



EURACTIV

YOUTH AND THE FUTURE OF AFRICA

SPECIAL REPORT | 25 SEPT. - 3 OCT. 2017
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Group of the Progressive Alliance of
Socialists & Democrats
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OPINION

DISCLAIMER: All opinions in this column reflect the views of the author(s), not of EURACTIV.com PLC.

An Erasmus for young Africans and Europeans

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Smiling happy African school girls and boys at their high school graduation day in Accra, Ghana. [Nataly Reinch/Shutterstock]

On 29 and 30 November in Abidjan, Africa and Europe have a date with destiny. It may sound a rather audacious statement in the face of the international community's growing interest in the African continent, but it is not, writes Gianni Pittella.

Gianni Pittella is the leader of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats Group in the European Parliament.

In the framework of the fifth African Union – European Union

Summit, which will for the first time take place in Africa, the heads of states and governments will be pressed to respond to the crucial challenges felt by both continents in the face of deep economic, social, political and security changes.

On one side, an old continent weakened by the financial crisis, terrorist attacks and the disastrous management of the refugee crisis, which did nothing but fuel populism. On the other side, a young continent boosted by unprecedented economic growth, embodied by a booming

middle class, but still overshadowed by countless threats, including extreme poverty, diseases, terror, conflicts, climate change and bad governance.

These are the scourges that, together with a lack of opportunities on the labour market, push thousands of young Africans to engage in terrorist movements or to flee their countries in search of a better life abroad, often risking their lives.

But the human tragedies that take place under our noses every day could

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end up being fairly minor compared to what could happen in the next 30 years. By 2050, the number of people under the age of 25 in Africa will jump from 232 million to 452 million. And 2050 is just around the corner!

While the decision to make youth the central topic of the AU-EU Summit seems to be forward-looking, the outcome cannot be business as usual.

Surely it will not be limited to the usual quid pro quo, whereby the Africans are only interested in asking for more funds from the EU, including funds to contribute to halting the migratory flows, while the Europeans are prepared to negotiate behind the scenes on security measures or return policies.

The controversies and the tragedies in the Mediterranean Sea confirm exactly what we can no longer allow to continue: looking at Africa merely through the lens of an emergency response. It is both useless and illusory to envisage the building of a European fortress that the likes of Salvini and Le Pen will never be able to set up, fortunately.

This is why if the illegal channels are rightly locked up, the opening of legal channels for migrants remains a crucial challenge in order to offer people willing to move to Europe safe routes to take. We should never forget that Europe needs migrants to maintain our economic, health and pension system.

It is not, however, just an economic issue. We have to imagine new ways to strengthen our partnership with Africa. The future of this partnership belongs to youth. We need to do everything we can to create real links between young Europeans and

Africans. This year, the European Union celebrates the 30th anniversary of Erasmus, one of the most successful projects in terms of cooperation among European countries and citizens.

Today, we need to get inspiration from this unique experience to launch an ambitious exchange programme between universities and research centres on both sides of the Mediterranean, by also supporting traineeships in companies: a “Europe-Africa Erasmus” for a partnership that is not one-way only anymore.

Concretely, this will mean welcoming through this programme students and researchers from Africa in Europe, but also push young Europeans and academics to go to Africa to learn and innovate.

We also need to support the exchanges between African and European start-ups, by creating “VISAs for start-ups” to facilitate the entry in the Schengen area of African entrepreneurs. These are the bridges and not the walls that we need to build between Europe and Africa, together with a real partnership based on equality.

Finally, Europe must respond to one of the strongest needs of its African partners: development aid, yes, but also and foremost – investments! The adoption of investment funds from outside the EU for Africa (and neighbouring countries), strangely omitted by Juncker in his State of the European Union speech, is going in the right direction.

We thus need to urgently put it in place, while respecting its main objective: supporting the development of social and economic sustainable infrastructures and of SMEs, both European and African. This should by no means support multinationals who

are already champions of tax evasion, or the ones who prey on mineral and natural resources.

The missions that have led me on the African continent in the last few years, and the political battles conducted at the heart of the European Institutions on issues such as conflict minerals, convinced me that a multidimensional approach, centered on development, democracy, security, investment and cultural diplomacy – the very one proposed by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini – can respond to the aspirations of millions of young Africans but also Europeans.

The second edition of the Africa Week organized by the Socialists and Democrats Group in the European Parliament, in Brussels, between September 25-28 will be the occasion to put the young generation at the heart of our debates and to send clear messages to leaders of both the African Union and of the European Union.

There is no other continent that compares to Africa when it comes to diversity or richness of cultures and opportunities. The whole of next week will be dedicated to meeting African leaders and intellectuals, discussing, questioning and challenging ourselves about how we can work better together and empower especially the youth to profit from the opportunities offered by the digital revolution.

It is time to breathe new life into the relationship between our two continents. The summit in Abidjan must be the “Summit of audacity”. As the Franco-Senegalese writer, Fatou Diome, whom we will welcome at the Africa Week, said so well: “Stop hypocrisy, we will be rich together or we will all drown together.”

Africa forum embraces the 'Spotlight initiative'

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By Georgi Gotev



Informal chat in preparation of the conference on "Political Empowerment of Women in Africa and in Europe". On the right is Letty Chiwara. [Georgi Gotev]

Violence against women and girls is the root cause of discrimination and disempowerment, and this is not only about Africa, speakers insisted on Tuesday (26 September) at a conference on "Political Empowerment of Women in Africa and in Europe".

The conference was part of the "S&D group Africa Week 2017". This is the second year that the group of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament has organised a week-long conference on Africa-EU

relations. This year the initiative is dedicated to the "youth and future of Africa".

S&D group leader Gianni Pittella said he was proud his political force was spearheading the initiative to build a more mature partnership between the EU and Africa.

As an Italian, he did not overlook the tragedy in the Mediterranean, saying that instead of building a "fortress Europe", legal channels for migrants should be made available, and real links between young Africans and Europeans should be created,

including "visas for start-ups".

European Commissioner for Development Neven Mimica said empowerment of women was a universal struggle as multiple economic, cultural and social barriers and gender stereotypes continue to hinder women's and girls' participation in all walks of life. No region or country in the world has truly triumphed in trying to solve the problem, he said.

"When women are elected to

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political office, policies are more varied and gender-sensitive. Health, education and social welfare improves, and there is also progress in terms of good governance and of the fight against corruption," the Commissioner said.

During a recent election campaign in Kenya, women candidates were hampered by hate speech and this is by no means an isolated example, as recent elections on both sides of the Atlantic have shown, he said.

General elections were held in Kenya on 8 August. The results were annulled and it was announced that fresh elections would be held on 17 October.

"The political environment remains a highly hostile battlefield for many women today, in all of our societies. No female politician, or political activist, or mayor for that matter, should ever run the threat of violence or recrimination as a result of their political position or participation," Mimica said.

"No women or girls should suffer the threat of violence simply because of her sex. Sexual and gender-based violence is a stain on all of our societies and one of the greatest obstacles to the full realisation of women's and girls' rights," the Commissioner added.

He said he was particularly proud to have launched a major new €500-million initiative (named the "Spotlight Initiative"), together with the United Nations, to fight all forms of violence against women and girls. He voiced hope that this would become a truly global movement and reach every corner of every community.

Gender inequality is not a women's problem, it's one of the greatest examples of collective self-harm the world knows today, Mimica argued.

Letty Chivara, UN Women's representative to Ethiopia, the African Union and the UN Economic Commission to Africa, said it was

impossible to de-link the issue of women participation in politics with violence against women and girls.

"Violence against women and girls is the root cause of discrimination, it is the root cause of disempowerment," she said, expressing her appreciation for the EU's role in spearheading the Spotlight initiative.

Grace Maria Theresa Maipambe Malila, the mayor of Chilanga, Zambia, shared her personal experience in Zambian politics in a speech repeatedly greeted by applause. Zambia has 109 districts with 109 mayors, only nine of whom are women.

She introduced herself as "a 44-year old woman with family and children" who did not want the children to grow up in a country where things were breaking down and needed fixing. "Instead I'm saying: if I don't do it, who will?"

JUMPING THE FENCE

Malila explained that before entering politics she had worked with the UN and facilitated a lot of policies, but saw the limits of what she could achieve.

"I saw how far I could go. I could not implement. And that was the push factor. You could do policies for women, for children, but you could not implement. And I said, OK, it's time to put on my gloves, it's time to fight. I have to jump the fence."

She said she entered politics the hard way, becoming affiliated with the United National Development Party, the biggest opposition force in Zambia.

Malila said she had often been the object of hate speech from men, who treated her as if she were "a sex object". This, she said, should not be ignored and women should fight back.

"You need to tell them exactly how you feel about that, and that they are not bringing down only you, they are bringing down their own daughters, they are bringing down their own

wives, they are bringing down their own mothers", Malila said.

As a mayor, she said, there were several occasions when people come into her office and said nothing, "waiting for the mayor to come". When she told them they were already with the mayor, they started listening when she used the magic word that she could solve their problems. "It is about saying yes, I can," Malila said

Women in Zambia, Malila added, often had very low self-esteem, and that's why she was trying to help them improve their speaking skills.

"Hit back when men deserve it. Not physically, with your voice," she said.

Photographer warns 'mankind's first people' face extinction

By Georgi Gotev



Photographer Roger Job in the European Parliament, with some of his works in the background. [Georgi Gotev]

A photo exhibition by Belgian photographer and journalist Roger Job has highlighted the risk of extinction facing the Turkanas, a nomad pastoral population in north-east Kenya, threatened by climate change and a significant recent discovery of natural resources in their lands.

The photo exhibition in the European Parliament was organised by the group of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) within the framework of Africa Week (25-28 September 2017),

which this year was dedicated to the continent's youth and its future.

The Turkana are mainly semi-nomadic tribes of farmers. According to the 2009 Kenyan census, the Turkana number 855,399, or 2.5% of the Kenyan population.

Although Lake Turkana and adjacent parts of the Rift Valley may not necessarily be the only – or even the earliest – cradle of mankind, the abundance of the fossil record there has been taken by many to support the 'Out of Africa' or 'African Eve' theories of human origin, which claim that

mankind began life in Africa.

Roger Job has visited the Turkana district in Kenya 12 times. He has shared the everyday life of the Turkana people, travelling with them and their herds, digging for water and sleeping under the starry skies.

Apart from their artistic value, his photos back up his claim that the living conditions of the Turkana people are seriously deteriorating, and that they may soon face extinction.

"In any case, their future is not

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rosy,” Job told EURACTIV. He said that due to climate change, the Turkanas sometimes had to survive years in which not a single drop of rainfall fell.

“For millions of years, Turkanas resisted the evolution of the world. But faced with climate change, they no longer have the capacity to adapt so fast. Moreover, there is the recent economic interest for their lands. It should be expected that businesses will arrive, and as the Indians in the Americas, they will be chased away

from their lands,” Job said.

An additional problem, the photographer explained, was the huge Gibe III dam Ethiopia has built on the Omo river that feeds Turkana Lake. The dam retains the water that would normally flow through the Turkana lands, further aggravating the predicament of the people.

Gianni Pittella, the S&D group chief, said that Job’s photos are a warning how fragile our world is. Victor Boştinaru, vice chair of the group, said that the photos were a warning about the challenges posed

not only by climate change, but by “our capitalistic model”.

Asked about his plans, Job said he would like to continue to document the fate of the Turkana people.

“To document their future, or at least their present, is my duty as a photo journalist and documenter,” he told EURACTIV.

The exhibition was organised with the help of the Museum of Photography of Charleroi where Job’s works are displayed.



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