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**“All Quiet on the Western Front” – Germany’s EU Presidency
and Africa**

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Introduction

On 1 January 2007 Germany took up the presidencies of the EU and the G8 and thus assumed a central role in Europe's international policy-making for the next six months. This paper looks at its policy agenda on Africa. Germany has more than once pointed out that the neighbouring continent will be one of the priorities during its double presidency. However, this is not surprising as the year 2007 is to bring a basic review of the European Union's relations with Africa with new agreements like the EU-Africa Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and the EU-Africa strategy due to be negotiated at the end of this year.

Furthermore, the paper will look at the presidency's Africa policy in the wider context of EU and G8 relations with the continent over time. It argues that Germany does in no way come up with new ideas for the relation between Africa and the West. Despite the general rhetoric of the presidency as opportunity to make headway on Africa related issues in the EU's¹ foreign policy, Germany has not developed innovative ways to implement protocols and does not work on visionary strategies for agreements to come. It is argued that this lack of vision for the EU's foreign policy on Africa is due to underlying unquestioned perspectives on Africa and the West in which the former is perceived to be a "problem" to be solved by the latter.

It is argued that new initiatives like the EPAs or the EU-Africa strategy will not bring any significant change into EU-Africa relations and contribute little to "development" as long as these fundamental presuppositions are not acknowledged and seriously challenged.

The German Presidency's Programme on Africa

The German EU presidency focuses on three traditional issues in EU-Africa relations, namely international peacekeeping, development and migration. None of these topics are in any way surprising as the EU has just finished a short-term intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with German participation, the flow of illegal

¹ This paper will be concentrating on Germany's EU presidency, but references will be made to its G8 programme throughout the text.

migrants trying to enter Southern Europe continues to be high² and “development” is nowadays seen as root cause of conflicts which in turn will determine future peacekeeping missions as well as coming flows of refugees (Adepoju 1995; Duffield 2001; Ulriksen et al. 2004).

As unsurprising as the choice of topics are the concrete policy proposals in the three areas. Concerning **peacekeeping** missions in Africa the presidency just points to the EU’s continuing support for “international partners” like the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) in their efforts. This assistance, however, will be restricted to money and technical support, the EU will not send new troops any time soon (Bundesregierung 2007a).

Germany’s agenda on **development** is also very much a continuation of existing programmes. The main points are promoting the UN’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), implementing the EU strategy for Africa already adopted in 2005 and preparing coming agreements, above all the new Economic Partnerships for Africa (EPAs) and the upcoming EU-Africa strategy. EPAs are due to come into force in 2008 and substantially modify the Cotonou agreement, the major treaty between the EU and African states. The EPAs are individually negotiated trade agreements between the European Union and regional organisations in Africa. They should increase the trading volume between two regions and prepare the ground for future free trade between the partners. It is impossible to know what exactly will be agreed in individual EPAs until the process nears completion (IDS 2005). The only thing that is known for sure is that the overall goal of EPAs is to make the EU-ACP trade regime more defensible within WTO regulations. ACP countries will therefore be expected to remove tariffs on a variety of products from the EU during the implementation phase but will have some room for manoeuvre to keep essential tariffs on EU imports up.³

The EU-Africa strategy is to be adopted during the upcoming EU-Africa summit in the second half of 2007 and thus under Portuguese presidency. It is to supplement the

² As Europol points out, it is impossible to come up with accurate statistics on illegal immigration, but the number of asylum applications filed within EU countries is used as indication of migration flows. See http://www.europol.europa.eu/index.asp?page=publ_illegalimmigration# (29 January 2007).

³ Stevens/Kennan 2005. The last point, however, is not generally agreed on in the literature, for different views see Hinkle/Schiff 2004; Karingi et al. 2005.

existing EU strategy for Africa, which already included the EU-Africa pact as a second stage. The proclaimed aim of the two strategies is to promote the realisation of the MDGs. Little is known about the EU-Africa strategy so far as its concrete contents will only be negotiated in a few months. Judging from its predecessor, however, it is likely to differentiate again between prerequisites for the achieving of the MDGs such as peace, security and good governance, economic growth, infrastructure and measures that address the MDGs directly like promoting health care and social services, education and a safer environment. The EU is set to implement its Paris declaration by spending more money on aid and make aid more effective by supporting Africa's trade sector. There are obvious similarities to the agenda of Germany's G8 presidency, which features prominently the "aid for trade" programme and which aims at increasing aid recipients' capacity to participate in international trade (Bundesregierung 2006e; Hoekman 2002; Liebig 2002; Prowse 2005).

The third main point on the German presidency's agenda for Africa is **migration**, or more precisely how to stem the flow of illegal migrants from Africa to Southern Europe. Although it is emphasised time and again that this will need a political approach and a concentration on basic problems in the countries of origin, the presidency does not come up with any concrete measures to actually address the root causes for migration. Instead the concrete programmes just entail effective measures to keep illegal migrants out, i.e. to patrol Europe's southern borders better and to improve the cooperation between national authorities, in order to ensure a rapid and efficiently return of migrants (Rat der EU 2006a).⁴

⁴ What is new is that three consecutive presidencies have drawn up a triple presidency programme (Rat der EU 2006a). The triple presidency is not stressed as particular innovative step in the EU policy-making on Africa here as it does not in any way add significantly new perspectives to Europe's foreign policy on its neighbouring continent. Another point that might be seen as particular "German" is the attention to sustainable energy policies in Africa in order to reduce the continent's reliance on non renewable resources like, for instance, oil. The point may be original, but there are no concrete measures planned to address the issue. The presidency's agenda on energy in Africa therefore resembles strategies on more traditional topics, i.e. its importance is acknowledged in statements but it does not result in any concrete policy-making.

What's New in Germany's Agenda?

EU presidencies are generally seen to be an opportunity for the incumbent state to add its particular twist to EU programmes on different policy issues.⁵ Seeing Germany's agenda in a broader timeframe will reveal up to what extent the new presidency is set to reflect a particular tag on EU foreign policy-making towards Africa⁶.

Peace keeping: Germany has never claimed to reinvent the wheel for peacekeeping during its presidency and indeed it has little to say about multilateral intervention apart from stressing that the EU will continue as usual. There are no plans to engage in African conflicts anew, most of Germany's statements about EU peacekeeping still stress how successful the DRC mission was and use the opportunity to point out that interventions need not be long and on a large scale in order to succeed (Bundesregierung 2007b). Current conflicts like Darfur and more recently in Somalia are only mentioned in connection with supporting peacekeeping efforts of the African Union and chancellor Merkel made it clear time and again that there are no further plans for EU engagements in those areas whatsoever.

Development: The clear focus of Germany's development agenda is on implementation and preparation as Germany sees its EU presidency to be in an interim phase between different stages of EU-Africa relations, being placed between the EU strategy for Africa and the EU-Africa pact and between the Cotonou Agreement and the new EPAs. The German presidency did not really claim to bring a complete new perspective into development cooperation, but sees itself as promoting the implementation of existing agreements. However, even with this limited mandate the presidency remains pretty feeble. So far there is little creativity to be seen in Germany's implementation agenda and the country does not seem to be decided to push things really forward or to bring fresh ideas into preparations for the agreements to come. There are so far no extraordinary meetings scheduled on development, and EU-Africa relations are also missing from any agenda for the European heads of states meetings. The EU's Africa policy will only be

⁵ International Alert n.d. The EU Presidencies: Opportunity for change.

⁶ Africa was focus of UK's G8 and EU presidencies which emphasised the need for a broad cancellation of debts, set up a commission for Africa and supported a joint plan to enhance African capabilities in conflict management. The UK government therefore tried to promote what it saw as fresh perspectives on Africa's problems. See Hoehn 2005; Ramsbotham et al. 2005.

discussed in forums that traditionally take on development issues like the European meeting of development ministers, their meeting with ACP countries, the council on general affairs with focus on development, the joint session of EU and ACP parliamentarians and the EU-ACP minister meeting (Bundesregierung 2006a).

The talk about a much needed better integration of Africa into the world economy is nothing new and the Euro-African Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), which are seen to be the concrete realisation of this approach, do not enjoy special priority under the German presidency. Finally, the upcoming EU-Africa summit in the second half of 2007 is often mentioned by the German chancellor, but so far no concrete preparatory talks have taken place or are scheduled to be held between European heads of state.

The general tendency of giving Africa priority in announcement but not in actual policy-making is also to be found in Germany's G8 presidency where the announced "new" reform partnership between the G8 and Africa does in no way differ from previous approaches like NEPAD and is in marked contrast to the complete absence of any concrete steps to put these partnerships into practice. Goals like more democracy, less corruption and better governance (Bundesregierung 2006b) have been prominent conditions in international aid for years now and will remain lip services within the current development dogma, if they are not followed by actual policy initiatives.

Migration: Fresh ideas or new approaches are also absent concerning the third main point of Germany's Africa agenda, migration. The current presidency promotes an intensification of already existing tendencies to tightly patrol Europe's borders and improve co-operation between national bureaucracies to make deportations of migrants more effective. Here again, there is an obvious gap between the rhetorical emphasis on addressing the root causes for migration in the refugees' home countries and the lack of any concrete initiatives to improve on the situation of international migrants. Addressing issues of security and development in home countries is widely acknowledged to be the key in preventing future refugee flows (EU 2003), but concrete action is taken solely to shut an ever-increasing flow of migrants out.⁷

⁷ Germany, Portugal and Slovenia plan to have a co-ordination meeting of national authorities dealing with asylum applications and they plan to achieve essential EU wide agreements on the harmonisation of asylum guidelines (Rat der EU 2006a).

Reasons for the Stagnant EU-Africa Relations under the German Presidency

Analysing Germany's strategy on Africa for the coming six months, the paper takes a closer look at potential reasons for its central paradox between a rhetoric of pushing things forward and a complete lack of efforts to take relations between two continents any further.

EU's Internal Problems

First of all, the overall focus of EU policy-making at the moment, that is during Germany's presidency but also before and after it, clearly lies on Europe, not on Africa or any other region of the world. The EU is momentarily very busy with itself as it has to deal with the aftermaths of decisive internal developments like the difficult EU Treaty process, the EU's recent enlargements and upcoming association talks with its neighbours. The main points on the development agenda of Germany's presidency are thus issues of internal EU co-ordination like the implementation of the Paris declaration on harmonisation of aid and an improvement of the division of tasks between commission and member states in the EU's aid regime. Development co-operation is the last point on the agenda of the upcoming triple presidency after a long list of EU internal issues and topics dealing directly with Africa remain additional points on the agenda for the council meetings. The frequency with which Merkel says that Africa is "naturally" a priority in EU's foreign relations just to start talking about ways to improve effectiveness on border patrol indicates that the EU perspective on other parts of the world does often not go beyond its own borders at the moment (Bundesregierung 2006d; Focus 2006).

Disillusion

Secondly, Germany's emphasis on the implementation of already existing approaches, its reliance on traditional neo-liberal instruments like free trade to promote "development" and its focus on security instead of more ambitious concepts like democracy all point to long-term shifts in the EU policy towards Africa. Olsen (2002) has argued that these tendencies can be read as an indication of a new EU disillusion with Africa. The continent's development has become first and foremost a means to achieve global, non-Africa related goals. The overall aim of conflict prevention policies is to increase the security of Europe in an interconnected world (Bundesregierung 2006c; EU 2003). The

EU's conflict management strategies should result in reducing EU's direct involvement in African conflicts by shifting responsibility to partners, above all UN and AU. Finally, development efforts are to show the EU's decisive contribution to achieve the MDGs and thus confirm its claim to be a major player in the international community.

The EU's increasing disillusion with Africa can also be seen in its ever more tightly control of African policy-making. The Reform partnerships announced by the current EU and G8 presidency essentially mean a much closer surveillance of African states in their implementation of far reaching policy reforms as European countries seem to have lost their trust in African states to truthfully implement economic policies.

The Root Causes for the Unchanging EU-Africa Relations beyond Germany's Presidency

Europe's internal problems and the *longue durée* of an increasing disillusion with Africa might partly account for the reasons why the continent is not more prominent in EU's external relations at the moment. However, it does not sufficiently explain why Germany's presidency, which was supposed to fast-track EU-Africa relations, started so lame and why Germany does not show any ambitions to add its own particular twist to the EU's foreign policy during its presidency.

The last part of the paper will argue that the root cause for the absence of any fresh perspectives on current EU-Africa relations lies in Germany's unquestioned acceptance of traditional ideas about the nature and identity of Africa and Europe and its uncritical parroting of truisms about the relation between the two continents.

The Myth of the Oppositional Identities of Africa and Europe

EU policy documents on Africa have for a long time been based on the dual identity of Africa as the "problem" and Europe as the "problem solver". From the Yaoundé I agreements in 1964 (European Development Fund n.d.) up to the recent EPAs is Africa always presented as a problem to be "fixed" by an external supporter or, well, "partner", i.e. the European Union.

Many documents Germany wants to implement during its presidency claim that Europe and Africa have a special relationship and that Europe does acknowledge its peculiar obligation towards the neighbouring continent by being the largest ODA giver for Africa (EU 2000; EU Commission 2005). Europe thus likes to portray itself as the benevolent neighbour whose long standing ties with Africa qualify it for a special leadership role in its development. This might become particularly important as the rise of “new players” like China will add to the traditional rivalry with the United States and thus increase the fight for influence and turf amongst donors in Africa.⁸ As many authors have pointed out claiming to be a world leader and pursuing an “ethical foreign policy” (Chafer 2002; Chandler 2003) requires a following European leaders recruit mostly in Africa.

Africa on the other hand is always seen as the “problem” and if policies fail or do not result in the expected outcomes, the reasons are first and foremost to be sought there. It is therefore not surprising that the new EU programmes on Africa focus on an increased control of the implementation and thus on the “African” side of the treaty and not on the strategies’ design or their underlying presuppositions. As the World Bank’s Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in the 1980s and other international financial packages have been before them, EU economic policies are seen to be perfectly fit to solve the problem Africa once the difficult task of their correct implementation is fixed.

The Replacement of (Euro-African) Politics by Development

If one wants to find out anything about the European Union’s relations with Africa, one will always be referred to the EU’s national or supranational development institutions. There is very little indeed what seems to connect the EU and Africa outside this policy area. Germany’s presidency programme is no exception to this. The overall aim of EU-Africa relations is an unquestioned “development” of the latter and the concrete steps to achieve this goal are equally unchallenged.⁹

⁸ When talking about the upcoming EU-Africa summit Merkel also noted that Europe had no Africa focused summit for years, whereas China hosted a high profile Sino-African meeting last year and that it was important that Europe equalizes (Bundesregierung 2006f).

⁹ This is not to say that the meaning of development as well as tools to achieve and measure it have not been changing since their invention, but the development discourse has never been challenged in general (Escobar 1995).

Neither in the new EPAs nor in any other EU-Africa policy document is there room for negotiating the overall goal and the major tools to achieve this. Development's new measure sticks are the MDGs, the golden path to its realisation are again neo-liberal reforms and, for the EU intrinsically connected with this, regionalisation and regional free trade areas. The partnership paradigm is just another tag on the overall development package as "ownership" is the new creed in international giving and recipients of aid have to come up with the right policies themselves. This, however, does not make the recent approaches in any way more flexible or "African" as it is clear which measures have to be "owned" by African governments, as they are acceptable in the overall development plan and which are not.¹⁰

It remains doubtful that the often-demanded "better" integration of Africa in world markets will lead to substantial economic growth in these countries. Firstly, Africa has for a long time been very well integrated in the world economy, one of the main goals of colonialism being just this (Rodney 1981). African products could be exported to NAFTA and EU markets with favourable import taxes, a regulation that will come under question in the EPAs. Irrespective of whether African producers can access European markets or not, they will never be able to compete with low cost European products on European and African markets. Moreover, Africa is not able to produce processed goods and has to import these from Europe. It is therefore the different modes of production, above all the different levels of industrialisation that are the central problem for African small producers.

The persuasiveness of the current development paradigm also becomes clear when considering what the German presidencies do *not* promote. The Jubilee Campaign and debt cancellation for Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) that were still so strong at Gleneagles¹¹ were not mentioned at all by the new EU/G8 presidency.

¹⁰ This is strikingly similar to the recently fashionable "Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers" (PRSPs) in international aid or indeed NEPAD and the African peer review mechanism; as one Mozambican official put it: "The World Bank now tells us that we must say it is our policy – and we do. We need World Bank money and aid is conditional on World Bank approval; we know we won't get that money if we tell the truth" (Abrahamsen 2000: 135).

¹¹ Admittedly, these topics have always been more popular at the G8 round due to the UK's initiatives during its presidency. The EU has always been rather sceptical about these policies. At the EU-Africa summit in 2000 representatives of the European Union refused to negotiate debt cancellation at all. See Jubilee 2000 Coalition n.d.

The German emphasis on “structural partnerships”, NEPAD and the African peer review mechanism, “aid for trade” and good governance programmes could thus be read as turn (again) to more neo-liberal approaches in the West’s relation with Africa. Foreign Direct Investments not the debt cancellation of the HIPC are now seen as panacea for “Africa’s development”. This places again the ball in the field of the African countries and turns “development” or economic growth anew into something that depends entirely on African states, and has nothing to do with the constitution of the international system or Western policy-making towards the global South.

Conclusion

In sum, EU-Africa relations under the current German presidency mean a continuing replacement of politics by development and are still based on a technical understanding of Africa as a “problem” for its traditional caretaker Europe. This paper argued that truly new approaches in EU-Africa relations cannot be expected until underlying assumptions about the identities of the two continents are revisited and Europe starts to see Africa as ordinary (Bayart 2004).

Visionary strategies in EU-Africa relations require a move away from ideas of linear progress towards “development” and need to step into the murky waters of politics, where negotiations of different values and agendas between political equals are of central importance. A return to politics might not only benefit Europe’s image of Africa and thus the relations between the two continents, but it might also bring new insights into the nature of European identity.

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