DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR AFRICA: EU AND GCC CONVERGENCES

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1. Introduction

There exists a growing consensus in the European Union (EU) that its relationship with Africa is of the utmost importance to the bloc’s future, notably in response to the pressing issues of migration, security, the climate crisis and sustainable development. Yet, despite its proximity and long historical ties to Africa, Europe has experienced a significant decline in its political and economic clout on the continent in favour of new entrants that have provided African leaders with tangible alternatives to the European partnership. The EU nonetheless seems to have acknowledged the urge to re-define its relations with Africa, as witnessed by the von der Leyen Commission’s intention to make Africa a priority on its ambitious geopolitical agenda. Considering that it has lost influence on the continent against international players, to China in particular, and given the increasing reticence of many African states to accept the conditionalities associated with the EU partnership, it is unlikely that Europe will manage to regain a leading position on its own. Consequently, the EU should seek to build alliances with potential partners to establish a more sustainable relationship with Africa.

In the last two decades, the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have significantly expanded their influence economically, politically and diplomatically on the continent. This paper argues that the GCC States are one of the better positioned international actors to help Europe maintain and enhance its position in Africa. The paper seeks to expand on that argument and to explore the potential of such a collaboration.

The first section of this paper concentrates on the strategy of the new EU leadership and explores the obstacles to the overhaul of the EU-Africa partnership. The second section examines the current GCC States’ approach to Africa across the political, economic and security fields, with an emphasis on the strategic importance of the Horn of Africa. The third section then determines the main opportunities for cooperation and synergies between the GCC and the EU, to address the issues of peace and security, economic recovery, as well as stabilisation and sustainable development.

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2. The EU-Africa Partnership

1) Africa and the Geopolitical Ambitions of the New Commission

Despite their historical and geographic proximity, Europe and Africa have seen their relations deteriorate in recent years due to a dichotomy of visions as to the nature of their partnership and an inability to move from rhetoric to action. The refugee crisis, in particular, has had a profound impact on the EU-Africa partnership. Although it precipitated the interest of certain European countries in Africa, this crisis also led to directing much of the EU’s African agenda towards security, in particular by reducing the spectrum of collaboration between both entities to concentrate efforts solely on containing the migration crisis and its associated security challenges. This in turn led to a neglect of the implementation of ambitious joint projects devised in the past.

On the surface Africa and Europe acknowledge that they need each other to tackle the many challenges ahead, from migration, economic growth and the climate crisis to security in the EU’s Southern Neighbourhood. Even before taking office, the new President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, had stressed the urgency of a total reset in EU-Africa relations, calling for a “partnership of equals.” She emphasised that relations with Africa were the priority of her commission by visiting Addis Ababa, the seat of the African Union’s (AU) headquarters, in December 2019, her first trip as President outside the EU.

The European call to build a “partnership of equals” is however not new and already dominated the Joint Africa EU Strategy (JAES) that was developed in 2007. Despite the good intentions that led to its creation and outside a few fruitful cooperation projects in the field of peace and security, the JAES has produced few tangible results. Instead the strategy has been replaced by short-term initiatives, based on a reactive and short-term approach, to deal with the crises that have emerged in the last decade. The call for more equality also dominated the work of von der Leyen’s predecessor, Jean-Claude Juncker, who launched the "Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable..."
Investment and Jobs” in 2018, an initiative meant to meet the African states’ intention to move away from an aid-focused partnership to an investment-based approach. Yet even this initiative suffered from a fatal flaw: it was put together without prior consultation with the African stakeholders and thus found little resonance from its anticipated target audience.⁴

President von der Leyen’s "African ambitions" are in direct correlation with her aspiration to lead a "geopolitical" Commission capable of defending the interests of all EU member states.⁵ Making the EU a leader on the international political scene requires consolidating as well as diversifying the EU’s relationships with its allies. To achieve this objective, the von der Leyen Commission recognises the prominent role of foreign policy and the need to strengthen European leadership in international fora, ambitions which are themselves dependent on a strengthened unity between member states, in particular in the aftermath of Brexit.⁶ For Europe, Africa stands as the perfect testing ground for these ambitions.

The importance given to a renewed partnership with Africa was exemplified by the publication of a joint communication, “Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa,” in March 2020. Even though it is not a fully-fledged strategy, this document that was endorsed by Ursula von der Leyen and Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the EU for Foreign and Security Policy, represents a first step towards a new, jointly developed strategy ahead of the EU-AU Summit⁷. The joint communication integrates both the interests of Africa and Europe by building on the aspirations detailed in the AU’s Agenda 2063 and focusing on the 5 traditional areas the EU wishes to develop, i.e.: green transition and energy, digital transformation, sustainable growth and jobs, peace and governance and migration and mobility.⁸ The joint communication also welcomes and supports the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), which will enhance intra-African and Africa-Europe trade, with the long-term prospect of the establishment of a continent-to-continent free-trade area.⁹ Further information on the AU’s Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA can be found in Box 1.

Overall, this suggests a first step towards an interest-driven partnership that is able to conciliate diverging views and priorities through negotiation. Nevertheless, a partnership of equals is far from a given. The stigma associated with the colonial past and the fact that the AU is still largely dependent on European donations for its budget make this prospect particularly complex to achieve.¹⁰

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¹⁴ Medinilla and Teevan, op.cit., p. 3.
¹⁵ The Commission’s ambitions are reflected in particular in the development of various projects (e.g.: EU Green Deal, EU’s Digital Vision, EU Industrial Strategy), whose implementations will nevertheless depend on its ability to allocate them the proper economic and financial means. The COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the postponement of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) negotiations, has slowed down the implementation of such projects (“Delivering on the political priorities,” European Commission, accessed 25 May 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/what-european-commission-does/delivering-political-priorities_en ).
¹⁶ Medinilla and Teevan, op.cit., p. 2.
¹⁷ Owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Summit, which was to be held in Brussels in October 2020, was postponed to 2021.
²⁰ “Aid is the second, but arguably the largest, source of AU funding. Almost thirty traditional and emerging donors provide money, technical assistance, and in-kind donations. The EU is the biggest donor and has the most comprehensive package of aid modalities or tools and programmes. Together with a few European member states, it is the prime funder and backer of the peace support operations and of the AUC’s programme budget.” (K. Kesa Pharatlhatlhe, and J. Vanheukelom, “Financing the African Union: On mindsets and money,” ECDPM, 2019, p. 5, https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/DP240-Financing-the-African-Union-on-mindsets-and-money.pdf).
President von der Leyen’s interest in Africa is designed to meet the growing EU member states’ interest in the continent. Migration, the African demography challenge, as well as the refugee and climate crises have led many European states to acknowledge the importance of Africa in many, if not all, European political and economic issues. The growing importance of Africa for the EU member states is not only reflected at the institutional level but also at the national level: some European countries with no real historic ties with the continent have started to develop their own African strategies, which could make the Commission’s task of finding a common European vision more difficult. Germany, for instance, launched its own African strategy, the “Marshall Plan with Africa,” in 2017.15

**Box 1**

**Agenda 2063**

Launched in 2013, the AU’s Agenda 2063 is an ambitious roadmap aimed at supporting sustainable social and economic development on the African continent over 50 years (2013-2063). The project was born out of the pan-African will to re-define the continent’s development trajectory in order to re-focus priorities on continental and regional integration, good governance and peace and security. To achieve these objectives, Agenda 2063 builds on and seeks to expand the implementation of previous pan-African projects11 that have been developed, to ensure inclusive and sustainable social and economic development. The creation of a single passport, an African Air Transport Market (SAATM), the implementation of the free movement of people, as well as the AfCFTA, are some of the flagship projects of Agenda 2063.12

**The AfCFTA**

The African Continental Free Trade Agreement is a continent-wide project for the creation of a free trade area. The idea was first formulated during the 18th ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the AU held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in January 2012. The project aims to create a single continental market for goods and services, to implement the free movement of people and investments and to pave the way for the establishment of a customs union. It was agreed that the project would be implemented by 2017. Owing to several drawbacks, however, it did not see daylight at the time.

If it was to be implemented, this free trade area would represent a market of 1.2 billion people, with an associated gross domestic product (GDP) of USD 3.4 billion. It would also be the largest free trade area in the world since the creation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in terms of the number of its member states. Based on estimates from the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the free trade area has the potential to boost intra-African trade by 52% by eliminating import taxes.

After a multitude of setbacks and negotiation cycles, in 2020 the project was close to completion. The agreement establishing the AfCFTA entered into force on 30 May 2019 for the 24 countries that had already deposited their instruments of ratification13. To date 30 countries have both signed and approved the ratification of the AfCFTA. Out of the 55 AU member states, only Eritrea has not yet signed the agreement. The operational phase was launched on 7 July 2019 during the 12th extraordinary session of the Assembly of the AU in Niamey, Niger. Trade exchanges were to start on 1 July 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they were postponed indefinitely.14

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12 Ibid.
15 Medinilla and Teevan, op.cit., p. 4.
Despite the initial closure to international affairs in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU has rapidly reiterated its commitment to its partnership with Africa. While hefty cuts in the financial packages for sub-Saharan Africa were expected in the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) negotiations, it appears that more aid is to be provided to the continent in the hope of alleviating some of the negative impacts linked to the pandemic. A budget of EUR 132.6 billion is to be allocated for external action, an increase of EUR 16.5 billion in comparison with the proposal put forward by Charles Michel, President of the European Council, in February 2020.

During the EU Summit held in Brussels in July 2020, the EU restated its intention to strengthen its continent-to-continent cooperation with the AU. Furthermore, the EU Commission has amended its initial proposal for the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument\(^\text{16}\) (NDICI), as adopted in 2018, with the aim of better improving the support to the Western Balkans, the EU’s wider Neighbourhood and Sub-Saharan Africa in their fight against COVID-19 and to encourage further their recovery from the economic and social impacts of the pandemic. In November 2019 a total budget of EUR 89.2 billion was to be allocated to the NDICI, EUR 32 billion of which is for sub-Saharan Africa alone\(^\text{17}\). It is expected that this amount will be further increased in accordance with the new aid to be provided in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU has determined that the External Action Guarantee and the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus will serve as the best instruments in this endeavour. Under the NDICI, the EU aims to increase its support to include economic growth and development projects, as well as African-led initiatives in peace and security.\(^\text{18}\)

In July 2020 the EU also announced the launch of a EUR 10.4 million programme aimed at promoting the use of digital solutions in the fight against COVID-19 in Africa and at improving the resilience of local health and education systems, notably by enhancing the quality of digital education.\(^\text{19}\)

2) Obstacles to the Africa-Europe Relationship

Despite the rhetoric of the new EU leadership, the EU needs to consider a number of obstacles that continue to prevent a more comprehensive EU-Africa partnership from emerging.

Since the end of the colonial era, Europe’s relations with Africa have been based on numerous institutional frameworks (e.g.: Yaoundé Conventions, Lomé Conventions, the Cotonou Partnership Agreement with the Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific States – see Box 2). These frameworks have led to a partnership essentially based on development aid, thereby encouraging a donor-recipient dynamic through which the political actions of African states were to a large extent dictated by Europe and other international donors (e.g. the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank). This asymmetry is also reflected on the one hand by the willingness of European actors to prioritise their own interests in the development of an African strategy and on the other by the lack of power of action available to African institutions, including the AU, in the development of coherent policies to deal with external actors.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^\text{16}\) The NDIC serves as the main instrument for EU cooperation and development with partner countries. In comparison with the initial proposal put forward in 2018, the new MFF proposal increases the instrument funds by over 8%. “Questions and answers: the EU budget for external action in the next Multiannual Financial Framework,” European Commission, 2 June 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_988.


Calls for Enhanced African Integration and the Paradox of the ACP

Relations between Europe and Africa are not solely institutionalised through the EU-AU partnership. Relations between the two continents are also governed by the Cotonou Agreement, a treaty between the EU, 48 African states and the Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (so-called "ACP countries"), which expires in 2020.\textsuperscript{21} Although it has facilitated certain cooperation projects, this institutional framework appears obsolete, mainly due to the growing importance of the AU as a pan-African body.\textsuperscript{22} Yet, despite its obsolete nature, negotiations are currently underway for its renewal.\textsuperscript{23} The current proposal is based on a separation of the three zones (A, C and P) into three distinct regional pillars. Paradoxically, maintaining such competing structures to the AU undermines the process of enhanced continental integration that the EU and many African partners are calling for. This paradox is also found in the EU’s Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA)\textsuperscript{24} that are directly derived from the Cotonou Agreement. These initiatives, intended to strengthen EU-ACP trade, were designed to meet specific regional realities.\textsuperscript{25}

Beyond the asymmetry in the definition of this partnership, another difficulty lies in the poor knowledge of the African agenda displayed by some EU member states, particularly on issues pertaining to the African continental integration process.\textsuperscript{26} While the AU and the EU enjoy similar structures, the role assigned to the integration process differs on both sides of the Mediterranean. Integration in Africa still relies to a large extent on a deliberative, intergovernmental basis without supranational institutions having any real decision-making powers. As a result, an agreement that was signed during an EU-AU Summit does not necessarily translate into an implemented agreement unless decided otherwise by the African governments themselves. To overcome these obstacles and to achieve tangible results, the EU needs to re-examine its Eurocentric approach and consider the institutional particularities of Africa.

African leaders often complain that the EU does not consider the continent’s interests when conceiving its African policies. Among the many criticisms formulated by African countries lie the EU’s restrictive conditions tied to its investment vehicles, which are tailor-made to meet the interests of EU member states, without leaving much room for the development of domestic African industries. This is exemplified by the fact that the majority of African exports to Europe remain raw commodities. This dichotomy in trading and investment privileges is acknowledged in the joint communication, which stresses that this could play to the disadvantage of Europe: "Africa's potential attracts increased interest from many players on the world scene. This is a welcome development, as it increases Africa's options and creates room for synergies. It also means that Europe, with the EU and its Member States working together in unison, must adapt the way it engages with Africa."\textsuperscript{27}
On the African side too there exists a clear understanding that Africa needs to develop a more ambitious negotiating position. While the EU is stressing its outreach, Africa, courted by an ever-increasing number of international players, has been seeking to diversify its partnerships with foreign powers.\textsuperscript{28} While they appreciate Europe being Africa's largest trading partner\textsuperscript{29} and a main supporter of its development and security agendas, African leaders have shown their support for a re-definition of the partnership, stressing the importance of moving beyond the donor-recipient relationship towards a mutual interests-based form of cooperation.\textsuperscript{30}

The EU also continues to suffer internally from the dichotomy of multi-lateral vs. bi-lateral approaches that characterises much of its foreign policy. This lack of unity is clearly reflected in its Africa policy. Although it projects the evident intent to give an image of unity and cohesion during the EU's participation in international summits and despite the role of the institutions in the development of a new EU-AU partnership, EU member states pursue their own bilateral relations often in contradiction to stated EU policy. France and the United Kingdom (UK), for instance, often demonstrated a will to conduct their own affairs without necessarily coordinating their approaches within the European context.\textsuperscript{31} This discrepancy is most evident in Libya where the EU has lost credibility in the eyes of its African counterparts due to its inability to demonstrate unity in the face of the crises that have erupted in the Southern neighbourhood.\textsuperscript{32}

Finally, there is the growing competition over Africa. Despite its new geopolitical ambitions, Europe, increasingly isolated in its defence of a rules-based international order and confronted by the expansionist threats of Russia, the rise of China and the disengagement of the US, has seen its influence and power of action questioned by the advent of a multipolar world. This observation is even more striking in Africa where it has lost diplomatic and political clout to China, Russia and the Gulf States in all areas.\textsuperscript{33} An area of particular concern is the Horn of Africa that has witnessed a significant increase in foreign military deployments in recent years, including those of China, Egypt, Turkey, the United States (US), Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These deployments include newly established security installations and a build-up of naval forces.\textsuperscript{34}

Alongside their critical roles in international trade, the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandab and the Gulf of Aden serve as entry points to Africa, especially for the actors of the Middle East and Far-East Asia.

Yet, presently, the EU's foreign policy is not adapted to the increasingly aggressive, multipolar competition. In the end, being able to operationalise the geopolitical ambitions of the new European Commission can only be achieved if the member states agree on a more unified EU foreign policy and if they manage to strengthen their positions in the few areas where they have a competitive advantage and develop their expertise in the areas where they lag behind. Building a

\textsuperscript{28} Over the past decade, 45 countries on the African continent have established defence-technology ties with China. 19 armament deals have been signed between Russia and African countries since 2014 while, over the last decade, Africa's trade with Turkey and Indonesia has more than tripled. France, which was the third largest commercial partner of Africa in 2006, was the seventh in 2018. “The new scramble for Africa,” The Economist, 7 March 2018, https://www.economist.com/leaders/2019/03/07/the-new-scramble-for-africa. See also Medinilla and Teevan, op.cit., p. 1.

\textsuperscript{29} Europe remains Africa’s main trading partner, the main source of “remittances”, the main source of development aid and the main source of FDI (Jean Bossuyt, “Can EU-Africa relations be deepened: A perspective on power relations, interests and incentives,” op.cit., p.1).


\textsuperscript{32} See Medinilla and Teevan, op.cit.

\textsuperscript{33} Bossuyt, “Can EU-Africa relations be deepened: A perspective on power relations, interests and incentives,” op.cit., p. 7.

new partnership with Africa is not to remain a mere intent. To succeed in a world of “geostrategic competition”, Europe must make Africa its priority. As Josep Borrell put it in 2020, “the EU must frame a new, integrated strategy for and with Africa, our sister continent. We need to think big and use our policies on trade, innovation, climate change, cyberspace, security, investment and migration to give substance to our rhetoric about being equal partners.”

3. The African Strategy of the Gulf States

Over the past decades, the GCC States have sought to increase their influence and to enhance their status on the international political stage. To achieve this objective they have resorted to various strategies, ranging from investments and the organisation of major international events (e.g.: Dubai Expo 2020, FIFA World Cup 2022) to humanitarian aid. The advent of a multipolar world, the growing importance of Asia and the waning interest of the US in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region further precipitated the emergence of this new dynamic and consolidated the will of the GCC States to diversify their economic and security partnerships and become rising players in regional affairs. Moreover, the “Arab Spring” and the subsequent collapse of long-standing authoritarian regimes emphasised the need for a more pro-active approach in foreign policy that could help Arab Gulf States to stem the spread of instability and bring about developments unfolding to their advantage.

In accordance with this new paradigm, the GCC States have recently taken on a more ambitious diplomatic role in Africa. While the GCC States have long been engaged in North Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea and the Western Indian Ocean, in the framework of the global competition for increased influence across the region, are now at the core of the Gulf States’ approach to Africa. The Horn of Africa is of significant strategic importance to the Gulf States, notably Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which are particularly concerned with protecting their trade routes and ensuring the stability of their direct neighbourhoods. With the war in Yemen, the security interests of Saudi Arabia and the UAE in this part of the world have been further underlined.

The GCC’s growing interest in Africa is primarily motivated by strategic intentions and is not only limited to the Horn region. Despite its colonial past, Africa is regarded by the Gulf States as a
relatively unexploited strategic region where they can play diplomatic and geopolitical roles significant enough to reinforce their status as mediators and their “powers of influence” in international fora. As the GCC States redefine their national security interests, they also view Africa as part of their extended neighbourhood and as an integral part of the expanding security paradigm of the Arabian Peninsula. Similarly, the Gulf States, which do not bear the weight of a recent colonial past, tend to be seen by African leaders as more neutral partners than their European counterparts. The following paragraphs explore the strategy of the GCC States in Africa through three intertwined dimensions: diplomacy, economy and security.

1) Diplomatic Policy

In the last few years, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar have dramatically increased their diplomatic presence on the continent, opening a significant number of new embassies in countries located south of the Sahara. This has allowed the GCC States to protect their interests better as well as to maintain, diversify and strengthen their diplomatic ties with local leaderships. The institutionalisation of diplomatic ties between the GCC States and African countries is however not solely based on embassy work. At the end of the third "Arab-Africa Summit" held in Kuwait City in 2013, the "Kuwait Declaration" was adopted, which reiterated the commitment of Arab and African leaders to cooperate in the fields of peace and security, development and investments. In 2015 the Commissioner for Peace and Security to the AU travelled to Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE to discuss cooperation in addressing regional conflicts and common challenges, in particular terrorism and extremism. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the AU and the UAE during the last leg of the visit to formalise their partnership in peace and security.

Alongside growing institutional ties, the GCC States have also involved themselves in numerous conflicts and disputes in the region. In 2010 Qatar was appointed representative of the Arab League in Sudan to help to bring an end to the escalation of tensions between the Sudanese government and the Darfur rebels and it successfully facilitated the signing of a cease-fire agreement. More recently, Saudi Arabia played a leading role in the resolution of the conflict in which Eritrea opposed Ethiopia from 1998 to 2018. Although a first peace treaty was signed in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, on 9 July 2018, this treaty was “consolidated” on 16 September 2018 with the signing of the “Jeddah Peace Agreement” during a meeting organised under the auspices of King Salman of Saudi Arabia. The choice of Jeddah as the setting to ratify the agreement, bringing an end to a 20-year-long conflict, was no coincidence: Saudi Arabia played a prominent role in the reconciliation, in particular by facilitating diplomatic discussions between both neighbours. The UAE played an equally important - although more discreet - part in this diplomatic affair. Both Saudi Arabia and the UAE also played pivotal roles in getting the United Nations (UN) sanctions against Eritrea lifted. This, together with the fact that the UAE maintained diplomatic ties with Eritrea when the country was isolated by the international community, greatly facilitated the success of their mediation roles.

Saudi Arabia has further demonstrated the increasing importance it attaches to African affairs by creating a dedicated diplomatic role, Secretary of State for African Affairs, in 2018. Furthermore,
to enhance its clout in the Red Sea, the Kingdom initiated the creation of the Red Sea Cooperation Council with Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, Egypt, Yemen and Jordan the following year. This initiative aims, among other objectives, to ensure the security of international navigation and is meant to emphasise the sovereignty of the member states by stressing that they should be the sole guarantors of the safety of the Red Sea routes at a time of an increasing presence of international vessels in this highly strategic location.

Overall, the enhanced diplomatic role of the GCC in the Horn of Africa is driven by the acknowledgement that, to prevent instability reaching their shores, the GCC States need to secure their direct neighbourhood. By helping to shape political transitions and to devise stabilisation strategies, the GCC States ensure their own stability.

2) Economic Diplomacy

Between 2000 and 2017, the GCC States invested no less than USD 13 billion in the Horn of Africa and the neighbouring countries, notably in Sudan and Ethiopia. The investments were mostly made in the industrial and agricultural sectors. To consolidate their positions in Africa, the Gulf States have adopted an "economic diplomacy" strategy: in exchange for financial contributions to the national budgets, the beneficiary pledges closer coordination on issues deemed important to the individual Gulf partner.

Trade relations between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula are millennia-long. However, the Gulf countries have shown a keener interest in investment opportunities on the African continent since 2007. After the increase in food prices that followed the 2007-2008 financial crisis, the GCC acknowledged the need to secure its access to affordable staple foods. Owing to the inhospitable peculiarities of their climate, the GCC States have struggled to grow and produce most of their food resources. The majority of the GCC States import 60 to 80% of their food supplies. To overcome the challenge of price volatility and the disruption of food supplies, they have sought to acquire arable lands in foreign countries as an alternative to grow their own agricultural produce, alongside the implementation of technology-based strategies to grow supplies locally. Consequently, farmlands are commonly purchased by the GCC States overseas. Africa, which is home to 60% of the planet’s unexploited arable lands and enjoys good proximity to the Gulf, serves as an ideal location to secure their food and water supplies. However, the GCC States’ acquisition of African lands has not come without its critics, as they often target states with their own existing food security issues and concerns over the breach of land ownership rights, which has posed evident reputational and operational risks to the GCC.

Aside from the food security strategy, the GCC countries were further attracted by the opportunities offered by a growing middle class and exceptional economic growth rates, at a time when they aspired to diversify their economies away from oil. Africa is home to some of the fastest growing economies in the world. By entering the competition early, the GCC investors (i.e.: sovereign wealth funds and the private sector) secured a comfortable position and a sizeable market share against future entrants. Furthermore, strategically located between Africa and Asia, the GCC States have understood that they can greatly benefit from the numerous exchanges between the two continents, especially those with China, which in 2018 alone invested USD 60 billion in Africa.
The UAE became the second largest investor in Africa behind China in 2016. By investing in the service sector and in infrastructure projects to help connect African consumers to international markets, the UAE has devised ambitious economic projects that could pave the way to sizeable returns and a clear competitive advantage. In 2007 DP World, the UAE ports operator, signed a 25-year Concession Agreement with the government of Senegal to operate the existing container terminal in its capital, Dakar, and pledged USD 534 million to upgrade the port. In 2020 DP World announced its participation in the “Port du Futur” project, an initiative to build a new port and economic zone in Senegal. In Somaliland the UAE is seeking to make the Port of Berbera the largest maritime hub in the Horn of Africa. This has benefits for Ethiopia, as the port has become its main outlet for its foreign trade, following the signing of an exclusive agreement with Somaliland. The UAE also serves as a major hub for African companies seeking to access the European and Asian markets, due to its own developed infrastructure in ports and airports.

Other GCC States have also broadened their economic reach into Africa. In 2018 Saudi Arabia pledged no less than USD 10 billion to the energy sector of South Africa. The state-owned chemical company, SABIC, has also increased its footprint on the continent by opening subsidiaries in South Africa, Morocco and Tunisia over the past decade. Acwa Power, a privately-owned company, invested in multiple solar power stations in Egypt, Morocco and South Africa. Kuwait has invested several million dollars in infrastructure projects through its Fund for Arab Economic Development in most African countries. Qatar invested in banking, mining and oil exploration in Kenya and other countries in East and Southern Africa while the Qatar Investment Authority plans to invest further in tourism and agricultural projects across the continent. Gulf air carriers have also increased their reach in Africa. As early as 2013 Etihad Airways struck a commercial partnership with Kenya Airways to gain access to 27 additional destinations across the Kenyan carrier’s African network. In 2019 Emirates Airlines followed suit and announced its intention to expand its operations on the continent, notably in West Africa.

The pursuit of economic opportunities is on par with the GCC countries’ diplomatic and geostrategic objectives: by increasing their economic presence in Africa, they also strengthen their political and diplomatic influence on the continent. This is evidenced by Saudi Arabia’s endeavour to curb the Iranian influence in East Africa. For example, Sudan agreed to sever diplomatic relations with Iran in 2016, following Saudi Arabia’s promise to invest massively in the country. Eritrea consented to the same policy shift, despite its long ties with the regime of Tehran, in exchange for financial support. Saudi Arabia also deposited no less than USD 1 billion into the Central Bank of Sudan after the government signed an agreement with Riyadh, promising to contribute a contingent of 1,000 soldiers to the fight against the Houthi rebels in Yemen in 2015. Three years later, following the renewal of this military contribution and the signing of new cooperation agreements, Saudi Arabia made new investment promises.

15 Todman, op.cit.
51 Todman, op.cit.
56 Auge, op. cit.
57 Detailed tables of these investments can be found on the website of the Kuwait Fund: https://www.kuwait-fund.org/en/web/kfund/table.
61 Todman, op.cit.
3) Security Policy

Alongside their diplomatic and economic presence, the Gulf States have also increased their stakes in security and have acquired a more significant ability to act in African political affairs. This is reflected in a number of instances of military cooperation. The GCC States were notably granted authorisations to build their first military bases abroad on the continent: Eritrea authorised the UAE to build a military base on its territory, while Djibouti consented to host Saudi Arabia’s first military installation abroad. The GCC also became involved in Africa through peacekeeping or counter-terrorism operations. One mechanism is the “Islamic Military Counter-terrorism Coalition,” launched by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman in 2016. On its launch Riyadh announced that it would provide logistical and training support to the Somali army. The creation of this coalition, half of whose members are sub-Saharan African countries, had a significant influence on the dynamics of military cooperation and in intelligence sharing between African countries and the GCC. As for the UAE, it provided logistical assistance and training programmes to Somali troops from 2014 to 2018 as part of an operation launched by the AU to combat an Islamist insurgency. From 2008 to 2017 Qatar also deployed peacekeeping forces to the border between Eritrea and Djibouti.

Although often seen as a monolithic block, it has to be mentioned that the GCC States often pursue contrary objectives. While the UAE and Saudi Arabia are seeking to increase their influence in the Horn of Africa, Libya and the Sahel to limit the further expansion of political Islam, Qatar appears to be working in the opposite direction and to be trying to consolidate for itself a position within the broader Islamist movement. These opposite trajectories have inevitable consequences in the internal affairs of the states concerned, particularly in weaker states like Somalia where Qatar has been accused of destabilising the country by facilitating the accession to power of politicians close to Islamist circles. A dispute between Abu Dhabi and Mogadishu also erupted in 2018 after Somali authorities seized almost USD 10 million in cash from a UAE flight, a sum that was purportedly intended to fund military training in the country but that Mogadishu viewed as potentially a financial means to support local opposition. The incident led to the severance of relations between both countries and precipitated the UAE’s increased support to Somaliland and other local federal states.

Despite these setbacks, the Arab Gulf countries remain significant international players in Africa. Against the backdrop of fierce international competition, the GCC States stand out by their readiness to deploy as many resources as necessary, the pugnacity they demonstrate in pursuing their interests and their rapid reactions and adaptations to changes on the ground. In the new scramble for Africa, they have expanded their positions, although they nonetheless also face several traditional players and new entrants that, over time, could prove to be either enemies or allies.

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62 Somaliland had initially authorised the UAE to build a military base near its Port of Berbera. However, it allegedly pedalled back and the project seems to have been aborted. Instead the UAE will be building a civilian airport. Michael Horton, “Somaliland Breaks Ranks and Defies China,” The American Conservative, 15 July 2020, https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/somaliland-breaks-ranks-and-defies-china/.
64 Todman, op.cit.
65 Mouton, op.cit.
67 Todman, op.cit.
4. Synergies: Where the EU and GCC Meet

With the EU pursuing a “partnership of equals” with Africa and parts of Africa moving into the focal point of the GCC States, it is possible to explore the main opportunities for cooperation and synergies between the GCC and the EU and how a collaboration between both partners could help to address the issues of economic recovery, stabilisation and sustainable development and peace and security. Each of these sections is covered below.

1) Economic Synergies

Following a period of political and social instability that hampered the growth of its economies, Africa started witnessing spectacular changes at the dawn of the 21st century. With rapid population growth, a fast-expanding middle-class, an abundance of natural resources and massive infrastructure projects underway, Africa offers a myriad of opportunities to global investors. It has enjoyed steady economic growth for the past two decades and thirty states on the continent are presently considered to be middle or high-income economies. In 2018 six of the ten fastest growing economies worldwide were to be found in Africa. The continent also boasts the youngest population in the world.

However, despite positive changes, Africa still faces several challenges that it will not be able to address on its own. A third of the continent’s population still lives below the poverty line, inequality remains rampant and a sizeable proportion of the youth has little to no prospect of employment. Estimates based on current trends suggest that 376 million people on the continent will still be suffering from poverty by 2030, a gloomy projection worsened by the threats of the climate crisis, debt distress, insecurity and the COVID-19 pandemic. Studies also indicate that Africa will need to create no fewer than 18 million jobs annually if it is to absorb the growing population into the labour force. To address its many issues Africa will need to develop its private

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68 According to UN estimates, 25% of the global population will be African by 2050.
sector, support small and medium-sized businesses\textsuperscript{72} and encourage intra-African trade. However, despite its evident need for investments, Africa's development remains largely unfunded. Together with Central Asian transition economies, the continent receives fewer Foreign Direct Investments\textsuperscript{73} (FDI) than any other emerging region in the world.\textsuperscript{74} Africa is in constant need of FDI to create jobs and finance the development of high technologies, roads, infrastructure and other facilities.\textsuperscript{75} This offers a myriad of opportunities for an EU-GCC partnership.

\textbf{The New EU Instruments}

In their joint communication on Africa, Ursula von der Leyen and Josep Borrell reiterated the need to improve the business environment and investment climate, boost research and innovation, create decent jobs and enhance value addition through sustainable investments, as well as to maximise the benefits of regional economic integration and trade.\textsuperscript{76} To retain its economic leverage on the continent, contribute to its development and stand a chance against rivals eager to maximise their economic stakes in Africa's booming industries, Europe has acknowledged that it needs to do away with its aid-based approach and to embrace an investment-based strategy. The EU has thus developed new instruments that make European investment money more flexible and attractive to African stakeholders.

By increasing collaboration in the area of investment mobilisation, Africa and Europe meet halfway, fulfilling mutual interests in economic transformation for increased prosperity and stability. To boost investments in Africa, the EU has adopted the External Investment Plan (EIP). This instrument was conceived to help Africa and countries in the EU’s neighbourhood to meet the UN’s sustainable development goals (SDGs) by 2030, create decent jobs, promote inclusive and sustainable development, and facilitate investments through private capital.\textsuperscript{77} By providing risk-sharing financing solutions, including subsidies and guarantees, the EIP aims to attract risk-averse investors and gather together enough capital to compete with China.\textsuperscript{78} The EIP can support a wide range of projects, provided that they generate “measurable, economic, social and environmental benefits.” The supported sectors include sustainable energy, water, transport, information and communication technologies, environmental protection, the sustainable use of natural resources, sustainable agriculture and the green and blue economies, social infrastructure, health and investments in human capital.\textsuperscript{79} Unlike the traditional financing instruments of the EU, the EIP, which was designed to be demand-driven to ensure competitiveness in local buyers’ markets, comes with fewer strings attached. It also provides technical assistance and a policy dialogue to improve the business environment.

Large-scale investment projects in Africa have the potential to impact the development of the continent significantly. However, they suffer from a chronic lack of financing on the part of

\textsuperscript{72} Unlike what one would expect, smaller projects are as attractive-if not more so-as large-scale ones. As Hamad Buamim, President of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce, put it in 2015, ‘given the risks associated with mega-projects in several African markets, smaller-scale projects have become increasingly more appealing, especially in the energy industry.’ Oxford Business Group, “Drivers and change in GCC-Africa investment,” https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/analysis/stable-supply-drivers-and-change-gcc-africa-investment.

\textsuperscript{73} In 2019, Africa received USD 49 billion in FDI while Europe and Developing Asia received USD 274 and 473 billion respectively. “Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) global inflows in 2018 and 2019, by region,” Statista, accessed 1 September 2020, https://www.statista.com/statistics/963936/fdi-global-inflows-region/.


\textsuperscript{75} Oxford Business Group, op.cit.


\textsuperscript{78} Gavas and Timmis, op.cit.

European development agencies and private investors because of the perceived, associated risks and limited risk-adjusted returns. In 2019 the European Investment Bank pledged EUR 3 billion to development projects in Africa. However, in 2015 the UN Economic Commission for Africa already estimated that, for infrastructure developments alone, USD 93 billion would be needed annually, thereby stressing the need for additional financial resources to ensure infrastructure development. With the EIP, the EU can bring about real change, provided it manages to use the instrument properly and in cooperation with the right partners. The EU would thus greatly benefit from collaborating with international actors that already enjoy significant economic clout on the continent. Furthermore, despite its new rhetoric and financing instruments, the EU still lacks an entrepreneurial mind-set in its approach to Africa. This is where the GCC States are well positioned to work together with the EU for the continent. They first increased their economic footprints, primarily through state-led investment initiatives that targeted the agricultural sector (i.e.: lands and strategic commodity production). However, they rapidly acknowledged the tremendous commercial opportunities on the continent and consequently significantly boosted their investments in other industries over the course of the past 10 years. This was facilitated by a strong competitive advantage based on extensive expertise in the many booming industries on the continent. As a result and taken together, the EU and the GCC should explore collaborations in the following areas: infrastructure, agriculture, the digital industry and the promotion of free trade.

**Infrastructure**

Owing to rapid urbanisation and population growth, Africa faces a housing crisis. According to estimates, there is a shortfall of 51 million housing units in sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, the property sector witnesses much interest from foreign investors. The GCC investors, notably in the UAE, have sensed the many opportunities to be seized in Africa and have started to invest significantly in property projects to diversify their portfolios. Rapid urbanisation also entails a critical need for enhanced infrastructure. Unlike China the GCC States have only modestly invested in the manufacturing industries, owing to the risks linked to poor infrastructure, complex bureaucracy and political instability and have instead concentrated their economic interests in the service sector (e.g.: banking, retail and telecommunications). Similar concerns have hampered massive investments in infrastructure projects. Consequently, the GCC States would greatly benefit from a financing instrument such as the EIP, which incentivises public-private partnerships through risk-sharing guarantees. Such a collaboration could also allow for fairer competition against China. While Europe may still lag behind in terms of investment quantity, it can nonetheless compete with Beijing on the quality side. China has attracted much criticism for burdening governments with unsustainable debt and for focusing on industries that lead to few job-creation opportunities. Europe, in partnership with the GCC States, can position itself as an economic partner able to provide quality infrastructure that raises environmental and labour standards. This would lead to healthier markets, which would in turn create more job opportunities.

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82 Currently, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the property sector is difficult to measure. While a significant decline in investment projects is expected, the impact could also prove temporary.
84 They have invested in manufacturing industries in Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Senegal and South Africa.
85 Tadesse Shiferaw, op.cit., p. 12.
86 Gavas and Timmis, op.cit.
Agriculture

With 70% of the population in sub-Saharan Africa still working in the agricultural sector, agro-business is incontestably the biggest industry on the continent. Over the years many international players (e.g.: China, India, GCC States and Europe) have invested in large-scale agricultural projects in several African countries as part of their food-security strategies. Yet, these investments have provided limited added value for the local economies and have proved unable to bring about positive change for the populations. The GCC’s approach to agro-investments, often dubbed “land grabbing”, has not been spared criticism.

However, there appears to be an opening in the wall that could help the GCC States to transform radically their approach to the industry. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed additional stresses on the food supplies of the GCC and revived the fears of a potential shortage, due to the resulting border closures and transportation disruptions. Bearing in mind the vulnerabilities associated with food-dependency, many GCC States have started devising technology-based strategies to harvest the desert. This has proved successful in some respects (e.g.: Saudi Arabia currently stands as the world’s largest date producer). Furthermore, in April 2020, the GCC approved a proposal put forward by Kuwait to work towards a joint food security network that would help alleviate the potential impact of the pandemic on food supplies. In accordance with the proposal, all GCC States consented to implement a system that ensures the adequate distribution of food supplies among all six countries. However, despite the current efforts, it is unlikely that they will do away with their dependency on international trade mechanisms in the foreseeable future. Consequently, the GCC countries would greatly benefit from collaborating with the EU to embrace a more environment-friendly approach that would also respect the rights of the local populations.

Both the EU and the GCC States import raw commodities from Africa. By sharing their expertise and knowledge in agro-industrial development, they could contribute to the enhanced industrialisation of the sector and help to alleviate

poverty, while also increasing the margins of potential returns in time. Investments in agriculture should favour intra-African food value chains and environment-friendly projects developed at a smaller scale, rather than maintaining current patterns of raw commodity exports and large-scale-farming investments. Considering the increasing importance of sustainability and bio-agriculture, the EU and the GCC States should also consider the growing demand for organic produce. This would be an opportunity to support the work of local farmers and encourage the development of a greener industry. By using the EU task force’s work on sustainable and responsible investments in agro-business, the GCC States can also regain the image of responsible investors in Africa.

**The Digital Industry**

To ensure the sustainable development of Africa, the creation of jobs and enhanced employment prospects for the young, the EU has emphasised the importance of the digital industry. The GCC States have similarly demonstrated their will to embrace the 4th Industrial Revolution fully. In the 2018 World Digital Competitiveness Index, the UAE ranked first in the Arab region, ahead of several European states, including Germany, France, Spain and Portugal. The country has also conceived an ambitious strategy to develop the sector of artificial intelligence (AI) and to build the associated supportive infrastructure. The EU is still struggling to join the global race for AI dominance. It would thus benefit from collaborating with the GCC States to develop the necessary infrastructure that would ensure the deployment of the latest digital technologies in Africa. The GCC could again use the guarantees offered by the EIP to alleviate the risks associated with such investments.

**Promoting the AfCFTA**

If it is successfully implemented, the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA) will foster economies of scale that will in turn lead to greater returns for private investors. By increasing intra-African trade, AfCFTA will help to create more job opportunities that will lead to enhanced economic growth. The EU enjoys a long legacy in integration processes and it should support the implementation of AfCFTA by sharing its expertise with the African states. By enhancing intra-African trade, attracting more private investors and enhancing the business environment in Africa, the implementation of AfCFTA would also pave the way to a continent-to-continent free trade zone, which could ultimately allow the EU to compete with China’s OBOR. For this to be achieved, however, AfCFTA requires significant public investments. By partnering up with the GCC States, the EU could help the AU to mobilise sufficient investments to ensure the success of the project. The GCC would benefit here from such collaboration through increased economic opportunities. This is particularly true for companies such as DP World that has already massively invested in the creation of hubs able to connect worldwide markets.

**2) Stabilisation and Sustainable Development**

Since the end of the colonial era, EU-Africa relations have essentially been based on development programmes or the provision of humanitarian aid, often associated with conditionalities of good governance and democratisation. However, despite the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness,

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90 Medinilla and Teevan, op.cit., p. 5.
the aid programmes developed by the EU, as well as the concessional loans granted to the African governments, have failed to bring about tangible outcomes in Africa. In some instances, the policies defended by the EU and other international organisations (e.g.: The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) have fuelled more injustice, poverty and instability, notably through the implementation of the structural adjustment plans or the display of rent-seeking behaviour on the part of some African leaderships. Furthermore, the Euro-centric approach of the EU, which often demonstrates a lack of knowledge and understanding of local environments, has failed to bring about the social justice and good governance it consistently advocates.

There is a global consensus that certain African states (e.g.: Libya, Mali and Burkina Faso) require real stabilisation strategies. However, the opinions of internal and external actors differ as to the content and scope of these strategies. In recent years the global influence of the West has largely declined, notably due to the advent of a multipolar world in which they are no longer the only voices heard. The stabilisation strategies advocated by Western states, which are based on democratisation processes to be implemented as a prerequisite for political stability, have also shown their limits. This approach, often supported by the EU owing to its historical attachment to democratic values, is also increasingly rejected by African states that regard it as a reflection of Europe’s political paternalism. Similarly, an approach based solely on the provision of humanitarian aid rarely leads to conclusive results on the ground: the many aid programmes developed for the countries in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel have failed to realise lasting stability or to increase the EU’s influence in the region. Therefore, a different strategy must be conceived.

While the West has focused on the importance of the rule of law and human rights, often imposing conditionalities on African leaders in exchange for aid, the UAE and Saudi Arabia have given excessive priority to stability and power control at the expense of well thought-out strategies destined to ensure sustainable development. Egypt is a case in point: Saudi Arabia and the UAE have provided tremendous support to President al-Sisi’s consolidation of power. However, despite his power control and the stability that has ensued in the country, al-Sisi has largely proven unable to provide Egypt with a sustainable development strategy.

What is required therefore is a new approach, coupling stabilisation efforts and sustainable development. A possibility lies in the development of a mechanism that considers the entire conflict management cycle, in which the dimensions of military stabilisation and security, coupled with development objectives, economic recovery, good governance and justice and reconciliation are all mobilised. Although it is still a matter of controversy, there is a growing consensus that economic stability is necessary to put an end to inequalities and the lack of prosperity that are frequent causes of instability and conflict. In turn, instability and wars aggravate economic decline and consequently contribute to social crises, increasing the vulnerability of the poorest layers of society. In this context it is not enough to base stabilisation strategies on democratisation or the mere provision of development aid, but rather they must include tangible economic steps aimed, among other things, at creating employment opportunities, particularly for the young, and transforming the informal sector into a market that contributes to national economic development. These strategies are generally based on an in-depth knowledge of local dynamics and they favour targeted, small-scale projects. These unique elements often ensure that the trust of local populations is earned and kept. Ultimately, if applied holistically, such an approach could allow stabilisation and development policies to stand the test of time and thereby ensure their sustainability. The case study of Rwanda (see box) provides a case example to be considered.

93 The GCC States tend to see development aid through an economic lens: aid is provided bilaterally in the form of loans (rather than grants). Tadesse Shiferaw, op.cit., p. 12.
Case Study: Rwanda - Tight Political Grip to Ensure Stability and Economic Recovery

At the end of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda was a devastated country and a profoundly divided nation with development indicators at the lowest level. Presently, the country is regarded as one of the most developed and prosperous ones on the African continent. This is due to the implementation of a holistic reform and development process, called Vision 2020, with the aim of achieving sustainable and inclusive growth, more justice and good governance. President Paul Kagame has also integrated Agenda 2063 and the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into his development strategy. Rwanda’s leadership has built its stabilisation and development strategy across several sectors:

- Human capital development: Rwanda has focused on quality education and training, devising up-to-date and relevant school curricula and promoting science, technology and innovation. In 2020 Rwanda had near-universal primary school enrolment.

- Inclusive economic growth: the economy of Rwanda has enjoyed sustainable economic growth since the end of the 1994 genocide. The country intends to become a middle-income country by 2035 and a high-income country by 2050. This objective is to be achieved through seven-year plans tailored to help the country to achieve the UN’s SDGs. Rwanda has also implemented protection schemes for the poorest layers of society.

- Climate change and environment protection: Rwanda intends to become a low carbon economy by 2050 and created the FONERWA, a green fund, in 2012 to achieve this objective.

- Good governance and Justice: Rwanda has also based its development strategy on accountability and enhanced citizens’ participation through locally-devised solutions and innovations such as the Rwanda Governance Scorecard and the Citizen Report Card.

Rwanda’s visionary leadership has also made a point to ensure that women, youth and citizens with disabilities are involved in all levels of decision making (e.g.: since the parliamentary elections of September 2018, women make up 64% of the seats). Rwanda nonetheless still faces several challenges it needs to address. Over the course of the past two decades, its development strategy has been based on public investments financed by external actors through grants and concessional and non-concessional borrowing. This state-led model has allowed Rwanda to achieve impressive development rates, but has limited the prospects of growth, as demonstrated by the economic slowdown in 2016 and 2017. To ensure sustainable economic growth, Rwanda will need to attract more FDI to allow the private sector to play a bigger role in its economic development. The Rwandan model evidently suffers many flaws. However, it still represents an excellent example of a holistic development approach that combines political stability with successful economic renewal.

Consequently, there is a clear opportunity for greater convergence on this front between the EU and GCC approaches. By joining forces, both entities could conceive a strategy that would favour both stability and sustainable development, instead of trading one off against the other. By showing more flexibility on the normative approach and by acknowledging that stability brought about by excessive political control does not necessarily translate into more prosperity, the EU and the GCC States can conceive stabilisation and development strategies that are adapted to local realities.

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96 According to the World Bank estimates, poverty decreased from 59 to 39% between 2001 and 2014. However, the numbers stagnated between 2014 and 2017. See World Bank, op.cit.
98 World Bank, op.cit.
There are many opportunities for cooperation with the Arab Gulf States, which advocate stabilisation strategies built across sectors to ensure security and economic recovery. The EU leadership has devised several financing instruments (e.g.: the EIP) to do away with the loan-based approach and embrace an investment-based partnership. The GCC could benefit from such instruments and alleviate some risks associated with investing in countries in post-conflict situations (e.g.: Libya, Eritrea). The GCC States also have a long experience in devising development strategies in emerging countries. The EU could thus benefit from their experience in conceiving strategies that consider the peculiarities of the local environments. By collaborating with the GCC in stabilisation initiatives, the EU could not only reap some investment benefits but also increase its diplomatic and political clout in emerging countries on the continent.

Furthermore, the EU has a vested interest in ensuring the development of nations located in its direct neighbourhood, in order to mitigate potential migration flows. Egypt, in particular, stands as a case in point. The North African nation already hosts a large number of refugees from neighbouring countries (e.g.: Iraq, Syria, Yemen) and is seen in Brussels as an EU ally in the fight against irregular migration. However, in light of the demographic pressure Egypt is experiencing and the modest job prospects of its population, the country is also subject to continued domestic unrest, which could cause instability and subsequently result in increased migration flows to Europe. This prospect stands in direct conflict with the political and economic interests of both the EU and the GCC States. The latter have a clear vested interest in the stability of Egypt, to ensure their security and economic priorities. Since President al-Sisi’s rise to power in 2014, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE have stood among the main creditors ensuring the stability of Egypt through cash deposits and investments in the national economy. Given the limited interest of the current Egyptian leadership in the AU and since Egypt does not aspire to reach a common position on migration with its African counterparts, the EU is unlikely to reach an agreement on the issue with Egypt through the pan-African organisation. Consequently, by consolidating its partnership with the GCC, the EU would be in a better position to increase its political and economic clout in the North African country. Egypt, like

“...The GCC states also have a long experience in devising development strategies in emerging countries. The EU could thus benefit from their experience in conceiving strategies that consider the peculiarities of the local environments.”

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the Maghreb states, also has every interest in collaborating with the EU. If the migration issue is not addressed, North African countries will remain transit hubs, with the risk of eventually becoming destination countries. Egypt, which already struggles to manage a population of 100 million inhabitants, would be overwhelmed by an uncontrollable demographic surplus. Consequently, even though the GCC States are not directly impacted by the issue of migration, they have a vested interest in ensuring the development of a nation whose demography could prove an obstacle to its long-term stability and thereby greatly impact its political and economic objectives.

3) Peace and Security

If it is to fulfil its ambition to become a main geopolitical actor on the international political stage and play a pivotal role in the new multipolar world order, the EU needs to become a stronger security actor, able to mobilise hard power and deploy military assistance in its vicinity and further afield. Over the past years the AU has sought to increase its stake in crisis management in Africa, with more successes in certain countries (e.g.: Sudan, Central African Republic) than others (e.g.: Libya). The AU has also developed continental capabilities to respond to conflicts arising in African states, an initiative supported by the EU through the African Peace Facility (APF). Both Europe and Africa have a vested interest in working together for peace and security. However, considering its new geopolitical ambitions and the frequent divergences of views and interests with the AU, the EU needs to look beyond the EU-AU partnership to increase its clout in peace and security affairs on the continent and to seek collaboration opportunities with other foreign actors.

The GCC States’ engagement in peace and security operations on the continent has taken different forms. There were instances of institutional cooperation between the GCC and the AU and the operations conducted by individual GCC States in the context of their national foreign policies, mainly in the Horn of Africa.

Enhanced collaboration with the GCC States would allow the EU to defend its military operations along the littoral of certain East African states that have resented the increased presence of foreign powers in their territorial waters. By creating the Red Sea Cooperation Council, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, Egypt, Yemen and Jordan have sought to emphasise their sovereignty by stressing that they should be the sole guarantors of the safety of the Red Sea routes. The EU could increase its clout in the region through a fruitful collaboration with this organisation. By joining as an observer, the EU could increase the international legitimacy of the organisation and help acknowledge the sovereignty of the Red Sea actors on the maritime routes. In return, the EU could gain access to intelligence and increase its influence with the member states.

In Sudan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the EU have stated their wish to support an orderly and stable transition. The EU has pledged USD 867 million in humanitarian and development aid, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE have together pledged USD 3 billion in aid, including a deposit of USD 500 million into Sudan’s central bank, in the first major publicly announced assistance offered to the country in several years. According to estimates, the country would need USD 8 billion to recover from the political turmoil that ravaged the economy. The Prime Minister of Sudan, Abdalla Hamdok, has expressed the wish to transform the economy into a production-based economy, able to export added-value goods, away from an import and consumption-based model. This shift

101 Medinilla and Teevan, op.cit., p. 11.
in economic pattern will require large sums of FDI to help develop the needed infrastructure and allow for the industrialisation of the larger sectors, including agriculture. This could serve as another cooperation opportunity between the GCC States and the EU.105

The EU and the GCC could also collaborate to help defuse the dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia regarding the Great Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD). Both African countries have been entangled in this dispute since the project was revealed in 2011. While Ethiopia is to start filling the almost completed dam in 2020, Egypt has vowed to use “all means available” to secure its water supply, stressing that the contention could dangerously jeopardise international peace and security. To date, the AU’s involvement in the dispute has been limited (South Africa, which chairs the pan-African organisation in 2020, has acted as an observer during the negotiations).106 This could serve as an opening for the EU to increase its engagement in the dispute as a mediator. To succeed in this endeavour, the EU has every interest in leveraging the clout of the GCC States in Ethiopia and Egypt. Both partners could attempt to help Egypt and Ethiopia find common ground in conceiving a wider development plan for the Nile that would benefit all the countries linked to this cross-border water source.

Away from the Horn of Africa, North Africa and the Sahel are other areas of potential cooperation. In Libya, the EU and AU have been unable to collaborate on a strategy to restore peace and security. The diverging views and conflicting interests of the member states of both organisations have played a great part in their inability to conceive a successful stabilisation strategy.107 Yet, despite the current deadlock there appears to be an opening in the wall. In June 2020 the Arab League, and by extension the GCC States, endorsed the Cairo Declaration, which largely builds on the conclusions drawn up during the Berlin Conference in January of the same year. This suggests there exists a consensus between the EU and the Arab League as to the main parameters necessary to achieve a lasting peace settlement in Libya.

Consequently, the EU and the GCC should use their influence in international fora to build on the momentum of the Cairo Declaration and the ceasefire declaration announced on 21 August 2020 by the Government of National Accord and the Head of the Eastern Libyan parliament, Aguila Saleh. This opens the door for a political process to take place. In addition, the EU and the GCC should further support the mediation efforts initiated by the UN by pushing for the appointment of a new Special UN Representative following the resignation of Ghassan Salame in early 2020.

In the Sahel and West Africa, the UAE and Saudi Arabia have increased their military presence and they have demonstrated their will to position themselves as serious partners in the international fight against terrorism and radicalisation. In 2017 Saudi Arabia and the UAE pledged USD 118 million and USD 35.4 million respectively to help counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel region108. In July 2020 the UAE and Saudi Arabia pledged additional financial aid to support the new coalition of European and West African allies set up by France to fight extremism in the Sahel.109 Besides financial support the UAE also opened a military academy in Mauritania in 2017 to help train soldiers to fight terrorism in the region.110 Combating extremism facilitates the

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107 Some European states (e.g.: the Netherlands, Finland) favour an EU-AU collaboration while others (e.g.: France) call for a bilateral approach outside the framework of the AU-EU partnership. In Africa, there are clear diverging views and conflicting interests as some states benefit from EU funds directly related to the conflict (e.g.: border management to prevent irregular migration). Medina and Teevan, op.cit., p. 12.
108 Todman, op.cit.
establishment of lasting development and stabilisation policies, which in turn improves all the economic parameters necessary to attract international investors. This would directly benefit the economic diplomacy strategy of the GCC countries.

By partnering up with the GCC the EU not only helps to secure the maritime roads that ensure its access to energy, but also enhances its political clout and foreign policy soft and hard powers on the continent. Such a collaboration also contributes to increasing political stability and security, which are necessary to improve the overall economic environment on the continent.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations: The Importance of Seeking Relevant Collaboration Opportunities

The present analysis suggests that there exists a substantial degree of convergence of interests between the EU and the GCC that should be explored and taken advantage of. On the one hand the GCC States are expanding their clout in Africa to the extent they have become actors whose role cannot be overlooked. The EU should acknowledge this fact. On the other hand the EU and GCC share numerous similar interests when it comes to Africa, including the need for sustainable stabilisation strategies on the political, economic and security fronts. Taken together the future of the African continent should become a permanent focal point of the EU-GCC common agenda. The following are the main aspects around which such a common agenda could be formed.

i. If it is to remain a relevant economic partner in Africa and stand a chance against international actors, the EU urgently needs to revise its development approach and economic model. The introduction of financial instruments such as the EIP represents an excellent first step in this direction. However, to help to mobilise public-private investment partnerships the EU would greatly benefit from looking beyond its internal financing mechanisms to collaborate with international actors that already enjoy economic clout and clear competitive advantages in the continent’s booming industries. The GCC States, which have occasionally proven risk-averse and reticent to invest in large-scale infrastructure projects, could benefit from the guarantees of the EIP instrument. By sharing knowledge, expertise and risks in the development of energy infrastructures and the creation of worldwide hubs, a collaboration between the GCC and the EU in Africa could also potentially threaten the hegemony of China.

ii. The EU’s long legacy in defending the values of democracy, human rights, good governance and social security makes Europe stand out as a global player able to offer Africa a holistic development partnership and able to transcend the mere financier-borrower alliance. However, the EU also needs to acknowledge that it cannot replicate its model and values in
Africa. Consequently, it would also benefit from collaborating with international actors that embrace alternate stabilisation strategies that encompass economic and sustainable developments based on locally-conceived instruments. The GCC States are in a position to fill this role, considering the limited diverging interests they have with the EU in Africa. Such economy-oriented strategies, based on the allocation of loans rather than grants, would also help the EU do away with the conditionality-based approach that has been deeply resented by African states and has led to their seeking alternative partnerships with other international actors.

iii. Considering the many criticisms formulated by African states against European trade policies that favour the bloc’s economic interests at the expense of the industrialisation of the continent’s economies, the EU needs to regain the trust of its African counterparts through win-win partnerships. The GCC States can prove excellent partners in this endeavour. To maintain their image of “attractive partners” and consequently secure their economic interests in an environment of increasingly aggressive international competition, the GCC States need to enhance their engagements with African governments, away from a pure investment-based approach. To achieve their respective objectives the EU and the GCC could put an end to the controversies surrounding their exports of raw commodities by collaborating with local communities affected by international players’ investments in large-scale intensive farming projects and by encouraging a greener and more responsible approach that would consider the needs of the local populations. In this endeavour the GCC would greatly benefit from the EU’s experience in building people-to-people ties that could be based on knowledge exchanges and enhanced relations with civil societies.

iv. Considering the many economic difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the EU should increase its stake in the health sector in Africa. During the pandemic the GCC States were among the international players that sent aid to Africa. The UAE has also announced a collaboration with Israel to defeat the COVID-19 pandemic with AI. Should these efforts to combat the virus through research and innovation prove successful, the EU could benefit from a collaboration with the GCC in the distribution of the medical solutions to Africa, paving the way to enhanced collaboration in the sector. This could also serve as an entry point to collaboration opportunities in the development of the digital industry.

v. Given its diverging views with the AU on migration, the EU is unlikely to tackle the issue effectively through its partnership with the pan-African organisation in the foreseeable future. The EU has also had little success in stemming irregular migration flows using financial deals with African transit countries. Furthermore, its traditional, aid-based approach has failed to bring stability to its direct neighbourhood. Consequently, the EU should work across several areas to ensure that the migration issue is addressed properly. By collaborating with the GCC States, the EU can leverage the GCC’s rising influence across the economic, political and security dimensions. It could stabilise its southern neighbourhood by defending a peaceful settlement in Libya, in collaboration with the GCC, and it could benefit from the subsequent economic opportunities in the country by helping to mobilise investments to contribute to the reconstruction efforts. This would also prove a rewarding collaboration opportunity for both the EU and the GCC.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the re-orientation of the political agendas of international players on domestic issues, the new EU leadership has reiterated its intention to work closely with Africa to address the common challenges ahead. If anything, the pandemic could prove a boon, as the EU could increase its footprint in Africa at a time when rivals will once again turn their backs on the continent due to other pressing domestic issues. Yet, if it is to realise its geopolitical ambitions in Africa the EU urgently needs to change its approach across all dimensions. Presently, the EU is
too weak and fragmented to compete against all its rivals on its own. Consequently, it would need to enhance its position by leveraging the clout of potential partners. Here the GCC States are in a unique position to fill this role, considering the limited diverging interests and the many opportunities that can arise from such a partnership. Economically, both the EU and the GCC could benefit from a partnership that would exploit synergies to increase their respective stakes in industries that can consolidate their competitive advantage in the long-term against traditional players and new entrants. Politically, such a collaboration could help find lasting solutions to the pressing migration issue and provide devastated countries with holistic development strategies. The partnership also represents a unique opportunity for the GCC States to consolidate their status in international fora and to fulfil their ambitions to be recognised as indispensable mediators in regional affairs.