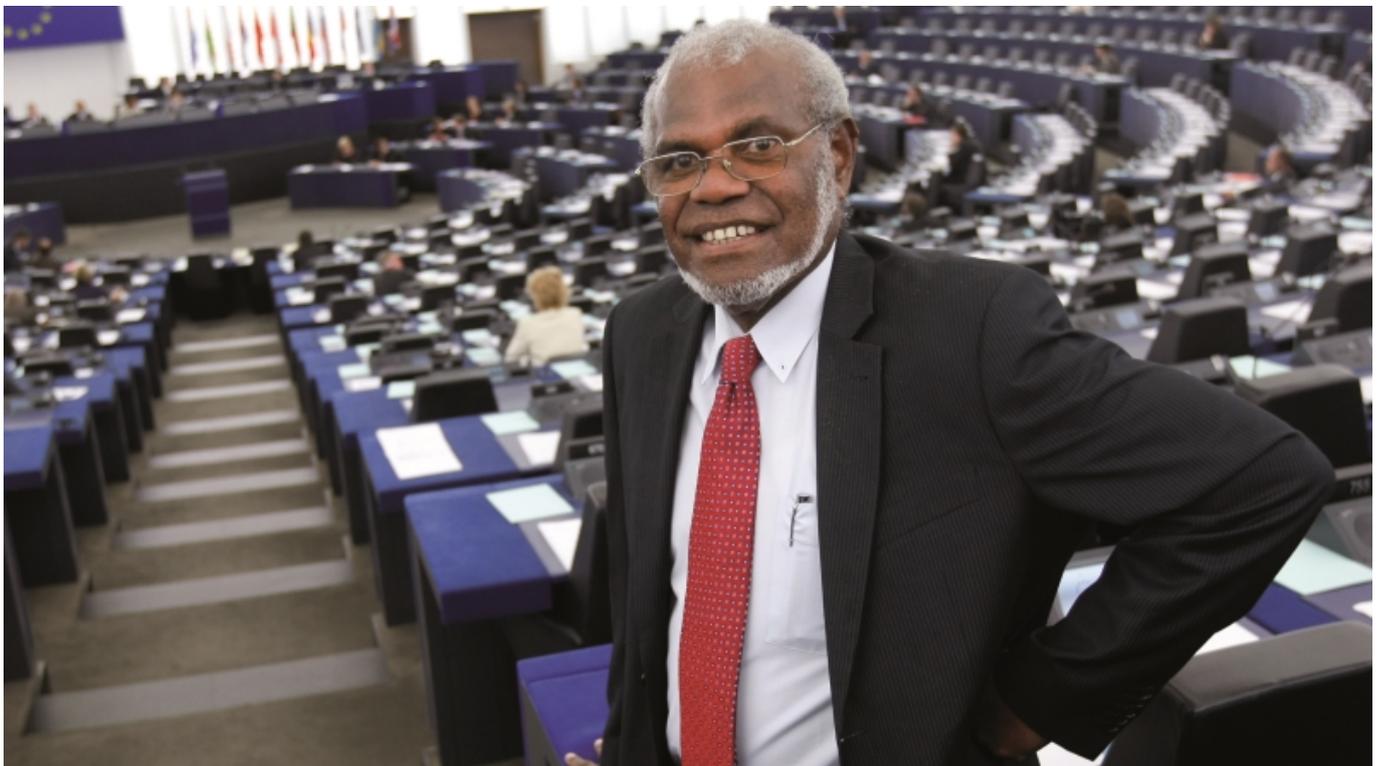


EU and Africa should do more to defend common interests

Written by Maurice Ponga on 20 November 2018 in Opinion
Opinion

The partnership between the European Union and Africa must be based on the principles of understanding and mutual interest, writes Maurice Ponga



The ties between the European Union and the African continent are historic and their destinies are closely interlinked. The EU is Africa's main partner in for economic activity and trade, as well as development, humanitarian aid and security.

Given these existing links and the new challenges we face, notably the demographic dynamic in Africa, the partnership between Africa and the EU needs a new vision of a future, one that reflects the changing social, environmental, economic and political situations in the two continents.

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We should have a more political, more modern and deeper partnership, one that focuses on defending our common interests. Indeed, the two continents share common challenges that can only be met through increased cooperation.

Relations between the EU and Africa must be based on understanding and mutual interest, as well as sharing common values within a reciprocal partnership.

As Parliament's rapporteur on the EU-Africa strategy, it was important for me to highlight that strengthening the political dialogue between the EU and Africa is a prerequisite for renewing our strategic partnership.

Establishing real coalitions on questions of global governance between the EU and Africa will be crucial in defending our joint interests on the international stage.

“Strengthening political dialogue between the European Union and Africa is a prerequisite for establishing a renewed strategic partnership”

The role of civil society - the private sector, parliamentary assemblies, local communities and the diaspora, as well as NGOs, is an equally important element in the partnership which binds our continents.

Together, these actors must play their part in consolidating the political dialogue between the EU and Africa to ensure a people-focused partnership.

Indeed, without people, we cannot build a relationship. In the report adopted by Parliament on the EU-Africa strategy, I defended the idea of making resilience, as well as mobility and migration, key elements of any future partnership. I believe that strengthening the resilience of the African continent in five areas (economics, politics, security, environment and social) will be fundamental if we are to contribute to the sustainable development goals (SDG) and commitments undertaken through the Paris climate agreement.

One of the first challenges is to reinforce governance, democracy, the rule of law and the respect of human rights.

“Education is another area of partnership between the EU and Africa that, in my opinion, should be strengthened. Indeed, without quality education there is no sustainable development”

However, it is also important to combat corruption on both continents, as they are indispensable elements of sustainable development.

Likewise, the close link between security and development should be highlighted. Here, it is vital to consider questions of security and development targets when it comes to resolving the problems of fragile states and helping build states and societies with greater resilience.

Given that Africa is particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change, it is essential that the EU develops climate resilience and supports African countries, in particular the least-developed countries (LDCs) in their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In its resolution, the European Parliament highlighted that it was imperative to respect the commitments taken in Paris in 2015 to allocate \$100bn to developing countries by 2020.

Education is another area of partnership between the EU and Africa that, in my opinion, should be strengthened.

Indeed, without quality education there will be no sustainable development. To strengthen this dimension of the partnership, I stand by the idea that at least 20 percent of member state budgets should be dedicated to education and that the EU should increase its contributions to the Global Partnership for Education and the “Education Cannot Wait” fund.

The question of migration and mobility between Europe and Africa is an element that should also be at the heart of relations between the two continents, as it has an economic, social, environmental and political impact. In my opinion, the challenge of migration should be tackled by the EU and Africa in a coordinated response, one that is free of taboo. It should have synergy and coordination of the current tools as its goal.

This challenge requires a carefully thought-out, balanced political response with a long-term strategy that considers demographic perspectives and the root causes of migration.

Lastly, I feel it is important to mention the particular role that the diaspora plays, both in the host country and in the country of origin. Given the considerable flow of funds, it plays an important role as a development partner at national and regional levels.

I believe that the diaspora can act as a source of information, tailored to respond to the real needs of the people. This can address the dangers associated with irregular migration as well as the challenges of integration in the host country. By bringing people together and fully associating them within the EU/Africa partnership, we will truly be able to move forward.

About the author

Maurice Ponga (EPP,FR) is rapporteur of Parliament’s EU-Africa strategy: a boost for development report

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