

## 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

**Amir Ben Yahmed, Chief Executive Officer of Jeune Afrique Media Group, President of Africa CEO Forum**

Mr. Dossou, we talked about disengagement. This has to do with political and democratic life, one of your areas of expertise. How do you see the situation developing over the next few years? We are undergoing a shock, mostly limited to the Sahel, even if Guinea and the coup in Gabon are added, which is another, slightly different form of shock not directly connected to the security issue. How do you see governance developing in Africa? Do you think Africa is backtracking? There was some progress following the AU's decision to systematically condemn coups and exclude their leaders from all decision-making bodies. But it is clear from the number of coups that everyone is paralyzed and institutions are extremely weak. The African Union is completely outside the discussion. ECOWAS was unable to do anything in Niger. How do you see the situation developing over the next few months and years? Do you view this as a wake-up call for political leaders? Are people, especially young people, going to force the political or democratic system to change?

**Robert Dossou**

Thank you. First, I would like to thank the organizers for creating this panel focusing on Africa: Where Is Africa Going? Looking at the situation today, from our viewpoint, Africa has made progress overall despite Covid. We cannot say otherwise. However, Africa as a whole is changing in every sector. We are in transition and nothing is consolidated.

Let's start with the economy, because that is what our first words on this panel are about. Drawing on the lessons of my experience at the Ministry of Planning, and Mr. Severino is a witness to this period, we are tackling the macroeconomics and producing figures that fill us with hope. That said, these figures do not put food on the table. I have learned that there is a time lag between the development of macroeconomics and the take-off of microeconomics. But what are citizens interested in? Microeconomics. I've noticed that here and there, in Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Benin, etc., when upbeat figures come out, grassroots poverty rises and cannot be explained, people don't understand it. So there are some metrics that need reviewing. I said earlier that we are in transition and nothing has stabilized. We are seeing a wave of democracy in Africa, which we have embraced because it was not imposed on us. It is insulting to think and say that democracy has been imposed on us.

**Amir Ben Yahmed**



So you're not taking part in the current populist debate, which says that African democracy should be different from global democracy?

**Robert Dossou**

With all due respect to those who espouse this point of view, I say there is no such thing as ethnic democracy, one for whites, another for blacks. Democracy stems from human rights and respect for human rights. There are not two kinds of human rights, one for blacks and another for whites. Democracy is a universal idea, but it can be adapted in different ways. From the speaker's podium of the United Nations, over the years some have proclaimed that democracy has been forced on them, that it is a Western and not an African model, and that we must get back to our roots. In that case, we might as well all get dressed up in panther skins. The people who say this reject the universal precepts of democracy.

When I spoke of progress earlier, one of things I meant was that Africa, particularly the African Union and the regional economic communities, have all adopted instruments proclaiming and guaranteeing democracy. African heads of state who have signed instruments guaranteeing democracy are trying to circumvent them in their day-to-day practices. That is why I say nothing is consolidated, either economically or in terms of human security. If you take the same country from one year to the next, you can see a sudden drop in the growth rate, which delays the development of microeconomics and consumer spending.

Mr. Severino and General Behanzin both raised the issue of emigration. I'm surprised we don't hold serious seminars in Africa on the issue. Young Africans, sometimes with a university degree or a technical trade under their belts, thinking there is nothing for them to do at home, are leaving, fleeing their countries. Aware that they might die in the Atlantic or the Mediterranean, they take the risk of heading north. This means several things. The most important is that they feel powerless to personally contribute anything to moving their countries forward because the principles laid down by our governments and regional and continental organizations are not always well respected.

Look at the generals who have carried out coups left and right. They backed the heads of State and saw them sign instruments that were widely adopted. But they also saw rigged elections, the politicization of public administration and the weaponization of the justice system. They do whatever they want because the State itself is not consolidated as an institution. It is not accepted as an institution by those in power, much less by those who are governed, but perceived as a tool that a team periodically takes over for personal gain. And it shows.

**Amir Ben Yahmed**

Allow me to ask you a question again because you haven't answered it. How do you see things developing over the coming months and years, especially in terms of governance? We are trying to answer the question, where is our continent heading? Are you neutral, Afro-optimistic, as Lionel always is, more moderate or worried?

**Robert Dossou**



Progress will continue in the years ahead. I am confident that consolidation will take place in half a century's time. However, hard times lie ahead because, as I see it, we are in the throes of the Third World War, which looks nothing like the First and Second World Wars. It is asymmetrical, multipolar and multi-centric.

**Amir Ben Yahmed**

We'll get back to this topic because I know everyone cares about it, in particular the relationship between Africa and the rest of the world and how what happens outside has an impact on political and economic developments.