



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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President of the European Commission

Opening speech by President Barroso at the 6th College-to-College Meeting of the African Union Commission and the European Commission

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6th College-to-College Meeting of the African Union Commission and the European Commission/Addis Ababa

26 April 2013

Madame Chairperson,
Doctor Dlamini-Zuma,
Vice-Chairman,
Commissioners,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Dear Friends,

It is for me a pleasure to be back to Africa, to Addis Ababa and to the new headquarters of the African Union. And this very important meeting between the two Commissions takes place just weeks before the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the African Union. May I, in advance of the celebrations convey to you and to all Africans on my own behalf and on behalf of the European Commission and the European Union my most sincere and warmest congratulations for the historic achievements of the Africans in the African Union.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is the 6th College-to-College (C2C) meeting between the African Union and the European Union Commissions. An event which symbolises the cooperation, convergence and concord between our two sister organisations, which have been driving regional integration in both Europe and Africa.

Dear Colleagues,

I have had the pleasure and the honour to attend all the previous meetings of the College-to-College. These meetings have reinforced one clear and indisputable fact: that in this ever changing world one thing is sure: Africa and Europe will remain each other's close neighbour. As one well-known activist has noted, the distance between us is 8 miles. On a clear day one can see each other's shores; on stormy days even if one cannot see each other, we know for a fact that we are close by.

And this is the first lesson we have to draw. Africa's 54 countries and the European Union's soon-to-be 28 member states have a shared geography, a shared history and most importantly, I believe, a shared future.

It has been with great satisfaction that I witness Africa realising its huge potential, with impressive levels of growth, 5% on average and up to double that in some countries, 6 out of the world's 10 fastest growing economies are African, a rapidly emerging middle class, and a young, dynamic, fast growing population that is expected to double by 2050.

These are all huge assets that are already transforming the continent for the better. Africa's economic and social development benefits first and foremost the people of Africa but I believe this is also in the European Union's interest.

At the same time, we should not forget the significant challenges still ahead of us, in particular in eradicating poverty and making sure that growth and wealth benefit the largest number of people. This month marks the final 1000 days to reach the Millennium Development Goals. We need to make a decisive push to achieve the eight anti-poverty targets. There are 1000 good reasons to do it, but the most compelling one is that we owe it to the world's poorest and most vulnerable people.

For our part, let me reassure you, that the European Union is (and will remain) Africa's most important partner, as far as development aid is concerned, and – more importantly – in trade, investment and people-to-people contacts.

The European Union is indeed the biggest partner of development assistance to Africa with the European Union institutions alone being the Africa's second biggest donor worldwide. From 2007 to 2013, the European Commission by itself has committed nearly €25 billion through its various financial instruments to support Africa and the objectives of our Joint Strategy.

The European Union also remains the biggest trading partner for the African continent, accounting for one third of Africa's total trade. And European Union countries also invest considerably in Africa. From 2005 to 2010 European Union countries were responsible for 43.7% of foreign direct investment in Africa. I believe that concluding the Economic and Partnership Agreements would create a more stable and predictable business environment, thus multiplying the opportunities for trade and investment in what should be a win-win situation.

But our partnership is also based on values and principles: democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law, good governance and sustainable development are foremost among these. And most importantly, these are not models that are coming from the outside; these are the very principles and values that are at the core of this organisation, the African Union, and of the recently adopted African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

Madam Chairperson,
Excellencies,

Let me state here today the European Commission's strong support for the priorities which the African Union Commission has adopted since you, Dr Zuma, took office just half a year ago.

These priorities, to tackle peace and security issues, to broaden the scope of the organisation to deal with a more ambitious political, economic and social agenda and to introduce reforms in the African Union Commission, address Africa's challenges head on.

We want to be your partners in these endeavours. In an increasingly interdependent world, Africa and Europe's future are closely interlinked. What affects you affects us, and vice versa. This includes threats to peace and stability, the risks of climate change, fundamentalism and organized crime or the impact of the economic and financial crisis.

We must work together; not just to provide security, but to improve the day-to-day lives of all our citizens. Our agenda is not just about national or regional security: it is about human security and, above all, human dignity.

All of this further demonstrates that the adoption of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy at Lisbon Summit in 2007 was the right thing to do. Indeed, a strategic partnership between our two continents is more relevant and necessary than ever before.

The objectives and principles established in 2007 remain valid. This is a partnership of equals which goes beyond development to tackle issues of common interest; it is also a partnership which treats Africa as one.

And it is a partnership that has been delivering results in various domains. For instance, peace and security. This is an area where the African Union has been stepping a peace action in helping to resolve the conflicts in the continent. We welcome this development. And we are directly supporting Africa's capability to manage African problems. Since 2004, the EU has provided more than 1.1 billion € to the Africa Peace Facility to fund African-led Peace Support Operations, to strengthen the African Peace and Security Architecture, and to make operational the Early Response Mechanism. A lot of progress has been achieved in this last decade in terms of peace, security and democracy, but challenges and threats still remain as proven by the situation in Mali, DRC, Central African Republic or Guinea Bissau.

We have also been supporting continent wide integration and infrastructure development. It is estimated that the lack of adequate infrastructure can reduce productivity by as much as 40%. This is why Africa gives high importance to its programme for Infrastructure Development. This is why a cornerstone of our cooperation is the EU-Africa Infrastructure trust fund, which has a total funding of 746 Million euros, of which 638 million come from the budget managed by the European Commission. This Trust Fund is a lever for far greater investment lever from European and African financing institutions. To date the Trust Fund has awarded over 80 grants for major regional interconnection programmes across Africa in the field of energy, transport, ICT and water supply representing a total investment of over 6.5 billion euros.

I underline this because I really believe that in terms of development assistance we have to think beyond the European Union budget. That is why for instance we are looking at ways for reinforcing the support to this African Union and European Union relationship beyond the European budget. In this context the action of the European Investment Bank is indeed very important and lately also of the European Investment Bank, recognising the presence among us of the Vice-President.

Boosting agriculture productivity, food security and resilience is another major priority to achieve the goal of eradicating poverty and tapping Africa's potential. This is why we are providing support to the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme at continental, regional and national level. We are also supporting projects promoting adaptation to Climate Change such as the ClimDev Africa Initiative, the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel and the very first edition of the African Soil Atlas, copies of which we will hand over to the African Union Commission later today.

And we will remain engaged in the years' ahead. We have adopted an Agenda for Change for our development policy that will concentrate assistance on those in greatest need, directly benefiting African countries. While our discussions for the future Multiannual Financial Framework are still ongoing, namely the discussions between the European Parliament and the Council in the European Union, I can say with some confidence that the European Development Fund will maintain the same order of magnitude in the future. And I also expect to see adopted a proposal from the European Commission for a Pan-African programme which would support pan-African integration and finance our joint strategy.

We will also continue supporting the African Union function and capacity building. Strong, operational and active common institutions are a necessary condition for successful regional integration. This is also our experience in Europe and one of the lessons of the recent economic and financial prevails we are going through. Common institutions need to be equipped with the right tools and the right mix of competences that enable them to tackle today's challenges being peace and security, finance and economy or managing the public goods. As one of the European Union founding fathers Jean Monnet has once said: "Nothing is possible without men, but nothing is lasting without institutions.

Mme Chairperson,

Our partnership is more than an institutional, political or economic relationship. At its heart are our citizens. Strengthening people to people contacts and human networks between our continents will bring mutual benefits for both sides. Business communities, researchers and academics, journalists and artists, civil society organizations and ordinary citizens are all eager and ready to engage. And we need to work together to empower women and youth across the continent to achieve their full potential.

This is why I share your ambition to invest in human development, through education. This is why we will increase our programmes to improve higher education in Africa, most notably through the Erasmus Mundus which already has an ACP "window" and the Nyerere programme.

With more than half of the population under 20 years of age, investing in education is a sure bet for the future. In the long term the transfer of knowledge is a more powerful tool for development, than the transfer of money.

Dear colleagues,

The EU and Africa are natural partners. But evolving challenges and opportunities require us to adapt our Partnership, to focus on priorities and added value, to focus also on concrete implementation as the Chairperson of the African Union just mentioned with my full support of that remark, and also to make our working arrangements much more efficient. We will launch a reflection today in our plenary session on how to make more effective our Joint Strategy. This is only the first step in a process that will bring us to 4th Africa-EU summit in Brussels that we are planning for the 2-3 April 2014.

Our meeting today is important for the future orientation of our work. We will continue to cooperate on global issues, work together to resolve peace and security crises, improve governance and address key development challenges such as migration and mobility, the management of raw materials, sustainable energy, trade and regional integration and the post MDG development agenda that covers so many issues of human development, for instance health issues.

For we live in two different continents but we share a single vision, that of a more prosperous, stable and open Europe and Africa. And we will continue to work together to make this vision a reality. For as an African proverb says, the future is like a baobab tree, you cannot embrace it alone.

I thank you for your attention.