



Protocol of the Afrika Club (online meeting) held on Tuesday, 19<sup>th</sup> May, 2020

Online Round Table  
**Covid-19: The response of the AU  
and the impact on the African European relations**

**With input from:**

**Angela Odai**, African Union - The Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO)

**Geert Laporte**, Co-Director of ECDPM – European Centre for Development Policy Management

**Luiza Soares**, Policy Manager of ADEPT - Africa Development Platform in Europe

**Moderation: Karen Kaneza**, Co-Chairperson ADYFE – African Diaspora Youth Forum in Europe

**Protocol:** Adjima TONDJI NIAT; **Editing:** Franz Schmidjell (VIDC)

Previous protocols: [www.vidc.org/themen/afrika/afrika-club/protokolle](http://www.vidc.org/themen/afrika/afrika-club/protokolle)

The Afrika Club is a joint initiative of Radio Afrika TV (RATV), the Association of African Students in Austria (VAS Österreich), the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC) and Ambassador Georg Lennkh.

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**Franz Schmidjell (VIDC)** welcomed the participants and introduced the Africa Club as an informal discussion forum with participants from public institutions, the African diaspora and Austrian civil society to share and respect different perspectives on specific topics.

Referring to the Covid-19 pandemic, Franz described a theatre play: “The End of the World” (Der Weltuntergang). Written by the Austrian-Russian writer Jura Soyfer - who was killed in a concentration camp in 1939 - the play is about a comet which wants to destroy the world and humankind. There are three stages of human reaction: ignorance, panic, then finally action. The play shows some similarities with our reaction to Covid-19. Despite early warnings, many leaders failed to respond. Then came a period of panic buying, with a particular mania for toilet paper, and finally a lockdown, along with testing and tracing activities. Soyfer’s play concludes on a positive note: the comet finds it difficult to destroy the earth so it passes it by, but it is frustrated by the stupidity of people and the mass manipulation which lead to fascism.

Today’s discussion would focus on the third phase of the ongoing pandemic: constructive responses, good practices and experiences.

Franz passed the floor to **Karen Kazema**, who introduced herself and presented ADYFE, a platform of nearly 110 African Diaspora youth organisations present in 31 countries of the Council of Europe. One of ADYFE’s main goals is the promotion of peace and development in all forms, which they aim to achieve through three pillars of action: entrepreneurship, employability, and civic engagement. Karen admires Franz’s metaphor and its application to their situation. Dozens of countries have been affected by the virus within a period of weeks. Fatalities are still low in Africa, but the pandemic could impact the continent’s social and economic balance. The EU and AU and its member states are working around the clock to fight the virus. The EU is mobilising huge resources (editor: the common “Team Europe” package reaches almost 36 billion Euros) to contribute the efforts in the partner countries and provides objective information about the spread of the virus and advice for effective efforts to contain it.

**Angela Odai** works in the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate of the African Union (CIDO). Her goal is to build stronger ties between the African diaspora in Europe and the African Union. She said that the pandemic has been a global challenge for us all, but especially for Africa, which already has other health and disaster challenges to deal with. She stressed the



importance of creating more centres in coordination with member states to find ways to test for the virus. The African Union and the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) formulated a joint continental strategy at the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak, which included testing, tracing and treatment, along with joint procurement and distribution of medical equipment, medical supplies and laboratory equipment as well as the training of health workers. The AU/CDC coordinates communication campaigns across the continent and supports individual states like Nigeria to improve health security in airports.

**Karen Kazema** asked if this collaboration between different stakeholders had changed the relationship between government and civil societies. **Angela Odai** answered that according to an AU-CIDO survey there is more engagement from governments. The results were shared with different stakeholders and got a lot of reactions. There is more access to technology. There are many civil society experts on the ground who use their expertise and share it via social media. AU leaders recommended that the diaspora and health professionals form a “think tank” to provide information about their research and pass on their knowledge to countries with fewer doctors.

**Geert Laporte** was asked where the European-African Partnership stands and how this has been reshaped by Covid-19. Europe shows a strong interest in Africa as there are sensitive issues to deal with, such as migration. It is important therefore to build a strong relationship based on mutual interests, as a relationship amongst equals. He sees two parallel tracks of talks. First the post-Cotonou negotiations have to be concluded. This agreement has existed for 45 years and is now criticised as old-fashioned and post-colonial. The Cotonou Agreement expired by end of February 2020 and has been expanded until end of this year . Second, there is the AU-EU Dialogue and a planned summit in Brussels in 28-29<sup>th</sup> October 2020. The summit might be postponed. In March, the EU released its so-called “Strategy for Africa”, however there was no mention of the Covid-19 pandemic.

To recover lost ground, the EU announced an international solidarity fund with 15,6 billion euros mainly for Africa. This is not new money, rather predominantly recycled funds. This is good, but too little, too late, especially with regards to Europe’s relationship with Africa. Europe has lost its image of being an untouchable continent, always able to find solutions.

Mr Laporte elaborated on some lessons learned:

- Africa needs to take more control of its future. As Angela stated earlier, a lot is going on in Africa and it looks very promising.
- Governance direction from institutions is essential. States should become stronger, not by cutting civil liberties but rather through the organisation of public life and the creation of fair taxation systems.
- There is a synergy in action: both rebuilding state capacities and the need to create an equilibrium between the state and the private sector.

**Karen** introduced **Luiza Soares** and asked how ADEPT reacted to Covid-19 in terms of diaspora mobilisation and activities, and challenges faced by communities.

Luiza Soares said ADEPT responded to the Covid-19 pandemic as follows:

- by making a survey among the African Diaspora Development Organisations (ADDOs) to assess the impact of Covid-19 on the activities of the organisations and coming up with a plan to support members and partners in Africa.
- by sending a Covid-19 working group made up of board members and coordinated by the executive director of ADEPT to develop an intervention plan which comprises several pillars, dedicated to ways to financing our members.
- by putting up a three-part series of webinars: the first was on April 3<sup>rd</sup>. The next will be this coming Friday, on the subject of remittances, and will discuss different financial issues people are facing.

The task force in charge of the intervention plan has several pillars.

- Advocacy: not only to respond through statements, but also to engage in a pro-active way, to represent the voice of the diaspora on both the European and African Union level, in order to give visibility to our members;
- Stronger partnerships: This is a good opportunity for ADEPT and its members to combine forces: to put webinars together, to include members in our plans, to strengthen links with the African Union through CIDO;
- Communication: New forms of communication have resulted in deeper links with other diasporas outside Europe, especially in the US, Australia and Africa; they have asked to work together to fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.



## **QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION:**

**Georg Lennkh**, a former Austrian ambassador, referred to Mr. Laporte's statement that the Cotonou negotiations were postponed due to internal European conflicts. Was that the only reason? In Africa, free trade area negotiations have also been postponed, and other institutional questions are also unclear. Luiza Suarez and Angela Odoi were asked what they think about the claim that Africa will have more control over its own affairs.

### **Mr. Laporte's response:**

The EU has tried to marry two different agreements: ACP-EU and AU-EU arrangements, with the intention of having an African pillar under an ACP foundation or umbrella. But to have that African pillar, you need North Africa on board, and it is not part of the ACP. Secondly, you need an AU which is willing to assume the role of a Pan-African institution under the ACP umbrella. With the post-colonial institutions such as the ACP secretariat being largely based in Brussels but not well known outside, it is difficult to combine these two dynamics.

Furthermore, there is tension within European institutions: should they continue with the ACP-EU (development) corporation managed by DG Development Cooperation (EC) or look into the more strategic orientations of European foreign policy proposed by the European External Action Service (EEAS)?

Another controversial issue is migration: the EU wants to talk about return and readmission while the AU wants to discuss labor mobility in return. This type of negotiation takes time. Mr. Laporte concluded that a new and healthier type of relationship will emerge because Africa is taking a more assertive role and is unwilling to accept all proposals from the European side.

**Angela Odai** explained that African countries and the African Development Bank have contributed millions of dollars to the Covid-19 fund which shows that Africa has taken a proactive path and is looking for its own solutions.

**Luiza Soares** agreed with **Mr. Laporte** that creating more institutions is not necessarily the best option. It is better to use existing institutions and combine their knowledge and expertise. But she is missing the issue of culture as a theme in the Cotonou negotiations. All African countries have their own cultures and ways to solve problems.



**Ibrahima Djiguine** from ADYFE asked about a herbal plant called *artemisia annua* which was promoted by Madagascar's president as a potential drug to be used against Covid-19, but was rejected by the WHO. **Joyce Lang** added that there is much controversy about vaccines which might be tested in Africa. **Angela Odai** replied that the African CDC has advised further clinical testing before this product is disseminated, in order to assess its impact and efficiency. So far, no vaccines have been accepted. The AU is a continental body which advises and works with member states, however there is also the issue of sovereignty of the member states. A lot of information is circulating via social media and CIDO is confronted with the challenge of testing the authenticity of this information.

**Alexis Neuberg**, Chairman of Radio Afrika & Vice President of ADEPT, asked Mr. Laporte what he thinks about the role of the diaspora during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. **Mr. Laporte** replied that a lesson learned from past summits was that they have been separated from the people. There should be more active participation by civil society, including associations, trade unions and the diaspora in particular. The diaspora can play an important role in "reaching-out" between the two continents. During the Covid-19 pandemic remittances have become more important than ever for families. Studies show however that these have dropped by 25 %.

**Youssouf Diakite** elaborated, explaining that the diaspora does a lot in terms of raising awareness and wants to contribute more by offering advice and assistance with remittances and communication. He asked Mr. Laporte about strategies which could be developed in order to mitigate migration via the Mediterranean Sea. **Mr. Laporte** said European interventions did not add to the localisation of value chains and the creation of large local industries which are necessary to create jobs. Africa can build its own institutions and strengthen its own financial basis. The taxation rate in many African countries is very low: in typically around 15%. In Nigeria it is only 7%. This does not provide a sound financial basis for countries to stand on their own feet and govern their own affairs. Maybe a type of regional protectionism is required, to ensure that Africa has its own trade block and can thus achieve food security for example? The EU should be clearer about where it can add value. Africa should not only react to European strategies but should also be proactive in developing and presenting their own strategy vis-à-vis Europe.

It is time to break this model of partnership, and now is an opportunity to do so.



**Karen Kaneza** thanked the participants and the quality of their contributions. She concluded that this crisis will:

Reshape the way we understand the world;

Reshape the socio-economic relations between both continents;

Reshape the relations of the continents with their own member states; and

Reshape the role of the diaspora in such relations.

**Franz** thanked Karen Kaneza from ADEPT, Angela Odai from CIDO, Geert Laporte from ECDPM and all participants, and referred to three aspects:

Firstly, he had joined one of the ADEPT webinars, which had been an eye opener for him to see the positive energy and activities of the diaspora, which go far beyond remittances. These wonderful stories of how Africa is taking control of its own future should be shown more to the public.

Secondly, the African CDC is doing a great job by coming up with an African-wide strategy to combat the pandemic early on, and this may have been a factor in keeping case numbers low. *Artemisia annua* is, or could be, a locally-produced drug, which due to its low cost could be accessible to all. There should be more investment in research to discover how helpful this drug could be in reducing Covid-19 symptoms. This example shows that there are African solutions.

Thirdly, the EU's strategy for Africa should include recommendations for changes here in Europe. Africa loses \$60–80 billion per annum through illicit capital flows, with much of this money being channeled to tax havens within OECD countries.