

## The EU-Africa peace and security partnership

*Political and financial stumbling blocks  
and a few ways forward*

November 2022

By **Lidet Tadesse  
Shiferaw (ECDPM)**  
and **Irene Paviotti (IAI)**

The views expressed  
in this paper are those  
of the authors.

### KEY MESSAGES

- Peace and security is an area in which the EU-Africa partnership has been particularly effective – despite the political falling outs of recent years. The partners' different responses to the Ukraine crisis, for example, highlights their differing views on the global order. Such differences should not be brushed aside, but rather should be the starting point for an honest discussion about the issues that the partnership faces.
- The EU is not Africa's only peace and security partner. African leaders have been diversifying their partnerships for a long time now, including in the peace and security realm. This has in some cases limited or even entirely side-lined the effectiveness of Europe's peace and security operations and role in regional conflicts, especially in the Sahel. To continue to be a relevant actor, Europe should acknowledge these new partnerships and the African interests that drive them, and ensure financial support for African-led peace and security operations.
- The creation of the European Peace Facility (EPF), which to date has been used mainly to support Ukraine's military response, adds to the challenges that the African Union is facing with regard to funding for peace and security operations. African leaders should proactively engage with European counterparts to ensure that their interests are duly considered in decisions affecting the EU-Africa peace and security partnership.



## SUMMARY

The EU-Africa partnership has ebbed and flowed over the years, with the period since 2020 being particularly dynamic. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the response to the war in Ukraine and the subsequent energy crisis in Europe, cleavages have been unearthed in the partnership. Yet, if approached in earnest, these same cleavages offer opportunities to engage in honest dialogue, identify areas of mutual interest and reckon with structural differences – to build a partnership that goes beyond aspirations to actually deliver. This policy brief explores the divergences and convergences in the EU-Africa peace and security partnership, concluding by pointing out a few ways forward.

## THE EU-AFRICA PEACE AND SECURITY PARTNERSHIP IN CONTEXT

Peace and security and governance are longstanding thematic pillars of the EU-Africa partnership. The legal basis of the EU-Africa peace and security partnership derives from the 1989 Lomé IV Convention. Unlike previous conventions, which emphasised trade relations, the Lomé IV Convention outlined the need for the EU and Africa (as part of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States) to stand for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law – and it introduced aid conditionality. The agreement was a product of its time. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, various African countries and eastern European states were undergoing a “wave” of democratisation, and aid conditionality was considered an expedient tool for promoting democratisation and disincentivising reversal.

Today, governance is no longer a prominent topic in the partnership, and the unidirectional application of aid conditionality is rejected. African countries argue that their path to democracy will be different from that of Europe, and that the African governance agenda should be pursued and enforced by African institutions, rather than the EU. Moreover, the EU's interests and values occasionally clash with those of Africa, and some of the values extolled by Europe are even contested at home. At the same time, the economic rise of non-democratic states has raised questions on the links between democracy and economic development and diversified the ideological market. This has challenged the EU's credibility in democracy promotion.

On matters of peace and security, however, broad convergences remain. Due to geographic proximity, North Africa is of utmost importance to both the EU and the African


Union (AU), while the Horn of Africa and maritime security in the Red Sea are critical to the EU's global commercial interests. There is a strong track record of peace and security collaboration between the EU and Africa, within the AU framework. For example, the EU is the AU's largest funder and has been an indispensable partner in financing various peace support operations (PSOs) deployed by the AU and its regional economic communities (RECs). Between 2007 and 2019, the EU dispensed €2.7 billion in support of the AU's peace and security activities. The lion's share of that amount went towards stipends for troops deployed in the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The EU has also provided funds for mediation and preventive diplomacy activities of the AU and its member states, and Europe has often demonstrated a willingness to lend political support as well.

This peace and security collaboration between the EU and the AU is arguably one of the most effective aspects of the broader EU-Africa relationship. However, it is not immune to political dissension, most recently related to the response to the war in Ukraine, which broke out a few days after the EU-AU Summit in February 2022. The management of insecurity in the Sahel is another area that has tested the partnership in the past two years.

## UNMET EXPECTATIONS: THE RESPONSE TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE

African countries' position on Russia's aggression against Ukraine has been heavily scrutinised. At the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) vote of 2 March on Resolution ES-11/1, condemning Russia's war against Ukraine, 28 African countries voted in favour, 1 voted against, 17 abstained and 8 were absent. More countries voted to condemn this Russian aggression than in the 2014 vote on Russia's Crimea annexation. Yet, most attention has focused on the countries that abstained. Abstention has been interpreted by European leaders as an act of condonation and a sign of Russia's influence in Africa.

From the African side, Europe's expectation of unequivocal support was confusing if not offensive. It seemed detached from the fact that African countries, too, have their own political considerations and that the national interests of the continent's 54 countries vary. Further, the European tendency to explain Africa's positions not as a product of its countries' respective national agendas but in connection to Russia's influence or disinformation campaigns left African countries wondering if their agency would ever be respected if and when their positions do not align with Europe's.



For Europe, the war was unexpected and outrageous, not only because of the belligerence it represents but also because it is so close to home. It is therefore seen as a war against democracy and European values. African countries' diverse responses to the war and the inability of African states to match the unilaterality of Europe's reaction, therefore, felt at odds with the commitments made to defend multilateralism at the EU-AU Summit just a couple of weeks before the war.

For Africa, Europe's outrage, subsequent sanctions against Russia and expectations of unequivocal support were nothing short of double standards regarding military aggression and negotiated solutions to war. It was seen as Europe asking its African partners to condemn an unjustified war of aggression simply because of its nearness to the EU's own borders – though EU has at times taken a controversial approach on issues on the African continent, including in Libya, and in relation to Iraq, Afghanistan and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It brought back memories of how the Libyan crisis was managed in 2011, when the AU's attempts to arrange a negotiated settlement were cut short by a United Nations (UN)-mandated intervention by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – which arguably surpassed its mandate to effect regime change. The stunted attempt at being a peace facilitator in the initial stages of the Libya crisis marginalised the AU even in the aftermath of regime change, leaving the AU with minimal influence over decisions made about Libya to this day.

Moreover, the justified outpouring of solidarity towards Ukrainian refugees clashes with Europe's attitude towards refugees from Africa, as they are not usually treated with the same care and generosity in Europe. The fact that all of this happened while tensions over vaccine equity and the response to Covid-19 were still in the open stirred an intense public and political discourse about whose lives matter. Emotions ran high both in the general public and among European and African diplomats in Brussels and Addis Ababa, as accusations of betrayal and bullying were heard.

The UNGA vote, however, might be cathartic in that it made clear that Europe and Africa have different interpretations of the global order and what the EU-Africa partnership can deliver. While the strength of a partnership is tested by how well it manages differences, doing so requires the partners to discuss critical issues, fighting the temptation to project an overly optimistic vision of the relationship. This is essential to maintain an effective partnership in a multipolar world.

## OF FRIENDS AND FOES

As the world changes, the partnership should adapt. One of the surfacing challenges in the EU-Africa peace and security partnership is how to deal with the rising political influence of non-Western partners. While the EU remains a significant trade partner for many African countries, it is not the only one, nor is it always the most preferred. African countries have diversified their partnerships, and most are in a better economic and political negotiating position than they were when the EU-Africa partnership commenced a few decades ago. Yet, competition with external powers, such as Russia, China and Turkey, has incentivised the EU to renew its engagement with Africa, as evidenced in Africa's prominence in EU external action. Developments within Africa, too, such as the continent's economic growth, its own self-assertion and interest displayed by non-traditional global actors, are changing the power balance between the EU and Africa. Europe is recognising this changing environment. A leaked EU report calls for more honest messaging towards African partners and highlights the need to ban lectures on values in favour of two-way conversations on the importance the EU attaches to certain values.

Such a revised attitude could also help smoothen the challenges that the EU-Africa partnership faces in the realm of peace and security. It would certainly be more constructive with regard to responses to transnational crises in the Sahel and North Africa. Alongside various regional and continental political initiatives on the Sahel, various EU member states have military presence in the Sahel region – namely in Mali and Niger – and the EU has had Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions in Mali. While the EU remains an important financier of the G5 Sahel force,<sup>1</sup> a number of critical issues have emerged that could rattle the EU-Africa peace and security partnership.

First, the EU's approach has been significantly militarised, with the security dimension of interrelated crises overtaking all others. The drivers of violence and terrorism, such as poverty, lack of social services, climate change and problematic economic models have received little attention, compared to military troop deployment and training. This may speak to European powers' sense of being threatened by terrorism at home, and it may benefit local governments, which can rely on stronger military capabilities to maintain regime security or repress dissent.

---

1. Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel) is a force established by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger in 2017



Second, the value added by this securitisation for the broader population is questionable, and in many instances, has led to public outrage against governments, as happened in Mali and Burkina Faso. Mali has experienced a decade of insecurity, despite the significant military presence of France and other forces, including under the auspices of the EU. In addition to contributing to the positive response by the population to the coup that took place there in 2019, it has also fed resentment towards France and other Western countries with a military presence in the country.

Third, three out of the five G5 Sahel countries have experienced a military takeover in the past several years. This points not only to the security and political fragility of these countries, but also to the possible implications of hypermilitarisation in settings without sufficient checks and balances. This should be of particular relevance to the EU, as the European Peace Facility (EPF) would allow financing of regional forces and lethal weapons in partner countries – an issue we will return to in the next section.

Fourth, the rise of insecurity and terrorism has compelled states to garner political and security support from all regional and global actors willing to provide it. In the Horn of Africa, this pertains to the Gulf States and Turkey, while in the Sahel, Russia has become an interesting ally. Russia's security presence in Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) has been a particular source of tension between the two countries and the EU. The EU and its member states allege that Mali and CAR are collaborating with "mercenaries", namely, a Russian private security company called the Wagner Group. Both Mali and CAR deny this characterisation, saying that their collaboration is with the Russian state and adding that decisions on security partnerships are within their own sovereign authority, even if the effectiveness of this partnership is questionable.

In the case of Mali, back and forth on this, alongside other political and security-related misalignments between Mali and France, as well as the EU, has led to a major diplomatic falling out between Mali and France. While this is just one example, it raises questions about how the two partners should react to each other's diverse partnerships. There is a growing unease in Europe about the increasing influence of China and Russia in Africa and elsewhere.

As the geopolitical tension between the West and China and Russia mount, African countries are concerned that their agency to choose their friends and allies is being undermined. Given that the EU-Africa partnership is not an exclusive one, African countries are wary of being forced to choose sides at a time when their interests are better served by diversifying their relationships.

## WHEN THE TECHNICAL BECOMES POLITICAL

The other remarkable development – short of a challenge – in the EU-Africa partnership is the sustainability of the EU's financial support to the AU and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). In the past, the EU provided funding to AU peace and security efforts through the African Peace Facility (APF). Those funds were used for a host of activities, ranging from emergency response to emerging crises to peace enforcement through PSOs. The funding allowed the AU to sustain operations such as AMISOM for over a decade, while also providing resources for missions such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)<sup>2</sup> and the G5 Sahel, which are not AU-led but are nonetheless deployed with AU approval.

While the EU's support to the APSA was appreciated by the AU, the need has far outstripped the provided resources. Pockets of regional terrorism in the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin continue to demand tremendous financial investment, whereas the EU, understandably, would like to reduce the AU's overreliance on it. The AU has been working on securing predictable funding for peace and security, especially since 2016, when an institutional reform process was launched to enhance the AU's own financial autonomy and increase member states' contribution to the AU's operational, programme, and peace and security costs. The reform process proposes reviving the AU's African Peace Fund, and introducing a 0.2% tax on selected imports to allow member states to pay their dues to the AU and make contributions to the African Peace Fund. The AU has also doubled down on diplomatic efforts to secure funding from the UN for AU-led operations that may be deployed on behalf of and at the decision of the UN Security Council (UNSC).

---

2. The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is a joint force by Lake Chad basin states – Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria – to address terrorism, namely by the Boko Haram group - around the Lake Chad basin.

As of June 2022, the African Peace Fund was endowed with US \$295,000, and it remains unclear if it will achieve its adapted target of collecting \$400,000 by 2023. The AU's negotiations with the UN, too, have been slow. The UNSC rejected a 2018 AU-backed resolution that would have committed the UN to finance 75% of the costs of UNSC-mandated AU-led PSOs. The AU, therefore, remains largely dependent on external partners, of which the EU is the most significant.

In 2021, the EU merged the African Peace Facility (APF) and other instruments to create the European Peace Facility (EPF), a financial instrument with global reach, and thus beyond only Africa. The EPF, moreover, is an instrument through which the EU can provide funds directly to partners and regional coalitions abroad. In Africa, this means that the EU does not need to go through the AU to provide funds. In addition, the EPF is the first-ever instrument allowing the EU to finance the purchase of lethal weaponry for partners (in addition to non-lethal apparatuses).

Yet, the EPF's provisions around the transfer of funds to partners without direct involvement of the AU risk side-lining the continental Union. While other provisions, such as the 2018 Memorandum of Understanding between the AU and the EU on Peace and Security and Governance, assert the EU's commitment to consult with the AU in case of usage of EPF funds in Africa, as a matter of principle, the memorandum's provisions do not guarantee it. Moreover, the possibility of provision of lethal weaponry ought to raise questions around the future role of the EU in Africa, not only because such transactions can easily make the EU a political actor in the domestic affairs of partners, but also because of the lessons learnt from recent coups in the Sahel.

Beyond these structural issues underlying the EPF, a more recent concern is the fast depletion of the fund for support to Ukraine. Of the €5.62 billion budget of the EPF for 2021-2027, €3.1 billion had already been pledged to Ukraine by October 2022. This has left the AU wondering if the EU will continue its financial assistance to the continent at the same scale as in previous years. The EU has committed some funds for the AU but in far smaller amounts than generally needed. While this should compel the AU to expedite its efforts towards financial autonomy and restart its negotiations with the UN, it may also add to the much-documented EU-Africa tension in regard to the response to the war in Ukraine.

## A FEW WAYS FORWARD

Africa and Europe – and the world – have been confronted with major emergencies in recent years, from Covid-19 to the war in Ukraine, and energy and food crises. These developments have unearthed cleavages in the partnership, but have also brought opportunities for collaboration. Renewed interest in collaboration on vaccine manufacturing, energy production and infrastructure development are examples in this regard.

To let go of the tensions and grievances of the past, three entry points and lessons are identified below, to enable the partners to better achieve their respective objectives and joint visions of the partnership.

### 1. Accepting diverging interests as necessary for a partnership

The measure of a successful partnership is not how often positions align but rather how quickly differences are managed or respected. For Africa and Europe, this means identifying areas where shared interests compel joint responses and acting on them. Specifically, honest and critical discussions are required regarding peace and security, use of EPF funds in Africa, and the response to insecurity in the Sahel and Libya, as well as on the promotion of the democratic governance agenda in general. For the EU, acknowledging and respecting the agency of African states, especially when their choices deviate from the EU's, will be critical.

Although the war in Ukraine has become a major fault line between the partners, the thread running through all of these issues and the main lesson that needs to be learnt is that respect for differences is as important as enhancing common agendas. The same applies to accepting each other's partners. The EU-Africa partnership is not an exclusive relationship. While African countries are diversifying their partnerships, the EU has remained wary of the increasing influence of China and Russia. The EU's geopolitical competition with these actors and the ideological differences between them has put a strain on the EU-Africa partnership. For African countries, each partner brings its own value, in which non-Western partners seem to focus less on the promotion of values, responding to expressed needs and delivering on their promises. The EU can take a position on how to partner with African countries, but neither party will achieve its objectives by coercing or imposing its agenda on the other.

## 2. Securing finance for peace and security is good, but addressing structural issues is better

While the EU's financial support to the APSA has been appreciated and indispensable, the partnership should not be limited to it. The power asymmetries that this type of support reinforces should also be recognised.

Capitalising on the lessons and relationships accrued through more than a decade of partnership, the EU and Africa have the potential to elevate their peace and security partnership. In the current geopolitical context, the EU-Africa partnership can achieve more by providing an avenue for political collaboration on structural matters, such as the UNSC reform, and on thematic issues, such as climate security. This will not be easy, as the EU, like the AU, does not always succeed in reining in its member states. With the UN reform agenda back on the table, the two continents have an opportunity to work together as much as their overlapping interests allow.

To achieve its potential, furthermore, the EU-Africa partnership must benefit not only the EU but also Africa and its citizens, as their interests too often seem forgotten. In the peace and security sphere, this means funding African-led operations, but also recognising the legitimacy of Africa's international positions and collaborating on global agendas.

## 3. Africa needs to proactively engage with the EU

While Europe's attitude towards Africa needs to be reviewed in line with the realities on the continent, the AU also needs to take proactive steps, not only to ensure that its own agenda is well placed in the partnership but also to influence EU decisions that affect it. For example, the AU has not actively engaged with the EU on the application and rollout of the EPF. This might be attributed to the lack of unity among the AU member states, as the national interests of countries which stand to benefit from direct assistance from the EU might clash with the collective interest of ensuring that the AU remains the primary and overarching coordinator of peace and security efforts in Africa.

The AU needs to identify specific agenda points beyond the "Silencing the Guns" campaign and "Agenda 2063" in order to drive the agenda of the partnership. Even if AU member states are not always able to speak in one voice, they ought to be clear on certain positions and defend them. In regard to the EPF, African leaders should proactively approach EU policymakers to secure financing for African support missions, while at the same time diversifying their funding sources. Moreover, the AU should continue to discuss avenues through which it will be consulted on the use of the EPF in Africa. ■

# ETTg | European Think Tanks Group

© European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), the Elcano Royal Institute, the International Affairs Institute / Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations / Institut du Développement Durable et des Relations Internationales (IDDRI), the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) and ODI, 2022.

The views presented in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisations that make up the European Think Tanks Group.

Readers are encouraged to quote or reproduce material from this report for their own publications. ECDPM, Elcano, IAI, IDDRI, IDOS and ODI request due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication.