

AFRICA DEMANDS OF EUROPE THE RIGHT TO SURVIVE

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A Chinese friend once told me a saying from his country that I have born in mind ever since: "Of 30 ways to escape a danger, running away is the best". Many of us run away from their homeland, they run and run, but they never find a home again. And yet, every man yearns for a secure life in his native land.

In our continent, Africa, waves of refugees are flooding the borders of foreign states. Let me talk mainly about that continent, as over 40 per cent of the refugees from the Southern hemisphere are concentrated there. The number of refugees in Africa jumped from 300,000 in 1960, the year in which many countries gained their independence, to three million in 1980. In 1990, almost five million people inside Africa were already running away from one country to another, simply because they wanted to survive.

The catastrophic situation in most African states justifies an often asked question: Why are these Africans not able to establish law and order in their own states and to ensure prosperity for their people, given that they gained independence 30 years ago and are now taking responsibility for their own affairs?

By answering this fundamental question, we will understand the reasons for flight in this continent of the South. Let me set out a main thesis. Since the middle of the 19th century, Africa has been mainly a structural concept of Europe and its allies. If we sum it up, Africa is a European concept. This means that since the massive encounter with Europe in the 19th century, Africans have not succeeded in making Africa a concept of the Africans. In other words: Since the colonial invasion, which itself was a logical consequence of more than three hundred years of transatlantic slave trade, the Africans have essentially failed to shaking off the European domination of Africa and to take the fate of their continent in their own hands. In discussing this thesis, I will here limit myself to talking about economic policies.

I am well aware that many Europeans react with irritation when it comes to analysing the historical causes of the catastrophic situation in Africa. The European media and the general public tend to show a clear preference for analyses limited to the 30 years of independence of African countries and emphasising the allegedly better economic situation under the era of colonialism, as compared with today. Alternatively, they prefer analyses that simply blame the continent's problems on its elites. Such explanations are inadequate, because they are incomplete and - consciously or not - shy away from a comprehensive understanding. However, a global analysis requires us to examine all relevant considerations.

The era of balanced relations

For most people, relations between Africa and Europe began in the 19th century. But our relationship existed long before that. Plato, for example, who died in 348 BC, spent 13 years

in Heliopolis, where he was initiated into geometry and theology. Pythagoras stayed in the temples of Egypt for 20 years, studying geometry and astronomy with African priests. Ethiopia was christianised as early as 333 AD. Only when the Arabs subjugated Egypt in 622 AD and settled there, was the European influence significantly reduced.

Nevertheless, relations with Europe continued to develop. Treaties were concluded and ambassadors exchanged between the countries of the Mediterranean region throughout the Middle Ages. Many trade routes linked Europe with Africa, and the maritime trade of East African kingdoms with India and China prospered, without taking the detour via Europe.

The triangular trade and the European domination of the African economy

The crucial change in the relationship between Africa and Europe came with the technological progress in Europe that, from the 15th century onwards, enabled regular navigation between Africa and Europe. Europe took an enormous lead in charting the whole world. The first important consequence of this was the invasion of the American continent, the almost total annihilation of the native population and the unrestricted take-over of political and economic power. America's economy was restructured and oriented according to European requirements. A system of gigantic plantations was introduced to grow sugar, cotton and tobacco and to produce rum for the European market.

For the first time, Africa's economy was profoundly shaken in its relations with Europe. Indeed, for three centuries, the American plantations were supplied with African slaves. In the slave trade, Africa lost some hundred million people from its work force. Not only were the social and political systems of African kingdoms destabilised in a decisive way, but the African economy gradually became strongly dependent on Europe. Somewhat simplified, I would formulate this as follows: With the transatlantic slave trade, from the 16th to the 19th century, Africa's economy was not only oriented towards Europe but also became controlled by Europe. It was precisely this European control of the economy of other continents that in its turn caused armed conflicts between certain European nations and European emigrants in America resulting in the birth and the independence of American states.

The European emigrants restructured the economy of the conquered America to their own benefit and then showed Europe the door. The USA gained independence in 1776, Brazil in 1822, Uruguay in 1828, etc. However, Europe had enriched itself enormously and had accumulated capital. The technical discoveries of Watt, Cugnot, Fulton, Stephenson, and others in the 18th and early 19th century enabled the processing of steel. The industrial machines and new transport opportunities created by ship and rail generated new needs within the European economy and entailed another significant change in the relations between Africa and Europe. The industrial revolution enabled many European states to use machines for production. This required gigantic amounts of raw materials that were not, or not sufficiently, available in Europe.

Moreover, the 19th century in Europe was deeply marked by an extreme nationalism with strong chauvinist tendencies. Everybody wanted to produce as much as possible, but nobody wanted to buy from their neighbour. Every European state felt the need to have at its disposal sovereign territory outside the continent that would provide both raw sources of material, and outlets for finished goods. After the independence war in America, this continent was lost to Europe. Yet Europe could make use elsewhere of the experience collected in America in exterminating and irreversibly disempowering the native people to the point of total

dominance of the continent by the Europeans. The industrial revolution consolidated Europe's technological lead in the field of arms production too. This enabled the European states to conquer and colonise Africa and Asia, first by single action, and later by concerted aggression.

Colonial expansion as an alternative for European economy

The European orientation and control of African economy began with the slave trade. With colonisation it was systematically developed. Defeated in their own country, the Africans were politically put under European tutelage. They were allowed no participation at all in political or economic decision making. Thus, Europe could ruthlessly restructure the African economy according to its own interests.

The Europeans now established the plantation system they had introduced before in America in Africa. Large scale single-crop farming was used to grow products which were required by European industries, but which were of no use to the African population. To this day, we are familiar with colonial products such as cotton, rubber, coffee, cocoa, bananas, etc. Let me name an example. My country, Cameroon, grows a lot of coffee and has also been very dependent on coffee prices, ever since the beginning of the colonial era. Yet, if you travel to Cameroon today, you will see many advertisements aimed at trying to get the Cameroonese to drink coffee at last! Actually, we prefer herbal teas. But no plantations of this sort have been laid out. Indeed, the plantations were never meant to produce foods for the African population. For nearly a century, Africa supplied the European economy with cash crops and mineral resources and, at the same time, became the common outlet for European industrial products.

From 1884 to 1960, this colonial division of labour between Europe and Africa was imposed on us by military force. During this period, Africa had no chance either to build up an economy benefitting its own people, or to participate in determining the rules of the economic game with Europe or the rest of a world equally under European domination. The production, the markets, the prices of African goods in and outside Africa were dictated exclusively by Europe. European economic experts wrote about Africa as the natural, colonial or tropical "complementary area" to Europe.

I have reached 1960 at last, the famous year of African independence. Things had drastically changed. The two world wars had made the Africans aware of the frailties and vulnerability of European states. The independence movements and the wars forced the colonial powers to give in. In the wake of these confrontations, the African states achieved independence in the 60s and the late 70s. After the independence movement of the American states in the 18th and 19th century, Europe suddenly faced the threat of having to accept the breakaway of another colonised continent, the more so as Asia too was freeing itself from European control.

But Africa is a direct neighbour of Europe. Moreover, after World War II, it was considered NATO's southern flank. The transport of raw materials from all over the world to Europe passes through the Suez canal in the North and round the Cape of Good Hope in the South. Therefore, Africa was considered a vital strategic route for supplying Europe with raw materials. Could the colonial western Europe be expected to allow the countries of such a strategic region to build up autonomous, independent economies, during a time of relentless confrontation with the socialist East? This did obviously not correspond to Realpolitik.

If the independence movements in Africa could not be stemmed, a political alternative had to be found. This is why in 1957, the NATO Council recommended its members to grant independence to their African colonies - on one condition, however: strategic installations must remain under the control of Europe, and Africa as a whole must remain within NATO's zone of influence. In most African countries, many leaders of liberation movements who strove to end any reliance upon Europe were murdered or effectively side-tracked. Politicians well disposed towards Europe and sponsored by the colonial powers were manoeuvred into the presidencies of the new republics. Their job consisted in acting as agents of the European powers. Those who failed to do so were removed by military coups. The few politicians who achieved power while advocating independence without European patronage found themselves isolated within Africa, and branded as extremists and communists in international politics.

European control in the post-colonial era

What did Africa's economic structure look like after its nations gained independence? It is not enough just to speak of a general European orientation and control. The Europeans had prepared the independence of African states to offer no chance to these countries of making themselves free from total dependence of Europe. In October 1955 and October 1956, French and German experts met in the town of Neuenahr near Bonn to deliberate on the structure of economic relations between Africa and Europe in the event of European unity and political independence of African countries, and to agree on some form of concerted action. The French side was represented by leading politicians such as François Mitterrand, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Christian Pineau, Edmond Vermeil and Robert Schumann. Their German counterparts were Eugen Gerstenmaier, Annemarie Renger, Kurt Georg Kiesinger, Carlo Schmid, Karl Carstens, and Hans Sterkens, among others. Some few Africans such as Hamani Diori were invited to the third and last meeting in December 1957 in Bad Godesberg.

However, by May 1956 all European states involved in the project of founding an economic community had already been discussing the future of Africa in Venice. These discussions resulted in the association of the French African colonies, according to articles 101 and 131 of the EEC Treaty, signed on 25 March 1957 in Rome. Africa was tied to the European economy before its states achieved independence and were thereby free to decide themselves. Visionary politicians such as the President of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, the President of Guinea, Sekou Touré, or Nigeria's Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa, and Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia believed that for African countries to be bound to the EEC in this way jeopardised African aspirations to unite after the achievement of independence by the African states and to create a common economy. They feared that Europe would undertake an indirect, collective colonisation of Africa via the association with the EEC.

Indeed, the European strategy proved effective in achieving the economic enchainment of Africa. When the African countries became independent and started to form new states, additional binding bilateral economic and financial treaties were signed with the former colonial powers. After Great Britain joined the EEC in 1973, the former British colonies were in their turn associated with the EEC by the Lomé I Treaty. There are now 69 states associated with the EEC. They form the ACP (African Pacific and Caribbean States) Group. As a result, any African state not belonging to this group would find itself completely isolated both within and outside Africa. Consequently, all African States south of the Sahara belong to the ACP Group, and South Africa is likely to follow soon.

All this implies that, after 34 years of political independence, the former French colonies still lack their own currencies and are still moving in the Franc zone controlled by Paris. The division of labour is essentially the same as in the era of colonialism. The internal economic structure of the African countries is still oriented towards agriculture and organised according to the needs of Europe. This leads to absurd situations. Agrarian countries are forced to import food, since they have to produce colonial goods for export. The Africans supply raw materials and precious metals, while the Europeans produce industrial goods. The markets for these goods are controlled by the Europeans and their allies who decide upon import and export prices. In spite of independence, the economic structure of Africa has remained in a state where economic relations between African states were limited to 7 per cent of their commercial exchange in the end of the 80s, while their relations with Europe amounted to 60 per cent. Thus the disproportionate European orientation and control of the African economy cannot be denied.

The internationalisation of the European control of Africa

There are those who praise this dependence of Europe, because it is said to bring development aid and investment to Africa, and even to cushion adverse terms of trade by the introduction of special measures.

Let me briefly address this subject. Africa is a European concept, even - and above all - economically. This is my main thesis. Binding Africa to Europe after the process of political independence was not an African, but a European concept. Terms such as "development" and "development aid" were not born from a debate among Africans who sought to regain control over their own destiny. Instead, these terms and the programmes accompanying them originated in Europe, at the time of the East-West conflict, when the issue was about dividing the world and securing zones of influence. After all, did the Africans ask Europe to develop Africa, after World War II? As far as I know, the Africans demanded to be freed from the chains of colonialism and the economic exploitation belonging to it. Instead, economic and financial mechanisms were conceived with a view to keep the puppet rulers forced upon the African people by the West, and later by the East, securely in place. These rulers left all economic planning to Euro-American experts, while their only concern consisted in enriching themselves and their clients beyond all limits and accountable to nobody. The economic future of their country was certainly not their main concern. Indeed, they were well aware that their remaining in power did not depend on the will of their people but on the goodwill of foreign powers.

This is why, three decades after the achievement of political independence, investment structures in Africa are mainly concentrated on securing Europe's need for raw materials. This form of economic relations between Africa and Europe leads to the paradox that, eventually, more money flowed from the poor Africa to the rich Europe and other industrial states than vice versa. Thus, what was developed, was not Africa, but the underdevelopment of Africa. This outcome should not surprise anybody. I will not analyse the dubious term "development" any further here. Let me just make this one observation: No country can "develop" a foreign country. This is even more true when this foreign country has not been in a position to put through its own concept of its destiny in these bilateral relations.

With ever greater output required to obtain an ever-shrinking return, Africa was caught in a desperate situation. The economic situation became even worse than under colonial rule. So, new concepts were conceived by international organisations controlled essentially by Europe

and North America. Experts were talking of "structural adaption measures". Once again, terms, concepts and programmes that did not originate from discussion inside Africa were being imposed on the continent. Thus, not only is Africa a European concept; it is now becoming a concept of international organisations essentially controlled by Europe and its allies. This is why European experts argue for putting Africa under the economic tutelage of international bodies. Economic concepts and programmes drawn up by the Africans themselves, such as the Action plan of Lagos or the African Economic Community in six stages until 2025 are hardly mentioned in Europe.

The East-West conflict has ended. Access to raw material supplies in Eastern Europe is now open to the West. The overcoming of nationalism by the trend towards European unity is gradually leading to the creation of the most powerful economic zone of the world. All these factors are leading Europeans to believe that the "European House" could soon meet all its needs on its own and make the continent largely independent of other continents. And should they really need something more, they will just go and get it, thanks to their economic power and military force. Africa, the "tropical complement" is no longer relevant as partner firmly "bound" to Europe and America. Thus, Africa with all its present misery can be "uncoupled". This is why European media are now talking about "uncoupling" Africa very much in the same way one in the days of the old talked about the "discovery" of Africa. Indeed, this "uncoupling" means that the catastrophic economic situation of African countries has rendered them unattractive as business partners, that the people there should cope themselves with the consequences of their relations with Europe, and that Europe will not hesitate to intervene militarily and show its superiority, should this be necessary for keeping its privileges.

For the African people, survival has become an art. But many die. Attending funerals has become a weekly duty for everybody. And people do not see, when they at last will have the freedom to develop their own concepts, to carry out their own programmes and to account for them. Have you ever had the experience of bearing your child, and seeing it dying in your arms, while you look on, powerless, incapable even of screaming?

"Of 30 ways to escape a danger, running away is the best". If you were living in such a country, wouldn't you too try to run away and apply for asylum in Europe, to settle there and to live in human dignity?