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# Africa in Sight: Strategising a renewed EU focus on the Continent

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## Abstract

Africa is (back) in sight. The belatedly formed coalition government in Germany, alongside the governments of France and the United Kingdom, has made 'Africa' a central focus of its political rhetoric. Numerous initiatives, from knowledge exchange to security exercises, stretch from the Sahel to South Africa. Translating these disparate endeavours into strategic policy – drawing on academic exchange to the possibilities embedded in, among others, PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) – can shape future perspectives and partnerships between the Europe, the European Union (EU) and Africa. This Policy Brief introduces key elements of the contemporary strategic context to offer a number of recommendations for a mutually useful re-engagement between the EU and the African Continent. Special emphasis is placed on human and health security.

## Context and Importance

Africa is (back) in sight. Current geopolitical, economic and social trends are upping the ante for European, principally French, German and British, engagement with Africa. Internal and external migration, burgeoning burdens of disease and demographic change, as well as innovative knowledge production, translation and translocation<sup>1</sup> are reshaping the African and the European Continents.

Seen from Europe, renewed strategic questions that emerge vis-à-vis Africa are: Is and how is African being conceived? Is Africa again a stumping ground for geopolitical ambitions? Is it a basket case to be rescued? Is it a security problem to be contained? To what end is Africa in renewed European sights? What is the strategy to get there? What are the challenges and opportunities with regard to human and health security in particular?

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Kitson, Alison, Alan Brook, Gill Harvey, Zoe Jordan, Rhianon Marshall, Rebekah O'Shea, and David Wilson (2018). 'Using Complexity and Network Concepts to Inform Healthcare Knowledge Translation,' *International Journal of Health Policy Management*, 7(3), pp. 231-243; and Stone, Diane (2016) 'Understanding the transfer of policy failure: bricolage, experimentalism and Translation,' *Policy & Politics* (Polity Press).

This Policy Brief introduces key elements of the contemporary strategic context to offer a number of recommendations for a mutually useful re-engagement between the EU, especially Germany as one of the two key European continental powers and one whose Africa-focus is less well known, and the African Continent. It identifies some of the comparative and competing aims in view of human and health security. Finally, the brief highlights a number of challenges that need to be addressed in any comprehensive strategic approach toward strategising mutually useful re-engagement between the EU and the African Continent.

### Critical Overview of Policies

Perpetuating incorrect perceptions, too many commentators continue to refer to Africa as a 'region' when it is a continent, and focus untoward attention on its many – real – challenges whereas neglecting to note that Africa boasts myriad opportunities. One key aim of a new Africa strategy that pivots **with** Africa<sup>2</sup> can be to burst these bubbles while acknowledging challenges and addressing opportunities.

'Africa' does not need to be discovered. It has been there all along. Nor does it need to be saved; not by well-meaning but misguided evangelicals, or by experts far removed. Despite claims of partnership, temporary contracts for African researchers in Europe and unclear aims of PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), whose aim may or may not be to give members a profile in Africa, tell another tale. Too many actors involved seem to regard much of Africa as a new arena to 'do health' or to 'do security' from the Sahel to South Africa.

The aims of additional, critical actors, including ministries of defence, development and foreign affairs, are uncoordinated and unclear.

This confused moment creates not only challenges but also opportunities. At a time when European countries themselves, including France, Germany and the UK, are grappling with challenges to that same rule-of-law domestically, it is all the more imperative to articulate a strategy not for but **with** Africa. This renders the assumptions of an aid-awaiting continent awash in crises and conflict mute. Such a new strategy must take a different premise altogether; a nuanced look at Africa analysed through SWOT – strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats – at the political, economic, social, policy and personal levels.

For example, the 2018 German Coalition Agreement makes multiple references to a new and improved relationship with Africa. It joins 'The Africa Strategy 2014-2018'<sup>3</sup> of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, as well as the so-called Marshall Plan for Africa.<sup>4</sup> Although human security, to which many African countries are explicitly committed<sup>5</sup>, is not mentioned by name, it emerges in the emphases on environmental, health, and water protections.

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<sup>2</sup> Agenda2016: The Africa We Want (2015). African Union Commission. Conception of a pivot with Africa attributed to Dr. Kaymarlin Govender, HEARD, during 3 April roundtable, 'Strategizing Human and Health Security,' convened by Annamarie Bindenagel Šehović at the University of Potsdam.

<sup>3</sup> The Africa Strategy 2014-2018: Africa as a Partner in Education and Research. Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Germany); see also German Federal Foreign Office. 'Global health policy, including Coordinator for the Foreign Policy Dimension of Global Health Issues, available at: [http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/GlobaleFragen/Gesundheit/Gesundheitspolitik\\_node.html](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/GlobaleFragen/Gesundheit/Gesundheitspolitik_node.html), and German Federal Foreign Office: German Partnership Program for Excellence in Biological and Health Security, available at: [http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/Friedenspolitik/Abroestung/BioChemie/Biosicherheit/Biosicherheit\\_node.html](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/Friedenspolitik/Abroestung/BioChemie/Biosicherheit/Biosicherheit_node.html), last accessed 24 April 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Africa and Europe – A new partnership for development, peace and a better future: Cornerstones of a Marshall Plan with Africa. (2017). Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (Germany). January.

<sup>5</sup> Cilliers, Jakkie. Human Security in Africa: A conceptual framework for review (2004). African Human Security Initiative. Compress.

Indeed, 2018 seems to be shaping up to prove a sea change. In academic and policy circles, there appears to be preparation for a pivot to Africa. Notwithstanding a raft of thinking shaping conceptions and exchanges with Africa, including the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA)'s Institute of African Affairs (IAA); and the Marshall Plan for Africa, there is a serious gap with reality. In the words of Professor Hussein Solomon at the University of the Free State in South Africa, 'they [Germans] have no clue what the hell is going on. Why because they are too conservative and stick to the status quo.'<sup>6</sup> Now is high time for a real look at Africa.

## Challenges

Challenges, notably to (human) security in Africa, as well as between Africa and Europe, are real. They can be categorised on the one hand as external challenges, including environmental degradation, water scarcity, and the burden of disease are realities. On the other hand, they can be categorised as structural challenges. The most important of these are the crises of unconsolidated states on the African Continent; and of over-institutionalised and over-reliant on multilateralism states on the European Continent. Taken together, these forces create a perfect storm of incapacity characterised by inapplicable or ineffective indecision-making. This is the opposite of the requisite multi-directional adaptability of local and global knowledge solutions to interconnected, even comparable problems.

The crucial differences between strategic planning on the African and European Continents are twofold: i) Local: most African states do not have the European luxury of responding in silos; they almost always have multiple overlapping crises to address simultaneously, insight and experience sorely needed in Europe. Most European states cannot imagine the orders of magnitude of these challenges – but the interconnected future is more likely than not to have such in store around the globe. ii) Global: institutionalism and multilateralism are under profound strain anywhere and everywhere. It is imperative that policy responses take this shifting landscape into account. Crisis management is reactive; it is time for strategy that prepares (resilient) responses with, within, beside and beyond state and state-based structures.

## Opportunities

Any successful strategy must admit that immigration / emigration are critical challenges confronting the relationship between Germany / Europe and Africa. Based on that admittance, goals including environmental, health and water provisions and protections become part of a long-term strategy at whose heart must lie human and health security for all. This is only possible with a pivot not just **to** but **with** Africa.

Identifying opportunities presupposes the perception that Africa possesses strengths, since these are often neglected. Though states are often seen as and indeed are the weak links in the chain of achievement of African goals and goals for Africa, select cases also reveal important insights: notably how to address and respond to multiple crises across policy silos and at the same time. European countries have often had the luxury of responding to one crisis after the next: not so in Africa; and possible not so in the European future. This is one critical cross-cutting area wherein knowledge and experience can be shared from Africa to Europe.

The essential questions to be answered are: whose security – Germany and European 'security' against immigration; and / or African security against emigration? Attendant to this question are two others focused on **human and health security**: what role do human and health (in)securities play on both sides of the immigration / emigration security debate?

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<sup>6</sup> Personal correspondence, April 2018.

Indeed, there is a special opportunity in a pivot with Africa with regard to human and health security. There is no globally accepted commitment to human security, nor a common definition of global health security. That means both are still up for debate and discussion. Any truly global definitions should balance provision and protection of human and health security (access) against risks and threat with the right to and realisation of the highest possible attainable standard of health for all.<sup>7</sup> Working towards a definition, what can be stated here is that human security has a long pedigree traceable from the evolution of the state<sup>8</sup> to the 1994 Human Development Report *Human Security Now*<sup>9</sup>, the 2003 Commission on Human Security Report, and beyond. Likewise, health security<sup>10</sup> has a history prior to the Ebola outbreak that erupted in West Africa in December 2013<sup>11</sup>. Tracing these histories is a lesson in exchange of experience – notably on the rights-based discourse that also paved the way from HIV to Ebola response; on the integration of immigrants including into local and regional health systems; on de-militarisation and de-radicalisation initiatives; on environmental, renewable energy and water (re)clamation programs – that need to be further explored.

## Conclusion: Exploring responses

Turning a renewed eye on Africa – Africa in sight – into a viable strategy for the mutual benefit of the EU and African Continents, requires a pivot *with* Africa. A strategy must be oriented towards what Africa(ns) want to become. Given the continent's diversity, any such vision will be local, as well as regional, more so perhaps than national. Plotting the strategic journey to get there will reveal how France and Germany – and Europe – help to achieve those goals; short of wholesale emigration: a boogeyman that should be addressed head-on. If a pivot with Africa is to focus on human and health security, this Policy Brief offers a number of elements that are crucial in exploring flexible, robust and sustainable and responses to the challenges *and* the opportunities ahead.

**First**, Europe, led by France and the UK, and increasingly including Germany, can clearly define its goals for engagement with Africa engagements separately – complementarily – and in cooperation. There is a deep desire for this. Whereas it is clear – if not always agreeable – what the Nordic countries, France, the UK, and the US focus on in their aid to Africa, this is notably not with the case with regard to Germany. While the embedded approach has been well-received, 2018 is seeing increasing pressure for a clear mission statement.<sup>12</sup>

**Second**, France and Germany, within Europe, anticipating BREXIT, can open a more direct portal to hear and decide whether and how to respond to requests from across Africa, and at what level: in the public or private spheres. One clarion call is for European pressure on African governments to adhere to and enforce the rule-of-law. This could be Europe's – via its leaders France and Germany – central focus once more, applicable both at home and abroad.

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<sup>7</sup> Declaration of Alma-Ata (1978); Constitution of the World Health Organization (1948).

<sup>8</sup> See also Šehović, Annamarie Bindenagel. (2014.) *HIV/AIDS and the South African State: The Responsibility to Respond*. (Ashgate Global Health); Šehović, Annamarie Bindenagel (2017). Identifying and Addressing the Governance Accountability Problem (GAP), *Global Public Health* (September); Šehović, Annamarie Bindenagel (2018). *Re-imagining State and Human Security Beyond Borders*. Palgrave.

<sup>9</sup> UNDP (1994). *Human Security Now*; see also Frenk, Julio, Gomez-Dantes, Octavio and Suerie Moon (2014). 'From sovereignty to solidarity: a renewed concept for global health for an era of complex interdependence,' *The Lancet* 383: 94-97; Pablos-Méndez, Ariel and Mario C. Raviglione (2018). A New World Health Era, *Global Health: Science and Practice* 6(1): 8-16 (March); Fauci A (2007). The expanding global health agenda: a welcome development. *Nature Medicine* Oct; 13(10); Fidler, David, "Architecture Amidst Anarchy: Global Health's Quest for Governance" (2007). *Articles by Maurer Faculty*. 329. <http://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/facpub/329>.

<sup>10</sup> Africa Health Strategy: 2007-2015: Strengthening of Health Systems for Equity and Development in Africa,' Third Session of the African Union Conference of Ministers of Health, Johannesburg, South Africa, 9-13 April 2007.

<sup>11</sup> See also World Health Organization: Health Security and Emergency Response, available at: [http://www.searo.who.int/topics/health\\_security/en/](http://www.searo.who.int/topics/health_security/en/), last accessed 24 April 2018; Enemark, Christian (2017). Ebola, Disease Control, and the Security Council: from Securitizing to Securing Circulation. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue 2 (April), p. 137-149; Elbe, Stefan (2010). *Security and Global Health*. Cambridge: Polity.

<sup>12</sup> Conversation with Dr. K. Govender, director of HEARD, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, 3 April 2018.

**Third**, necessarily academically, scientifically and politically, attuned and attached to the first two recommendations, is the analysis, articulation and acculturation of vehicles on **how** evidence, knowledge and experience, including of the adoption and adaptation of the rights-based discourse<sup>13</sup> that paved the way from HIV to Ebola response can be applied North-South, South-South and South-North. This course, through which the experience of advocacy for research, development, provision and access to HIV treatment – and prevention – smoothed the argument for biomedical and socio-cultural responses to Ebola, can exemplify how to prepare for and response to future eruptions of both new and re-emerging outbreaks.

Similarly, **fourth**, evidence and experience of integrating migrants into local and regional health systems, a key 21<sup>st</sup> century challenge, is a critical exchange that can take place North-South, South-South and South-North.

**Fifth**, **de**-securitisation initiatives that integrate health with environmental, renewable energy and water (re)clamation programs in policy and practice need to be explored and both evolved and devolved in an African-European strategy identifying, establishing and sustaining human security.

A pivot **with** Africa would acknowledge the challenges **and** opportunities facing both it and the European Continent. It would open up new perspectives in innovative knowledge production, translation and translocation and facilitate moves away from crisis management towards strategic planning for mutual human and health security.

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<sup>13</sup> Winter, Sebastian F. and Winter Stefan F. 2018. Human Dignity as Leading Principle in Public Health Ethics: A Multi-Case Analysis of 21<sup>st</sup> Century German Health Policy Decisions. *International Journal of Health Policy Management*, 7(3), pp. 210-224.

## About the author



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