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The EU's Sphere of Influence: Eurafrica, Present and Past

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“Europe is today confronted on its periphery with certain number of conflicts or tensions in the Sahel, in Libya and in Eastern Mediterranean. In these three cases Europe must act even more, and alone, because these problems do not primarily concern the United States.”

Josep Borrell¹

“The idea of spheres of influence are ghosts of the last century.”

Ursula von der Leyen²

A series of internal crises have shaken the EU project in the recent decade. These have sowed division, as in the eurozone crisis, and even secession, as in the case of Brexit. The crises have severely compromised the Union's internal cohesion and ability to act. Externally, the EU has also experienced a number of challenges, as seen in the worsened relations with Russia, Turkey, China and, during Trump's presidency, even the U.S.

But the EU's global aspirations also show resilience, and *vis-à-vis* Africa they remain vigorous. In 2018 the then European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker launched the new “Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs”, focusing on a range of economic issues but also on security and, as always, on measures to prevent irregular migration.³ As Juncker put it in his State of the Union address in 2018 when referring to the new Africa–Europe Alliance: “Africa does not need charity it needs true and fair partnership. And we, Europeans need this partnership just as much.”⁴

The new European Commission that took office on 1 December 2019 followed suit and pledged to make the EU's partnership with Africa its number one global priority. It also launched “the geopolitical Commission” and stressed the concept of the EU's

¹ Josep Borrell, “Why European strategic autonomy matters”.

² Ursula von der Leyen, “Speech by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary on EU-Russia relations, European security and Russia's military threat against Ukraine”, European Commission, 16 February 2022.

³ European Commission, “Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs”, COM(2018) 643 final, Brussels 12 September 2018.

⁴ European Commission, Press Release, IP/18/5702, 12 September 2018

“strategic autonomy”⁵ to send a clear signal that “We want to be stronger in the world.”⁶ The incoming Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen, wasted no time in going to work. Before her first hundred days in office had come to an end, she had not only visited the African Union’s headquarter in Addis Ababa twice;⁷ she had also presented a brand new “Comprehensive Strategy with Africa”.⁸ The strategy document was prepared jointly with Josep Borrell, the EU’s new High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. As Borrell emphasized when presenting the new “Strategy with Africa”: “A part of Europe’s future is at stake in Africa. To face our common challenges, we need a strong Africa, and Africa needs a strong Europe”.⁹

It is this precise rhetoric of mutuality and interdependence between the two continents that permeates the EU’s current relations with Africa. But mutuality and interdependence also have a long history, as these formed part of the key reasons adduced by the EU’s founders for their decision to annex France’s and Belgium’s African colonies to the EU, or the European Economic Community (EEC), in the Treaty of Rome in 1957. The EU’s colonial annexation or “association”, which went under the name Eurafrica, aspired to have “dependent peoples” in the colonies skip, so to speak, the stage of national sovereignty and political independence by instead being incorporated directly into the EEC. In December 1956, the intergovernmental Ad-Hoc Overseas Territories Group, which was tasked to prepare the Rome Treaty’s colonial association regime, presented its final report to the negotiating parties:

Economically speaking, the European member states of the common market have an essential need for the cooperation and support that the overseas territories – particularly the African ones – are able to offer in order to establish long-term balance of the European economy. The sources of raw material, variegated and abundant, which the overseas territories dispose of are likely to ensure for the

⁵ Josep Borrell, “Why European strategic autonomy matters”, European Union External Action, 3 December 2020, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en

⁶ European Commission, “Geopolitical Commission builds on International Partnerships”, 15 January 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/stories/geopolitical-commission-builds-international-partnerships_en

⁷ David M. Herszenhorn, “EU’s Africa strategy stresses climate and digital policies”, *Politico*, 9 March 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-africa-strategy-stresses-climate-and-digital-policies-trade/>

⁸ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, “Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa”, JOIN(2020) 4 final, Brussels 9 March 2020.

⁹ David M. Herszenhorn, “EU’s Africa strategy stresses climate and digital policies”.

entirety of the European economy of the common market the indispensable foundation for an expanding economy and present the additional advantage of being situated in countries whose orientation may be influenced by the European countries themselves. In addition to the mineral riches of all kinds and the agricultural and exotic products of the overseas countries, it is fair to mention as a concrete incentive, the results of very recent prospections in the petroliferous area carried out in connection with the systematic inventorying of the immense African reserves of metals, phosphates, hydraulic energy, etc.¹⁰

The report compared this project to the Marshall Plan for Europe, insisting that the association of the overseas territories should be undertaken in a similar spirit. The report's preamble concluded: "The proposed enterprise entails consequences of major importance for the future of Europe. [...] In aiding Africa and supporting itself on her, the community of the Six is able to furnish Europe with its equilibrium and a new youth. It is with this perspective that all other elements of information assembled in the present report should be understood."¹¹

Although current EU scholarship remains oblivious, today's European Union encompassed a huge colonial polity when it was founded in 1957. Only such a larger Eurafrican community and "Third Force" in world geopolitics, the reasoning went, could reconcile with the new and commanding stage of *interdependence* that the postwar world had entered. The efforts and resources of each of the community's participating parties would complement each other towards the social and economic sustainability of the whole. Another good example of this strategy is to be found in Socialist Prime Minister Guy Mollet's statement on the Algerian situation, issued to the UN General Assembly on 9 January 1957:

France is negotiating at this time with her European partners for the organization of a vast common market, to which the Overseas Territories will be associated. All of Europe will be called upon to help in the development of Africa, and tomorrow Eurafrica may become one of the principal factors in world politics. Isolated

¹⁰ HAEU (Historical Archives of the European Union), CM 3/NEGO 252, "Groupe Ad hoc territoires d'outre-mer, Projet de préambule," 18 December 1956.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

nations can no longer keep pace with the world. What would Algeria amount to by itself? On the other hand, what future might it not have, as one of the foundations of the Eurafrican community now taking shape? [...] Independence would result in inevitable economic and social regression as well as political regression toward dictatorship or the quasi-feudal regime of certain Arab States – would this be progress? [...] interdependence among nations is becoming the rule.¹²

If much of Western Europe dreaded the prospect of a collapsing colonial order it also tried to convince the colonized to feel the same. One of the strategies pursued was thus to reiterate the world's growing and inescapable "interdependence" in the postwar era – similar to our time's globalization mantra. As part of this, a nation-state system was portrayed as obsolete and anachronistic, even before it had seen the light of the day. "Dependent peoples" were thus to be persuaded to see national and political independence as a dead-end and instead welcome their incorporation into larger communities, foremost the French Union and the EEC. Only such larger *franco-africaine* and Eurafrican communities could reconcile with the new and commanding stage of interdependence that the world had entered.

Let me illustrate a bit further. In a speech on Algeria before the UN in February 1957, France's foreign minister, socialist Christian Pineau, spoke of "the so-called right to independence" and of "the right of peoples to self-determination" as "a sort of mystic aim of the international organization" that "would end in multiplying the number of states at a time when, on the contrary, the peoples should be brought together in a common action". The French foreign minister was apprehensive about the proliferation of states that would result from decolonization. For Pineau and France, therefore, "[t]he most important thing is to promote throughout the world an acceptable standard of living which would enable men of all countries to enjoy true liberty and enable the nations to become something other than states." Nations, just like the French nation, could be recognized, but they should remain inside the French imperial state and the newly created European or Eurafrican association regime. "On the day", Pineau asserted, "when a large common market – in which the overseas territories will be associated – has been created, she [France] would like to promote the formation of a Eurafrican

¹² HAEU, EN 2736, "Text of the French Government's Statement on Algeria", 9 January 1957.

whole. Europe in its entirety, bringing to Africa its capital and its techniques, should enable the immense African continent to become an essential factor in world politics.”¹³ In contrast to this colonial vision, Pineau pointed to the grim alternative: “What would remain of the prospects thus offered to Algeria if it were to become a foreign land pledged to fanaticism [...]. On the other hand, its participation in Eurafrica would mean for Algeria comfort, riches, in other words, the true conditions of independence.” In conclusion, Pineau reiterated France’s contention that the nation-state had had its day, saying “[o]nce again, most nations can no longer keep pace with the world. They must enter into partnership, cooperate with each other, or give themselves up to the worst forms of ideological or economic bondage.”¹⁴

Pineau’s colleague, West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer, was also very hostile towards the liquidation of colonialism in Africa and was thus a warm supporter of Eurafrica. In early 1960 Adenauer informed his cabinet that he had received a note from de Gaulle during their most recent consultations that recounted the expected new members of the UN. Adenauer, Hans-Peter Schwartz writes, “read out: ‘Thirty black states, twenty Islamic states, eighteen Asian, non-Muslim nations, twelve Soviet states, eighteen Central and South American countries – ninety-eight in all.’ Compared with fifteen Western states. ‘These are the prospects for future world policies.’”¹⁵

Felix Houphouët-Boigny, finally – a West African cabinet member under Guy Mollet’s socialist government and future president of Ivory Coast – also argued vehemently in favour of the EEC’s association regime, embracing the concepts of interdependence and independence without statehood. Addressing the United Nations in 1957, Boigny criticized the “notion of absolute independence”, adding: “In this century each nation feels more and more cramped within its boundaries. The nations, even the largest, the most powerful, can no longer enjoy the deceptive luxury of isolation.”¹⁶ Yet again, we see how important it was to insist on a topsy-turvy history, wherein that which had yet to appear (i.e. the nation-state system) was made to look as if its time had passed, in order for colonialism – disguised as interdependence, association or partnership – to look modern and equipped for the future.

¹³ *The New York Times*, “Excerpts From Address During United Nations Debate On the Algerian Question”, 5 February 1957.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Hans-Peter Schwartz, *Konrad Adenauer: A German Politician and Statesman in a Period of War, Revolution and Reconstruction*. Vol. 2: *The Statesman, 1952–1967* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1997), 254–5.

¹⁶ *The New York Times*, “African Conciliator: Felix Houphouet-Boigny”, 8 August 1961.

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Today, the European Commission' Comprehensive Strategy with Africa states that in order "[t]o benefit both continents our partnership should be based on a clear understanding of our respective and mutual interests and responsibilities, reflecting the comprehensiveness and maturity of our relationship."¹⁷ To be sure, the current strategy acknowledges that "Africa's potential attracts increased interest from many players on the world scene."¹⁸ But it also highlights that China and the US continue to be junior players in Africa compared to the EU. As emphasized on several occasions in the strategy document, "[t]he EU remains Africa's biggest partner in terms of investment, trade and development."¹⁹ Although the past decade's news reporting on China's role in Africa may have given the impression to the contrary, China still trails the EU when it comes to African trade and investment, and the same applies to the U.S.

Despite the EU's economic dominance in Africa, however, the EU's strategy with Africa leaves no room for complacency. Recent research commissioned by the EU shows that Africans today place greater value on their relationships with China and the US than those they have with the EU. As noted by Kingsley Ighobor, this has "triggered a major PR campaign to showcase the EU's activities in Africa to Africans".²⁰ The Commission President von der Leyen has also expressed her frustration with China's growing presence in Africa. As she remarked last autumn: "We are good at financing roads. But it does not make sense for Europe to build a perfect road between a Chinese-owned copper mine and a Chinese-owned harbour".²¹ In propagating the EU's "strategic autonomy", Josep Borrell warned that while China's global clout is growing, "the weight of Europe in the world is shrinking". Unless the EU's strategic autonomy is taken seriously and conceived of as "a process of political survival", Borell went on, "we will become irrelevant".²²

¹⁷ European Commission, "Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa", p. 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 17, 6.

²⁰ Kingsley Ighobor, "EU-AU Summit 2022: The EU wants to be Africa's friend in need – indeed", Africa Renewal, 21 March 2022, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/march-2022/eu-au-summit-2022-eu-wants-be-africa-s-friend-need—and-indeed>

²¹ Quoted in *Financial Times*, "EU eyes greater world influence with project spending plans", 16 September 2021.

²² Josep Borrell, "Why European strategic autonomy matters".

At the most recent EU-Africa summit in February of this year, it was precisely “China’s rising influence in Africa” that constituted “the implicit backdrop” for the EU’s concerns.²³ The EU has thus launched (in 2021) a competitor to China’s Belt and Road programme, called the Global Gateway, which aims to invest €300 billion in infrastructure and development in the global south during the next six years. At the EU–AU summit in February, the EU pledged to invest half of that amount (€150 billion) in Africa.

The EU’s current apprehensions concerning competition over Africa’s riches are of course not new. The objectives of hedging against potential adversaries in Africa and protecting European powers’ strategic autonomy in Africa were at the heart of the efforts of European integration in the 1950s. As the Rome Treaty negotiations over colonial association reached their final stage, Félix Houphouët-Boigny spoke for the French government at the heads of the negotiation delegation meeting in Brussels (19–22 January, 1957) and delivered a strong plea for the Eurafrican cause. The weight assigned to Houphouët-Boigny’s intervention in the treaty negotiations was underscored in *Le Monde* (January 23) and by the French ambassador in Belgium, Raymond Bousquet, who gave this report to the French government:

He [Houphouët-Boigny] put emphasis on the danger to the French–Belgian ensemble represented by the attraction of the powers of Bandung (Afro-Asians). In his view, the politics of Great Britain in Africa, which assures independence to its old black colonies, but without taking measures concerning the level of life and social and economic improvement of its populations, is extremely dangerous to the French–Belgian ensemble. It will result from this that, if the Six do not associate the overseas territories to their exchanges and investments, the Afro-Asian bloc, “spearhead of communism”, will implant itself on these territories. Already, the Afro-Asians and the communists begin to exercise their harmful activities in Britain’s old African colonies. However, neither of them is able to make anything but ideological propaganda, and without bringing anything tangible to the native populations. Europe has its opportunity, if she is wise enough to seize it, to victoriously combat this double influence, in assuring, through her actions on the

²³ Kingsley Ighobor, “EU–AU Summit 2022”.

financial, economic and social level, to black Africa an increasing standard of living. From an egotistical point of view, Europe has the greatest interest in this, since, without black Africa, her 150 million inhabitants will be cramped within their borders. If the Europe of the Six, through a truly efficient financial and investment policy, succeeds in making the black populations feel that the Eurafrican Association is capable of producing practical results, the French–Belgian territories of this part of the continent will not just reject the attempt of the Bandung group and the communists, but the French–Belgian territories will also constitute a symbol of prosperity to its neighbouring colonies. It is then likely that Britain’s old African colonies will demand their own association to the Eurafrican Common Market on the same conditions that Great Britain will do, at the right moment in the future European Market.²⁴

The New York Times conveyed a similar message in June 1957:

One of the outstanding French apostles of “Eurafrica,” Pierre-Henri Teitgen, said in a speech at the Congress of Europe in Rome Monday that for Africa the alternatives were to choose [sic] “the American bloc, the Soviet world, the Bandung coalition, the Asian-African group or free Europe.” He added that this choice would involve much more than merely an economic link, such as is provided in the common market treaty.²⁵

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Although much has changed since 1957, the European Union’s quest to control Africa and harness its vast resources has not. In order to develop and further solidify the current economic partnership with African countries, Brussel’s new strategy underscores that the “partnership should now also translate into a strong political alliance”. The “alliance” aspect was repeated by Charles Michel, the president of the European Council, at the EU-Africa summit in February. Such a political alliance,

²⁴ HAEU, SGCICEE 3109, Raymond Bousquet to Christian Pineau, “Territoires d’Outre-Mer”, 25 January 1957, Ambassade de France en Belgique, letter no. 184.

²⁵ *The New York Times*, “Ambiguity in France”, 15 June 1957.

Brussels underlines, is “crucial in a multipolar world where collective action is sorely needed. Enhanced cooperation on global and multilateral affairs will be at the heart of our common action.” This is clearly the boldest and most interesting element in the new strategy. Brussels points out that “[t]ogether Africa and Europe form the largest voting bloc in the UN” and that this joint force should be used to push for common causes such as climate change and sustainable development. Moreover, the EU and Africa should act in unison “on the global scene to strengthen the multilateral rules-based order, promoting universal values, human rights, democracy, rule of law and gender equality.”²⁶

Again, by invoking a “multipolar world”, the strategy acknowledges that the EU’s strong position in Africa by no means should be taken for granted; hence the need for a political alliance with Africa. Josep Borrell made this clear in his address to the European Parliament’s plenary debate on the EU’s common foreign and security policy, which took place on 14 January 2020. In pointing to the problems in the EU’s “Southern neighbourhood”, and Libya in particular, Borrell sounded the alarm over Russia’s and Turkey’s recent inroads into Libya. “Russia and Turkey were not showing up there 6 months ago. Now, they are taking the lead to try to solve this problem.” So, while the EU had been leading the hard work of conflict resolution in Libya, Russia and Turkey had assumed the initiative.²⁷ In direct relation to this, Borrell went on to say: “Africa. Let us talk a lot about Africa. A continent of both promises and challenges.” Borrell did indeed talk a lot about Africa. In the short speech of merely three pages, Africa was mentioned no less than nine times. Whereas Libya and the Sahel were mentioned six and four times respectively, China was only mentioned once in passing, as was India. The U.S. was not mentioned at all. And we should remember that Borrell’s speech was about the EU’s foreign policy *in general*.

The EU’s bid to form a *political* alliance with the African Union is a striking development. Especially when explicitly framed as helping Europe regain her geopolitical stamina and navigate the stormy waters of a “multipolar world”. Not long before the EU’s Strategy with Africa was presented, Angela Merkel contributed to the

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 15, 1.

²⁷ Josep Borrell, “Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the European Parliament plenary debate on the annual report on the implementation of the common foreign and security policy”, Strasbourg, 14 January 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/73065/node/73065_id

discussion on the EU's "strategic autonomy", saying that "Europe should also develop its own military capability. There may be regions outside Nato's primary focus where Europe must, if necessary, be prepared to get involved. I see Africa as one example".²⁸ Prior to this, Merkel's had pledged to launch a "Marshall Plan with Africa" – a comprehensive, long-term blueprint for economic development, peace, democracy and migration management in Africa. "Africa and Europe are neighbouring continents", the plan establishes:

We are bound together by a shared history – and we are responsible for determining the course of our shared future. How successfully we manage the major challenges that lie ahead will decide not only the future and the fate of Africa – both its people and its natural environment – but also the future of Europe.²⁹

This is not the first time that Germans have proposed a Marshall Plan for Africa. During the negotiations for the Treaty of Rome in 1957, West Germany's foreign minister, Heinrich von Brentano, proposed a Marshall Plan for France's African colonies as part of the EEC's annexation of France's and Belgium's African colonies.³⁰ Indeed, West Germany was very eager to gain a stake in France's African empire. On 15 February 1957, Chancellor Adenauer explained the great advantages of the EEC's colonial association regime to his cabinet. "The Chancellor", the cabinet protocols relate, "is of the opinion that in the long-term France offers much better economic prospects than Britain. France possesses a latent wealth, just think of the Sahara with its oil and uranium deposits. Equatorial Africa also constitutes a significant reserve. In comparison, Britain's development points to a substantial decline."³¹ On 26 March 1957 – the day after the Rome Treaty's signing ceremony – *The New York Times* (1957a) took note of West Germany's African interests. As its headline ran: "Germans go to Africa: Bonn mission to study ways to develop resources." As reported, a German delegation was

²⁸ *Financial Times*, 16 January 2020.

²⁹ Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Africa and Europe – A new partnership for development, peace and a better future: Cornerstones of a Marshall Plan with Africa*, January 2017, https://www.bmz.de/en/publications/type_of_publication/information_flyer/information_brochures/Materialie270_africa_marshallplan.pdf

³⁰ Peo Hansen & Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 222.

³¹ Kabinettsprotokolle der Bundesregierung, "Assoziierung der überseeischen Gebiete", Kabinettsitzung, 15 February 1957, Vol. 10 (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag), 144.

heading for “France’s African colonies to survey the joint development of industrial raw materials required by West Europe”. It was also related that this formed part of the EEC accord, “signed today in Rome”, and its objective to secure “the joint financing of the economic development of France’s African colonies.” A few months later another headline in *The New York Times* (1957b) ran as follows: “Europe may get new oil source: Common Economic Market could mean shift from Mideast to Africa: Resources big factor”.

This should remind us of the self-evident stability and durability with which the EEC’s ownership of Africa was perceived in 1957. Here, in the wake of the agreement on the EEC, *The New York Times* recounts the upbeat mood concerning the great economic prospects proffered by the new European community’s joint development of Algeria and its members’ “overseas possessions”. In as little time as five or six years, the article informs, the EEC may very well, thanks to the recently discovered oil reserves in Algeria “bring about a most important and perhaps permanent change in the European oil picture and a partial solution to a tough foreign exchange problem”. As also noted, the EEC’s “ultimate goal appears to be a self-sufficiency in oil and some other raw materials available from the overseas possessions, mostly in Africa”.

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By aligning with Africa, the current EU sees itself much better equipped to deal with China, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, and other contenders in Africa. The EU’s geopolitical alliance with Africa – “the largest voting bloc in the UN” – invokes an image of an emergent force between east and west, running from north to south. From the EU’s perspective, Africa is the only place where Europeans are relatively unconstrained by U.S. interest. This is ironic since this is not the case in Europe itself, as starkly illustrated by the war in Ukraine. Africa thus fits very well with the EU’s goal of strategic autonomy. Josep Borrell helps clarify this too when he speaks of strategic autonomy in the EU-African context: “Europe is today confronted on its periphery with certain number of conflicts or tensions in the Sahel, in Libya and in Eastern

Mediterranean. In these three cases Europe must act even more, and alone, because these problems do not primarily concern the United States.”³²

The EU–AU summit in February reiterated the alliance’s UN strength, basically depicting the EU–AU as a bloc: “Together, the European Union and the African Union account for 42% of the UN countries; 55+27 out of 193.”³³ In the General Assembly vote on the UN resolution on “Aggression against Ukraine”, however, which took place on 2 March, such a Eurafrikan voting bloc proved to be a mirage. Many African countries thus failed to kowtow to the wishes of the EU. But this should only serve to galvanize the EU’s Eurafrikan resolve, since the war in Ukraine and the sanctions on Russia and Belarus will just intensify the scramble for African resources even further.

Even if the EU’s engagement with Africa has geopolitical ambitions, we also notice its rhetorical emphasis on promoting human rights, democracy, multilateralism, peace, women’s rights, the rule of law, and universal norms and values. Some of this is certainly not unique for the European Union. Yet, the EU seems uniquely adept at promoting its geopolitical ambitions and economic interests as democracy, peace and the dissemination of universal norms and values. Whereas Russia, Turkey, China and the US continue to play the old game of power politics and unilateralism, the EU travels the world on soft power; it does not make adversaries, it negotiates, it creates partners, it facilitates trade, cultivates its neighbourhood and it upholds multilateralism and the role of the UN. As I will come back to below, however, with the launch of the “geopolitical European Commission” and the EU’s “strategic autonomy”, this rhetoric seems to be changing.

Assertions of the EU’s exceptional status as a benevolent global actor have a long history, harking back to the 1920s and the earliest proposals and movements championing European integration. More importantly, the political valence and credibility of such assertions have always presupposed that history is continually and permanently evaded.

The awarding of the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize to the EU organization is ample testimony to this. To be sure, the Norwegian Nobel Committee came under much fire for its choice, but all of this concerned the current state of the EU and no criticism was

³² Josep Borrell, “Why European strategic autonomy matters”.

³³ European Council, Council of the European Union, “Infographic - Africa and Europe: a joint vision for 2030”, 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/africa-and-europe-a-joint-vision-for-2030/>

levelled at the Committee's main purpose of venerating the aims and spirit that went into the founding of today's EU in the 1950s. Under the typical headline "The EU's badly timed prize: The European Union might once have deserved its Nobel, but with the euro it has initiated an era of strife", *The Guardian's* David Priestland thus criticized the Committee for being out of touch with today's realities, yet never failed to emphasize that the award should be seen as "an important reminder that the European project has always had a strong element of anti-war idealism at its core", commemorating the "real internationalism among the first European generation."

A closer look tells us that the first European generation committed atrocities and was fighting or supporting wars almost non-stop between 1945 and the birth of today's European Union in 1957; e.g., Indochina, Indonesia, Madagascar, Algeria, Cameroon, Egypt. Hence, when the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman pleaded for "World peace", which are the very first words of the Schuman Declaration, Schuman was also busy overseeing an extremely brutal colonial war in Indochina, killing as many as half a million Vietnamese. Since 1985 the EU officially celebrates the Schuman Declaration as Europe Day: "on 9 May 1950 the foundation of the European Union as we know it was set out in an extraordinary declaration based on two core principles: peace and solidarity."³⁴ Given that French Algeria was fully incorporated into the EEC as an integral part of metropolitan France, an extremely bloody war was raging also *inside* the EEC from its birth until 1962. Yet, the EU is hailed as a historical "peace project". For all the scathing criticism against the EU's Nobel, this very same criticism actually served to further solidify not only the Nobel Committee's basic premise, but also the Brussels-promoted image of the EU as an organization with an untainted historical origin and purpose, far removed from the ugly imperial and national worlds of power politics and crude interest maximization.

To illustrate further we can turn to the 2007 EU–Africa Summit in Lisbon, where the European Union and 53 African states adopted the Lisbon Declaration. Besides defining a number of current challenges for EU-Africa cooperation, the Lisbon Declaration also alluded to the prehistory of the EU-Africa partnership. Starting out on a conciliatory note, acknowledging that "we have come together in awareness of the lessons and experiences of the past," the text of the Declaration further hailed the Lisbon Summit as

³⁴ European Council, "The Schuman Declaration: Where the EU was born", 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/70-schuman-declaration/>

offering “a unique opportunity jointly to address the common contemporary challenges for our continents, in the year that we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the European integration and the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the independence of Africa”.³⁵ This, of course, was a direct reference to the founding of the European Economic Community in the Rome Treaties signed on March 25, 1957, and to Ghana’s independence from British rule just weeks earlier on March 6, 1957. While the Declaration depicted 1957 as a watershed or as a “year zero” in postcolonial African and European history, referencing the two historical shifts and changes in political processes, it also created the impression that these processes were quite compatible, even mutually interdependent in harmonious ways.

At the time, in 1957, however, few if any adhered to this perception. Although Europe’s colonial empires in Asia and the Middle East had been on the decline since 1947, this was not true for Africa. Here a reverse movement took place after 1945, based on a belief that Europeans could keep Africa within its power orbit by working to isolate Africa from the cold war logic and by instituting cooperative frameworks, such as the EEC, that could pool and thus synergize colonial sovereignty, investments and benefits. As the Rome Treaty makes unequivocally clear, the founders of the EEC were determined to strengthen the grip over the African colonies. For his part, Kwame Nkrumah, the leader of Ghana’s independence movement and the country’s first president, argued that the Treaty of Rome could “be compared to the treaty that emanated from the Congress of Berlin [1885]... the latter treaty established the undisputed sway of colonialism in Africa, the former marks the advent of neo-colonialism in Africa.”³⁶ What Nkrumah aimed at with these words was the EEC’s colonial association regime, which, to the Ghanaian leader, represented a new-fangled “system of collective colonialism which will be stronger and more dangerous than the old evils we are striving to liquidate.”³⁷

Such discontent is, of course, never recounted in the official, Brussels version of the historical genesis of European integration. Neither does it have a place in EU scholarship. In contrast to many of its founding states, the EU organization avows no

³⁵ Lisbon Declaration – EU Africa Summit, Lisbon, 8–9 December 2007, http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/sites/default/files/documents/eas2007_lisbon_declaration_en.pdf

³⁶ Kwame Nkrumah, “Address to the Ghana National Assembly”, 30 May 1961; quoted in Guy Martin, *Africa in World Politics: A Pan-African Perspective* (Trenton and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2002), 9.

³⁷ Kwame Nkrumah, “Address to the Nationalists’ Conference, June 4, 1962” (1962), 12.

official historical relation to colonialism in Africa. From Brussels' perspective, the EU-Africa relation is instead seen as being of a *post*-colonial nature, first codified at the 1963 Yaoundé Convention where eighteen nominally independent African states entered into a multilateral trade and aid association with the EEC.

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Shortly after having been elected President of France in 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy made a tour of Western Africa. In a speech at the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, he stated as follows: "What France wants with Africa is co-development, shared development. ... What France wants with Africa is to prepare the advent of 'Eurafrica', a great common destiny which awaits Europe and Africa."³⁸ While the speech caught quite a bit of attention in international news, no commentary touched upon the historical significance of the French president's reference to "Eurafrica". In 2018, a headline in *The Economist* stated: "Rebirth of Eurafrica" – "Why Europe should focus on its growing interdependence with Africa".³⁹ As the *re*-birth of Eurafrica denotes, *The Economist* argued that Eurafrica was part and parcel of the "Roman, Carthaginian, Moorish and Venetian empires". Yet, it failed to mention Eurafrica's most recent historical materialization, namely, that of being an integral – or "interdependent" – part of the European Union when it was founded in 1957. As *Le Monde's* headline put it in 1957: "*Première étape vers l'Eurafrrique: Accord des Six sur l'association des territoires d'outremer au marché commun.*"⁴⁰

This amnesia reflects the EU's successful ability to bend history to fit its own purposes. The embarrassing fact is that this success has a great deal to do with the failure of much current EU scholarship. Scholars have often failed in the historical examination of the global ramifications of European integration and therefore they have also failed to interrogate the historical role of the EU in global affairs. In many ways, therefore, the EU project is still a project without history, still mainly steeped in a myth

³⁸ D. Flynn, "Sarkozy proposes 'Eurafrica' partnership on tour", Reuters, 26 July 2007.

³⁹ *The Economist*, "The rebirth of Eurafrica", 22 September 2018 (print edition); *The Economist*, "Why Europe should focus on its growing interdependence with Africa", 20 September 2018, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/09/20/why-europe-should-focus-on-its-growing-interdependence-with-africa>

⁴⁰ *Le Monde*, 21 February 1957.

about being a *post*-colonial project, a new beginning, and a peace project not tainted by the colonial histories and policies tied to the member states.

In 1962, the Secretary of the Council of Europe's Economic Committee, Uwe Kitzinger, commented on the Rome Treaty's colonial association provisions, saying: "They were based on a largely static conception of the political relations between the African countries and the metropolitan Member States. In the past three years that relationship has evolved beyond all expectations."⁴¹ Writing a few years later, Carol Ann Cosgrove also stressed this crucial point: "The treaty was drafted at a time when rapid decolonization was discounted by the European metropolises, with the result that no reference was made to the possible attainment of sovereign independence by the associate except in the case of Somaliland."⁴² Kitzinger's comment regarding the "static conception of the political relations between the African countries and the metropolitan Member States" is crucial here, as is Cosgrove's reminder of the "European metropolises" refusal, in 1957, to consider "sovereign independence" in Africa.

Sixty years after the formal decolonization of the EEC's colonial annex many of the EU's conceptions about its relations with African countries have a "static" feel to them. Investment and resource extraction certainly have such a feel. But as seen, in this area there has also been some quite startling transformations taking place over the past decades. The EU now has competitors and challengers, foremost China. The static feel thus concerns the dread and disdain with which the EU approaches this transformation. On the African side, however, the transformation has more of a dynamic feel to it. Although we know of the scores of problems concerning the growing competition over Africa's riches, it has also brought more choice and leverage to African governments. And this is of course a bitter pill to swallow for the EU. One of the main reasons for this is the fact that the EU has yet to accept "sovereign independence" for its former colonial annex. Said former EU commissioner and current chancellor of the University of Oxford, Chris Patten: "For reasons of history, morality, and security, Africa should be regarded as a particular European responsibility. We should deploy our aid, diplomacy, and peacekeeping capacity to support sustainable development, good governance, and regional collaboration on that continent."⁴³

⁴¹ Uwe Kitzinger, *The Challenge of the Common Market* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell), 98.

⁴² Carol Ann Cosgrove, "The Common Market and its colonial heritage", *Journal of Contemporary History* 4 (1969), 77.

⁴³ Chris Patten, "What Is Europe to Do?", *New York Review of Books*, 11 March, 2010.

The EU speaks confidently about intervening militarily in its southern “periphery” and it assumes that Africa will just succumb to EU plans of having the EU and Africa form a UN bloc. The German government, for its part, can toy around with European Marshall Plans for Africa and announce that “Europe must, if necessary, be prepared to get involved” militarily in Africa. Again, it reflects a deep-seated refusal to perceive of sovereignty as anything but an alien concept in the African context. This explains why “Europe” does not need permission to intervene militarily in “Africa” and it also explains why the EU has a hard time accepting as reality that African countries may have interests totally at odds with those of the EU. And this sentiment is widely shared. As *Financial Times*’ David Pilling insisted: “This is no time for neutrality in Africa on Ukraine”.⁴⁴ Under these circumstances, it should also be easy to understand why there cannot be a “partnership” between the EU and the AU. True partnerships presuppose equality and mutuality.

As the competition for African resources and markets stiffens, global geopolitical interests will also increasingly come to clash in and over Africa. With African countries and the AU being equipped with more choice and leverage in its foreign relations, the EU may also have to deal with more of precisely that which it finds difficult to acknowledge: namely, sovereignty on the African side. So far, the EU is handling this by turning to a more aggressive rhetoric that forebodes more aggressive action. A “geopolitical Commission” says Ursula von der Leyen, and with the war in Ukraine Josep Borrell speaks of “the EU’s geopolitical awakening”.⁴⁵ “Today”, Borrell asserts “we are in a situation where economic interdependence is becoming politically very conflictual. And what was traditionally called soft power is becoming an instrument of hard power.”⁴⁶ It should not be a wild guess to say that an emerging “Eurasia” of Russia and China – and possible other powers – will lend even more incentive to “Eurafrica”. That is why today’s developments should be an incentive for EU studies and scholarship to engage more with the EU’s past and with Eurafrica, that “ghost of the of the last century”, to paraphrase von der Leyen. It will help us better understand the current EU’s plans for its African sphere of influence.

⁴⁴ David Pilling, “This is no time for neutrality in Africa on Ukraine”, *Financial Times*, 25 March, 2022.

⁴⁵ Josep Borrell, “Defending Ukraine in its hour of maximum need”, European Union External Action, 1 March 2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/defending-ukraine-its-hour-maximum-need-0_en

⁴⁶ Josep Borrell, “Why European strategic autonomy matters”.