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Ελληνοαφρικανικού Επιμελητηρίου, 13 Φεβρουαρίου 2023

## **The Future of EU-Africa relations and Greece**

In the last 5-6 years the developments in EU's relations with Africa are at the first glance disappointing. With BREXIT, Africa lost one of its strongest champions in Brussels. Then as the pandemic hit, EU's attention focused on domestic health challenges. Finally, a week after EU's African Union summit on 17-18 February 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Several analysts pessimistically concluded that Europe's focus is shifting from Africa to other parts of the world.

But then in the last 3-4 years we had a number of positive messages and developments. In 2019, just before the last German election, Angela Merkel proudly argued that EU's "policies on Africa, now follow a common strategy, which a few years ago would have been unthinkable". In March 2020 while Europe was closing down in response to the coronavirus, the new European Commission released a communication entitled "Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa", a document with plenty of new ideas and plans. And finally in December 2021 the EU announced the so-called €300bn Global Gateway investment strategy – a very ambitious project similar to the Chinese Belt & Road Initiative. Half of it – this means 150 billion euros - is to be deployed in Africa. Details of the Africa-Europe program, the first regional plan under Global Gateway, were announced just two months after the launch of the strategy.

So, there is no doubt that despite BREXIT, despite the pandemic and despite the war in Ukraine, increasingly EU officials and EU member states are looking towards Africa. Why? My view is that there are a number of factors that explain EU's growing interest for Africa and in turn push the two continents together, leading to a much closer partnership.

The first factor is a growing understanding by the EU that tackling underlying security and migration challenges would require a more holistic approach towards Africa.

The second factor is the realization of the need to respond to Europe's loss of influence amidst the growing number of external actors showing an interest in Africa, especially – but not only - China.

The third is an understanding of the huge opportunities for European businesses that might arise from supporting Africa's adoption and implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement.

Finally, in a strange way, the Ukrainian crisis has also increased Africa's geopolitical importance for the EU. Both the EU and Africa increasingly focus on energy and food security. In particular, cooperation with some African countries is expected to help Europe replace imports of Russian natural gas and reduce dependence on Moscow.

Now let me say a few words about Greece's relations with Africa. There is a lot of diplomatic activity taking place within the last 2-3 years. Greece has opened a new embassy in Senegal and the foreign minister made several official visits to the continent. There is no doubt that much of these contacts relate to Greece's ambition to be elected as a non-permanent member of the UN's security council for the 2025-6 period. There is also a push from Turkey's advance and rising influence in Africa (this is the main reason that the previous Greek government had announced an Africa strategy). There is also pressure of the MFA to the PM to increase Greece's development aid bilateral budget that has declined a lot in the crisis years. So the main reasons for the new Greek-African rapprochement are mainly political.

Is there an economic aspect in Greece's relations with Africa ? If you look at Greece's trade of goods with SSA, numbers are insignificant. Of course, they always were. However, there is a "hidden" economic activity, not very well recorded in statistics to say the least, that has to do with trade in services. Moreover academic contacts and inter-university cooperation are multiplying. I have the feeling, we have the feeling, that initiatives that are now in their first steps from the Greek business community and other Greek state and non-state actors, initiatives that are largely fragmented and difficult to monitor, may in the immediate future surprise observers of the Greek-Africa relationship. And I am sure that the Greek-African Chamber of Commerce will have played an important role in this.

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Title:  
Subject:  
Author: ASTERIOS CHOULIARAS  
Keywords:  
Comments:  
Creation Date: 13/2/2023 1:15:00 μμ  
Change Number: 3  
Last Saved On: 1/3/2023 12:01:00 μμ  
Last Saved By: user  
Total Editing Time: 6 Minutes  
Last Printed On: 1/3/2023 12:01:00 μμ  
As of Last Complete Printing  
Number of Pages: 2  
Number of Words: 695  
Number of Characters: 3.730 (approx.)