of its geographical proximity to Europe.⁴³ Indeed the representation of Africa as a source of trouble has been at the centre of recent discussions, including, for example, in relation to African illegal migration and possible ways to stem it.⁴⁴ By the same token, conflict and security are by now the most important policy field in European relations with Africa. Unconvinced by the policy linkages between security, governance and development which the European Union has

set out in its Africa Strategy of 2005, already critics warn of a securitization of policies towards Africa.⁴⁵

Still, the growing importance of security policies towards Africa is not exclusively driven by discourses that are rooted in a ‘fear of a black planet’.⁴⁶ Comprehending European Africa policies requires to take the identity and institutional developments of the European Union seriously. From this perspective, recent policies towards Africa may tell us more about the international ambitions of the European Union that seeks to project its interests, values and policies rather than its objectives in Africa per se. Recent evidence suggests that security policies towards Africa have unfolded simply because the continent fits as a ‘potential experimentation field’.⁴⁷ African security meets the institutional interests within and between European Union institutions and European members states to strengthen the institutional capacities of the European Union and to harmonize and Europeanize bilateral foreign and defense policies.⁴⁸

In other words, European policies towards Africa are more of a function of internal institutional dynamics and international ambitions than of specific goals in Africa. Because the political and security stakes are so marginal in Africa, and because a collusion of interests with other international actors seems unlikely, Africa has become a training ground for the European Union’s ESDP. In this sense, ‘Africa policy serves as a way of creating a united Europe on the cheap.’⁴⁹

These institutional dynamics will not necessarily result in a coherent Africa policy, precisely because they tend to make Africa – once more – the subject or even the instrument of Europe’s own ambition, this time as a region where the European Union can experiment with its strategies and tools to bear out its global leverage. Nor will they provide the European Union with renewed credibility on the continent. If the much touted European-African strategic partnership is to get off the ground Europeans need to take into consideration African interests and concerns, for instance, in relation to migration. Deploying border protection guards in the Mediterranean sea and the Atlantic Ocean and paying West African governments money to take back their citizens amounts to a poorly conceived and short-sighted approach that will clearly not solve the ‘problem’.

The same is true for the scandalous agricultural subsidies that the European Union is paying to its farmer or the meagre sums (‘cash for access’) that it pays to West African governments to in fact pillage fish stocks along the West African coast, which deprives tens of thousands of families of their livelihoods and in turn adds to emigration pressure.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the painstaking negotiations over the new Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) that the European Union drafted to replace preferential trade deals with 80 former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific has been perceived in much of Africa as an imposition that – without appropriate compensation mechanisms – might have devastating economic consequences on African economies.⁵¹

In summary, the European Union still lacks a clear political profile in Africa. Even worse, its contradictory policies only tend to increase its credibility gap in the region.⁵² For its stated goals of eradicating poverty, promoting democracy, human rights

and security in Africa simply do not square with more narrow interests such as propping up its own 'security' (in terms of migration) or imposing trade agreements and maintaining agricultural subsidies that are hurting Africa's economic prospects. In comparison, many in Africa seem to perceive China's approach as more honest and straightforward, even if the downsides of its involvement are slowly coming to the fore. The perceived hypocrisy, which is at the bottom of Europe's credibility gap in Africa, was brought to the limelight during and after Nicolas Sarkozy's first presidential visit to Africa. In Dakar, he held a speech which was widely condemned across Africa for its paternalistic tone, with the notable exception of South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki.⁵³

In one of the speech's most contested parts, Sarkozy's claimed that Africa's tragedy was that the continent 'has never really entered history into history, ...never launched itself into the future' to shape its own destiny.⁵⁴ As an advisor to Benin's president commented: 'By sketching this miserable and d compassionate image of Africa, France is reassuring itself. For its own sake, it needs to think that Africa is doing badly. Meanwhile, people from Dubai, India and China do not tell us that we have failed to entered history, they do business with us.'⁵⁵ Ultimately, external involvement in Africa is becoming more varied and intense as China and other countries seize opportunities in the region. The ensuing sense of competition, however limited, may contribute to the emergence of a more political relationship between Europe and Africa, a relationship that does not primarily consist in Europeans lecturing Africans and Africans pretending to agree in return for more assistance.

¹ Sabine C. Carey, 'European Aid: Human Rights Versus Bureaucratic Inertia?', *Journal of Peace Research*, 44 (2007) 4, pp. 447-464

² On Germany, see Ulf Engel/Robert Kappel (eds.), *Germany's Africa Policy Revisited* (Hamburg: Lit Publishers 2006).

³ Paul Williams, 'Britain and Africa after the Cold War: Beyond Damage Limitation?' in Ian Taylor/Paul Williams (eds.), *Africa in International Politics*, (London: Routledge 2004), pp. 41-60.

⁴ Daniela Krosiak, 'France's Policy towards Africa: Continuity or Change?' in Ian Taylor/Paul Williams (eds.), *Africa in International Politics*, (London: Routledge 2004), pp. 61-82.

⁵ All trade figures are from International Monetary Fund, *Direction of Trade Statistics*, Washington, D.C., 2007.

⁶ European Union, *A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy*, Brussels 2003.

⁷ The ESDP is the security dimension of the CFSP.

⁸ The African Union Mission in Darfur (AMIS) benefited from Peace Facility funding. For a good assessment see International Crisis Group, *The EU/AU Partnership in Darfur: Not Yet a Winning Combination*, Brussels 2005.

⁹ In theory, Operation Artemis was the first autonomous mission, in practice; however, it was carried out by the French military.

¹⁰ Council Conclusions on Chad, The Central African Republic and Sudan, (Brussels: Council of the European Union, 15 October 2007).

¹¹ Gorm Rye Olsen, 'Promoting Democracy, Preventing Conflict: The European Union and Africa', *International Politics*, 39 (2002) 3, p. 324.

¹² This chapter will not address the issue of Darfur as a bone of contention, partly because the case is well known, partly because Darfur has by far not received the amount of attention in Europe than has been the case in the US. The same is true for China's role in the conflict; although China's indirect responsibility in Darfur is often noted in Europe.

¹³ I thank Gudrun Wacker for drawing my attention to this.

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- ¹⁴ See, for example, 'EU envoy reportedly cautions Zambia against "mortgaging" country to China', BBC Monitoring, 3 October 2007; 'IMF Worried Over China's \$5 bln Loan to Congo', Reuters, 3 October 2007.
- ¹⁵ 'Chinese Aid to Africa May Do More Harm Than Good, Warns Benn', *Guardian*, 7 February 2007.
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