A new multilateralism for the post-COVID world: What role for the EU-Africa partnership?

April 2021

KEY MESSAGES

• In the wake of COVID-19, European leaders have reaffirmed their support for multilateralism and their hope of reforming and carrying forward the multilateral system. This was most recently stated in the EU’s Communication on Multilateralism of February 2021. Strengthening multilateral cooperation will require partners. The African Union (AU) with its 55 member states could be an important partner, but it cannot be taken for granted.

• To build meaningful cooperation with African actors and work together towards constructive multilateralism, the EU and its members must accept that African states have their own views of shifts in the global order and the desirability of further change. For greater legitimacy of the multilateral system, the EU must move beyond simply protecting the status quo, combining its stance as a defender of human rights and other universal norms and values with support for reforms and efforts to strengthen meaningful African participation in multilateral fora.

• The EU must support reform of the UN Security Council to ensure that Africa gains proper representation. In the meantime, the EU should take further
KEY MESSAGES (CONTINUED)

steps towards substantive cooperation. This includes improving internal coordination; increasing outreach to the A3, the AU and concerned African states; and working with the A3 early in the drafting process for resolutions that affect Africa.

• The EU should make the most of the G20 Italian Presidency in 2021 to facilitate participation of African actors in this forum, which has increasing sway over a range of sensitive issues for African countries, such as debt relief. The G20 should seek to build consensus around an inclusive recovery agenda, to “build back better” and advance structural cooperation in the financial and health sectors.

• COVID-19 has demonstrated the importance of health as an urgent area of multilateral cooperation. The EU should seek to work closely with African actors to reform and improve multilateral structures in the health domain, to respond effectively to the ongoing crisis and for future preparedness. This should include supporting African countries in developing local bio-manufacturing capabilities, working together to reform and strengthen the World Health Organization (WHO) and to fully implement the “One Health” approach.

• The EU should engage with African countries now to formulate a common and mutually beneficial vision and position for the international climate and environmental negotiations set for this year. Particularly, this concerns decisions on the post-2020 biodiversity framework and post-2025 climate finance target and reporting standards. Key topics include the role of nature-based solutions in addressing and integrating multiple environmental issues and provision of more funds for climate adaptation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Multilateralism has been in trouble for a while, particularly at the global level. Yet, the European Union (EU) and its member states have remained among its staunchest supporters. In their June 2019 Council Conclusions, EU leaders drew the outlines of a common European vision to uphold, extend and reform the multilateral system. Against an increasingly complex and contested geopolitical backdrop, these goals were further developed in the recent EU Communication on Multilateralism, published in February 2021.

One of the main background factors, of course, is the pandemic. COVID-19 has set off an unprecedented health, social and economic crisis and kindled nationalist reflexes. Yet, it has also triggered calls for a stronger and more effective multilateral system; one equipped to tackle old and new vulnerabilities while leaving no one behind.

To strengthen multilateralism, deep collaboration with a broad range of partners will be needed, particularly in the wider EU neighbourhood. This paper looks specifically at the potential for EU partnership with Africa, notably through the African Union (AU), in global multilateral fora and on key global issues.

As multilateral organisations, both the EU and AU are highly invested in the multilateral system, and they have stated their common commitment to effective multilateralism. The entry into force of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) in 2021, represents an ambitious step towards a uniquely African “way of doing” multilateralism. African actors’ pursuit of a reformed multilateralism reflects their quest for greater agency in the international system. African agency here regards the ability of African actors “to negotiate and bargain with external actors in a manner

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Despite the EU’s and AU’s commitments to multilateralism, the two have not always held similar views on international issues, or consistently worked together. Both continental unions and their respective member states often diverge in how they see the ongoing global shifts. This has sometimes undermined the possibility of a common approach to multilateralism. Their conclusions have also differed on whose interests are favoured by existing multilateral rules and organisations. For the AU and African countries, rebalancing institutions and processes that now favour the developed world will be an essential part of any future multilateralism. That means for the EU to really support a multilateralism equipped for the future, it has to move beyond defending the status quo, and work towards a fairer and more balanced multilateral system with better representation of countries in the Global South.

This paper explores initial steps that European actors can take to improve cooperation with the AU and Africa on the multilateral stage, while also realising that improving multilateral cooperation requires counterparts on both sides willing to engage. Section 2 examines how the EU, the AU and their respective members are responding to shifts in the global order, identifying some of the core interests of each side regarding the multilateral system. Section 3 assesses how Europeans might improve cooperation with Africa in two key multilateral institutions: the UN Security Council and the G20. Both play a major role in questions affecting Africa, the first with emphasis on peace and security and the second on economic development. However, Africa remains underrepresented in both. While short-term reform of these institutions is complex, we nonetheless argue that Europe must pay attention to the question of African agency. Indeed, Africa’s current underrepresentation affects these institutions’ legitimacy to take decisions concerning Africa. Section 4 focuses on the potential of multilateral collaboration around the two great crises of the moment: health and climate. While multilateral cooperation is desirable on many issues, it is absolutely vital to address these global threats. Neither the climate crisis, nor the current (or any future) health crisis, can be realistically tackled alone. There is a vital need to build wide coalitions. The case for global health cooperation has never been stronger. Both the EU and the AU have a keen interest in rehabilitating the global health architecture and promoting the “One Health” approach. Regarding climate, much remains to be done to bring about a clearer convergence of interests and to make good on the EU’s stated ambition to work closely with Africa on climate and environmental issues. The paper closes with a set of conclusions and policy recommendations for European and African leaders.
2. THE EU, THE AU AND THE MULTILATERAL SYSTEM

Multilateral organisations are vital. They bring states together, allow for greater predictability in international relations, and provide conduits for nations to pool resources, expertise and decision-making. This is particularly important in the face of global threats and crises. Yet, recent shifts in the global order – including the rise of China, renewed Russian recalcitrance and US unilateralism – have led to growing multipolarity and challenged the principled meanings at the foundation of today’s multilateral system. The United States has gradually lost its legitimacy – and under Trump its desire – to play the role of global hegemon, while new powers are gaining strengthened capacity to shape the system. However, this is not a simple return to multipolarity in the classic pre-war sense. Rather, what we are now seeing is better characterised as “multiplexity”. That is, there is an expanding population of actors that matter on the global stage, including multinational corporations, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and other non-state entities. Today’s economic interdependencies are deeper too, with more complex challenges to global stability and order.

These shifts impact the EU and the AU differently. While stopping short of pointing fingers, the EU’s recent Communication on Multilateralism nevertheless bemoans the fact that “international law, human rights, democracy and the rule of law are being challenged”. The Communication then lays out a vision of multilateralism in which these normative principles are bolstered. Yet, at the same time, the EU has continued to build on the principled pragmatism that has guided its foreign policy since the 2016 Global Strategy. Regarding engagement with non-democratic powers, the EU has gravitated towards a focus on issues-based cooperation, achieved through “creative diplomacy”.

The growing assertiveness displayed by the EU on the issue of multilateralism emerged in part in response to the progressive disengagement of its traditional ally, the United States. The Trump administration’s disregard for the international order, alongside China’s growing confidence, have been especially influential in this regard. In her first State of the Union, EU President Ursula von der Leyen warned, “Our global system has grown into a creeping paralysis. Major powers are either pulling out of institutions or taking them hostage for their own interests.”

Publication of the EU Communication so early in the Biden presidency signalled that in the post-Trump era, the EU is not waiting for the United States to lead, though it still identifies the United States as a “like-minded partner”, alongside the United Kingdom. Indeed, Europe’s advocacy of “effective multilateralism” goes back further than the past four years. Such calls first emerged in the wake of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the EU’s own divisions following that event.

The EU’s internal struggle for coherence in foreign policy is evident in the Communication on Multilateralism’s emphasis on the importance of internal “coherence, unity and solidarity” to boost effective external action.

The Communication sets out the EU’s priorities regarding multilateralism. These include recognition of the inherent value of a well-functioning multilateral system and the importance of multilateral cooperation in fostering peace and security and upholding fundamental values. In terms of economic and social cooperation, EU priorities are less clearly laid out, beyond the “build back better” agenda, which is essentially an internationalised version of the Von der Leyen Commission’s priorities, including job creation.

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While the AU is a strong supporter of multilateral cooperation, African officials emphasise that the AU and its members vote in accordance with their own interests; they have little inclination to consistently support one global power.15 Traditionally, coordination between AU members is not as developed as in the EU, particularly outside the realm of peace and security, although recent African coordination around the COVID response showed the potential of greater unity.16 There is an understanding, however, that Africa is stronger when it speaks with one voice. Moreover, recent intra-African processes, such as the institutional reform of the AU and the launch of the AfCFTA, will pool African influence and strengthen Africa’s hand in world affairs. The end of US hegemony could well bring opportunities for the AU and its members to demonstrate this agency, giving African actors new openings to negotiate with multiple global powers to further their interests.17 Greater consistency among African countries in working and voting together could be one element of an emerging enhanced African agency, with a pragmatic approach to partnerships in multilateral fora being another.

African leaders expressed a strong commitment to multilateralism at the 75th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA 75) in 2020. Their remarks underlined values that they consider key in underpinning the global order going forward, including respect, solidarity and cooperation. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa stated, “The order we seek to build must be rooted in solidarity, equality and unity of purpose. The coronavirus pandemic has presented us with a choice. It is a choice between the global cooperation envisaged in the UN Charter or the pursuit of narrow self-interest and unilateralism.”18 Rwandan President Paul Kagame asked, “Did the collective accomplishment of three generations over 75 years, in building a stronger international order, disintegrate into recrimination and resentment? Or did we come together to once again secure global progress on a foundation of cooperation and mutual respect?”19

For Africa and the AU, global shifts have brought more options in terms of partners and more negotiating space and leverage vis-à-vis external actors, thereby potentially enhancing African agency. The AU is currently developing a vision for Africa’s international partnerships, including a strategy for relations with global and regional powers and regional blocs such as the EU. This could be the start of a more structured approach to partnerships, and provide an avenue for Africa to further its interests in the multiplex world.

The AU has clearly expressed its interests in the development sphere in major policy documents such as Agenda 2063, while the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) regularly publishes its positions on peace and security issues. The centrality of the development agenda was evident in African leaders’ speeches at UNGA 75. These highlighted the need for sustainable development solutions in the wake of COVID-19, including but not limited to a reprioritisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ramaphosa, speaking also as Chair of the AU, had a particularly strong message, calling for economic solidarity and the forging of a “New Social Contract and a New Global Deal”.

The EU, the AU and their respective member states thus share a commitment to the multilateral system, but European leaders place much more emphasis on rule of law, human rights and other core values as guiding principles, whereas African leaders place stronger emphasis on solidarity and mutual respect. Both sides uphold the importance of peace and security goals, though this by no means translates to common interests on all issues. On the economic front, while the EU has expressed the importance of solidarity across the international community and a commitment to the SDGs, the urgency is much greater among African leaders, and their emphasis on development is much stronger.

Given that our focus here is on cross-regional cooperation, it is worth noting that most classic multilateral institutions have not adapted to fully include regional organisations. They reflect a global order in which the state is still the principal (if not the only) actor in international affairs. In that regard, the EU’s presence in the United Nations is unusual, as it holds a permanent observer seat in the UN General Assembly and it has observer status in most of the specialised agencies. Similarly, the EU’s status as a full member of the G20 is unique. Nonetheless, the outcome of EU participation is highly dependent on how member states act, as we will see in the next section on the UN Security Council.

Further, multilateral cooperation is interest-based. Coalitions and cooperation between different groups is rarely cross-cutting, but requires meaningful engagement on individual topics and issues. Though there is a diversity of intergovernmental coalitions in multilateral settings, these by no means always reflect clear positions within regional alliances. Indeed, some of these alliances reflect an older geopolitical order. For example at UNGA 75, AU members were not always a coherent bloc, while the Group of African Countries often voted with the wider Group of 77 (G77), which continues to be one of the principal alliances in the UN General Assembly.

3. WORKING TOGETHER IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL FORA

3.1 The UN Security Council

Despite persistent issues around legitimacy and protracted stalemate over the past four years, the UN Security Council (UNSC) is still the main global multilateral institution for discussion of peace and security matters. Neither the EU nor the AU are members of the Security Council, but both unions and their members have a strong interest in the UNSC’s agenda. A disproportionate number of the topics addressed by the Council pertain directly to Africa, though Africa is underrepresented, with only three temporary seats.

The EU has traditionally been overrepresented, holding two permanent seats before Brexit, alongside one to three temporary seats. African members have tended to hold the view that intervention in domestic conflicts in Africa should be subject to the principle of subsidiarity. That is, the UNSC should defer to AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) positions on issues of conflict on the continent. EU member states, in contrast, have tended to prioritise broader international security and humanitarian concerns. To develop meaningful cooperation with Africa in the UNSC, the EU and its members will have to stand up in support of

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24. While the United Kingdom is increasingly separating itself from the EU, this has not yet led to marked differences in the UNSC. When not held by EU states, the other temporary seats are usually held by like-minded states, such as Norway at present.
its meaningful reform, while also working towards improved outreach and cooperation.

The EU sees international peace and security, alongside the upholding of fundamental values, as an end in itself. Both the 2019 Council Conclusions and the Communication on Multilateralism express a desire to ensure that the Security Council “can fulfil its role”, while also stating the EU’s commitment to the reform of both, albeit without a clear common position on what such reform should entail. For the AU and its members, a strong African role in questions of African peace and security has generally been paramount. Furthermore, Africa has repeatedly called for permanent African UNSC seats, and requested use of UN assessed contributions to fund AU peacekeeping missions on the continent. Unlike the Europeans, the African continent converged around a specific formula for UNSC reform in 2005, the Ezulwini Consensus, which demanded two permanent seats for Africa. The push to bring a collective African voice to the UNSC table was reiterated in the AU PSC on 10 March 2021, echoing an earlier AU Assembly decision in January 2016 calling for coordination between UNSC decisions and the positions of the PSC. While France and some of the other permanent members supported the idea of African permanent seats, no consensus could be reached on an overall formula for reform, given the divisions between the five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States).

Coordination between EU members on the UNSC and with other like-minded states has tended to be strong, though unlike the AU, the EU has no process for advance agreement on candidacies for the UNSC. The three non-permanent African UNSC members, known as the A3, have traditionally struggled to maintain a united front, but they have demonstrated a strong and growing focus on adopting coordinated positions (joined by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines since January 2020). Further, unlike the EU UNSC members, the A3 has generally united in endorsing the candidacies agreed in the AU. South African officials saw coordination of A3 positions as one of the main achievements of its latest two-year UNSC term in 2019-2020.

As neither the EU nor the AU has a seat on the Security Council, the onus is ultimately on member states to engage in active diplomacy to build alliances and work together within the Council. Further, there is no formal coordination mechanism between EU and AU member states, though informal consultations occasionally bring all the ambassadors together, albeit irregularly. One diplomat interviewed remarked on the absence of meaningful engagement with African countries in the Security Council or at the General Assembly by the EU Mission. EU engagement was described as “process heavy”, without enough consideration of the importance of personal

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29. The 2016 AU Assembly decision stated, “the Assembly REITERATES that the African Members of the UN Security Council have special responsibility to ensure that the decisions of the PSC are well reflected in the decision making process of the UNSC on peace and security issues of concern to Africa”. Decisions, declarations and resolution. African Union. Assembly of the Union. 26th Ordinary Session. 30-31 January 2016. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, p. 8.
30. Though this did not prevent Burundi from running against Kenya for the 2021-2022 seat.
relationships and the strengths of individual member states.\textsuperscript{32}

Each EU member state on the UNSC engages in its own frequent outreach to African counterparts. Some of these efforts have occasionally divided the A3 members, such as French outreach to francophone countries.\textsuperscript{33} However, EU and like-minded UNSC members appear to be increasingly aware of the importance of early consultation with A3 members on African issues, and A3 members have been increasingly made penholders or co-penholders on African issues. EU and like-minded countries, including the P3 (the United States, United Kingdom and France), tend to consult the A3 and affected countries’ representations more, not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is expedient, as their inputs can sometimes sway the debate with other permanent members. EU and member state diplomats noted in interviews that the relative lack of personnel at the AU and African missions could make outreach difficult, but they also remarked that the African Peer Review Mechanism appeared to be playing a role in forging a common understanding and purpose among African states.\textsuperscript{34}

The primary area of disagreement between EU and AU UNSC members continues to be subsidiarity. The handling of the Libya crisis, beginning in 2011, is an example here, but there are many others. The P3 bypassed the diplomatic channels that the A3 had pushed for in UNSC resolution 1973, and later the UNSC failed to give the AU the bigger role it sought or to appoint an African envoy following Ghassan Salame’s resignation as special envoy for Libya.\textsuperscript{35} Outside Africa, A3 positions are typically less strong, with a few exceptions, such as the Palestine question, which is important to countries like Tunisia and South Africa.

EU and AU UNSC members do have several areas of convergence, including on newer issues such as the climate-security nexus. Previously a source of contention, efforts to build shared understandings and to listen to the experiences of African states and small island countries such as St Vincent are producing results. However, Russia still threatens to veto any potential resolution in this area.\textsuperscript{36} The EU has largely supported the A3’s calls to secure UN assessed contributions for funding AU peacekeeping missions in Africa. Indeed, France has been an active proponent in this regard, though this has not always been appreciated due to its inclination to intervene. The issue is currently back with the AU to propose a new formula for cooperation, so it may soon resurface.\textsuperscript{37} In 2020, France and Tunisia led efforts to finally secure a resolution calling for a global COVID-19 ceasefire after many months of geopolitical point-scoring between the United States and China. There is strong European and African support for the women, peace and security agenda. Both sides and other missions co-hosted a March 2021 Arria formula meeting which called for full implementation of that agenda.\textsuperscript{38} Yet, given the growing divergence on the issue between the five permanent members, South Africa has emphasised the need for a pragmatic approach to reach agreement on the topic, even if that means supporting a less than perfect resolution.\textsuperscript{39} Youth, peace and security (YPS), children and security, and food security are other areas of relative convergence between Europe and Africa.\textsuperscript{40}

Moving forward to improve outreach and engagement with A3 members, a crucial first step will be for the EU to get its own house in order. Europe needs to improve its own coordination, ensuring that different EU member states do not communicate different messages on key issues.

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34. Video interview, New York, 17 March 2021
40. Video Interview, New York, 17 March 2021
Another essential step will be to try to break down the two-tier system between the permanent and temporary UNSC members, for smoother cooperation and better information sharing between France (a permanent member) and the EU temporary members. This coordination needs to extend even beyond the current UNSC members, to the EU27 as a whole, so future temporary members are up to speed and can easily pick up issues when they join the UNSC.

A more systematic approach to engagement between the EU and A3 UNSC members should also be encouraged, both in national capitals and in New York. It is unclear whether there is an appetite for regular meetings at the ambassador level, but informal and ad hoc exchanges between EU and A3 members could certainly be stepped up. European officials already acknowledge the need for a much more “joined up” strategy to facilitate dialogue between the EU delegations in Africa and the EU delegation to the United Nations in New York. This is also acknowledged in the EU’s recent communication.

EU UNSC members, and particularly France as a permanent member and frequent penholder on African issues, should begin to consistently reach out to A3 member states and affected states early on in the process of drafting resolutions. Further, European states need to be ready to work in real partnership with A3 members, including a willingness to listen and negotiate positions and to serve with A3 members as co-penholders where possible. This would help integrate A3 perspectives into draft resolutions on Africa, facilitating the negotiation process and real coordination.

In September 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres will present his report “Our Common Agenda”, containing recommendations for responding to current and future challenges.41 Mandated by UNGA 75, at which member states committed “to instil new life” in discussions on Security Council reforms, the report will likely present suggestions in this regard. For EU and AU states, the report could provide an opportunity to push forward meaningful reform and bring the United Nations up to date on current realities in the security realm and beyond. Although the geopolitical climate seems hostile, they should be open to more ambitious changes to better prepare the United Nations to tackle future global challenges. An example in this regard is the potential of the UN development system reform to spur global progress towards the SDGs (see sidebar).

### The reform of the UN development system

A more effective UN development system would benefit both Africa and the EU. It could help Africa meet its development challenges, while giving the EU and its members better value for money. Moreover, a coherent UN development system that upholds universally agreed norms and values and supports countries in their transitions towards sustainable development would itself contribute towards strengthened multilateralism.

The ongoing reform of the UN development system is the most advanced and ambitious of the reforms instigated by UN Secretary-General Guterres. The aim is to create a system that is greater than the sum of its parts, to meet the requirements of the 2030 Agenda.42 By and large, the reforms have withstood the test of the COVID-19 pandemic, and contributed to swift collective responses. However, their overall success is far from certain.

Though African countries have long demanded a more effective UN development system, some might be wary of cohesive and strong UN country teams. The EU and its member states provide roughly 30% of all contributed funds for development-related activities (2018).43 Though the EU and its member states have vocally supported reform of the UN development system, they have continued to earmark a large share of their funding, which remains an obstacle.44

At present, key reform elements are in place and implementation is ongoing. Yet, further consolidation is needed, as well as refinements and adjustments, particularly regarding the resident coordinator (RC) system and its funding. The RC system should serve as the backbone of a cohesive UN development system working towards a common agenda. The reform strengthened the authority and neutrality of RC’s as the highest ranking representative of the Secretary-General. She/he is also responsible towards programme country governments with regard to

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the UNDS’ collective support for example, SDG implementation. If the RC system is not functioning, other parts of the reform cannot fall into place. Regarding funding, currently the RC system is financed via a hybrid mechanism, combining contributions from UN entities, a levy on earmarked resources and a special purpose trust fund to which member states can make voluntary contributions. However, this has not provided a sound enough basis. In mid-2021, the Secretary-General is scheduled to present recommendations on new financing arrangements to the General Assembly.

Despite African and European countries’ joint interest in a well-functioning and effective UN development system, if current trends continue there is a real risk that the system will be reduced to an implementer of mostly humanitarian aid. Many would argue, however, that the UN development system should act as a champion of the global transformation towards sustainable development, predicated on human rights and other agreed norms. African and European states have a shared opportunity here to work together towards compromises that not only secure more sustainable funding for the RC system, but also distribute the overall relatively modest financial burden more equally across a larger number of states. Supporting the inclusion of assessed contributions in the funding model would send a strong signal of member states’ support for this vital function. At the same time, it would considerably raise the stakes for the United States and China, the two members with the largest share of assessed contributions, to object to such a proposal.

3.2 The G20 and the Italian Presidency in 2021

The G20 has become a key multilateral forum for discussion of pressing international economic issues. It is thus an increasingly relevant forum for EU-Africa cooperation. In 2020, European and African stakeholders played an important role in advocating for debt relief and other reforms with major influence on the fiscal space of African countries and thus on their path towards achieving the SDGs. However, as with the UNSC, Africa’s limited membership in the G20 raises questions of legitimacy, particularly regarding discussions of development issues primarily affecting Africa. While a reformed membership is unlikely in the short term, the Italian G20 Presidency in 2021 offers an opportunity to enhance African agency through increased outreach, and ensure that the 2030 Agenda and health capabilities are central to the G20’s agenda.

Originally framed as an informal summit of the leaders of the most industrialised countries after the 2008 financial crisis, the G20 has gradually broadened its reach, including a deeper focus on development. The launch of the G20 Development Working Group in 2010 marked the formal incorporation of the development agenda, with the AU participating with observer status for the first time. Since then, the increasing activism of the G20 in the development sphere has been accompanied by growing calls for enhanced representation of African perspectives in it. Such calls reveal the current limits of the G20, while also highlighting the untapped potential for greater cooperation between the EU and AU in a club that is influential in setting the global agenda.

Structural factors, starting with asymmetric membership, have hindered effective coordination between the EU and AU within the G20. The EU is well represented, as Germany, France and Italy are members, and it is a full member itself. The AU, in contrast, shares observer status with the African Union Development Agency (AUDA), and South Africa is the only African full member of the group. This asymmetric structure has generated concern about the legitimacy of the AU’s role in the G20. To address these challenges, the Italian G20 Presidency has established the Development Committee, which includes all G20 ministers for the first time, and has the potential to significantly enhance the AU’s agency within the group. The AU’s role in the G20 is expected to be strengthened further in the coming years, as the EU and AU work towards a more integrated approach to global development challenges.

43. See Funding Annex Tables 2018 Excel file.
45. As of April 2021, there was an overall gap of US $153 million for 2021, and only thirteen states had contributed. See United Nations Sustainable Development Group. 2021. The special purpose trust fund: An overview.
Only with African buy-in can the G20 contribute to the effective global economic and health policy coordination that it says it is committed to.

of the forum, considering the impact its decisions have on Africa. Critics of this configuration denounce it as sacrificing legitimacy. The restricted membership and simplified decision-making are expedient, and thus spur effectiveness, though to the detriment of a more inclusive approach to the global agenda. The confinement of Africa-related matters to the development policy silo has also been criticised as a sign of the reification of the donor-recipient Europe-Africa relationship. Broader involvement of the AU in the G20 would open a clear path towards enhanced African agency at the international level. At the same time, finding effective ways of working with African actors in the G20 will benefit both the EU’s interests and its normative aspirations in line with the “principled pragmatism” that increasingly guides EU policy. Only with African buy-in can the G20 contribute to the effective global economic and health policy coordination that it says it is committed to, especially in the countries that need it most.

In the absence of modifications to G20 membership, the EU could use the G20’s expanding outreach to deepen multilateral cooperation with Africa. For over a decade, the G20 has used “engagement groups” to nuance its structural contradictions and broaden the scope of its dialogue to include different kinds of stakeholders. For example, Think20 (T20) is a network of think tanks in G20 countries and serves as an “ideas bank” for the forum. Civil 20 is a worldwide platform of civil society organisations to foster dialogue with the G20. Business 20 is the G20 dialogue forum with the global business community.

While the G20’s outreach strategy has increasingly targeted non-members as the AU, T20 has also advanced various proposals over the years to facilitate representation of African stakeholders and favour a multilateral dialogue with Europe. Proposals have ranged from enhanced roles for the AU Commission, the African Development Bank and the UN Commission for Africa to establishment of an informal coordination mechanism through a Europe-Africa caucus within the G20. Inclusion of different voices could also be achieved with deeper dialogue between policymakers, experts and practitioners in the T20 Africa Standing Group (ASG). This group was launched in 2017 to provide policy advice on Africa-related matters. As such, it could open new paths for bottom-up agency in the international sphere, involving civil society and the private sector.

The G20 Development Working Group, not coincidentally co-chaired by South Africa, holds a privileged position in pursuit of the “building back better” strategy after the pandemic. A number of sensitive topics for least-developed countries, such as debt relief and finance for development, have already topped the Working Group’s agenda at past meetings. These included adoption of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), which was achieved in 2020 thanks to a coordinated advocacy effort by European and African stakeholders to “institute an immediate moratorium on all bilateral and multilateral debt payments, both public and private, until the pandemic has passed”. Now attention to the impact of the pandemic and its socio-economic effects on the most vulnerable is gaining steam, with calls for international solidarity and

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47. Ibid.
an inclusive approach to economic recovery, in line with the 2030 Agenda. The shared – and well established – commitment of European and African stakeholders to the SDGs\(^3\) could thus be a useful tool to spearhead their cooperation within the G20, particularly in the Development Working Group.

The Italian G20 Presidency in 2021 brings opportunities for concretely supporting the most vulnerable countries, particularly to safeguard and if possible increase their fiscal space. “Building back together” cannot only be a statement of support for global solidarity, it must bring forth concrete interventions to assure an inclusive recovery, development of health and education sectors and access to basic services, especially for the most vulnerable. To achieve these objectives, African and European actors should first cooperate to extend the DSSI beyond December 2021. Long-term debt relief interventions are also necessary. The EU welcomed the G20 agreement on a “common framework for debt treatments beyond the DSSI”\(^4\) and it should play a role in facilitating the participation of African countries in talks about future policy initiatives in this field. At the same time, debt relief measures need to be released from the trap of geopolitical rivalries between creditors, which in the past sowed discord with African partners.\(^5\)

One way forward would be to empower the Development Working Group by exploring deeper synergies with the G20 Finance Track on decisions and deliverables linked to debt relief and resource allocation to achieve the SDGs. This path could make use of the tighter cooperation between the Italian Presidency and the European Commission unfolding this year.\(^6\) More transparency can also be achieved by establishing multilateral coordination mechanisms between the G20, international financial institutions and the Paris Club.\(^7\) Finally, the United States’ realignment with the multilateral agenda\(^8\) could open an opportunity for the long-delayed reform of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) within the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and possibly their reallocation to poorer countries.\(^9\) As one of the most influential multilateral stakeholders in the financial sphere, the G20 should act as an informal platform to build consensus, drawing on the April 2021 joint European and African request for allocation of SDRs\(^10\) and following the agreement reached by the G7 in March 2021.\(^11\)

Health represents another key sector for cooperation. Here, the G20 can play a decisive role in boosting effective multilateral collaboration. But this is not an easy path to follow, as illustrated by the G7’s recent failure to agree on a coordinated mechanism to reallocate vaccines to developing countries. The United Kingdom rejected a proposal from France to reallocate 5% of supplies from G7 countries to African nations.\(^*\) The Italian Presidency should support the launch of initiatives and projects to expand vaccine manufacturing capacities in Africa and promote the One Health approach, which recognises the health of people as closely connected to the health of animals and our shared environment.\(^12\) Such initiatives will be crucial to counter the immediate health threat and to pave the way for faster, more coordinated responses to future pandemics.

4. ADDRESSING CRISIS: MULTILATERAL COOPERATION ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE IN 2021

4.1 EU-Africa multilateral health cooperation beyond vaccines

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us of the importance of strong multilateral health cooperation. Now is the time for the EU to establish solid, long-term partnerships with African countries to tackle both immediate health needs, such as vaccine supply and management of endemic diseases, and to prepare for future threats, for instance, by supporting the build-up of an African bio-manufacturing capability. Multilateral cooperation is also essential for the reform of the existing global health architecture, including the World

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57. The Paris Club is an informal group of official creditors.
Health Organization (WHO), and for rollout of the “One Health” approach, which underscores the connection between human, animal and environmental health. To be effective, however, multilateral health cooperation has to give equal footing to all. European countries have much to learn from African experiences in addressing the root causes of zoonotic diseases. These lessons, and other experiences, need to be factored in to effectively respond to present and future pandemics.

Protectionist, nationalist policies have failed miserably to counter the spread of the coronavirus. Deepening multilateral cooperation on health is essential, not only to meet the unprecedented demand for treatments, tests and vaccines, but also to rekindle trust in global collaboration. This is particularly relevant following the clashes in 2020 regarding the speed and forcefulness of countries’ public health measures to counter the initial COVID-19 outbreak. Controversies on this topic have continued to fuel transatlantic tensions, and raised doubts about the WHO’s relationship with China.

Against this backdrop, African countries have demonstrated impressive shows of solidarity within their blocs, while it took more time for Europeans to band together and launch a common approach to tackle the spread of the virus. For instance, the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) stepped up to coordinate Africa’s COVID-19 response, setting up a COVID-19 response fund and launching the Africa Medical Supplies Platform (AMSP) to secure millions of doses of vaccine for the continent. This swift response to the initial pandemic surge demonstrates that Africa’s way of “doing” multilateralism is concrete and could be worth emulating on the world stage.

The EU and AU worked together as co-sponsors of a May 2020 World Health Assembly resolution in support of the WHO. The resolution, penned by the EU, was initially criticised, as it did not recognise vaccines as a global public good. However, it did reaffirm the importance of solidarity and multilateral cooperation in pandemic response, while prioritising global access to vaccines and affordable equipment, medicines and treatments.

Despite initial domestic tensions, the EU was one of the first and largest funders of the COVAX facility. This global initiative, co-led by the WHO, the GAVI Vaccine Alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), alongside key delivery partner UNICEF, aims to provide guarantees and reduce risks for pharmaceutical manufacturers and to secure access to vaccines for participating countries – including in Africa. The EU has also pledged significant resources through the European Investment Bank and European Commission to kick off the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator. This is a global collaboration to counter the acute phase of the pandemic by deploying tests, treatments and vaccines. While COVAX and the ACT Accelerator did succeed in kick-starting vaccine deliveries in 2021, the number of doses envisaged has been far less than needed for herd immunity on the African continent. As yet, only 20% of Africans are expected to be vaccinated by the end of 2021. Moreover, the supply problems experienced by vaccine manufacturers, coupled with bilateral advance purchases from wealthier countries, including the EU, risk undermining potential COVAX stocks.

After the mixed track record in cooperation during the first year of the pandemic, there is clearly much room for strengthening multilateral health cooperation with Africa. Priorities in this respect are boosting African bio-manufacturing capabilities, reforming the WHO and fostering adoption of the One Health approach, both domestically and through multilateral fora. For the first,

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66. EEAS. 2020. World Health Organisation: Joint statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell and Commissioner Stella Kyriakides on the adoption of the resolution on COVID-19 response at the World Health Assembly. 19 May.
70. European Commission. 2021. EU doubles contribution to COVAX to €1 billion to ensure safe and effective vaccines for low and middle-income countries. 19 February.

For instance, the Green Deal refers to “leaving no one behind” and structures its initiative around key transformations.
Successful EU-Africa multilateral cooperation on health beyond vaccines provides a unique opportunity for the EU to work cooperatively with Africa.

Successful EU-Africa multilateral cooperation on health beyond vaccines provides a unique opportunity for the EU to work cooperatively with Africa.

the partnership initiative launched in December 2020 by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and Africa CDC is a good starting point. It aims to increase Africa CDC’s capacity to prepare for and respond to public health threats in Africa. In the medium to long term, the EU needs to invest more in knowledge transfer and support African countries in developing local bio-manufacturing capabilities. This is crucial to build the long-term competences and resilience needed to combat diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV, as well as future pandemics. As another avenue to pursue this aim, the EU should back the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP) proposed by Costa Rica and the WHO, and work towards a consensus in the World Trade Organization (WTO) on suspending patents and waiving intellectual property for COVID-19 vaccines. Closer proximity between purchasers and suppliers would generate positive spillovers, such as reduced transport needs, shorter lead times, lower carbon impacts and transaction costs, and creation of new jobs and economic opportunities.

The second priority, reforming the WHO, is a cornerstone for boosting multilateral health cooperation. A stronger WHO is crucial to advance national and international rapid detection capacities; to strengthen health risk assessment, management and communication; and to stimulate research and development for early identification of new and potentially threatening pathogens, especially those of zoonotic origin. This is particularly important for African and less-developed countries that lack the needed infrastructure and tools to effectively manage emergencies. The EU has repeatedly stated the importance of reforming and strengthening the WHO, as well as implementing the One Health approach. COVID-19 has confirmed the need for international coordination of critical health supplies deployment between the EU and Africa, alongside public health intelligence platforms and epidemiological forecasting, surveillance and early warning technologies. However, though relations with Washington, DC, on this issue are likely to get smoother with the Biden administration, reforming the WHO may be a bumpy ride. On the EU side, it will require, first, a strong diplomatic effort and coordination so that member states speak with one voice.

The third health priority is investment of human and financial resources to support the One Health approach, both domestically and at the international level. One Health will be a core pillar of the upcoming G20 Global Health Summit in May 2021. The concept provides a fertile soil for an EU-Africa cooperation that puts the partners on equal footing. For poorer countries, EU support will remain important to guide better integration of human, animal and environmental health within sustainable development planning. For instance, support can help leverage frameworks, such as the tripartite One Health partnership set up by the WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organization

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73. Murphy, T. 2021. How Europe can work with Africa amid the global scramble for vaccines. European Council on Foreign Relations. 5 January.
76. Fransen, L., Nkengason, J. Expand production of vaccines and increase global resilience and pandemic preparedness, Think20 Italy, forthcoming August 2021
80. Interview G20 Italian Sherpa Office. 4 March 2021.
of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) to prevent future pandemics.\(^{82}\)

In the EU, countries can learn from the expertise of their African counterparts in handling zoonotic diseases and implementing the One Health approach domestically.

In conclusion, EU policymakers need to realise that effective multilateral health cooperation represents a key opportunity for EU development policy. Effective multilateral health cooperation can promote access to health as a truly global public good. Furthermore, successful EU-Africa multilateral cooperation on health beyond vaccines provides a unique opportunity for the EU to work cooperatively with Africa and rebuild mutual trust, which was badly hit with the last-minute decision to postpone the long-planned EU-Africa Summit from October 2020\(^{89}\) to, likely, early 2022. Finally, looking at aid as an investment, rather than as a cost or charity,\(^{84}\) and putting emphasis and energy into African needs and priorities in the post-pandemic world, will strengthen the EU’s credibility as a development actor on the continent, including in relation to other geopolitical powers like Russia and China.

### 4.2 EU-Africa multilateral cooperation on climate and environmental issues

The unresolved global climate and environmental problems could potentially unleash crises even more disruptive than COVID-19. These too will require multilateral cooperation to resolve. Indeed, the zoonotic emergence of COVID-19 has been linked to human infringement on the natural environment, while the pandemic has demonstrated the challenges of risk management and resilience. While EU and African countries differ in their vulnerabilities to environmental changes, as well as their respective responsibilities and capabilities to address these changes, both share a strong mutual interest in curbing global warming and protecting and conserving natural resources.

To reach this common goal, the EU should engage with African countries to formulate a common vision, conduct joint planning, identify convergences of interests and address differences. Purposeful, early engagement on this year’s line-up of environmentally-relevant international events\(^{85}\) can work to support a green recovery post-COVID-19.\(^{86}\) Opportunities are ahead on topics such as nature-based solutions, food systems, carbon markets, adaptation finance, energy and, no less important, better integration of the different international environmental negotiations.

Key multilateral processes addressing climate change and biodiversity loss have come to a standstill since 2020. Major negotiation sessions to kick-off the Paris Agreement implementation under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and to advance a post-2020 global biodiversity framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) were delayed by one year, to November and October 2021, respectively. Further delays are likely, and several countries remain opposed to an online format for the interim negotiation sessions, i.e. subsidiary bodies meetings, which are essential to prepare for these UNFCCC and CBD Conferences of Parties (COPs).\(^{87}\) These delays have wasted precious time, and also bring the risk of a window of opportunity closing, for a recovery that does not lock countries into unsustainable practices. Now is the time for the EU to push implementation of its Green Deal and for Africa to seize opportunities for “green leapfrogging” and a sustainable and resilient transformation. The fifth session of the UN Environmental Assembly (UNEA-5) held earlier this year declared 2021 as “the year when we must consolidate the transformation”.\(^{88}\)

To seize the opportunities of 2021, the EU must engage with African countries now and use ongoing multilateral processes in the months prior to key environmental

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84. Murphy, T. 2021. How Europe can work with Africa amid the global scramble for vaccines. European Council on Foreign Relations. 5 January.

85. These events include the Climate Adaptation Summit in January, the High-Level Political Forum in July, the High-Level Dialogue on Energy and the UN COP15 on combating desertification in September, the UN Food Systems Summit in September or October, the biodiversity COP15 in October and the climate COP26 in November. Additionally, the UN Decade on Ecosystems Restoration will be launched in early June.

86. Bauer, S., Brandi, C., Jacobvita, G. 2020. Curb your enthusiasm: Corona may slow down multilateral process, but must not derail global climate policy. ETTG. 2 April.


negotiations to set the tone and prepare outcomes. Europe is ideally positioned to facilitate such coordination this year, as the United Kingdom and Italy co-host the UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), and also hold the presidencies of the G7 and G20, respectively. Though the EU-AU Summit will likely be postponed, the EU will have other opportunities to discuss the COPs with African counterparts. An EU-AU Ministerial meeting is planned in Brussels in May or June, and the EU Commission hopes to organise another Commission-to-Commission meeting in 2021.\(^{90}\) Other opportunities are the High-Level EU-Africa Green Investment Forum in Lisbon set for 23 April and the preceding Green Talks,\(^{91}\) a French summit on financing African economies in May,\(^{71}\) and G20 events, provided they have sufficient African representation.

While the EU and African countries have supported each other in the past, their interests and positions still diverge on several issues. In the climate and environmental fora, the EU holds strong historical responsibility and capability. It is currently the world’s third largest emitter of greenhouse gases, after China and the United States, but it has demonstrated a willingness to lead in addressing these issues, including through international support provision. African countries are among those with the lowest per capita emissions and ecological footprint, though they are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, such as severe and prolonged drought, torrential rains and flooding, and sea-level rise. Africa therefore has a large stake in addressing climate and environmental issues and pushing for a just green transition in the multilateral system. Nonetheless, Africa’s development needs and capability gaps at times divert priorities away from climate change. This is especially so now, in the harsher economic climate due to COVID-19.

The EU has switched its focus to a green transformation, but obtaining African partners’ buy-in remains challenging. The European Green Deal risks being perceived as “imposed” on African partners, in the absence of joint communications and strategies that factor in their diverging interests.\(^{92}\) The implications of an EU carbon border adjustment mechanism have been particularly concerning for African countries. The EU has stated its commitment to green trade and to promote green value chains in the medium term.\(^{93}\) Yet, this could limit access of African products to the EU market. The EU will need to better consider these concerns and credibly demonstrate how the external dimension of the Green Deal will support African countries’ own green transformations, match their development interests and deliver benefits.\(^{94}\)

If EU and African countries can establish a functional, sustainable and mutually beneficial trade and development cooperation model, it could serve as an example for future global approaches. Such a model would need to stimulate sustainable consumption and production, enhance resilience, create new decent jobs and ensure a just transition for all. This could involve, for instance, the EU setting differential carbon tariffs based on country income groups,\(^{95}\) providing alternatives for highly fossil fuel-dependent exports to the EU, and investing in mutually-beneficial international circular economy systems and decarbonisation of African industries.\(^{96}\) Such a model, however, can only be successful if it is jointly developed with inputs from both the European and African sides, taking all needs equally into account and with a common understanding of the green transformation.

Furthermore, the interlinkages between various environmental issues and the need for cross-sectoral and cross-topic solutions has to be acknowledged for effective sustainable development action.\(^{77}\) This year’s multilateral processes around food, energy, biodiversity and climate offer opportunities to break out of silo thinking and become more integrated. Together, agriculture, land
use, land-use change and forestry were responsible for 57% of greenhouse gas emissions from Africa in 2016, and African Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement have a strong focus on agriculture and forestry. Shifting agriculture, often driven by rapid population growth, is responsible for 92% of tree cover loss and related biodiversity loss in Africa. Building more sustainable food systems in Africa, and with Europe, could alleviate food insecurity and loss of ecosystems and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The EU has clearly voiced its support for such systems. Moreover, nature-based solutions that protect and enhance carbon sinks, boost adaptation and resilience, and prevent soil degradation, water scarcity and biodiversity loss would concomitantly enhance food security and rural development in Africa. Nature-based solutions have featured prominently in recent international negotiations, and provide a means to link the varied multilateral strands. Importantly, 45% of primary energy usage in Africa came from biomass in 2018. Supporting the transition to clean energy in renewables-rich Africa would not only reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but would also address deforestation and the health issues caused by biomass use and could boost access to electricity. EU and African groups of negotiators could push for further integration through improved coordination of their teams to this year’s COPs for UNFCCC, CBD and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), alongside other environmentally-relevant events.

In the run-up to COP26, the EU and AU can work on a common vision for increased ambition in climate action. While most African countries have stated their intent to enhance their NDCs under the Paris Agreement by 2020, only five countries have so far made submissions (Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Zambia and Senegal). In this regard, the EU could support African countries in two ways: first, by providing technical support for the formulation of NDCs and, second, by committing financial, technological and capacity building support that matches African countries’ identified needs and interests, to boost confidence for more ambitious conditional pledges. The NDC Partnership, in which the EU and most African countries are members, could be an ideal platform for such an exchange. In addition, to ensure a successful COP26, the EU and African countries should prepare a common vision, especially on international carbon markets (Paris Agreement Article 6), and adoption of a global biodiversity framework under the CBD.

A key topic at COP26 will be the new post-2025 climate finance target. The EU has generally shown stronger commitment than other actors in this area, not only as the largest donor but also with its more balanced allocation to mitigation and adaptation actions. As highly vulnerable and low-emitting parties, African countries are especially interested in greater adaptation support, as reflected in their NDCs and in the AU’s Agenda 2063. Thus, EU and African countries could work together to steer negotiations

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101. European Commission. 2019. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The European Green Deal. 11 December.
102. Including at the Fifth UN Environmental Assembly of this and next year.
105. Climate Watch. 2020 NDC Tracker.
108. Aid Atlas. EU institutions (excl. EIB) to Africa (all) for climate change (total) during 2002-2018.
towards stronger support for climate adaptation, alongside stronger accountability and adequate standards for climate finance reporting.\textsuperscript{110}

While “building back better” and “green recovery” have become mantras, substantial investments have nevertheless been directed towards fossil fuel industries,\textsuperscript{111} risking carbon lock-ins and aggravation of environmental problems. To be effective, the extensive efforts to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic must respond to the much bigger, longer-term environmental and climate crises.\textsuperscript{112} Given the global nature of all three crises, multilateralism will be essential. In short, this year offers major opportunities for a more integrated approach to environmental, social and economic issues. The EU and African countries could lead the way, greening their economies jointly and establishing mutually-beneficial cooperation models.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Priming EU-Africa cooperation on the multilateral stage

The EU has clearly stated its interest in building new partnerships and strengthening multilateralism. To do this, Africa, and the AU with its 55 member states, is an important counterpart. Yet, it is clear that the EU and AU, or Europe and Africa, do not necessarily see shifts in the global order in the same way, and they do not always share the same interests with regard to multilateral systems and processes. Nonetheless, there are plenty of areas where shared interests can be found, particularly if the EU adopts an approach based on mutual respect. Further, the framing of the European perspective as universal and the perspectives of others as ideological must be discarded, as it undermines constructive negotiations.

The Von der Leyen Commission has made many big announcements regarding its ambition to step up the EU-Africa partnership. Yet, there remains very little equality in international affairs, though there are ways to move towards better partnership. This paper has outlined some of the ways this might be approached within multilateral fora, particularly, the UN Security Council and the G20. It also presented some steps that the EU could take towards a better partnership with Africa for a safer, healthier world.

In this regard, there are many other relevant topics that this paper did not touch upon, such as global trade and multilateral digital cooperation. Even in the areas we did address, we make no claim of having easy answers. Yet, we do believe these issue areas offer important lessons for developing deeper, more equal and more meaningful cooperation with our neighbours in Africa.

Disparities in representation hamper international cooperation and undermine the legitimacy of global fora such as the UN Security Council, on the security front, and the G20, in regard to economic cooperation. Given the complexity of reforming these fora in the current geopolitical climate, much more can and should be done to support African agency in the spirit of real partnership.

While a truly equal partnership can only be assured with permanent seats for Africa on the UN Security Council and better representation in the G20, in the interim, the EU and its members must take steps to ensure that African voices are heard in both fora and ensure that decisions that affect Africa are not taken without deep African involvement. In the UN Security Council, this means consulting A3 members and affected countries early on about African topics, and bringing African countries in as penholders and co-penholders on these issues. In the G20, this year’s Italian Presidency brings opportunities for deepening outreach to African stakeholders, by building on existing informal channels and inviting a wider range of African actors to

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{109} Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want. Addis Ababa: African Union.


\textsuperscript{112} Bauer, S., Brandi, C., Iacobuta, G. 2020. Curb your enthusiasm: Corona may slow down multilateral process, but must not derail global climate policy. ETIG. 2 April.

Maxwell, S. 2020. How to unlock the Glasgow COP. 7 January.
\end{footnotesize}
the table. Regarding the reform of the UN development system, African and EU members could join forces and help establish a truly multilateral funding solution for the RC system, which would also raise the priority given to sustainable development within the United Nations.

This year, 2021, offers the unprecedented opportunity to put real meat on the bones of discussions of partnership in the multilateral sphere, particularly on the issues of health and climate. In both these areas, the time is ripe to take steps forward to create a safer and better world. The links between the two issues are apparent in the One Health approach, which is predicated on the inherent connections between human, animal and environmental health. In the area of multilateral health cooperation, COVAX is an important step towards ending the global health crisis of COVID-19. But Europe should also work much more closely with Africa to boost preparedness for future crises. This means investing in initiatives to improve Africa’s bio-manufacturing capacities, while collaborating with Africa on reform of the WHO to better equip it to respond to the health crises of the future. Finally, the EU and Africa should work together to promote the One Health approach, fully harnessing the potential offered by the Italian G20 Presidency and the G2O Global Health Summit 2021.

On the climate front, cooperation means truly listening to African concerns about the European Green Deal, and working with African countries towards jointly agreed paths for sustainable development on both continents, in line with climate ambitions and without disadvantaging developing countries. The EU can support African countries in developing their NDCs, while also encouraging other developed countries to step up their own climate financing commitments, with a stronger focus on adaptation, ahead of COP26. The linkages between food, energy, biodiversity and climate should also be at the heart of discussions between the EU and Africa this year. Indeed, the COVID-19 crisis has particularly demonstrated the link between the environment and human health questions.

5.2 Policy recommendations

From the analysis presented, we derive ten key policy recommendations for both European and African policymakers:

1. To build meaningful cooperation with Africa and work together to reinforce multilateralism, the EU and its members must accept that European and African states often have different analyses of shifts in the global order, and the desirability of further change. To promote greater legitimacy of the multilateral system, the EU should not simply protect the status quo, but should combine its defence of human rights and other universal norms and values with support for wide-ranging reforms and African agency in multilateral fora.

2. While the EU needs to improve its internal coordination to avoid in-house conflicts, Europe must also be more systematic in its engagement with African members of the UN Security Council. It should stand up in support of UN Security Council reform, increase outreach to the A3 (and to other developing countries) and work closely with the A3 on issues pertaining to Africa.

3. EU and AU states should use the recommendations by UN Secretary-General António Guterres’ on “Our Common Agenda” in September this year as an opportunity to push forward meaningful reform and to bring the United Nations up to date on current realities in the security realm and beyond. Although the geopolitical climate may seem hostile, they should be open to more ambitious changes, to better prepare the United Nations to tackle the global challenges of the future.

4. African and European countries must support reforms towards a more coherent and effective UN development system. They should join forces to establish a reliable financing model for the resident coordinator (RC) system, including in the form of assessed contributions, which distribute the financial burden more equally across a larger number of states.
5. Although modifications to the G20’s asymmetric membership are unlikely in the short term, the EU should work to deepen the participation of African stakeholders, by strengthening the role of the AU Commission, the African Development Bank and the UN Commission for Africa, while establishing informal coordination mechanisms within the G20.

6. African and European actors should cooperate to extend the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) beyond June 2021, while also establishing more transparent coordination mechanisms between the G20, international financial institutions and the Paris Club and reaching consensus on the allocation of more redistributive Special Drawing Rights (SDR) to boost the international liquidity of developing countries.

7. While in the short term, the EU should keep investing in COVAX and the COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, in the longer term, it should facilitate knowledge transfer and support African countries in developing local bio-manufacturing capabilities to combat endemic diseases and future pandemics.

8. The EU should work closely with African partners to reform and strengthen the WHO and implement the One Health approach, by guiding poorer countries in better integrating human, animal and environmental health within sustainable development planning, and learning from African expertise on handling zoonotic diseases.

9. The EU should seize the opportunity that this year’s line-up of environmentally-relevant events offers to better integrate varied environmental topics. To that end, it should coordinate its teams of negotiators and engage with those of African countries to work together in international environmental fora for enhanced policy coherence and multiple-objective measures, such as nature-based solutions.

10. In the run-up to this year’s important climate and environmental COPs, the EU should engage with African countries to formulate a common and mutually-beneficial vision for the post-2020 biodiversity framework and climate finance post-2025, among others, and provide technical guidance and financial commitments to support African countries in submitting ambitious new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).