

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on the ‘Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and to the Council — Partnership between the European Union and Africa — Connecting Africa and Europe: working towards strengthening transport cooperation’

COM(2009) 301 final

(2011/C 18/12)

Rapporteur: **Mr SIMONS**

On 24 June 2009 the Commission decided to consult the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, on the

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and to the Council - Partnership between the European Union and Africa - Connecting Africa and Europe: working towards strengthening transport cooperation

COM(2009) 301 final.

The Section for Transport, Energy, Infrastructure and the Information Society, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 24 March 2010.

At its 462nd plenary session, held on 28 and 29 April 2010 (meeting of 29 April), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion unanimously.

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 The Commission's communication is in line with current policy, but aims to go further: it also aims to launch a process of reflection in order to improve links between the continents by taking experience gained in the EU and tailoring it to circumstances in Africa.

1.2 The EESC is in favour of closer cooperation between the EU and Africa, provided it is based on a partnership with equal rights and obligations rather than a donor/recipient relationship as in the past.

1.3 The Committee stresses that infrastructure and transport systems are prerequisites for social, economic and regional integration, thus providing greater access to employment opportunities, healthcare and education and constituting a valuable contribution to combating poverty.

1.4 The Committee regrets the fact that this communication does not adequately integrate the Commission's various policy areas, particularly those covered by DG Development and DG Trade, which should demonstrate the coherence of the EU's policy towards Africa.

1.5 The Committee welcomes the fact that, at the 'TEN-T days 2009' conference held in Naples on 21 and 22 October 2009, it was decided that the EU would work with its African partners to develop an action plan.

1.6 This action plan will be drawn up prior to the upcoming informal transport forum within the EU-Africa Partnership and

published afterwards, i.e. in autumn 2010. The Committee endorses an approach that involves closely monitoring progress in implementation, for example by setting up a joint committee.

1.7 The Committee recommends that the action plan should explicitly state that priority must be given to combating corruption and piracy in Africa.

1.8 With regard, in particular, to planning, to funding the transport infrastructure network and to the action plan as a whole, the EESC believes that it will be necessary to look into the extent to which the economic and social partners involved in implementing the Cotonou Agreement have a role to play.

1.9 The Committee would welcome it if the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union would assess the proposals included in the action plan and issue an opinion on them.

1.10 The Committee points out that, when allocating EU funds, one of the requirements should be that local, officially registered workers from the African Union benefit from the implementation.

1.11 In the Committee's view, it is important that plans and programmes relating to TEN-T should be based on an assumption of interoperability, making use of the natural advantages of each form of transport and taking account of the co-modal approach taken in the EU.

1.12 Moreover, the cooperation arrangements should, in the Committee's view, pay attention to training, working conditions, and social, safety, environmental and sustainability considerations.

1.13 The construction and expansion of road infrastructure should result in the trend towards urbanisation being reversed dynamically, making use of a well-functioning public transport system.

1.14 One essential requirement is for good traceability and monitoring of how the funds are spent to be established and actually implemented in a focused way.

1.15 The Committee feels that the EU needs to be aware that China has had a presence in Africa for decades, with a different political motive and with different aims. It considers that efforts should be made to develop a trilateral partnership between the EU, China and Africa, with one requirement being that any work and tenders must support 'African employment opportunities'.

2. Introductory summary of the Commission communication

2.1 On 24 June 2009, the European Commission published the communication COM(2009) 301 final, which deals with the partnership between the European Union and Africa in the field of transport.

2.2 This communication emphasises that transport and transport infrastructure are of vital importance for social and economic integration and are essential for transporting people and goods.

2.3 This should take account of the increasing level of urbanisation in Africa: 40 % of the population currently live in urban areas, and if action is not taken this percentage will double by 2030.

2.4 The reference framework for cooperation between the EU and Africa in the field of transport is the infrastructure partnership concluded in 2006, the main aim of which was to improve links between African infrastructure networks, thereby boosting regional integration and hence contributing to the development of the African population.

2.5 Transport infrastructure projects in Africa are primarily financed by the European Development Fund; this fund provides 30 % of the financing.

2.6 In its communication, the Commission notes that cooperation between the EU and Africa relates not only to the physical infrastructure but also to the legal and administrative

aspects, so that the improved infrastructure can promote not only trade and economic growth but also employment, and more effectively combat poverty.

2.7 This is one of the reasons why, on 18 May 2009, the Council adopted a number of conclusions advocating support for the development of regional infrastructure and for the construction of new infrastructure in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

2.8 The communication in question fits in with the plans for implementing the strategic infrastructure partnership concluded between the European and African Unions in 2007.

2.9 The concrete outcome of this communication needs to be the launching of consultations between representatives of the European and African Unions, resulting in a plan containing priority actions and associated funding options for inclusion in a declaration issued jointly by the European Union and the African Union.

3. General comments

3.1 General

3.1.1 The Committee advocates closer cooperation between the EU and Africa, based on equal rights and obligations, although in reality there are differences that need to be taken into account. This intention and the means of putting it into practice are set out in the Lisbon Declaration (8 and 9 December 2007).

3.1.2 In the Committee's view, this is a question of socio-economic regional integration, including transport facilities. It believes that regional integration should be a key topic when the Cotonou Agreement is revised in 2010.

3.1.3 It goes without saying that this is a difficult task. The Committee recommends that, when implementing further cooperation plans, it should be borne in mind that they need to be based on reciprocity and shared responsibility.

3.1.4 The Committee would like to stress that the cooperation must relate to a broad range of subjects, including training, working conditions, social, safety, environmental and sustainability issues, citizens' rights, interoperability and public transport in urban areas, administrative and customs issues and, of course, combating corruption, as well as experience gained in Europe with regard to interoperability and best practices.

3.1.5 The Committee finds it regrettable that the Commission communication makes no reference to the importance of social and training issues in the transport sector, and notes that these matters were included in the infrastructure partnership concluded in 2006.

3.1.6 The Committee believes that the cooperation arrangements should take specific account of the fact that all the aforementioned topics and measures can only be successful if they have a solid foundation in the form of well-trained local workers.

3.1.7 The cooperation must relate to all forms of transport and to the way they complement each other, tailored to specific circumstances in Africa.

3.1.8 In the Committee's view, it is vital for certain important conditions to be met: there must be transparency and an adequate level of safety, and cooperation programmes must only be implemented with the assistance of accompanying measures.

3.1.9 In its opinion on the EU-Africa strategy ⁽¹⁾, adopted on 18 September 2008, the EESC noted that 'while regional and sub-regional economic integration has progressed significantly, trade potential has yet to be fully exploited. In particular, measures should be coordinated in order to harmonise customs procedures, improve infrastructure and guarantee the free movement of citizens'.

3.1.10 During the 'TEN-T days 2009' conference, held in Naples on 21 and 22 October 2009, speakers at the Euro-African Transport Forum referred to the question of how development in Africa and the trans-African networks could benefit from the EU's experience with the TENs.

3.1.11 One result was that the European Commission, together with its African partners, is going to develop an action plan to strengthen transport networks between the two continents on an ongoing basis; this plan will be published in the second half of 2010.

3.1.12 The Committee considers it important to conclude regional economic partnerships in addition to the existing bilateral economic partnerships, to help to consolidate regional integration.

3.1.13 The details of the measures included in the action plan, bearing in mind the involvement of the social partners, should, in the Committee's view, be developed in close cooperation with the African Union.

3.1.13.1 The structures for involving the social partners in the planning process are less well developed in Africa, and it has emerged in practice that they are not yet even aware of the plans; the provision of information and opportunities to participate in consultations therefore need to be reinforced, in consultation with the African Union.

3.1.14 The Committee feels that, if this is achieved, a joint strategy will need to be developed focusing in particular on

sustainability and the development and welfare of the people of Africa.

3.1.15 Even then, the Committee expects problems to arise in the implementation of the action programme. In particular, it will be necessary to take account of the difference between African and European culture.

3.1.16 The Committee believes that it would be worthwhile for the African Union to ask its Economic, Social and Cultural Council to supervise projects included in the action plan.

3.1.17 The EU has allocated EUR 4,6 billion from the European Development Fund for the period 2007-2013 for the development and improvement of African infrastructure and transport.

3.1.18 The next EU-Africa summit, which will be held in Addis Ababa in late 2010, will assess all the partnerships, and the informal transport forum in autumn 2010 will adopt the action plan for implementing the projects. The Committee calls for the social partners and other non-governmental representatives to be formally involved in this, in accordance with the declaration agreed on this matter at the Lisbon summit.

3.1.19 Better transport networks enable the population to travel more quickly, reduce transport costs and increase the sustainability and reliability of transport, which should particularly benefit poorer people in the form of more affordable prices. This requires a coordinated approach to the planning and construction of infrastructure.

3.1.20 This is all the more important because transport costs in Africa are amongst the highest in the world (15 % of export earnings, compared with 4 % in industrialised countries). There is thus a real need for action, because it is necessary in order to integrate regional and national markets.

3.1.21 Moreover, greater cooperation, including making use of best practices, should result in increased trade, greater safety, more security and a modern transport system.

3.1.22 The slogan 'working together for a better future' can, in the Committee's opinion, be seen as a guiding principle to be followed.

3.1.23 This is also reflected in the results of the Lisbon summit held on 8 and 9 December 2007, which laid the foundations for a strategic partnership on equal terms between Africa and the European Union, as set out in the Lisbon Declaration of 9 December 2007.

3.1.24 This partnership is based on the principles of peace and security, governance and human rights, migration, energy and climate change, trade, infrastructure and development.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 77, 31.3.2009, pp. 148-156.

3.1.25 The Committee notes that the communication relates only to the EU-Africa partnership, even though China has had a firm foothold in Africa for decades, particularly with regard to infrastructure development; China's strategy is to provide low-interest loans separately to each African country, often in exchange for long-term contracts for infrastructure and transport projects and for the exploitation of natural resources.

3.1.26 One possible way of overcoming this could be to establish a trilateral partnership between the EU, China and Africa, with the requirement that any work and tenders must support 'African employment opportunities'. The Committee adopted a very interesting opinion⁽²⁾ on relations between the EU, China and Africa on 1 October 2009.

3.2 *Non-governmental players*

3.2.1 In the Committee's view, it is necessary to look into whether the non-state sector has a role to play alongside government when it comes to planning and funding the transport infrastructure network. The state and the public, including NGOs, need to be involved, and investment from big business and major European funds is also essential.

3.2.2 In recent years, groups including, in particular, farmers' associations, trade unions and consumer associations have had a significant role to play, not least thanks to the success of the Cotonou Agreement and the Lomé Convention. The Committee wishes to emphasise that this must continue.

3.3 *Corruption and piracy*

3.3.1 The problem of corruption and piracy is, unfortunately, mentioned in the communication only in passing, though it arises in Africa at all levels and is standing in the way of economic development. It also constitutes a barrier to further regional integration.

3.3.2 In the Committee's opinion, any proposal or action relating to cooperation with the African Union must include combating corruption and piracy.

3.3.3 This is also one of the African Union's goals, and has been laid down in the Cotonou Agreement.

3.3.4 As far as the EU is concerned, European funds must only be used if it can be ensured, and checked, that the financial resources are traceable and if it is possible to monitor closely how they are used.

3.3.5 In the transport and infrastructure sector, corruption primarily manifests itself in land transport, particularly road transport, while piracy is connected with shipping.

3.3.6 The EESC stresses that ships, when sailing off the coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden, should follow the 'Best Management Practices to deter piracy' (UN) and register their route on the websites of EU – NAVFOR/MSF (HOA). These practices include also a list of self-defence measures of ships.

4. **Specific comments**

4.1 It should be noted that all 53 states in Africa have problems regarding transport and infrastructure. In 2006, the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) was launched with the aim of improving coordination in the planning and construction of infrastructure.

4.2 The PIDA programme incorporates a number of training initiatives, including in air traffic control, security consultancy, the environment and transport safety.

4.3 The next step is to bring the planning processes in the EU and Africa into line with each other, as is necessary in order to create a Euro-African transport network: in particular, it will be necessary to establish the nodes, especially ports and airports.

4.4 The scarcity of the financial resources being used means that they should only be used for the specific projects that bring the most benefit: in transport terms, this means a co-modal approach, making use of the unique features of each appropriate mode of transport and the characteristics and specific circumstances of each country.

4.5 In this connection, the Committee would also recommend that the action plan should explicitly include the fight against corruption.

4.6 A list of priority rail links should be drawn up, because the rail network is of vital importance in the development of land-locked countries. At the moment, 15 countries have no railways.

4.7 Africa currently accounts for only 4 % of global air traffic, and the safety and quality of aircraft and services are unfortunately lagging far behind mobility requirements. Safety, security and restricting emissions of pollutants are all high on the agenda.

4.8 Shipping accounts for 92 % of Africa's international trade. Closer cooperation between the European and African Unions should result in the establishment of logistics centres and in improvements in the operation of ports in the following respects:

⁽²⁾ OJ C 318, 23.12.2009, pp. 106-112.

— simplification of customs and registration procedures;

— deepening ports to make them accessible to ships that currently have to anchor off the coast, with all of the dangers associated with that;

— security of ports, by implementing the ISPS code.

4.9 A large proportion of continental trade is transported by road, despite the fact that the infrastructure – the quality of which varies considerably from country to country – is completely inadequate: Africa has less than 7 kilometres of road per 100 km², not to mention the long delays for customs clearance formalities and the endemic corruption.

4.10 At the start of 2009 the European Commission provided EUR 3 billion from the European Development Fund (EDF) to develop trans-African transport routes that will in future be linked with the trans-European transport network.

4.11 The Committee would like to stress that the allocation of European funds for infrastructure should be dependent on a requirement that only local, officially registered, salaried workers from the African Union should be used, in order to ensure that the skill levels and welfare of the local population benefit from the projects.

4.12 It is evident from current practice that international road transport is not possible in all parts of Africa and, where it is possible, is hindered by bribery and corruption en

route and at border crossings. Nevertheless, in many cases there is no alternative to road transport.

4.13 In the Committee's view, the African Union is being realistic in taking the EU's approach to TEN-Ts as an example, with the important thing being to use interoperability as an initial objective in the plans and programmes.

4.14 It is not only financial matters that are relevant. When implementing major trans-European infrastructure projects, the European Union appointed coordinators to support the Member States both in finding funding for the projects and in finding solutions to the problems that arise when implementing large-scale projects. In the Committee's opinion, it is a good option to appoint project coordinators for the missing links in eight previously selected trans-African networks.

4.15 The Committee notes that, before we invest in infrastructure in Africa, we must obtain sufficient guarantees with regard to safety and security problems. With regard to combating piracy at sea, there are the support programmes developed by the IMO.

4.16 Particular attention should also be given to measures to improve road safety: according to the Commission communication (point 3.2.4, paragraph 2, first sentence), around 1 million people a year are killed in road accidents, 65 % of them pedestrians.

Brussels, 29 April 2010.

The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee
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