epp group
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EPP Group Position Paper on Africa

# A RENEWED PARTNERSHIP WITH AFRICA – GROWTH, STABILITY AND OPPORTUNITIES

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## Introduction

In today's world of multiple geopolitical crises and challenges, it is crucial that the EU prioritises its relationship with Africa, its southern neighbour. Africa is a key partner of the EU, and its stability and prosperity have a direct impact on Europe. We, as partners, are bound by long-standing cultural, linguistic and historical ties with Africa and share many links, including across the Mediterranean Sea. Africa is a dynamic continent, with diverse economies and a young population. The EPP Group underlines that the full potential of our partnership has remained untapped for far too long. Thus, we are keen to advance the EU-Africa partnership based on trust, reciprocity, shared responsibility, solidarity, mutual benefits, respect and equality.

We believe that the EU and Africa must coordinate better on common interests and jointly identify concrete long-term goals. EU-Africa relations should be integral to EU policymaking,andasignificantrecommitment by the EU leadership is needed to fulfil past promises through concrete action. A host of important topics shape our partnership, ranging from economic development, trade and investment, digitalisation, security cooperation, democracy promotion, climate, energy production, health, migration, women and youth empowerment, food security and multilateral cooperation. We stress that our cooperation must take African and European interests and priorities fully into account. Looking at current geopolitical developments, we note that the EU and Africa also need to align their approaches on tackling the repercussions of the 2026 Iran war and the resulting crisis in the Strait of Hormuz. Many African economies remain highly exposed to external commodity shocks due to their dependence on imported fuel, fertilisers and agricultural commodities, making closer coordination between the EU and Africa increasingly important. Looking towards the future, we believe that the economy should play a central role in EU-Africa relations. Therefore, we have high hopes for the Global Gateway initiative, which will focus on energy, digital infrastructure, transport, health and education. The EU is the top trading partner of most African countries and by far the largest export market. Furthermore, particularly since the regrettable suspension of the operations of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the EU is the leading international donor for Africa and the key provider of humanitarian aid. This important fact should be made more visible and recognisable.

In the unstable and evolving global arena, the EU stands out as a stable and reliable partner for Africa. We in the EPP Group underline that the EU has substantially more to offer than the one-sided deals offered by other foreign actors, including Russia and China. The EU and Africa each bring distinct strengths to this partnership. The EPP Group underlines that achieving the full potential of the partnership requires the EU and Africa to understand each other better. We recognise the importance of the summits between the African Union (AU) and the EU, held every three years, as well as other dialogues, including ministerial meetings. We also underline the importance of fostering regional cooperation and integration, including by engaging with the various regional organisations on the African continent. In this light, we are also highlighting the importance of increased parliamentary diplomacy with the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), the Africa-EU Parliamentary Assembly (RPA) and with the national parliaments of key African partners. This parliamentary diplomacy and these dialogues need to be intensified and occur more frequently to fulfil the Samoa Agreement, which is the legal framework for most of our partnerships.

## Trade, Jobs, Economy and Development

We support the priorities of the AU's 2063 agenda, and we reiterate that the key to increased growth, prosperity and democracy in Africa is economic development and a functioning social market economy. It is widely acknowledged that job creation is essential for sustainable development and economic stability. Supporting job creation should therefore be a strategic priority of our partnership. To advance economic development and job creation, we advocate enabling investment in small and medium-sized enterprises, strengthening local industries and improving access to education and vocational training. It is estimated that by 2050, the African population will double in size, and it is important that countries in Africa are able to absorb this expanding young workforce. Furthermore, the EU should work closely with African partners to create sustainable employment opportunities, particularly for young people and women. The EU's private sector must play a role in development, fostering innovation, and supporting infra-structure projects, creating greater added value across sectors and contributing to long-term economic growth and stability, benefiting both Africa and the EU. In this

light, the EU must make much better use of its Global Gateway initiative and align it with the priorities of its African partners and the private sector. All EU investment tools should be interoperable and linked with Member States' investment plans in the spirit of the Team Europe approach.

A key challenge for the EU is not a lack of engagement, but limited visibility. Major EU-funded projects are often not recognised as part of a coherent European offer. Despite its scale, the Global Gateway initiative still lacks clear recognition, while fragmented communication and complex access reduce the EU's political visibility and strategic influence. This must change without delay. The EPP Group underlines that EU investments on the African continent must be viable and efficient and should aim to be the most attractive options. Therefore, we call for prioritising investments in critical infrastructure, energy projects, the digital economy and services, the education sector and development of skills and knowledge. Particular attention should be given to strengthening energy security, resilience, connectivity, and a stable and predictable investment environment. Furthermore, stronger energy partnerships should also consider connecting African energy resources to European markets. An important element of these partnerships is trade in renewable energy, notably green hydrogen. In this context, we believe that electrifying the African continent must also be a top priority for EU energy investments. This can lead to mutual benefits as it would potentially allow North African countries to export solar electricity to the EU.

Looking back at our past relationship with Africa, we believe it is high time to move beyond traditional development cooperation. Therefore, we stress that Global Gateway projects must become a true win-win, create opportunities for EU companies and truly advance both the EU's strategic interests and Africa's long-term ambitions. Thus, the EPP Group stresses that the Global Gateway initiative should prioritise high-impact, strategically relevant and scalable projects, delivering tangible results on the ground and reinforcing the EU's credibility as a partner. Europe must play to its strengths in strategic sectors where our European companies offer valuable expertise and competitive offers. Thereby, key areas for investment should be transport and connectivity infrastructure, including ports, corridors and logistics networks, which could act as a key driver of economic integration and regional development. In this light, the EPP Group underlines the huge potential of stronger cooperation in the field of critical raw materials. Cooperation in this field is key for the EU to achieve strategic autonomy, economic security, and resilient supply chains, while creating local value added, local industrialisation, and supporting local processing capabilities. The EPP Group also reiterates that EU-funded and EU-backed projects under the Global Gateway initiative must ensure a genuine level playing field for European companies. Thus, procurement frameworks used by implementing partners should reflect the EU's strategic interests, reciprocity principles and the need for European preference where EU financing is at stake.

We also underline the crucial importance of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which must become a success. The EPP Group recognises the strong and growing economic potential across the African continent and sees deeper intra-African market integration as an opportunity to attract European and global investments, including the long-term ambition of a free trade agreement between the EU and the AfCFTA on a continent-to-continent basis. We should thus increase our efforts to support our African counterparts and share our experience and expertise on regional integration, based on our own history with the EU single market. The EU is a major trading partner and has negotiated several trade agreements covering most African countries, including the Generalised Scheme of Preferences from which many countries are still benefiting. We should equally ensure that the EU's instruments, such as the Economic Partnership Agreements and the Global Gateway projects, are compatible with African initiatives at market integration. At the same time, we should offer tailored approaches, recognising the diversity of the African continent and its different needs and opportunities. Furthermore, we also support stronger trade and investment ties with African partners in strategic maritime sectors, such as fishing and the blue economy.

In addition, we stress that EU and African countries share a strong interest in re-inforcing a rules-based multilateral trading system. Closer cooperation between the two blocs is thus essential to advance a meaningful reform of the World Trade Organisation. The EPP Group recognises that illicit financial flows deprive African countries of significant public revenues needed for sustainable development and economic growth. We therefore support stronger EU-Africa cooperation to combat

illicit financial flows, money laundering, trade-based financial crime and corruption while promoting transparency, sound financial governance and domestic resource mobilisation.

## Governance and Democracy

In the EPP Group, we wholeheartedly share the objectives and principles enshrined in Articles 3 and 4 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union, which emphasise the significance of good governance, people's participation in democracy, and the rule of law and human rights. We also share the ambitions enshrined in the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance, namely, to promote and strengthen good governance through institutionalising transparency, accountability and participatory democracy. We will always continue to support democracy, representative institutions and free and fair elections, enabled through independent and transparent electoral processes, strengthened electoral management bodies, and credible, impartial election observation mechanisms. We reiterate our support for reforms addressing shortcomings such as lack of public services and institutional presence, and corruption. As the EPP Group, we are further committed to fostering good governance, democracy, and protecting minorities and marginalised groups. We will continue promoting civil society and institution-building and call for state structures to be established throughout the entire territory of African states, particularly in the peripheral regions. Institution and capacity building, together with the consequent access to public services, will not only help increase respect for human rights but also help increase trust in the state. In this light, we believe that countries which cooperate with us and pursue ambitious reforms should benefit from closer cooperation and better market access, as opposed to those who are regressing.

Unfortunately, political instability and coups d'état remain persistent in some African countries. We are very concerned by the recent democratic backsliding by several countries, particularly in the Sahel and eastern Africa. In this light, we will continue to speak out when opposition leaders are oppressed and elections are manipulated. We will continue to support political parties striving for progress and democracy, particularly those with which we are aligned through the Centrist Democrat International (CDI), International Democracy Union (IDU) and Democracy Union of Africa (DUA) platforms and commit to deepening the partnership with those parties, including through invitations to the EPP Party Congress. The EPP Group reiterates that the dialogue with our African partners must not just focus on the executive level but also include parliaments, civil society (including women and youth forums), researchers and universities, as well as political parties and party-affiliated associations. We underline the importance of ensuring that adequate political and financial support is provided for these dialogues. Furthermore, we stand ready to foster our cooperation with and support for the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) and support it in its efforts to acquire fully fledged legislative and oversight powers as the parliamentary body of the AU, in accordance with the AU's relevant protocols.

## Peace and Security

It is fundamentally important to Africa and Europe that lasting peace and security are achieved and maintained on both continents. Peace and security are not only essential for achieving long-term sustainable development, economic investments, job creation and institutional stability in Africa, but also for ensuring Europe's security and preventing irregular migration. Security and stability, along with good and consistent cooperation with governments in the Southern Neighbourhood, also have a key impact on the EU's external borders.

The EPP Group is concerned about the worrying security situation in several regions, such as the Sahel, Sudan, the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes Region, as well as the ongoing conflicts in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and in Mozambique's northern province of Cabo Delgado. The EU should step up cooperation on maritime security, particularly in the Gulf of Guinea and along key Atlantic routes, to combat piracy, illegal fishing and trafficking. In the Sahel, the power vacuum left by the forced withdrawal of Western actors has been filled by Russia, whose Africa Corps (formerly the Wagner Group) is clearly failing to provide security and on the contrary has become synonymous with domestic oppression and human rights violations. Thus, regrettably, jihadist terrorism remains a key threat, especially in the Sahel. Moreover, the civil war in Sudan, which has

now lasted for more than three years, has led to grave atrocities, thousands of deaths and immense human suffering. At the same time, the conflict in Sudan risks spilling over into neighbouring countries, exacerbating regional instability and increasing the risk of a broader escalation in conflict across the region, particularly through the growing involvement of foreign actors from the Middle East. The EPP Group also deplores the fact that religious terrorism and the persecution of minorities, including Christians, continue to pose grave security challenges and stresses that they must be urgently addressed by African and EU policymakers. Furthermore, radicalisation, which mostly affects young people, must be tackled. The EPP Group also recognises the vital role of humanitarian aid in responding to crises, while stressing that sustainable development, economic growth, and good governance are the foundations of lasting stability.

Given the complex and interconnected challenges outlined, strengthening the EU's preventive diplomacy is essential for stability and security in Africa. Therefore, the EU must further develop and adapt its conflict prevention and peacebuilding tools in line with the evolving nature of crises and its broader geopolitical ambitions. At the same time, our approach must be tailored to the local political, social and economic context to ensure the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of EU involvement across the African continent. In this light we also welcome the recent conclusion of the Security and Defence Partnership (SDP) with Ghana and support the conclusion of similar agreements with our partners on the continent.

European and international assistance is vital for enabling African countries to guarantee their own security. As part of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and supported by the European Peace Facility (EPF), the EU is currently engaged in multiple military operations and civilian missions in Africa. Given the limited progress and even the premature termination of some EU missions and recalling the worryingly increasing influence of malign actors like Russia and China, the EPP Group welcomes the ongoing review of the mandates of the CSDP and calls for a critical and honest review of CSDP missions to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

While we already substantially contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding across the African continent, the EPP Group supports African partners in stepping up their efforts to establish the conditions needed to ensure the success of these joint efforts. The EPP Group thus calls for more Security Sector Reforms (SSR) in African partner countries to make their security forces more efficient, more reliable and more trustworthy domestically. Additionally, as part of strengthening dialogue on security with Africa, the EPP Group supports the regular structured dialogue between NATO and the AU. Furthermore, the EPP Group is strongly and unequivocally committed to tackling violence against women and girls. We reiterate our commitment to tackle sexual and gender-based violence, including trafficking, female genital mutilation as well as child and forced marriages. Moreover, organised crime, in particular drug trafficking, poses a growing threat to stability across Africa. The EPP Group believes that solving these growing problems requires a comprehensive approach combining security measures, strengthened international cooperation and long-term development strategies.

We reaffirm the strategic importance of freedom of navigation, which is essential for the economic growth of both the EU and Africa. We underline the need to ensure safe and free passage in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, and the wider region and reaffirm our support for the EU naval missions in the area. In this context, the EPP Group is concerned about the increasing use of 'shadow fleets' to circumvent sanctions, particularly by Russia. These vessels operate outside international rules, lack transparency and pose risks to maritime security, the environment and African coastal economies, especially in regions such as the Gulf of Guinea. Revenue generated through these activities fuel ongoing conflicts, including Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The EU and its African partners should strengthen cooperation to monitor and counter these activities, such as through maritime surveillance, information sharing and capacity building. In cases where a country had been clearly cooperating with the Russian shadow fleet, the EPP Group underlines that the EU should act decisively and review its cooperation with the country concerned, including the possible suspension of development cooperation.

## Media and Disinformation

Africa, like the EU, is struggling to tackle disinformation and regulate social media. Disinformation and hostile information campaigns are increasingly shaping public perceptions of external partners in Africa. At times, this leads to a distorted image of the

EU, which in turn erodes trust in democracy and the state, thereby having negative long-term impacts on African peace and security. Furthermore, on both continents, radicalisation and disinformation campaigns are exacerbated by online forums. Artificial intelligence (AI) is further accelerating this trend on both continents. This must be urgently addressed and should be added to the agendas of future meetings. We believe that in these fields, the EU and Africa can learn from each other and should foster dialogue. Furthermore, the EPP Group is calling for increased support to ensure people have access to media and can benefit from media freedom and online literacy. After all, free and open access to information is a prerequisite for people to make informed choices in democratic elections and, as such, is key to fostering active civil societies.

In addition, the EU should strengthen its support for independent journalism, investigative reporting, journalist safety, media pluralism and local fact-checking initiatives across Africa. In this context, we should further support trustworthy and independent news platforms with a local presence, capable of providing independent, fact-based reporting on crises and humanitarian situations.

We in the EPP Group also believe that the EU must significantly improve its own communication strategy. The EU must become better at explaining why our partnership is good for both Africa and Europe. The EPP Group expects such improvements to become visible regarding the communication on the upcoming Global Gateway initiatives and its flagships.

## Education and Culture

The EPP Group recognises that education and culture are indispensable for sustainable development and stronger EU-Africa relations. Thus, we believe it is important to support African countries in strengthening their education systems and prioritising education as a key driver of long-term growth. We also emphasise the importance of academic, cultural and scientific cooperation, including as a pillar of the Global Gateway's digital and innovation agenda. We believe that global exchange programmes, in synergy with Global Gateway projects, enable talented students to study in Europe and increase the level of local expertise in partner countries. Similarly, at university level, we call for a significant increase in European Studies programmes and Jean Monnet Chairs. This would foster mutual understanding and deepen our partnership. Such efforts should also be seen in the light of the increasing number of Chinese Studies programmes sponsored by the Chinese Communist Party. Additionally, we support African educational institutions as centres of excellence, especially in the field of science and technology, while building on African knowledge, traditions and global linkages, including through the Erasmus+ programme and the Platform for African European Studies (PAES). In this regard cooperation must make full use of the various official languages spoken across the African continent, which constitute irreplicable channels for engagement and are a natural platform for a deepened partnership. We also propose increased support to enable graduates to return to their local communities to apply their knowledge and skills. Furthermore, the EPP Group supports cooperation at a wider level regarding cultural and art institutions in order to strengthen mutual understanding and ties between Europe and Africa.

## Migration

The EPP Group considers it imperative that the EU and Africa jointly tackle the root causes of migration, including poverty, conflict, religious persecution and climate change, to prevent Africans from being forced to leave their homes in the first place. We are additionally committed to supporting those African countries that receive and host large numbers of refugees and migrants, in order to help them strengthen their asylum and border management capabilities. Furthermore, we must address the role of foreign actors in instrumentalising migration.

We recognise the potential of circular migration and welcome the new EU visa strategy. We call for the strategy to be swiftly implemented, highlighting the importance of meaningful cooperation in the prevention of irregular departures, the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking of human beings, and the establishment of effective return and readmission procedures. Migration is one of the top political priorities for the EPP Group and the EU and should therefore be fully embedded in international partnerships as a core part of our geopolitical engagement with partner countries. In the increasingly difficult geopolitical context, the EU's comparative advantage lies in leverage through partnerships. Cooperation on migration should, therefore, first be pursued through balanced, mutually bene-

ficial partnerships, including through incentives and comprehensive engagement frameworks. Furthermore, we support the integration of migration-related conditionality in relation to all relevant policies, funds and tools, such as visa policy, as well as trade and development funding, for the purpose of supporting predictable and effective return procedures.

We also recognise the importance of the external dimension of migration and support the use of safe-country concepts and the conclusion of agreements and arrangements for the effective return of third-country nationals who have no right to stay in the EU, including the establishment of return hubs. We remain open to supporting legal channels, including through talent pool partnerships as part of a balanced approach that also ensures effective action to tackle irregular migration and improve returns. We will continue to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling, such as by supporting African countries most exposed to these practices. We support the external dimension of the EU's return policy and both the Union, and the Member States should ensure that it forms an integral part of the comprehensive approach to migration management. Likewise, we invite the Commission to explore pragmatic solutions for migration management, particularly to prevent and tackle illegal migration and enable return and reintegration, in close cooperation with partner countries.

## Climate, Health, Water and Food Security

Africa is one of the continents that suffer most from the consequences of climate change, while it bears the least responsibility for global warming. Natural disasters have an adverse impact on lives, homes and ecosystems, as well as on the economy. Furthermore, climate change is directly linked to the important issues of access to clean drinking water, water scarcity and food security. All of these also have implications for peace and security, as well as migration. We also recognise the important role Africa plays in tackling global warming. Thus, we strongly support efforts to protect forests and wildlife in Africa, particularly in the Congo Basin. The EPP Group is committed to the Paris Agreement and other international agreements to establish climate crisis measures. We support enhanced cooperation with African partner countries and underline that improving climate adaptation and resilience, as well as fostering technological cooperation, is critical.

For the EPP Group, a common objective for both the EU and Africa should be to transform the way we produce, distribute and consume food. We are far from fulfilling the objective of SDG 2-zero hunger by 2030. At the same time, geopolitical developments continue to place additional pressure on food security, as disruptions in energy, fertiliser and transport markets drive up input costs, affecting agricultural production, food affordability and social stability across large parts of Africa. We therefore welcome the renewed focus on this issue by the European institutions. The EU must continue to promote European solutions to these challenges, making use of our expertise in the fields of genetics and food logistics to facilitate food security in partner countries. Additionally, we should intensify European support and collaboration with African agricultural research institutions, contributing to the continent's agricultural capabilities and climate resilience. The EPP Group considers it crucial that the EU and Africa tackle this challenge together.

The EPP Group encourages a close partnership in the health sector. We welcome the strong cooperation with the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) and initiatives like the Platform for Harmonised African Health Manufacturing and the Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, Medicines, and Health Technologies in Africa. Considering the regrettable withdrawal of US support for health cooperation, we call for stronger EU engagement to strengthen national health systems and pandemic preparedness.

## Conclusion

This Position Paper is a renewed commitment for deeper engagement with Africa and its diverse regions, and it is intended to serve as a framework for the further development of a stronger EU-Africa relationship. It will help tackle our common challenges and advance our values and priorities.

Looking towards the future of EU-Africa relations, the EPP Group highlights again that the multifaceted EU-Africa relationship is full of potential. The various topics outlined above lie at the heart of the future EU-Africa partnership. We align

ourselves with the AU's Agenda 2063, as the overarching framework, and call for an honest, frank and results-orientated dialogue. While the EU pursues its own interests, we are convinced that a strong win-win partnership, in line with both the EU's and Africa's priorities, is possible. We underline that both the EU and Africa must fully commit to a strategic partnership that should result in cooperation between true equals. We want to move beyond the donor-recipient concept, basing our relationship on the guiding principles of reciprocity, mutual benefits, shared responsibility and solidarity. For this to work, we call for increased dialogue between European and African counterparts, including annual consultations with the leadership of the AU and the PAP. In this light, we also point to the important work done by many EU delegations and the EP Antenna to the AU (Parliament's official liaison and diplomatic office in Africa). We also seek stronger harmonisation between national strategies in order to adopt a real 'Team Europe' approach. The EU institutions and the Member States must act in a more coherent and unified manner in their relations with the African continent, working together on common priorities. We can and must do better. Despite the multiple global challenges, we must realise that we can only truly address them in close and deep partnership with Africa. The EPP Group thus strongly believes that now is the right moment to truly take the EU-Africa relationship to a new level!