

‘Africa and Europe: a relationship at crossroads’

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Excellencies,

Distinguished Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

(introduction)

First of all, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks for your invitation to this important and very auspicious event and the opportunity to visit Austria again. I only wish I would have more time, not only to saunter through the beautiful city of Vienna, but also to pay a visit to the famous “Benin collection” at the *Ethnographic Museum*, or the “African collection” at the *Natural History Museum*, which already gives us a hint of the complex and dense relationship between Europe and Africa.

Indeed Vienna is a most appropriate place for this forum. I would like to pay tribute to Bruno Kreisky, who as foreign minister, as chancellor, as an intellectual and activist, promoted education, peace, justice, dialogue and cooperation. At a time

the cold war divided the world, Kreisky maintained dialogue with Kennedy as well as Brezhnev, and he was friends with Indira Gandhi, Anwar al-Sadat, and many others, while promoting the self-determination of the Palestinian people. Austria, indeed, always knew how to strut above her weight!

Kreisky also tirelessly promoted the Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe, whose efforts led to the rapprochement between what was then East and West. It is no coincidence that Vienna is home not only to an important seat of the United Nations, but also to the OSCE, whose monitors were, or are deployed along fragile borders in Georgia, Ukraine, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere, and whose offices are providing support to entrench democratic principles from Belgrade to Bishkek. Because democracy takes time to take root, and its progress is not always linear, as these days, we can again observe even in Austria's near neighbourhood.

(the power & spread of democracy)

Indeed it was 70 kilometers from here, 28 years ago, that the Iron Curtain finally cracked and let through migrants fleeing oppression and scarcity, in search for a future for their families. I very well remember those pictures, the happiness we all shared when, as a triumph also of Kreisky's efforts, the Berlin Wall came down, and the world came together.

And I also remember the joy of people further afield, in West Africa, where people young and old were equally inspired by this outburst of freedom, seeing a window opening up to rekindle their aspirations which in so many places had been obstructed by repressive and exploitative regimes often propped up by centres of power elsewhere, soon after the euphoria of independence.

It seems to me that this is a fact sometimes overlooked in Europe busy with reorganizing itself after 1989, that also across West Africa, people marched in the streets, and set up Commissions for Democracy, that paved the way for the establishment of multi-party democratic systems. In the ensuing years, in a development with many parallels, both on the doorsteps of Vienna as well as in West Africa, violent conflicts erupted over “who belongs to whom and how to share a common space inherited by history”.

It is now, nearly one generation later, that we see things stabilizing. You may be surprised to know that, as a much-underappreciated fact, West Africa is doing remarkably well in terms of democratization. This is in particular true if we compare West Africa to many countries in Asia or other regions in Africa. In the last two years alone, there were ten elections that were mostly credible and transparent, and which resulted in a series of peaceful changes of government, in some cases for the first time since independence. All over West Africa, people followed very closely how outgoing Presidents in Nigeria, Benin or Ghana, called to congratulate the winner of a democratic contest. These, truly, were among the most heartwarming moments of my career.

The latest expression of this we have seen in The Gambia, where people were fed up with 22 years of oppression and unfulfilled promises of development. There are still many flaws, and democracy always, everywhere, is work in progress. Democracy is much more than just elections, which are just the visible tip of an iceberg of press freedom, human rights, the rule of law, participation of all groups and all genders in society, a vibrant civil society, a functioning court system, and much more. Because there cannot be good governance, there cannot be development where there is intimidation and fear.

This, (*Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen*), is the beauty of Sustainable Development Goal 16, to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable

development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.” Establishing this link between democracy, governance, and development, the 17 goals of the SDGs were adopted by 193 countries in 2015, with the strong support of Austria and its partners in the European Union.

On this note, I would like to congratulate the *Osterreichische Entwicklungszusammenarbeit*, the Austrian Development Cooperation, which, for example, in Burkina Faso supports vocational training, the participation of women, and other forms of probs for sustainable development, as well as conflict prevention. Thanks from Burkina Faso, “Land of the upright people”, to you here in Austria!

(three lessons)

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

These preliminary observations lead me to three initial lessons:

First and foremost is that, yes, human aspirations are universal. The Declaration of Human Rights, remains as valid as when it was signed after the indescribable horrors of the Second World War. Every human being, be they Austrians displaced in the 1930s and 1940s or Syrians displaced now, has inalienable rights. In this regard, you will also be familiar with the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, and his seminal work “Development as Freedom”, in which he essentially posits that freedom is both an intrinsic aspiration, a basic constituent of development in itself, and an enabling key for men and women being able to exercise their capabilities in various domains of life, and thus push forward well-being and development. In this respect, he also pointed out that famines never occurred in genuine democracies. And when human beings feel they cannot realize their capabilities, they take rational choices to look for them elsewhere, as the Chinese did in South East Asia, the

Indians in East Africa, the Europeans in Africa and the Americas, and many Africans now do in other African countries and the Gulf, Europe and North America, in particular as Africa also gets richer. This, by the way, is one of the paradoxes of modern migration, that it takes off only after societies have reached a certain level of income to afford the perilous journeys.

Secondly, as we know, our world is more interconnected than ever. A pope appointed in Rome helps bring down a government in Poland, a president inaugurated in Washington creates ripples in the South China Sea, and protests in Cairo inspire youths in Ouagadougou to topple their government. A dictator killed in Libya triggers armed movements in Mali further south, which again threaten and perpetrate acts of terror in neighbouring countries, which are already fragile. And a free and fair election in The Gambia, which gives back hope to the people, will probably reduce the number of youths trying to reach Europe - you might know that, proportionately (in relation to its population size), The Gambia is by far the largest contributor of migrants.

Thirdly, there is the critical importance of cooperation, which is another lesson from The Gambia's remarkable transition. What happened between the election on 1 December 2016, and the departure of former President Jammeh, is an outstanding example of what can be achieved by all of us working together: Local stakeholders, subregional and regional organisations and the international community. I can say so, having myself used the contribution of my good offices with the blessing of the Security Council of the United Nations. A particular applause is due to the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS, which groups together 15 West African countries from Senegal to Nigeria, whose leaders met several times for sometimes heated deliberations, and managed to collectively, mobilize commitment for a peaceful transition, with the support of the African Union and the United Nations. Equally, the next steps were carefully coordinated, from the organization of

the swearing-in through to last-minute concerted diplomatic efforts involving numerous Heads of State, to the planning, authorizing, and execution of accompanying military presence, within tight deadlines and limited budgets. Not less important, joint messages were carefully choreographed by international stakeholders, who simultaneously acknowledged the new President Adama Barrow. On her part, the European Union at the same time agreed to announce the resumption of support, which had been suspended over concerns of the deteriorating human rights situation.

(working together)

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was truly impressive seeing all actors pulling the same strings. It is now, of course, that the real harder work will actually start, to maintain momentum beyond the headlines, to effectively transform governance, and deliver peace dividends to all Gambians, particularly to the young people.

Talking about cooperation, I would like to believe that we have a strong foundation. Already in 2000, there was the first summit between the EU and what was then the Organization of African Unity, in Cairo. A high point in Europe-African relations was then reached seven years later at the joint summit in Lisbon, when both organizations adopted a joint strategy. Allow me to read an excerpt from this key text:

“Africa and Europe are bound together by history, culture, geography, a common future, as well as a community of values: the respect for human rights, freedom, equality, solidarity, justice, the rule of law and democracy as enshrined in the relevant international agreements and constitutive texts of our respective Unions”.

It is in the sphere of implementation, as so often, that we are lagging behind. And now, as we are moving towards the next Summit, planned to take place in Abidjan in November this year, many are saying that the world has changed, that the financial crisis of 2007-8 and globalization have rocked the foundations of the welfare state and development assistance, that migration flows, the debt crisis, and the departure or threat of departure of Members are pulling at the fundamentals of the European project, that new global challenges such as terrorism and climate change have changed the equation. In a word, that we are no longer looking forward and outward, but backward and inwards.

(terrorism & climate change)

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Indeed, when the German-Austrian explorer Oskar Lenz, as the fourth European to do so, in 1880 reached the ancient centre of learning Timbuktu, and on the way back passed through Senegal, where my Office is located today, he praised the warm welcome by the populations, and the support by the authorities that facilitated his voyage. Now, with events in Syria, Libya, (or Washington,) he might have been met with hostility, been kidnapped or killed in zones where the state has withdrawn. Now, Austrian troops are stationed in Mali, as well as in some other locations, assisting international efforts to build peace. When Mr. Lenz travelled, the Sahara did not yet reach so far south, and the Lake Chad was still larger than *Lower Austria* and *Burgenland*^[1] combined.

Now, the desert has encroached valuable farmland, and the Lake Chad has shrunk to five percent of its original size, caused by climate change and bad management, leaving many youths disillusioned and disgruntled, exposed to

extremist propaganda that often comes from elsewhere, and offered to take up arms to gain respect and livelihoods. As a matter of fact, Africa is the continent most affected by both climate change and terrorism, and thousands of civilians have lost their lives. As militants from Mali have staged attacks in France, so have jihadists from the Middle East killed innocent people in African countries.

(joint concerns, joint values)

In this sense, Africa is as much affected by the French presidential elections, or the possible British exit from the EU, as Austria is affected by the shrinking of the Lake Chad. Since that momentous joint summit in 2007, we have seen other China-Africa, US-Africa, Turkey-Africa, Japan-Africa, and other summits. However, if we take a look at the map, we see Africa in the South, and Europe in the North, separated, or indeed linked by the *Mediterranean*, which translated means "*in the middle of the land*". This reminds me of the book of the famous French historian Fernand Braudel, who in his book "History of civilizations" pointedly remarked how the people of the Mediterranean, beyond the ups and downs of rulers, forms of government, technological advances, and religious beliefs are united by very deep elements of human nature.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

And even beyond the "bread, wine, and olive oil", as he famously mentioned, beyond the vagaries of daily realpolitik, I would like to believe that indeed, there is a community of values that binds us together. I have mentioned democracy taking root in West Africa, mirroring a similar process that took place in Central and Eastern Europe. As a matter of fact, it is worth noting that, before the advent of formal democracy, which even in quite a number of European countries is a fairly recent

innovation, many forms of consultative decision-making existed in Africa, and elsewhere.

One would also note that, out of the 124 countries that have ratified or acceded to the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute, the constitutive body of the International Criminal Court (ICC), nearly one third are from Africa, with the remainder predominantly European or American^[2]. Those that have not signed, tend to either be in turmoil or have authoritarian regimes. Yes, the announced departure of some countries, and perceptions of anti-African bias brought up by some African leaders have made headlines. Yes, it is true that the Court may need reforms, and reach out. But don't be mistaken, the ICC has strong supporters in countries that threatened to withdraw, or did so recently – many in Burundi would be happy to see violations of essential freedoms brought to justice, as also the people of The Gambia expressed satisfaction when the new democratically-elected President announced that The Gambia's will return to the Court. And also, the Assembly's Chair is Senegal's Minister of Justice and Human Rights, and the Court's chief prosecutor is a woman from The Gambia!

On the basis of values and common interests, I trust we can and must find solutions to common challenges. We need to look beyond the day-to-day headlines, the narratives of fear that are poisoning our discourse. Human beings have migrated for centuries, and current pictures of overcrowded boats crossing the Middle-of-the-Land, the Mediterranean, in the long run of things, will remain a side-phenomenon, as we are getting better at cooperating, better at improving governance, better at instilling hope. By the way, one would also notice, in this regard, that even now the biggest migration flows are from Mali to Nigeria rather than to the Netherlands, from Burkina Faso to Ivory Coast rather than to Italy.

(moving forward)

Dear Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, (to conclude).

Despite the rhetoric, it will take time until the EU – AU relationship will be truly symmetrical. In fact, it is often smaller countries, untainted by the history of colonialism, like Austria, whose cooperation is more enlightened, is not tied to the respective industries or power interests of bigger countries, not to mention China, but also Turkey or India. This is very much noticed and appreciated on the other side of the Mediterranean. In this vein, I would be happy to see an open- mindedness to learn from each other. Our children are already growing up in a world that is connected and where knowledge is easily shared; they will be working in teams across continents. Innovation often comes from the fringes, and who would have predicted, a generation ago, that countries like South Korea or Estonia would have reached where they are now? Similarly, a system to send money by mobile phone, M-Pesa, has spread from Kenya to many parts of the globe.

As we continue to see change happening, I count on Austria, to keep on making available its expertise and technical assistance, where just a little can transform and change lives. Let us remember that Kreisky had to flee from persecution in his very home country. In this spirit, in the best tradition of our venue today, I count on Austria's diplomatic finesse and experience, its remarkable ability to rally international opinion, within the EU, and through the EU, to shape our common future.

I thank you very much for your attention.