

Key note statement by Mr Anders Henriksson, Director Horn of Africa, East and Southern Africa, Indian Ocean and Pacific, DG Development, European Commission, at Instituto de Estudos Estratégicos e Internacionais - Conference "The Challenges of Europe-Africa Relations: An Agenda of Priorities", Lisbon, 23 October 2003

Let me first of all apologize on behalf of Commissioner Nielson, who could not be present today due to a very heavy agenda. He has asked me to represent him here and to let you know that he would have liked to participate personally at this conference, committed as he is to the pan-African integration process and to a strengthened relationship between this new Africa and Europe.

The political commitment of the European Commission to this process has most recently been demonstrated by the presence of President Prodi and Commissioner Nielson at the AU Summit in Maputo last July.

I fully agree with the remarks made by Mr Laporte this morning that we have today opportunities for progress in Africa which have not been present in the past. Given this perspective, I would this morning like to make a few remarks on three points:

- (1) How we at the European Commission see the emerging African integration process;
- (2) Some ideas of the European Commission regarding how the EU-Africa dialogue can be further developed; and
- (3) The involvement of non-state actors in the EU-Africa dialogue and the role of this conference.

The emerging African integration process

Over the last three years, we have witnessed a remarkable development in Africa by Africans to speed up the continental integration process by creating a pan-African level of governance with a new vision and new institutions.

The EU, and the European Commission in particular, has been closely following these promising developments.

The African Union makes a clear break with the OAU in addressing Africa's development challenges. These challenges have also evolved, politically since the fall at the Berlin wall and economically with the intensification of the globalisation process, which has led to an increased marginalisation of Africa.

With the establishment of new institutions, such as the AU Commission, the pan-African Parliament and the African Court of Justice, the African Union is about to create a new level of political governance on the continent. The Constitutive Act of the Union clearly reflects this ambition for an Africa-wide integration and it provides, inter alia, a legal basis for the intervention in Member States affairs in case of grave circumstances. This represents a very significant evolution in Africa.

With NEPAD African leaders have provided their emerging institutions with a concrete programme of action. Last week I had the pleasure of hosting the NEPAD Secretariat during its visit to the European Commission in Brussels. The visit allowed me to witness the progress made by the Secretariat since the presentation of its first comprehensive programme two years ago by translating this programme into concrete action plans.

With the progressive integration of the NEPAD Secretariat into the AU Commission in the next three years, Africa should definitely be equipped with one single strategic institutional framework at the continental level.

Developing the EU-Africa dialogue

The specificity of EU-Africa and, indeed, of EU-AU relations does not need much explanation. The two continents are linked through their history, economy and shared political interests to eradicate poverty and create security, stability, democracy and better governance across the African continent.

We at the European Commission have recently presented our views on how the EU-Africa dialogue could be strengthened and developed. We did so in a Communication to the EU Council issued last July, which I believe has been distributed to all of you. I am happy to say that the Council has reacted quite positively to our proposals and I strongly recommend the text to you.

While the Zimbabwe issue has provoked some turbulence in the dialogue, including the postponement of the Lisbon Summit, European and African ministers decided in Maputo last July to look forward and to work out concrete proposals for how to improve both the content and the modalities of the dialogue.

The new modalities, which should make the dialogue more focused on key political issues, more flexible and thus more effective, will be discussed at the upcoming EU-Africa Ministerial Troika meeting in Rome on 10 November. I expect that in this meeting the ideas that we have put forward in our Communication will play a prominent role.

Regarding the substance, the dialogue on governance and mutual accountability is certainly a new challenge, which requires mutual confidence and trust. We have to work hard on this, as the creation and maintenance of mutual confidence is key to the effectiveness of the dialogue.

One area where the dialogue looks quite promising is on the key issue of peace and security - one of the themes of this conference. The combination of a new legal basis in the AU Constitutive Act, more efficient institutions and strong political leadership make the AU profoundly different than the OAU in this respect. This emerging new peace and security architecture in Africa has elicited a political response from the EU side.

Europe should and will be a major partner when Africa is now facing this key challenge. We should offer our support, both morally, politically and financially.

As such, the Commission is currently engaged in financing different African peace-keeping forces, such as in Liberia and Burundi. Beyond this ad-hoc financing, the Commission is currently preparing a more permanent Peace Facility as was requested by the AU Summit in Maputo. The basic principles of this facility should be ownership, solidarity and development.

Involvement of non-state actors in the EU-Africa dialogue and the role of this conference

The participation of non-state actors, such as civil society, academics and economic and social actors, in the EU-Africa dialogue has until now been rather limited. No formal dialogue including such actors has taken place since the civil society conference held in conjunction with the Cairo Summit in 2000. At European Commission, we consider this to be a pity. We believe that non-state actors have a real input to offer to enrich the dialogue. In fact, the involvement of such actors is considered to be one of the major innovative elements of the Cotonou agreement.

Also the AU attaches a fundamental importance to the involvement of civil society. It has taken steps to involve civil society in discussions on human rights, democracy and governance and to provide for the representation of such actors in the pan-African Parliament and the ECOSOC. It is in this context that we at the European Commission are keen to hear your views on this issue and we see this conference as an important contribution to strengthening the involvement of non-state actors in the EU-Africa dialogue.

I thank you for your attention.