

Strengthening Cooperation between Europe and Africa on Democratic Reform

Conclusions of the Conference
Brussels – 11 & 12 October 2010



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**I. Challenges and politics of supporting democratization processes
in Africa: setting the scene**

Moderator: Amb. Renier Nijskens (Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

Panel:

Mr. Roel von Meijenfeldt (EPD)

Mr. Paul Graham (IDASA)

Amb. Koen Vervaeke (EU Special Representative to the African Union)

Description:

- Mo Ibrahim governance index: economic welfare has increased during 2004 – 2010, but **rule of law, human rights, etc. decreased** during the same period in 2/3 of African countries.
- Economic growth / development should not be separated from democratic reforms. **Democracy is important for sustainability**: citizens ask that their voices are heard.
- In some countries, there is a **clear will to rebalance power of executive** (examples: Mali, Ghana, Kenya and Malawi). Many countries are in the process of reviewing their Constitution.
- As far as **good practices** for the region are concerned, we should find a mechanism which would allow good countries to pull the others upward.

Operational conclusions:

- **Quality of democracy** is an important issue: in Africa, there is no incentive (such as enlargement in case of EU new members) to convince countries to improve their democratic system.
- Support to election processes should not be underestimated as an important part of the democratization process. The number of elections in Africa grows year by year. **Citizens want clear and transparent elections.**
- More **policy coherence** is needed between the different European instruments supporting democratization processes (COTONOU articles 96 and 8, 2009 Council conclusions, Africa-EU Strategy 2007, etc.).
- It is important to have a political dialogue **with all the actors**: state structures, civil society, private sector, etc.
- It is especially important to promote an **independent civil society**.
- Importance of **promoting leadership / ownership** of Africa rather than conditionality.
- The process should only be driven from the inside and should be **in hands of Africans.**
- As far as elections are concerned, the **EU should help Africans to develop their own agenda.**

II. Domestic processes and conflicting values and interests in EU's foreign policy: an African perspective

Moderator: Mr. Lucien Toulou (EISA)

Panel:

Amb. Mohammed Ibn Chambas (ACP)

Mr. Pamphile Sebahara (GRIP)

Description:

- The importance of **norm-setting** at the continental and regional level.
- The EU disposes of a **multitude of instruments** for its external policy: COTONOU agreement, JAES, Council Conclusions of 2009, Consensus on Development, External Action Service etc. The establishment of the External Action Service should help to streamline the EU policies in Africa.
- The **COTONOU instruments** remain a very important basis for dialogue and collaboration at a continental, regional and country level. The instruments are more effective in certain countries than in others: there is more leverage in small countries than in big ones.
- Within the AU, there is now a **zero tolerance for unconstitutional changes of rule**. In some cases, the AU has been faster in taking actions against certain regimes than the EU (examples: Niger, Madagascar).
- The EU is hindered in its actions by **double standards and competing interests**. The economic agenda of some EU member states leads to actions that go against EU policy (example: Niger). The activities of EU enterprises in non-democratic states make the EU message even more confused

Operational conclusions:

- The EU should offer capacity building support for institutions, so that they can take responsibility for norm-settings.
- The **"Big Boys" should be reminded about their responsibility and leadership role**. The EU has to convince them that it is in their own interest to respect certain principles.
- It is of utmost importance that citizens in countries with democratic regimes see the **economic benefits of democracy ("Democracy dividend")**.

III. An assessment of the COTONOU instruments: best cases and practices

Moderator: Dr. Oladiran W. Bello (FRIDE)

Panel:

Mr. Geert Laporte (ECDPM)

Prof. Mirjam van Reizen (University of Tilburg / EEPA)

Description:

- Political provisions: **COTONOU has put politics at the heart of our partnership** (= key innovation): Article 8 (reinforced political dialogue)

and Article 96 (violation of essential element could lead to suspension). Human rights – democratic principles – rule of law are essential elements. Violation of one of the three can lead to suspension. Governance is an important element but not essential (hard to agree on a definition).

- Despite provisions regarding democracy, in particular in the COTONOU agreement, the ***Africa-EU dialogue on democracy remains difficult***:
 - The system of democracy has a lot of rhetoric;
 - Inconsistent application of articles (most African recipients in top 10 of EU aid are non democracy);
 - Self interest individual Member States;
 - Major lack of coordination between donors;
 - Democracy is not a project but a long term process beyond time boundaries of project cycle.

Operational conclusions:

- Dialogue is crucial. Necessity ***to combine support to State and Non State Actors*** (NGOs, civil society organizations, private sector, etc.). NGOs could however become an obstacle to transition and EU has to take its responsibility in that sense.
- It is important ***to be modest about the influence of the EU*** in most African countries. The EU assistance does not make a fundamental difference, so it also doesn't give it a say.
- We should ***harmonize our approach with other non EU key players*** in Africa.
- ***Regional approach*** should be given higher priority as well as ***Social dimension*** (role of women to help to create stability).
- Aid to government when dictatorial regimes: ***need to "stay engaged"***: have windows of dialogue even with these countries.

IV. Contradictions in the relationship Democracy – Governance – Stability

Moderator: Mr. Hans Hoebeke (Egmont Institute)

Panel:

Amb. Andebrhan Welde Giorgis (Revival Africa Initiative)

Prof. Richard Banégas (University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)

Mr. Jeremy Lester (Head of Unit at European Commission, DG DEV/E/2)

Dr. Nic Cheeseman (Oxford University)

Description:

- No inherent contradictions in the ***relationship Democracy – Governance – Stability***. They are complementary and mutually reinforcing.
- Many countries are in a state of ***"active stagnation"*** because of a lack of co-ordination (with donors and internally) and the interconnected nature of problems.

- Studies indicate that many citizens in Africa are disappointed by democracy in their country. Nevertheless, **they prefer democracy as compared to any other system.**
- **Power sharing** was originally used as a mechanism for countries coming out of civil war (examples: Burundi, Liberia). More and more, it is also used for situations of democratic deadlock, as an alternative for handing over of power.
- Formal power systems have sometimes become disconnected from informal power systems (example: Kenya).
- Stability can be defined as the **capacity of countries to manage their own democratic regime**; to have a peaceful change of leadership without having a change of system. Many African countries have become "democracy dependent", meaning that there is no prospect for the democracy to become self-sustainable in the foreseeable future (example: DRC).

Operational conclusions:

- A balance should be found between **"Rule-bound behaviour" and "Quality of formal rules"** (example: Kenya).
- The EU **needs to have a consistent, concerted, common message**, supported by all of its Member States, in order for political dialogue to be effective.
- Democracy is a **lengthy process**: the EU should **go beyond electoral observation** to support broad democratic reforms over a longer period of time.

V. Supporting difficult transitions

Moderator: Mrs. Marieke Van Doorn (EPD)

Panel:

Dr. Knox Chitiyo (Royal United Services Institute)

Mr. Willy Nindorera (Burundi based analyst)

Prof. Bob Kabamba (Liège University)

Description:

3 case studies show that context is very important:

- **ZIMBABWE:**
 - Complex context / situation which **goes beyond binary approach** (coalition government with three parties). Ground support for democratic process in particular on rule of law (civil society, business sectors, etc.): people are positioning themselves: New Constitution reform and elections. Long history of European support (UK in particular).
 - Challenge for the EU because you cannot engage with Zimbabwe as with other southern countries taken into account of the context. EU adopted a **strategy for democracy which is inappropriate.**
 - **Security sector** is part of the problem but also part of the solution.
- **BURUNDI:**

- **Arusha is the Bible:** has inspired the Constitution (ask for elections).
- **Political dimension** of the conflict.
- **Media and civil society is dynamic and very active** to speak frankly about human rights violation.
- **AU is present** and gives support since the beginning of the conflict (several observation missions).
- **EU support: complexity of procedures, lack of coordination.**
- **DRC:**
 - **One of the most difficult transitions** (reference to "1st African World War" because of (1) multiple actors, (2) long transition which started in 2003, (3) many victims).
 - **Huge EU support** but the countries involved in the process were also there for other reasons.

Operational conclusions:

- Sanctions are a very political and difficult issue notably for the EU (do sanctions promote democracy?). In any case, **there has to be a sanctions dialogue/strategy** (e.g.: Zimbabwe). To keep sanctions indefinitely will bring problems in the region.
- EU should **increase support in particular for soft security** (justice in particular which should be key part of democracy).
- Important to **support civil society and local NGOs. Local groups** should be encouraged **to set their own agenda/targets.**
- **Eastern Europe countries could bring their experience** because of their history of transition (and because they are perceived as more "neutral" actors).
- Democracy and development should not be treated as distant topics: **democracy has a practical dividend in terms of development.**
- Development and democracy in Africa is affected by Chinese engagement. **China offers an alternative model** and shows that you can have development without democracy "promotion".
- As far as EU support is concerned, it is needed to have **better coordination between projects and different support mechanisms**, as well as transparency **of procedures.**
- Progress is only possible when there is a good **dialogue between AU – regions – MS.**

VI. Support for elections and democratic consolidation – Lessons from recent experiences in support for elections in Africa

Moderator: Mr. Frank Balme (NEEDS)

Panel:

Mr. Lucien Toulou (EISA)

Mr. Patrice Lenormand (European Commission EuropeAid)

Mr. Joao Pereira (Director of MASC, Mecanismo de Appuio à Sociedade Civil, Mozambique)

Description:

- 26 African countries had planned to organize elections during 2010: 10 countries managed to organize them in time, 15 countries had to postpone them. These postponements are due to juridical or political reasons, logistical problems or unavailability of financial resources.
- The way of offering election process support depends on **the local context**: it is very different in conflict or post-conflict situations than in situations of stability.
- The process of influencing elections does often start a long time before the actual elections → need for **long-term election monitoring**.
- In many African countries, there is a tradition of authoritarian rule and "clientelism". Mentalities should change before a working democracy can be established.
- It is easier for African governments to rely on donor money for raising their budget, rather than to raise and collect taxes. Most of the money needed for organizing elections is coming from donors. In this way, budget support might actually hinder the establishment of sustainable democracies.
- Election observer missions always bring a perception of **neo-colonial involvement in domestic affairs**. It is very difficult to stay neutral in an election process (also for multilateral agencies).

Operational conclusions:

- The EU does urgently need **more planning for its support to election processes**. The support should be foreseen over prolonged periods of time, addressing all issues of pre- and post-electoral periods. If assistance is offered, it should be done in a timely and holistic way.
- Support for election processes can only happen when there is a lot of investment in **dialogue with all domestic stakeholders and regional organizations**.
- Promote the adoption and dissemination of norms, standards and good practices. Lobby African States to ratify the **Charter on democracy, governance and elections** (dating from 2007, but ratified by only 7 countries).
- African States should take responsibility for their own democratic system and plan to **pay for the organization of elections from their regular budget**.
- Donors should **favour a culture of accountability**. Local citizens cannot in a credible way ask their government to be accountable domestically if donors are turning a blind eye on corruption and other cases of mismanagement. More transparency is needed with regard to budget support, both from the government and the donor's side.
- Next to support for election processes, there should also be a focus on democratic consolidation. It is important to keep in mind the **Council Conclusions on Democracy of 2009**.
- **Should EU give direct support to political parties?** Difference of view between European Commission and Civil Society organizations

VII. Building political consensus and inclusiveness around policy and constitutional reform

Moderator: Mr. Luc van de Goor (Clingendael)

Panel:

Dr. Stefan Lindemann (London School of Economics)

Mr. Ohene Ntow (Institute of Economic Affairs – Ghana)

Description:

- **New interest in elite power-sharing** and implications for peace democracy and economic development. Elite power-sharing **facilitates peace in divided societies**.
- Power sharing triangle: peace – democracy – economic development. A lot of studies associate elite power-sharing to post conflict peace. Relationship between power-sharing and economic development remain under theorised.
- Possible trade-offs between power-sharing and democracy. Elite power-sharing is characterised by **important trade-offs between peace, democracy and economic development**.
- Evidences from **ZAMBIA** (mixed effects of elite power-sharing on democracy) **and UGANDA** (economic performances constrained by unproductive imperatives of power-sharing) were given. **GHANA** (role of the EU to support democratic process).

Operational conclusions:

- **Positive link between elite power-sharing and peace**. It helps to build stable democracy. **Political fragmentation may undermine peace and security** in the long term.
- Even if we have a successful case like Ghana, **need to continue to sustain**
- Need to **promote dialogue also with local actors** (E.g.: Ghana, launching of dialogue Platform for inclusion. Objective of **non state facilitators to promote the platform**. In Ghana, the platform is the most important instrument to provide a way of delivering a dialogue). Currently, the Constitutional review process has used the platform to make proposals for political parties).
- Political parties should be allowed to have a **free, frank and open dialogue** to achieve inclusive elite-sharing arrangements.
- To take into account of the **Media which play a key role** (E.g. Ghana: very aggressive and strong). Every political party should have equal access to State Media.
- **Building inclusiveness** is important for achieving democratic reforms.
- **Role of leaders is important** in this context (reference to Mo Ibrahim index). Role in shaping consensus.

VIII. Are policy instruments attuned to work with underlying structures of power and domestic agendas?

Moderator: Prof. Koen Vlassenroot (Egmont Institute – Ghent University)

Panel:

Prof. William Gumede (University of the Witwatersrand)

Dr. Denis Tull (SWP)

Description:

- Many African rulers “cheat in a sophisticated way”. They have a double motive to do so: to stay in power and to accommodate demands from donors. At present, opposition leader in Africa have only 15% chance to win in an election. Only 3 or 4 countries in Africa have genuinely tried to become democratic (examples: Mauritius, Botswana, Ghana, Cape Verde)
- Rule-based behaviour did not increase in Africa; **informal rules** are as important as ever.
- **Effective and democratic political parties** are needed to make real progress towards democratization. At present, political parties in Africa are often ethnicity-based in origin, and tried to become more inclusive in a later stage. Often, parties are over-ambitious or over-ideologic.
- The EU is **extremely inconsistent** in its approach towards election, democracy and human rights in Africa. There is more than only the “big boy” – “small boy” issue (example: Gambia).

Operational conclusions:

- Final **statements of election observation missions** should be published closer to polling dates.
- It is of utmost importance to promote **internal democracy within political parties**. Democratic parties are more successful, both in government and in opposition.
- Importance of supporting local media (both public and private) and **having different perspectives** on important socio-economic questions.
- Importance of developing an industrial policy, at the national and regional level.
- There is a need to recognize **traditional authorities** and the important key role they play.
- The EU policies should be aligned with the interests of EU private operators in non-democratic regimes.
- It is important to have **dialogue platforms** to find agreements and to harmonise agendas. A horizontal dialogue should complement dialogue on vertical issues.

Final recommendations: Supporting democratization process in Africa in changing global environment: What can we do?

- Make sure that leaders and citizens in democratic countries enjoy a "**democratic dividend**". A number of countries lack incentives to move forward towards democracy. Citizens see little or no direct benefits from engaging in a difficult process towards a democratic governance system. Because of this, citizens in many African countries tend to get frustrated, although they continue to overwhelmingly support democracy over any other governance system.
- All **stakeholders have to be involved** in democratization processes: state structures, civil society, private sector, traditional authorities etc. Special attention should be given to gender balances. It is important that the stakeholders and local groups have the freedom to set their own agendas. At the same time, we need to have open eyes, especially while engaging the civil society, which also has its own limitations.
- **Transparency and accountability** have to be enhanced, both from the side of the donors and from the side of the receiving governments. This point is especially important with regard to budget support mechanisms.
- It is important to **work with regional and sub-regional organizations** for dialogue, asking advice, setting norms and using peer mechanisms (such as APRM) to engage and put pressure on African States.
- The EU should **not overestimate its influence** (especially economically); but it shouldn't underestimate also its **role in restoring trust and fostering dialogue** between political parties and other stakeholders. It is also important to coordinate with EU member states and with key non-EU players.
- Better **early warning systems** are needed in order to see the "cracks in the wall". The EU involvement should remain sustain for a prolonged period of time after a crisis: **don't walk away too soon**.
- Greater **coherence between different EU instruments** is needed. The External Action Service should play an important role in this regard.
