

## ÉLISABETH GUIGOU

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**Robert Dossou, President of the African Association of International Law, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Benin, former President of the Constitutional Court of Benin**

I now give the floor to Élisabeth Guigou.

### Élisabeth Guigou

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I will try not go over the time limit, and be even briefer, and give you a European's perspective, in other words an outside view, even though in many ways I feel a little African in my heart, or in any case North African.

I am delighted to see that an equal number of men and women are speaking today. You can count on me, in any case, to send this message. I am sure that others will send it to Thierry de Montbrial.

I have just two main points. First, Africa has indeed made noteworthy progress. Several of us have pointed this out. Africa has begun overcoming its weaknesses. Our friend has just been very eloquent on the subject. But Africa has been hard hit by Covid and by the climate crisis, a cruel twist of fate since it is the continent most impacted by but the least responsible for this crisis.

How can Africa grow stronger, defend its interests and free itself from all forms of neo-colonialism, which, as it is endlessly pointed out, still keeps the continent back?

From this perspective, what can Europe do with Africa? Today we fortunately no longer say "for Africa", but "with Africa". The work has begun, but I think it is important to see how Africa, viewed from the outside, can overcome today's challenges. I will listen carefully to what is said after me. I think there has already been a lot of success.

There is an outside and inside consensus, I believe, that Africa's young people are incredibly energetic. All young people are energetic, but in Africa they have a creativity that I admire. What African women are achieving in the circular economy is amazing, especially given today's challenges.

Covid and the war in Ukraine have made matters worse throughout the world, but especially in Africa, because they accentuate difficulties, security problems and, obviously, economic and development challenges.



One point seems very important to me. Africa continues making progress towards unity in order to look after its own interests. The persistent rift between Algeria and Morocco, which has grown wider recently, weighs heavily on Mauritania and the Sahel.

The lack of a single market in the Maghreb, not just between Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia but also with Libya and even Egypt, really needs to be resolved, no matter how difficult it may be.

There has been a lot of headway in Sub-Saharan Africa in recent years. The African Union, I believe, has made lucid observations and all of its conferences show that things are happening. The free-trade zone is obviously very important. At last year's WPC, Lionel Zinsou explained how much financing has grown, including internal financing within Africa.

All of this is obviously good news. But new methods to meet Africa's real needs and prevent it from being exploited by predators must also be developed.

I think that much remains to be done to develop agroecology, industrialize Africa and promote better governance. As you said, Mr. Chairman, to begin with nothing can be done unless there is a state that functions with rules and respect for the rule of law, and therefore the fight against corruption and for sustainable development.

So, what should the European Union do to help Africa better? First, I think it should devote as much attention and as many priorities to Africa as it does to Eastern Europe. This is obviously very difficult. It has become even harder since the fall of the Berlin Wall. There was already an imbalance well before the war in Ukraine, but the war has made it even worse.

But it is all the more necessary because the EU must realize that in today's world, its interests, and the interests of all its member states, lie in working with Africa to develop a strategy to keep us from being caught between the interests of the two superpowers.

Everything remains to be done in this area. But I think, as you have just said, that this is not just a matter of financial and economic aid, which, fortunately, has increased with the Global Gateway. We in the European Union have understood that new methods are also called for. That remains to be done. But there should also be more emphasis on training, health and education. This will certainly be talked about better than I can do in a short while.

Lastly, the EU must overhaul its asylum and immigration policy. This will be the hardest thing to do because it touches a nerve in our countries. It recalls a painful past and a complicated present, which is also sometimes tragic when you think of all the people who have drowned while trying to cross the Mediterranean.

I was struck, and I will end on this note, by what the General Secretary of the United Nations said at the last European Union, African Union and United Nations conference about how much we owe to Africa. He emphasized the restoration of trust and the need to put Africa at the heart of the solutions the world needs. I think that should inspire us.

Perhaps this is pie-in-the-sky thinking. Perhaps the current problems are too complicated for us to be already thinking about the future. But I think that in Europe, but also in Africa, we have no other choice but to develop, each of us with our interests in mind, a common strategy to meet the challenges of today's world. Otherwise, we will be crushed.