



# REPORT

**Crossed Perspectives : Rethinking EU-Africa Relations**

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### Speakers:

- **H.E Bitange Ndemo** – Ambassador of Kenya to Belgium and EU
- **Mouctar Bah** – Brussels-Africa Hub
- **Chloe Teevan** – ECDPM

Moderated by **Adam Bouzi** – ARS Geopolitica

### Context

The European Union's traditional approach to Africa, which focused mainly on aid and infrastructure, has shown limits in addressing deeper systemic challenges. To discuss this, ARS Geopolitica and ECDPM organised a seminar to rethink EU-Africa relations. The event pointed out a shift from aid dependency toward equal, sustainable partnerships based on skill development, local value creation, and capacity building. It highlighted the need for a multifaceted strategy that goes beyond infrastructure, aiming to foster inclusive growth and long-term cooperation in a complex geopolitical environment.

### From Aid Dependency to Strategic Autonomy

From the start, speakers underlined the limitations of the traditional cooperation model between the European Union and African nations, one largely centered on development aid and infrastructure investment. While these efforts have yielded some positive results in terms of physical connectivity and social services, they have failed to address deeper systemic challenges such as economic dependency, weak local industrial capacity, and insufficient autonomy in policy making. It was notably underscored how the rapid withdrawal of USAID from the continent, coupled with Europe's reallocation of aid funds toward defense considering global tensions, reveals the fragility and volatility of external support. Rather than lamenting these changes, African leaders and institutions are called to seize this moment as an opportunity to redefine their role on the global stage. Moving away from aid dependency, they are urged to advocate for partnerships grounded in shared interests, reciprocity, and mutual respect. This shift involves rebalancing priorities towards the development of human capital, the reinforcement of domestic value chains, and the creation of sustainable, self-driven growth trajectories.

### Reforming EU Frameworks to Engage Africa Effectively

The financial and regulatory structures currently governing EU external action are not adequately designed to foster deep and effective engagement with African economies. Much of the EU's investment architecture remains heavily aligned with the United States' financial system, with strict rules and procedures shaped by post-World War II arrangements such as the Marshall Plan. These legacy systems make it difficult for the EU to operate flexibly in regions like Africa, where informal economies, fragmented markets, and high perceived risks require more tailored approaches. As a result, European private sector actors often hesitate to invest, despite Africa offering immense potential. The continent is not only rich in natural resources, including 40% of the world's strategic minerals, but is also undergoing rapid demographic and urban growth, with a burgeoning youth population eager to participate in the digital and green transitions. Kenya, for instance, stands out as a regional leader in renewable energy initiatives. Tapping into this



dynamism will require the EU to overcome institutional inertia and reconfigure its engagement instruments to better match Africa's evolving needs.

### **Investing in Africa's Transformative Sectors**

The seminar also directed attention to the urgent need for the European Union to rethink the tools it uses to build partnerships with Africa. Speakers agreed that while policy ambitions exist on paper, such as the €120 billion earmarked under the Global Gateway strategy, implementation has lagged due to insufficient adaptation of institutional mechanisms. To be an effective and credible partner, the EU must go beyond declarations and commit to concrete investments in sectors where Africa has the potential to leapfrog, such as digital infrastructure, energy access, housing, and the processing of raw materials. These sectors not only offer high returns but also contribute directly to employment and economic sovereignty across the continent. Yet such engagement requires more than just capital, it demands a better understanding of the realities on the ground, a willingness to share risk, and a shift in mindset from charity to co-creation. Importantly, economic prosperity cannot be disconnected from political stability and social cohesion. Sustainable development must be seen as the foundation of peace and long-term resilience.

### **From Post-Colonial Legacy to Equal Partnership**

Some reflections revolved around the historical and philosophical underpinnings of the EU-Africa relationship. Referencing philosopher Friedrich Hegel's controversial characterization of Africa as a "land without history," critiqued the enduring colonial attitudes that continue to shape European policy discourse. These narratives, often implicit, contribute to a vision of Africa as eternally dependent and lacking strategic value outside of its raw materials. However, as the continent increasingly asserts itself geopolitically, the need for a new narrative becomes pressing, one that acknowledges Africa's past while empowering its present and future. This new framework must be jointly written by African and European stakeholders, moving from asymmetrical aid relationships to equal, sovereign partnerships built on innovation, co-investment, and trust. The post-colonial lens should be replaced by a future-oriented perspective that embraces Africa as a driver, not just a recipient, of global change.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the event emphasised that the future of EU-Africa relations lies in abandoning outdated paradigms and building a modern, inclusive, and strategic partnership. This involves not only increasing European investments in African-led initiatives but also rethinking the foundations of engagement, moving from charity to collaboration, from control to cooperation. The success of this transformation depends on the willingness of both sides to adapt, listen, and build together.