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The Future of Europe- Africa Relations: Mapping Strategic Trends for 2030

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Abstract

In 2023 the Megatrends Afrika Project conducted a strategic trend analysis to explore possible future developments in Europe-Africa relations. Together with a group of experts, we examined selected strategic trends that can be expected to influence relations between the continents in 2030. As well as some of the “usual suspects” that appear in most such exercises (demographics, climate change), we also identified political and social trends that we believe to be underappreciated in policy discussions. In this paper, we focus in particular on (1) *Political instability in Europe*, characterized by the rise of nationalism and anti-immigrant populism, and (2) *African contestation of Eurocentric policies/debates*, in relation to issues such as European migration policies, gender norms, climate issues and the colonial past. Our reflections are not predictions. Instead, we identify *possible* future developments that should be on the radar of today’s policymakers.

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Europe–Africa Relations as a Subject of Foresight

Relations between Africa and Europe have seen major upheavals in recent years. Flash-points have included African discontent with European vaccine patent policies and travel restrictions during the global COVID pandemic and the expulsion of French troops and European missions from several Sahel countries. Implementation of the European Union’s Global Gateway investment package has been slow and hesitant. A global context of growing geopolitical confrontation sees African and European actors at loggerheads over issues including climate justice, trade and migration. The list of disputes goes on, conjuring a future relationship characterized by many challenges and unknowns. Which of these developments are short-lived phenomena that come and go – and which presage major and lasting changes for which policymakers need to prepare?

Anticipating the future of Europe-Africa relations is a challenging endeavour. The more complex the system, the more difficult it is to make assumptions about the future.¹ The Europe-Africa relationship involves 54 African countries and 27 EU member states, as well as the supranational EU institutions and their intergovernmental AU counterparts. The relationship is not driven by a single policy objective. Instead, actors on both sides have different and sometimes conflicting objectives, interests, norms and aspirations. There is also a lack of hard data on which to base policy decisions, while megatrends such as global warming can overwhelm policy processes (in both their scale and timeframe). Nevertheless, policymakers need to be able to take strategic decisions at this aggregate level if they are to adapt to novel challenges and realities.

In order to explore those issues, we conducted a strategic trend analysis for Africa-Europe relations in 2030. Working with a group of experts (see annex 2), we considered trends in the global environment within which the relationship unfolds, the actors involved, and the dynamics of cooperation in different policy areas. Our aim was not to make short-term predictions or to specify the probability of a specific event occurring, but to raise awareness of what might lie ahead.² We sought to identify trends that are not only possible but *probable*, and considered their possible consequences. As well as the trends themselves, we examined the *interactions* between them: Which trends drive others, which are more driven? Ultimately, we sought an actionable perspective on where the “system” of Europe-Africa relations is likely heading. In this report, we present the findings and develop them further.³

Overall, our trend assumptions follow an “it gets worse” trajectory. By 2030, tensions over migration, climate justice and LGBTQI+ rights will be more apparent. The effects of climate change will be felt more acutely on both continents. Some of these assertions are supported by data. For example, predictive modelling of demographic developments and migration patterns can inform the assumptions underlying policy decisions. Other trends are much harder to pin down. This is particularly true of highly complex political and social phenomena such as polarization and political contestation of established orders. They are

¹ Jenny Zorn and Stefan Schweiger, “Kontext bitte! Einblicke in die Geschichte der Zukunftsforschung und ihre Relevanz für die Erfindung der Megatrends”, 2020, in *Energiewende und Megatrends*, ed. Steven Engler, Julia Janik and Matthias Wolf, vol. 93, Bielefeld, transcript, 23–44, 23.

² Lars Brozus, (Not) Lost in Foresight, Structuring Futures Complexity in a Politically Meaningful Way. SWP Comment, 2021, accessed 31 Januar 2024, 2.

³ The authors would like to thank SWP colleagues working on EU/Europe and migration for helpful discussions during the drafting of this paper.

difficult to model or quantify and tend to be underappreciated. However, these social and political phenomena often mark the onset of major change, and they should therefore be kept on the policy radar (for example the “Arab Spring”).

Strategic Trend Analysis

Between September and December 2023, we held three workshops to identify the strategic trends and trend interactions that are likely to shape Europe-Africa relations in 2030. Aiming for the “wisdom of crowds”, participants engaged in collective reasoning to arrive at assumptions about the future. The external participants included Europe-Africa generalists as well as experts on specific issues (such as migration, demography). Some of them are involved in European/German foreign policy process (primarily through the German Federal Foreign Office and the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development; see list of participants, annex 2). We assigned a degree of homogeneity/actorness to both regions (“Europe”, “Africa”) in order to capture the broader relationship dynamics (sometimes came at the cost of precision and nuance).

How did we select the trends? Trends are directional patterns, for example in economic, social and political developments.⁴ Our selection of trends was based on their expected impact on social and political *relations* between the continents, not on societies and politics in general. We concentrated on what we believe to be the most important *strategic* trends, rather than attempting to cover all the aspects that might be relevant for Europe-Africa relations. The strategic aspect meant considering the potential implications for the policies that underpin Europe-Africa relations. Six trends were selected, while six additional uncertainty factors were included in the third workshop. For an overview of the trends and uncertainty factors, see the text box below. Additional information on the workshop format can be found in annex 1.

Why 2030? The more distant the future, the more difficult it is to imagine. Different time frames are appropriate for different phenomena. Our analysis combines megatrends such as climate change,⁵ which unfold over decades and require comprehensive and long-term policy responses, with fluid phenomena such as political instability, where changes can occur suddenly and require immediate political action. Our five to ten-year timeframe represents the middle ground, allowing for longer-term strategic thinking without losing sight of today’s policy making needs.

⁴ Edgar Göll, “Trends und Megatrends als Ansatz der modernen Zukunftsforschung,” in *Energiewende und Megatrends*, ed. Steven Engler, Julia Janik and Matthias Wolf, vol. 93, Bielefeld, transcript, 45–60, 50.













⁵ Benedikt Erforth and Lena Gutheil, *Why We Should talk about Megatrends in Africa*, 2022, accessed 2 February 2024.

Trend Dynamics: Where Are Europe-Africa Relations Heading in 2030?

In this section, we outline the key strategic trends that emerged from the expert discussions and discuss how these might interact in the future. In particular, we take a closer look at political instability, which emerged as one of the *main drivers* in the trend system, and African contestation of Eurocentric policies, which is the trend *most strongly driven* by other trends. For further information on the “driver/driven” assumptions, see annex 1.

Multipolarity: A Blessing for Africa and a Curse for Europe?

Geopolitical dynamics and the changing world order will strongly influence the relationship between Africa and Europe in 2030. Our discussions suggest that growing multipolarity will have uneven effects on Africa and Europe. For Africa, the positive effects dominate as the proliferation of potential partners widens fiscal (and political) space and more gener-

Main trends	Uncertainty factors
 <p>Multipolarity describes a geopolitical landscape in which global affairs are shaped by more than two influential actors or power centres.</p>	 <p>Migration flows refer to the movement of individuals or groups across geographical areas and borders (here: between Africa and Europe).</p>
 <p>Climate change is a complex phenomenon characterized by a number of interrelated changes, including heightened occurrence of extreme weather events, rising temperatures, rising sea levels and increased drought.</p>	 <p>The rise of xenophobia and populism represents a growing trend in Europe of public sentiment and political dynamics in Europe, characterized by nationalist political agendas and hostility towards immigrants.</p>
 <p>Demographics refer to changes in the size and structure of populations resulting from shifts in birth rates, death rates and migration patterns.</p>	 <p>African economic integration refers to cooperation the degree of cooperation among African countries, particularly in the fields of trade and investment (e.g., African Continental Free Trade Area).</p>
 <p>Political instability encompasses a wide range of phenomena such as democratic regression and autocratization, unconstitutional changes of government and the erosion of institutions.</p>	 <p>African fiscal space denotes the abilities of African governments to sustainably deliver effective governance without resorting to unsustainable debt or extreme austerity measures.</p>
 <p>Africa's role in (energy-related) value chains refers to the extent to which African countries are involved in various stages of the energy production and distribution processes.</p>	 <p>Multilateralism refers to the extent to which nations engage in cooperation in international forums and organizations and indicates the degree of commitment to collective decision-making.</p>
 <p>African actors are increasingly contesting Eurocentric diplomacy. In particular, they are challenging Europe's assumption that it controls the substance, agenda and rules of the relationship.</p>	 <p>European cohesion refers to the collective capacity of the EU member states to act effectively in the international system and to the degree of international recognition.</p>

ally reduces ingrained dependencies on “traditional” partners. By 2030, competition among external actors in Africa (including the United States, China, Russia, Turkey, European states and the Gulf states) will have intensified. Attempts by great powers to build ideological alliances in Africa have failed. Instead, African countries are pursuing a decidedly pragmatic approach that is mostly non-aligned and transactional. They engage with the rest of the world from a position of moderately increased leverage. Dependencies may not have disappeared, but they have begun to shift.

European states, on the other hand, associate multipolarity in Africa with international fragmentation and the loss of their real or imagined status as a privileged partner. By 2030, Europe is no longer the preferred partner for most African countries, but one among others, at best. Its ability to shape diplomatic relations and outcomes is weakening. Europe is also under pressure politically, especially as its traditional selling point in the postcolonial era – development cooperation – comes under increasing scrutiny in African countries looking for other ways to expand trade and investment.⁶

Climate Change: Justice to the Fore

Global megatrends such as climate change will impact on both continents. Among the trends discussed, climate change is relatively well researched. By 2030, adverse events (for example, in the form of increased temperatures and rising sea levels) will be more frequent and severe in both Africa and Europe. African countries will be cooperating with various external partners, most notably China, on adaptive technologies and renewable energy; Europe is one of many interested parties (interaction with “multipolarity” trend).⁷ Certain adaptation/mitigation efforts are under way but their impact is limited, given that low-emission energy investments are long term and green technologies are still in their infancy. The effects of climate change may be felt less acutely in Europe than in Africa, where weaker adaptive capacity (for example finance) negatively impacts livelihoods and exacerbates vulnerabilities (including dependency on agriculture, deficits in health care and housing, lack of infrastructure such as sanitation).

However, while the impact of climate change is likely to have worsened only slightly by 2030, we suggest that the way climate change is negotiated within the Europe-Africa relationship will have changed – a development already seen in the COP meetings and the 2023 Africa Climate Summit. Europe’s past and present role as a major polluter will bring climate justice to the fore, despite ongoing efforts to implement an energy transition in countries on both continents (promoted in Africa partly through debt-for-climate swaps).⁸ Europe has already started to integrate its climate policy, trade policy and external investment – for example in relation to carbon emissions and deforestation which some African countries see as holding back their economic aspirations.⁹ We explore these dynamics in more detail below, in relation to cooperation on energy-related exports from Africa to Europe.

⁶ Aanu Adeoye, *The Heart of the Matter: Economic Concerns Will Shape Africa’s Foreign Affairs Strategies*, 2024, accessed 15 May 2024.

⁷ Cobus van Staden, *Climate Collaboration in Multipolar Times*, 2024, accessed 3 April 2024.

⁸ Anja Berretta, *A Just Transition? Transforming Energy Systems in Africa*, 2024, accessed 23 April 2024; Zainab Usman, Olumide Abimbola and Imeh Ituen, *Navigating the Opportunities and Risks of the European Green Deal for Africa*, 201.

⁹ Bruce Byiers, *The Case for an Africa-Europe Trade-Climate-Development Triangle*, 2023, accessed 3 April 2024.

Demographic Dividend vs. Anti-Immigration Populism

By 2030, sharply contrasting demographic trends give African and European countries strong incentives to expand their economic cooperation. Predictive models suggest that African populations will continue to grow, although urban birth rates will eventually fall (but not by 2030).¹⁰ Africa's youthful demography comes with high unemployment, mainly due to economic challenges, inadequate education and training, and a lack of employment opportunities for growing numbers of university graduates. By contrast, European populations are stable or declining. Europe's overall workforce is shrinking due to the ageing population, with some EU member states more strongly affected than others. In Germany, for example, the natural population change is negative and immigration is the sole source of population growth rates.¹¹

Consequently, the pressure to adjust to demographic change and create economic opportunities has increased on both sides. One might think that in 2030 both sides will have a stronger interest in strategic migration planning to increase labour migration. However, our deliberations suggest that the interactions between demographic trends and rising anti-immigrant populism in Europe are likely to block demographic dividends of increased (labour) migration.

Political Instability: What if Europe Is (also) the Problem?

Increasing political instability will be a key determinant of the relationship in the coming years. In multiple African countries political turmoil will continue to threaten the democratic gains made in recent decades. By 2030 military coups and militarization of politics have become normalized in parts of North, West and Central Africa. Undermining stability and economic progress, some of Africa's largest states remain engulfed in often internationalized civil wars (for example DR Congo, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan), where insurgent movements and other non-state actors proliferate.

We found political instability to be the main driver in the trend system. In other words, it has a significant impact on other trends. Political instability, in turn, is influenced by increasing multipolarity, demographic growth and severe climate events. Political instability will significantly hamper the ability of states and societies to adapt to climate change, possibly creating conditions for a vicious circle of climate change and conflict. It will also be an important driver of African contestation of European approaches. Certain African countries (especially in the Sahel) see Europe as part of the problem (or specific European countries, in particular France). The implication is that Europe's relevance as a conflict management actor in Africa will be greatly diminished by 2030.

Europe has long regarded political instability as an African problem looking for European solutions (in the form of military interventions). However, our projection for 2030 suggests that European domestic and external policies are also heading for crisis and a thorough shake up. What are the prospects for Africa-EU relations in a Europe where important countries are governed by the far right? We engage with this question below.

¹⁰ Andrew Stanley, African Century, International Monetary Fund, September 2023, accessed 13 May 2024.

¹¹ Statistisches Bundesamt, Bevölkerung wächst im Jahr 2023 um gut 0,3 Millionen Personen (2024), accessed 2 April 2024.

A Greater African Role in Energy-Related Value Chains: Wishful Policy Thinking?

Critical minerals and energy-related value chains will be an increasingly important area of cooperation between Africa and Europe in 2030, although there are many unknowns here. As Europe steps up its efforts to reduce its dependency on China (de-risking), demand for raw materials from African countries will increase. This will apply in particular to the minerals required for the green transition (such as copper and cobalt), as well as energy imports (especially hydrogen). African countries will be negotiating from a position of relative strength, given the rising global demand for resources and energy. Seeking a compelling “win-win” offer, Europe has stepped up its political efforts to demonstrate its commitment to structural transformation of African local industries, supporting the development of sustainable and resilient value chains, and creating jobs. For example, in 2023 the EU signed strategic partnerships on critical raw material value chains with the DR Congo and Zambia.¹² Africa appears to be sitting pretty here. Does this mean that African countries will enjoy greater control of energy-related value chains and a greater share of value creation? Current external proposals such as Europe’s Global Gateway would suggest they might. We started our foresight deliberations from this well-established policy assumption but arrived at a different conclusion (see also “Biases and heuristics” below).

We suggest that while energy-related value chains will become a focus of Europe-Africa cooperation, African countries’ control and share will not necessarily change meaningfully (at least by 2030), because other trends are more decisive. The first of these is multipolarity: global energy and climate trends will be defined by demand and emissions in China, not Europe.¹³ China will lead the world in renewable technologies. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates will also expand their investment in Africa’s critical minerals and renewable energy sectors.¹⁴ The United States will have taken steps to become a significant actor in the mineral sector of selected African countries, although the 2024 presidential election casts great uncertainty over the future of Africa-US relations.

We suggest that by 2030, Europe will have started implementing policies related to the Green Deal (specifically the Critical Raw Materials Act) in certain African countries. Current activities on the Lobito Corridor, in cooperation with the US, and Germany’s hydrogen deal with Namibia are indicative of this trend. However, Europe’s attempt to position its offer alongside established players like China will not be successful for several reasons. Firstly, implementing structural changes would take much more time. Secondly, China retains a strong interest in market access and large-scale resource deals with African countries, despite its turn to “small and beautiful” projects in other sectors. Thirdly, although demand for Africa’s commodities is increasingly competitive, resource-rich African countries will not automatically benefit. DR Congo and Zambia for instance remain dependent on a small number of mining companies.¹⁵

Finally, and crucially, political dynamics in Europe are likely to influence Africa-Europe cooperation. On the one hand, although Europe is currently showing growing interest in international climate policy and renewable energy, it is also implementing domestic industrial

¹² European Commission, Global Gateway: EU Signs Strategic Partnerships on Critical Raw Materials Value Chains with DRC and Zambia and Advances Cooperation with US and other Key Partners to Develop the “Lobito Corridor” 2023, accessed 11 March 2024).

¹³ Jakkie Cilliers and Alize le Roux, Energy, 11 April 2024, accessed 24 April 2024.

¹⁴ Africa Confidential, Facing Neither West Nor East – But Forwards, 11 April 2024, accessed 24 April 2024.

¹⁵ Meike Schulze, Rohstoffversorgung in Zeiten geoökonomischer Fragmentierung, SWP-Aktuell 22, April 2024, accessed 22 April 2024, 5.

Biases and Heuristics

“Mental shortcuts” influence perceptions and decision-making, and foresight is no exception.¹⁶ In our discussions, recent shifts in European policy priorities, such as the focus on energy-related value chains, were expected to strongly influence Europe-Africa relations in the coming years. However, one could argue that the selection of this strategic trend simply illustrates the *difficulty of making policy-neutral projections* in this format. The trends were selected on the basis of the views of a group of experts associated in some way with the German foreign policy process, and were therefore already on the policy radar. The process was not designed to identify “unknown unknowns” – truly unexpected factors of which participants are not aware. In the case of energy-related value chains, the discussion is likely to have been influenced by wishful thinking (about quickly replacing Russian energy with imports from Africa). Likewise, the prominence of geopolitical shifts and multipolarity in the analysis suggests that there was a tendency to see *external agency* as an important driver of developments. This is consistent with other foresight exercises, which tend to take into account the policies, interests and “appetite” of donors (EU, China, philanthropists) when making assumptions about Africa’s future. Our discussions highlighted awareness of these biases, but could not completely eliminate them.

policies that will be perceived as protectionist.¹⁷ On the other hand, if our assumptions about political instability in Europe prove correct (see below), policy shifts can be expected. An EU with a majority of far-right national governments will pursue a decidedly different approach to foreign trade and investment promotion, and may well drop the green deal/sustainability policies that underpin current thinking about Africa-Europe cooperation.¹⁸

We conclude that relations with Europe will not be decisive for Africa’s role in energy-related value chains. The crucial factors will be political stability, positive effects of multipolarity, and African strategic cooperation and regional economic integration. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), for example, should improve the efficiency of markets and facilitate trade and investment – and thus help to strengthen African agency.

Who Makes the Rules? African Contestation of Eurocentric Policies

By 2030 African dissatisfaction with the relationship with Europe has grown and is increasingly openly expressed. The Europe-Africa discourse has become more polarized, as African actors increasingly challenge Europe’s assumption that it sets the agenda. There is growing frustration with Europe’s moral and political paternalism, double standards and perceived encroachment on African sovereignty. Importantly, we found that contestation is strongly reinforced by certain trends (such as multipolarity and political instability) but not mitigated by others. Therefore, we take a closer look at the trend and its interactions in the following section.

¹⁶ Elna Schirrmeister, Anne-Louise Göhring and Philine Warnke, “Psychological Biases and Heuristics in the Context of Foresight and Scenario Processes,” *Futures & Foresight Science* 2, no. 2 (2020), doi:10.1002/ffo2.31.

¹⁷ Meike Schulze, Rohstoffversorgung in Zeiten geökonomischer Fragmentierung, SWP-Aktuell 22, April 2024, accessed 22 April 2024, 4.

¹⁸ Raphael Bossong and Nicolai von Ondarza, “Die Transformation zu einem illiberalen Europa,” in: Miranda Böttcher and Lars Brozus, eds., *Weltpolitische Unwägbarkeiten: Erkundungen der Zukunft*, SWP, May 2024, accessed 15 May 2024, 12–13.

The Strongest Driver: Political Instability in Africa and Europe

As mentioned above, political instability is the main driver of other trends. It plays a central role, for example, in preventing societies from collectively addressing the effects of demographic and climate change. While political instability in Africa is a frequent agenda item in Europe-Africa diplomacy, political instability in Europe tends to be underappreciated.

By 2030, we expect to see a profound shake-up and fragmentation in European politics (national level and EU). Far right parties will have been elected to govern several more member states. Rather than seeking European consensus, their foreign policies on issues including Africa will lean to bilateralism and temporary alliances among selected member states. While far right governments are unlikely to leave the EU “Brexit”-style, they will seek to instrumentalize it in their respective national interest.¹⁹ With the principle of unanimity still in place and far right governments gaining a blocking minority in European institutions (if not a majority), these processes will exacerbate centrifugal forces and diminish the EU as a foreign policy actor. The ailing credibility and legitimacy of national and European institutions will sharpen the crisis of representative democracy. Several developments are likely to contribute to this process.

First and foremost, Europe is already experiencing a rise of right-wing and far right populist movements and parties. Indeed, they have formed or joined national governments in the Netherlands, Austria and Portugal (since 2024), Slovakia and Finland (since 2023), Italy (since 2022) and Hungary (since 2010). In other countries, such as Germany, the tide of right-wing populism has pushed mainstream parties rightwards.²⁰ These developments are reinforced by disinformation and propaganda, which has fuelled political division and polarization. In France far right politicians are likely to win the national elections in 2027. That could be a tipping point for Europe’s ability to function collectively due to France’s central role in the EU as a whole and specifically its influence over the EU’s policy towards Africa.

All Europe’s far right parties espouse anti-immigration rhetoric that frames the movement of people (from Africa) as an existential threat.²¹ Yet even here, far right policies are surprisingly diverse. While some far-right parties regard development cooperation and poverty reduction as a means to prevent migration, others seek to cut aid completely or use it as a lever to exert pressure on African governments to accept deportees.²² The British “Rwanda asylum plan” has sparked interest in other European countries including Germany, where policymakers seek similar arrangements with other African countries – largely to impress their domestic audiences.

European countries will continue to need resources (and labour) from Africa, even if far right parties are in government. Even if Europe’s far right parties disagree over geopolitical competition, competitiveness and diversification of value chains will remain important

¹⁹ Raphael Bossong and Nicolai von Ondarza, “Die Transformation zu einem illiberalen Europa”, in: Miranda Böttcher and Lars Brozus, eds., *Weltpolitische Unwägbarkeiten: Erkundungen der Zukunft*, SWP, May 2024, accessed 15 May 2024, 9.

²⁰ Max Becker and Nicolai von Ondarza, *Geostrategie von rechts außen: Wie sich EU-Gegner und Rechtsaußenparteien außen- und sicherheitspolitisch positionieren*, SWP, 2024, accessed 2 April 2024.

²¹ Luca Barana, Francesco Vigneri and Giulia Daga, *Policy Brief on the Impact of Narratives on EU Policymaking*, 2023, accessed 31 January 2024.

²² The Economist, *How Europe’s Fear of Migrants Came to Dominate its Foreign Policy*, 2024, accessed 2 April 2024.

foreign policy objectives. We suggest that far right parties in government will seek to emulate Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's approach, as presented in the "Mattei Plan" and the 2024 Italy-Africa summit. Meloni has significantly softened her rhetoric since assuming power, while demonstrating her ability to act independently and instrumentalizing the EU to further Italy's interest in access to energy and controlled labour migration.²³

African countries observe the current political developments in Europe with a degree of indifference. Autocratic leaders (for example in Egypt, Eritrea, Niger, Sudan and Tunisia) enjoy relative domestic autonomy, and have considerable freedom to strike economic, political and security deals with far-right European governments. Their perspective is informed by transactional pragmatism. They also prefer to negotiate economic and political agreements with individual European countries (rather than the EU collectively), as the power imbalance is smaller.

A larger group of African leaders, however, resents the far-right policies that target African citizens. Initiatives like Meloni's "Mattei Plan" confirm long-held suspicions in Africa that European decision-makers are quick to embrace impressive rhetoric ("a new chapter in Africa-Europe relations"; "cooperation between equals"), but fall short on implementation and follow-up. Migration is an explosive issue in African countries, not just in Europe. Bowing to European pressure to limit migration or accept involuntary repatriations exposes African governments to significant pressure from their voters. Moreover, European far right parties care little about debt restructuring, climate justice or reforming the development finance architecture, suggesting that while these areas of cooperation continue to exist formally they will have lost practical relevance by 2030.

While this is only one of many possible futures for Europe, it is by no means an unlikely scenario. It contrasts sharply with the EU's current foreign policy principles and self-identification as a normative actor seeking to influence the behaviour of other states. We will return to this point in the conclusions.

²³ Filippo Simonelli, Maria L. Fantappié and Leo Goretti, *The Italy-Africa Summit 2024 and the Mattei Plan: Towards Cooperation between Equals?* March 2024, accessed 2 April 2024.

Driven by Others: African Contestation of Eurocentric Diplomacy

African contestation of Eurocentric diplomacy is likely to be a defining feature of the relationship in 2030. Contestation describes an essentially oppositional posture. African countries challenge the meaning, implementation or existence of certain (discursive) norms espoused by Europe: the “standards of appropriate behaviour” that govern the relationship.²⁴

By 2030 repertoires of contestation will include popular protests against European policies, boycotts of European companies, anti-colonial electoral campaigns by populist politicians and diplomatic tussles, with corresponding fallout in bilateral relations. African-European alignment in multilateral forums will become the exception. For instance, the three African members of the UN Security Council (the A3) will vote increasingly with Russia and China; between 2001 and 2020 they voted with the United Kingdom and France more than 90 percent of the time.²⁵

Identity matters: the history of Africa-Europe relations informs attitudes and expectations, and especially political and moral judgements. Decolonisation discourses – hitherto confined to academic and activist niches – have already begun to enter the political sphere in Africa and Europe (although by 2030 they are still far from mainstream). The colonial legacy is being negotiated between Africa and Europe, for example in the context of returning artefacts like the Benin bronzes.²⁶ By 2030, European actors will have adapted certain formats (such as consultations) to permit greater African representation – but they will only include selected actors such as development-oriented civil society groups.

African governments will increasingly pursue assertive foreign policy approaches – towards Europe and more broadly. In some African countries, pushing back against Europe has proved to be a successful political strategy for generating domestic support. It is no longer limited to the Sahel or Francophone Africa, and has gained traction across the continent.²⁷ These developments were foreshadowed by the acrimonious African-European debates over the appropriate response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the fallout in the Sahel over European security interventions in the Sahel. In multilateral forums, Europe is seen as stubbornly defending the status quo. From that perspective, Europe will be blamed at least partly for the lack of meaningful outcomes from the UN Summit of the Future (2024) and the failure of other initiatives to enable greater African representation in international forums.

Issues of contestation have come to the fore in concert with Europe’s turn towards interest-driven Africa relations (see above). By 2030, most areas of Africa-Europe relations will have become politically contentious. The likelihood and focus of diplomatic escalation varies from region to region. Diplomatic conflicts over migration are likely with African

²⁴ Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “International Norm Dynamics and Political Change,” *International Organization*, 62, no. 4 (1998), 891.

²⁵ Priyal Singh and Gustavo De Carvalho, *Walking with the Bear? Russia and the A3 in the UN Security Council*, Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, 2021, 7.

²⁶ Kokou Azamede and Andreas Mehler, *Restitution als Chance zum Dialog zwischen “Zentrum” und “Peripherie”*, 23 October 2023, accessed 23 April 2024.

²⁷ Giovanni Carbone, Lucia Ragazzi and Paolo Magri, eds., *Is Africa Turning Against the West? 2023*, accessed 12 April 2024.

countries close to the Mediterranean and Europe. The rise of far-right populist movements in Europe will make the kind of liberal visa and migration policies Africans would like to see a remote prospect. In Southern Africa, contestation of Europe's normative authority is likely to increase, as evidenced by Namibia's anger over Germany's support for Israel at the International Court of Justice and Botswana's push-back against Germany over wildlife conservation.²⁸ Disputes are also likely over trade and climate justice, where African and European positions are not aligned. Another issue revolves around certain norms that are decried as Western paternalism in certain African countries. This applies in particular to LGBTQI+ rights, where there has been a backlash in Uganda and other African countries.

Contestation appears to be strongly driven by other trends. The more diverse Africa's spectrum of partners becomes, the more likely Africans are to criticize Europe's approach to cooperation (and in this case, vice versa too – the two trends reinforce each other). Contestation is more salient in the African societies worst affected by climate change and political instability. Currently, contestation appears to be an inevitable process where things can get only worse for Europe. Whether Europe can do anything to mitigate the impact of this trend and improve the relationship at the political and social levels should therefore be an important policy concern.

²⁸ Jasko Rust and Martina Schwikowski, *Namibia: Germany "Unable to Draw Lessons from History,"* Deutsche Welle, 24 January 2024, accessed 13 May 2024; Jacqueline Howard, *Botswana Threatens to Send 20,000 Elephants to Germany,* BBC, 3 April 2024, accessed 13 May 2024.

Conclusions

Europe-Africa relations are characterized by many uncertainties. This paper lays out what the relationship might look like if current trends continue. Events such as the UN vote on Russia's attack on Ukraine, the Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi, and public debates about returning colonial artefacts provide valuable insights into social and political dynamics that are likely to lead to major and lasting changes in the relationship. While social and political developments largely defy prediction, considering possible futures can help us to prepare for eventualities.

Multipolarity has different consequences for Africa and Europe. Does the growing presence of other external actors create political instability in Africa (as Russia's current activities in the Sahel would suggest, at least from a European perspective)? Or does it promote economic development and political stability, as African leaders would argue with regard to Chinese infrastructure investments? We suggest that multipolarity is too broad a concept on which to base diplomacy. European actors should not avoid the subject of risk, but they should acknowledge that the growing number of external actors in Africa has different implications for Africa and Europe.

The issue of justice will become more prominent in negotiations on climate change and energy-related value chains. The impact of climate change in Africa and Europe will be nowhere near peaking in 2030, nor will Africa's role in energy-related value chains have changed majorly. China's approach to renewables (and possibly growing Sino-American rivalry) will be more decisive for Africa's energy future than anything Europe might offer. However, European actors should be prepared for climate justice issues to be raised in multilateral negotiations, along with louder calls from Africa for accountability among the large emitters.²⁹

Foresight can provide valuable insights for European decision-making. *Backcasting* could be useful if European actors want to explore ways to step up their efforts to support African countries dealing with the impact of climate change. Rather than starting from today's policy trajectory (as we did in this foresight process), backcasting involves looking at the desired end point and then exploring how to get there (roadmap). This approach is helpful for identifying concrete decisions that need to be made, and for discovering whether today's policy goals are realistically achievable in a given timeframe (and in light of given trend interactions).

Dominant (anti-)migration narratives link demographics and political instability. Our workshop discussions indicate that more effective or strategic migration planning alone is unlikely to transform Europe-Africa relations. Anti-immigrant populism in Europe will continue, unaffected by the realities of migration. Initiatives to make the migration narrative more constructive would be helpful, however. There are plenty of examples where labour migration has powered growth and prosperity, including in Europe. Labour migration agreements, like the one between Kenya and Germany, could provide a point of reference for such initiatives (although the impacts in both countries are far from clear at this point).³⁰

Finally, we anticipate that the impact of growing African contestation of Eurocentric policies could be enormous. Again, foresight can be helpful. In order to prepare, European

²⁹ Jakkie Cilliers and Alize Le Roux, *An Urgent Call for a Global Carbon Tax Framework to Combat the Climate Crisis*, 2024, accessed 3 April 2024.

³⁰ Heiner Hoffmann and Khadija Farah, *Germany Seeks to Ramp Up Skilled Labor Migration from Kenya*, 2024, accessed 3 April 2024.

actors could engage in *surprise-sensitive forecasting*. Rather than looking for what is most likely to happen, this approach draws attention to dangerous possibilities that could become tipping points. *Wild card* events and trends are highly unlikely but would have a huge impact if they did occur.³¹ What would be the consequences, for example, of a mega-drought in Europe, a game-changing innovation in renewable energy, or a landmark ruling on colonial injustices?

European actors should also consider how to mitigate the impact of African contestation. If European and African actors managed to achieve a breakthrough on one of the highly charged issues (for example a mutually satisfactory migration deal, however unlikely that would appear) that could lead to a more positive mutual perception, and build confidence that consensus is possible and could also be sought in other areas of the relationship. Alternatively, Europe's consensus on shared values and beliefs (for example on LGBTQI+ rights) could splinter or change. Political developments point in this direction in Hungary, where Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has passed laws restricting public discourse and curtailing the legal rights of the LGBTQI+ community. Either is possible, but only the former would be compatible with Europe's self-image as a normative actor in foreign relations.

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³¹ Paul Saffo, *Six Rules for Effective Forecasting*, 2007, accessed 2 February 2024.

Annex 1: The Workshop Format

Preparatory Phase

Initially, in an online survey, the invited workshop participants identified factors they believed would be relevant to the course of Africa-Europe relations between now and 2030. To be included, a factor had to be potentially impactful and relatively certain. The facilitator used cluster analysis to group the factors, and conducted a further survey to assess and validate them. The survey results were presented during the workshop.

First Workshop

The first workshop identified the six most important (mega)trends from the consolidated list of 50 descriptors, and then split into six working groups (one for each trend). The working groups worked on the following questions: How do we expect the trends to manifest themselves in 2030? What indicators would suggest that real developments fit the projections? What alternative trajectories should be considered? Finally, the findings of the working groups were discussed and revised in plenary sessions.

Second Workshop

The second workshop considered the trend *system*. Six working groups discussed trend interactions: How do the six trends influence each other? Which are *drivers* of other trends? Which are more *driven* by others? A cross-impact matrix captured the expected interactions between trends (see below). Finally, the “driver/driven” constellations were discussed and revised in plenary sessions.

Third Workshop

The third and final workshop addressed six additional uncertainty factors that we believe will have a major impact on African-European relations but whose future long-term development (in contrast to the six main trends discussed in the previous workshops) is more uncertain. Three working groups each developed a set of four scenarios based on two of these uncertainties. Each working group then selected the scenario that it considered most relevant and developed a more comprehensive description by adding further and highly consistent assumptions for the year 2030. These “what if” scenarios were subsequently discussed and revised in plenary sessions. By taking into account the context/environment of the trend system, the scenarios helped to refine the understanding of trends developed in the previous workshops.

Cross-Impact Matrix

A cross-impact matrix illustrates the interactions among a set of factors – in our case, pairings between six (mega)trends. Participants were asked to assess the extent to which trends influence each other (on a scale of 0–3). The assessment concerned the direction and intensity of influence, not the normative desirability for Africa-Europe relations.

In our case, the cross-impact analysis helped to identify which trends are strong drivers, which *reinforce* other trends. These are the trends that reinforce the system as a whole and therefore deserve special attention.

Political instability and multipolarity emerged as strong drivers. For example, the more strongly African countries are affected by political instability, the less likely they are to play a larger role in energy-related value chains (rating: -2.5). The more external actors are active in Africa (multipolarity), the more likely it is that African actors will contest Eurocentric diplomacy (rating: +3). As these examples illustrate, the impact of trend interactions may be seen as positive or negative depending on the perspective.

Certain trends were found to be essentially disconnected. For example, demographic developments are not influenced by multipolarity or African contestation of Eurocentric diplomacy (rating: 0). This does not mean that demography is unimportant, just that the other trends do not reinforce or inhibit it.


Annex 2: Workshop Participants

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- Sarah Bernardy, German Federal Foreign Office
- Karoline Eickhoff, German Institute for International and Security Affairs
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- Stefan Friedrich, Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation
- Rose Jaji, German Institute of Development and Sustainability
- Catherina Hinz, Berlin Institute for Population and Development
- Wolfram Lacher, German Institute for International and Security Affairs
- Hangwei Li, German Institute of Development and Sustainability
- Henrik Maihack, Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation
- Ruth Müller, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
- Karen Pfundt, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
- Kagiso “TK” Pooe, University of the Witwatersrand
- Christoph Rendtorff, German Federal Foreign Office
- Yohannis Mulu Tessema, Water and Land Resource Center, Addis Ababa University
- Rainer Thiele, Kiel Institute for the World Economy
- Denis Tull, German Institute for International and Security Affairs
- Leonard von Galen, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
- Cobus von Staden, The China-Global South Project

Workshop facilitation: Johannes Gabriel, Foresight Intelligence

The workshop participants are not responsible for the content of this paper, which lies with the authors.

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