

THE TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE ON AFRICA

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I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

¶1 This is the first of our annual transatlantic dialogue conferences that has chosen an “area” approach by focusing on Africa and, in particular, the humanitarian crises in two countries, the Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In this contribution, I would like to deal with the transatlantic dialogue between the United States (U.S.) and the European Union (EU) on Africa. As you know, Europe and the U.S. work together intensively in a great number of fields, and Africa is definitely a part thereof.

¶2 I will take a broader perspective than the humanitarian crises in the Sudan and DRC, however, and will try to focus on Africa as a whole. I will essentially elaborate on four areas of transatlantic cooperation regarding Africa: (i) peace and security; (ii) democracy, human rights, rule of law and good governance; (iii) important societal challenges in Africa, in particular HIV-Aids and migration; and (iv) economic challenges, in particular fostering prosperity.

¶3 Please allow me to first make some general observations on both America’s and Europe’s relationship with Africa. In a way, both the U.S. and the EU have a historical debt vis-à-vis this continent: Europe, quite obviously, because of its colonial past in Africa and the many abuses that went together with this; the U.S. because of the transatlantic slave trade, slavery and policies vis-à-vis African Americans. There is more to this: especially during the Cold War, the U.S. and its European allies had certain preferences for African regimes that chose the western side, but that had sometimes deeply problematic human rights and governance records. All of these past policies still throw long shadows upon Africa’s present and future. It is not too much to say that here lies a historical responsibility that both America and Europe should live up to.

¶4 We should be aware, moreover, that new geostrategic and geopolitical needs are strongly coming up that may again distract both the U.S. and Europe to more real political approaches vis-à-vis Africa, in spite of all the rhetoric about democracy, human rights, rule of law and good governance. To just name two of them: energy and counterterrorism. It has been stressed in a recent task-force report from the Council on Foreign Relations¹ that, by the end of the decade, sub-Saharan Africa is likely to become as important a source of U.S. energy imports as the Middle East, and that China, India

¹ Council on Foreign Relations, *More than Humanitarianism: A Strategic U.S. Approach Toward Africa*, http://www.cfr.org/publication/9302/more_than_humanitarianism.html

and Europe are competing with the U.S. and each other for access to oil, natural gas, and other natural resources. We know how relentless China is in securing energy supplies on the African continent – including in the Sudan – and how it is able to win over governments because, at least, it is a partner that does not interfere in matters relating to human rights and democracy. In other words, the world’s major powers are looking for energy in Africa and are becoming ever more active in trying to secure privileged bonds, investments, contracts and so on with African governments in their endeavors for energy security. But there is also another security motive driving them. Africa is one of the battlegrounds in the fight against terrorism, as the aforementioned task force report rightly stresses. It was in Africa (Kenya and Tanzania) that Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda struck first at two U.S. embassies in 1998, years before the attacks of 9/11. Africans, in particular Muslim Africans, are being actively recruited for terrorist operations stretching from the Middle East (in particular, but not limited to, Iraq) to South Asia. Terrorist organizations appear to seek refuge in West Africa’s Sahel region. How such recruitments and relocations can be stopped and what can be done to give meaningful professional employment to the more than 1 billion sub-Saharan young Africans (between 15-25) in desperate need of jobs are some of the most pressing challenges for policy-makers both in Europe and the U.S.

¶5 But there is more, much more, to be said about Africa itself. The continent is going through rapid processes of change, which many of us in the North have difficulty seeing clearly. We may all risk having outdated views on Africa. In a way, this was illustrated by the “Live 8” concerts, headed by the famous rock musicians Bono and Bob Geldof, viewed by over two billion people around the world in June 2005. However well-intentioned these benefit concerts may have been, it has been observed that they may not have given us an accurate view of Africa – or worse, that they reinforced an outdated view of the continent. As the aforementioned task-force report of the Council on Foreign Relations observed, they did not feature any African leaders, teachers, doctors, or nurses. There are plenty of dynamic developments going on in today’s Africa, where some 40% of the States are now electoral democracies and where civil society, businesses and new generations of politicians and officials are emerging.

¶6 Interestingly, on both sides of the Atlantic we have witnessed important policy developments with regard to Africa over the last years. The EU has now put its act together in the framework of an EU Strategy for Africa, adopted in December 2005 by the European Council (the EU’s heads of State and government). This Strategy comprises the EU’s new political vision and roadmap for enhanced cooperation with Africa and the EU strongly hopes to elaborate together with the African Union a “Joint Strategy for Africa,” to be endorsed at the EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon in the second half of 2007. The new buzzwords in the EU’s relationship with Africa are: equality, partnership, ownership, subsidiarity and solidarity. But also on the U.S. side things have been moving. The aforementioned task-force report of the Council on Foreign Relations mentions the increase in attention that Africa has been given in both the Clinton and Bush administrations. Still, it observes that the public rhetoric continues to emphasize humanitarian concerns much more than other U.S. stakes, and the report strongly recommends that U.S. policy should change in order to reflect Africa’s growing strategic importance: it recommends shaping a more comprehensive Africa policy – in a way, the exercise that the EU has conducted last year.

II. THE MULTILATERAL FRAMEWORK AND PARAMETERS FOR THE TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE ON AFRICA

Another point to be made, before going into the substance of the transatlantic dialogue on Africa, is the multilateral framework and parameters in the context of which this dialogue takes place. The United Nations (UN) is especially central to all of this. We know that Africa was singled out by the UN Millennium Declaration in 2000 as a continent with special needs. For Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, the challenges to implement the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in all respects by 2015 are simply enormous. This was also highlighted by last year's *Sachs Report* and the Outcome Document of the UN World Summit of September 2005. From the socio-economic point of view, the transatlantic dialogue between the U.S. and Europe is therefore essentially one that has to assist in implementing and realizing the MDGs for Africa.

The UN is not only setting the parameters for Africa's development through the MDGs. It is also offering the multilateral institutional machinery through which all countries, including the U.S. and EU Member States, can work to achieve a number of agreed objectives. Two novel UN organs that have to be highlighted in this respect, and in which the U.S. and European countries work together, are the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission. As far as the Human Rights Council is concerned, it is addressing a number of country reports, including African countries, and deciding at its special session, December 12-13, 2006, on the situation in Darfur whether to dispatch a high-level mission to assess the human rights situation in Darfur.² The Peacebuilding Commission, set up by parallel Security Council and General Assembly resolutions in December 2005,³ is dealing as a matter of priority with two African countries, Burundi and Sierra Leone.⁴ In addition, there is the Security Council, where both the situation in Darfur and in the DRC has been high on the agenda over the last years.

Other multilateral fora play a role in the transatlantic cooperation here, such as the G8, where 2005 saw an unprecedented decision to cancel 100 percent of the outstanding debt of eligible heavily indebted poor countries owed to the International Monetary Fund, the International Development Association and African Development Fund (this boils down to debt forgiveness for fourteen of Africa's poorest countries). But there is another dimension to multilateralism here. Africa itself is clearly on the move with regard to multilateral institutions. The African Union, only set up in 2002, is clearly recognized as the central forum to address pan-African problems stretching from peace and security to human rights. Much of both the U.S.'s and the EU's recent actions, including the joint meeting that the European Commission and the Commission of the African Union held in the beginning of this week, on October 2, in Addis Ababa, focuses on supporting the African Union in the accomplishment of its tasks. In the EU, such support takes place, primarily, through the so-called African Peace Facility. As the global security system is

² See The Fourth Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the Human Rights Situation in Darfur, December 12-13, 2006, Decision S-4/101 (Dec. 13, 2006), available at <http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/specialsession/4/index.htm>

³ See G.A. Res. 60/180, U.N. Doc. A/RES/60/180 (Dec. 20, 2005) and S.C. Res. 1645, U.N. Doc. S/RES/1645 (Dec. 20, 2005).

⁴ On December 12-13, 2006 the Peacebuilding Commission held two days of country-specific meetings on Burundi and Sierra Leone and announced that it expects to give \$25 million each to Burundi and Sierra Leone as part of its first round of contributions, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=20976&Cr=peacebuild&Cr1>.

increasingly reliant on strong regional organizations in the framework of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, the importance of a strong and effective African Union can hardly be overemphasized: the need for assistance in capacity-building is huge here indeed. Let us, apart from the considerable number of regional integration organizations in the various parts of Africa (from ECOWAS to SAADC), not forget the much-applauded New Economic Partnership for African Development, NEPAD. Much, probably too much, is expected from NEPAD, an initiative from African political leaders (and therefore “owned” by Africa) to promote sustainable growth and development and deepen democracy, human rights, good governance and sound economic management.

III. THE TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE ON PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFRICA

¶10 At the level of Africa, the 2006 EU-U.S. Summit Progress Report on political and security issues (June 21, 2006, Vienna) highlights that the EU and the U.S. have strengthened their cooperation in enhancing African Union capacity for peace support operations, backing the implementation of the comprehensive peace agreement in Sudan, supporting African Union leadership in the Darfur crisis through the UN and other international and regional partners and organizations, including NATO, pursuing a resolution on the border stalemate between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and supporting the Somalia reconciliation process. They also work together on a regional approach to peace and security in West Africa by enhancing conflict management in ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) and supporting the peace process in the DRC through assistance to the organization of the elections in July and late October of this year. One can say that on issues of crisis management the EU and the U.S. have multiplied their working contacts, both in Brussels and in crisis areas, contributing to cooperation on specific issues such as the DRC and Darfur, where the EU and NATO have helped support the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). The EU and the U.S. have obtained, in the Security Council, the UN authorization to “bluehat” this AMIS force, but as you know, this proves to be an extremely delicate point for the Sudanese Government, which refuses UN troops and seems only willing to accept an “internationally strengthened” AU peacekeeping force.

¶11 It can be expected that the EU and the U.S. will continue to cooperate on this issue. On June 20, 2005 they adopted an EU-U.S. Declaration with the title “Working Together to Promote Peace, Stability, Prosperity and Good Governance in Africa.” In this Declaration they stress how they have been working together to strengthen the African Union and other regional organizations that aim to improve stability in Africa. Further, they stress that they are committed to continuing to assist African peace support operations, as the EU has done through its African Peace Facility and contributions from its Member States and as the U.S. does through the Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative.

IV. THE TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE ON DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, RULE OF LAW AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

¶12 Europe and the U.S. are cooperating in a number of ways to bring about more democracy, human rights, rule of law and good governance in Africa. They have a dialogue on democracy promotion which, as far as Africa is concerned, has recently seen

intense exchanges on countries like Egypt, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. The nature and level of their dialogue on these countries varies, going from high-level political exchanges to working level desk-to-desk contacts and cooperation on the ground in ensuring coherence in assistance programs. It is interesting to note that in their Vienna Summit Declaration of June 21, 2006, they stress their common support to the Government of Egypt's efforts towards ensuring fundamental freedoms and building multiparty democracy and their intention to continue to encourage the Egyptian government to proceed with fundamental political and constitutional reforms.

¶13 At the global multilateral level, this dialogue results in cooperation in setting up, for instance, the UN Democracy Fund to promote and consolidate new and restored democracies, but also in cooperation in the framework of the new Human Rights Council, even though the U.S. is currently not a member thereof.

¶14 The link between strengthening democracy and the fight against (the breeding grounds of) terrorism and extremism is quite clear in a number of places. Thus, in Somalia, the EU and the U.S. are providing support to the efforts of the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFI) in pursuing dialogue, reconciliation and stable governance.

¶15 Zimbabwe is another case on which the EU and the U.S. coordinate their respective efforts on humanitarian and democracy assistance with a view to reverse the economic collapse of the country and the worsening plight of the population.

V. THE TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE ON SOCIETAL CHALLENGES FOR AFRICA

¶16 The societal challenges that Africa faces are numerous and complex. They can of course not be seen in isolation from the economic development problems, but I may highlight two societal challenges in particular here: HIV/AIDS and Malaria, on the one hand, and migration on the other hand.

¶17 It is well-known that Africa is the epicenter of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and that it is rapidly reaching the stage where the death toll is undermining not just social and political stability but the very social and economic fabric of societies.

¶18 A particularly important point, especially from the European perspective, is the problem of migration. You know of the problems of mass clandestine migration towards Europe, either directly by crossing the street of Gibraltar or indirectly by using the Canary Islands, often in the face of bewildered tourists. A very important step was made in July of this year with a Euro-African ministerial conference on migration and development in Rabat, Morocco. However comprehensive the EU's policy in this area may have become (common migration and asylum rules, common approach to human traffickers, and addressing root causes such as poverty and lack of employment), it is my conviction that we are very far off from a sustainable solution to this problem. Europe is geographically simply too close to Africa, especially Northern Africa, to immunize itself from ever stronger migratory pressures if the aforementioned root causes are not addressed in a much more systematic and ambitious manner.

VI. THE TRANSATLANTIC DIALOGUE ON ECONOMIC CHALLENGES FOR AFRICA

¶19 With regard to Africa's economic challenges and in particular its need to be more firmly integrated into the international trading system, there is a rather painful gap between words and deeds in the transatlantic dialogue. Thus, at their Vienna Summit

Declaration on June 21 of this year the EU and the U.S. reiterated their “strong commitment to reaching an ambitious conclusion to the Doha Development Agenda by the end of 2006” and pledged that, “as responsible leaders, we will continue to work in cooperation with other WTO members towards an agreement that is worthy of the objectives” with which the Doha Round was launched in 2001. Lofty words, but less than six weeks later the Doha talks completely broke down in Geneva and were suspended, with the EU and the U.S. trying to blame each other for lack of flexibility and/or concessions in the area of agricultural policies.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

¶20 In December 2003, the European Council, that well-known periodic high-level gathering of two heads of State and 23 prime ministers from the European Union together with their ministers of foreign affairs and the President of the European Commission, adopted a very powerful “declaration on transatlantic relations.” I quote from it:

“The transatlantic relationship is irreplaceable. The EU remains fully committed to a constructive, balanced and forward-looking partnership with our transatlantic partners.”

And the declaration continued:

“Shared values and common interests form the basis of our partnership with the US and Canada. This partnership is also rooted in our growing political and economic interdependence. Acting together, the EU and its transatlantic partners can be a formidable force for good in the world.”

This also applies to Africa. Together, the EU and the U.S. can be a formidable force for good in Africa, but this requires sustained political will and the deployment of a comprehensive set of policy instruments in a coordinated manner.