



ELISABETH GUIGOU

President of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures, former Member of the French National Assembly and President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the National Assembly

Nathalie DELAPALME

Elisabeth, Madame la Ministre, allow me now to turn to you to ask you, as a key expert in European affairs, what lessons can be learnt from the history of the European Union, which was basically built at the beginning on economic interests. Are there best practices that could be shared with our African partners and friends? Are there also some shortfalls that should be avoided? How was one of us driven to Brexit? Is that something that could happen in Africa if we do not pay enough attention to the people, who should be the first beneficiaries of this agreement? Thank you for your wisdom and experience on this.

Elisabeth GUIGOU

I am certainly not going to claim that Europe can teach Africa a lesson. I am even going to say the opposite. I think Europeans must shed their paternalistic attitude towards Africa. If we want Franco-African relations, and especially European-African relations, that are up to the challenges we face together, we need to establish a new and equal partnership. And of course we must build upon good practices. Let us try to learn from what has not worked for Africans in Europe as well as for Europeans in Africa.

I would like to dwell on relations between Europe and Africa because in France it is often heard that Africa can be a dream or a nightmare for Europe. Populists across Europe say that Africa will be a nightmare for Europeans. That is their stock-in-trade. Extremists have always stoked fears without ever offering solutions. They argue that Africa's population is growing so much faster than its economy that African immigrants will overrun Europe.

I do not think Europeans should dismiss those fears. The demographic imbalance is a reality, we must face it. But populists also play on other fears that come from further away, which for Europeans, include the fear of decline and the loss of influence. Since yesterday, a lot of our debates have focused on how Europeans must grow accustomed to becoming countries of immigration, whereas they used to be countries of emigrants. They must get used to no longer dominating the world. Obviously, Africans harbour a long-standing resentment against Europe stemming from colonialism and neo-colonialism, which continued causing damage after independence. All of that hinders the development of constructive relations between Europe and Africa. The problem is that if those fears prevail, if we do not react to the populists' alarming messages, Europe will increasingly shut out Africa. And if Africa sells itself to China, to put it bluntly, to quickly meet its obviously important infrastructure and funding needs, which you underscored, we will have enormous damage to both sides. Europe runs the risk of being lastingly dominated by populists, as we see in Italy. But populists are clearly unable to offer real solutions to problems. All they do is fuel disillusionment, leading to even more isolationism and rejection. Meanwhile, if Africa yields to quick, easy and abundant Chinese financing, it will eventually have to pay the bill. Over-indebtedness is already a concern.

However, I am sure that this nightmare can be avoided. Africa and Europe can build a win-win relationship together. Why should they? Because both have something to gain. When on the one side, we have an ageing Europe in need of labour and fresh blood and on the other, a teeming African youth, this represents training opportunities and technological input for Africa. Those complementary factors could join forces to foster positive synergy. The reason they should is that we have common challenges that can only be overcome if there are cooperative strategies between Europe and Africa. Obviously, youth employment is not the only one. There are also the challenges of artificial intelligence, the new economy and mobility, because mobility will rise with development. It always has, so even if Africa's development tends to be more

harmonious, the demand for mobility will increase. Therefore, it is absolutely crucial that we handle this together. I think we must work together to manage those population movements in order to regulate and control them, and not just seal our borders. Both sides must organise legal means of mobility. Obviously, we must tackle all forms of insecurity together, starting with trafficking in human beings on both sides of the Mediterranean. Of course, we must also meet the environmental challenge.

How can we do all of that? First, Europe and Africa must assume their respective responsibilities and stop blaming each other. I think Europe must invest more in Africa and not just settle for trading, buying raw materials, processing them in Europe and reselling them, which creates few jobs in African countries. Trade is good but not enough. Private and public investments in agriculture and industry are needed. Unfortunately, international aid has done much to underwrite poor governance and corruption in Africa. It is up to Africans to address those problems.

Europeans and Africans should seize the opportunity of negotiating post-Cotonou agreements. That has been scarcely visible so far, but there is the 2020 deadline. So far, the Cotonou agreement has looked like a sort of tossed salad with all the formerly colonised countries and all the Europeans thrown in together. We must absolutely address the issues of Europe and Africa separately with, in my view, four goals.

First, a political strategy defined and accepted by both sides, in other words an equal partnership where Europeans and Africans table proposals and officials have forthright policy discussions with each other. Second, co-production agreements in well-known key sectors: food, energy, ecology, digital technology, health, education. Third, a bank or a bank holding company to secure investments and ensure capital mobility, which are very low on the list of existing banks' priorities. Lastly, I think, as the IPEMED said—perhaps Jean-Louis Guigou will also come back to this—that we need a foundation, like the ones in Asia between China, Japan and the countries of South Asia, and between American states. That foundation would bring together experts, researchers, public officials and CEOs, as we do here at the WPC but on a permanent basis, to analyse the present, think about the future and ask “What can we do to maximise our chances together?”

Lastly, we need to maximise our efforts on the economy but also on cultural dialogue because Europeans and Africans also fear for their identity. If we keep on living with the idea that there is a clash of civilisations, if religion is thrown into the mix and many unrelated things are lumped together, we will never succeed. There is above all a clash of ignorance, as a well-known philosopher said. We have a duty to understand what brings Europeans and Africans closer together, without glossing over differences, because I think they enrich us. History has also had some good aspects, so many human relationships enrich us all, but we do not take enough advantage of them. These points should be more stressed in the public debate. All we hear about is disasters. At the Anna Lindh Foundation for Dialogue between Euro-Mediterranean Cultures, we have conducted large surveys every three years for 10 years. Our societies expect us to show what brings us together, not what divides us. When we ask people about the issues that are constantly exploited in populist messages, they reply, “Yes, war, terrorism and xenophobia are real problems”, but between Europeans and southern Mediterraneans they are not essential. What links us is much more important!

Europe must solve its internal problems. Let us look on the bright side. Europe has turned out to be much more united on Brexit than expected. But it must turn more towards Africa. We have no other choice than to work more closely together, but in a different spirit than in the past.

Nathalie DELAPALME

Thank you very much for that enlightening analysis, which frames our discussion very nicely. I was struck by one point in particular, the renegotiation of the Cotonou agreement, because clearly it must accompany, if not strengthen, the implementation of the intra-african free trade agreement, a matter that certainly deserves our attention.