From development to partnership: Time for courage has come!

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Speaker
EESC members,
Distinguished invited guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely pleased to welcome you to a focus panel on "Development cooperation policy" and exchange on what is probably one of the most geo-strategically relevant topics of the moment.

Today we will address the renewed EU approach of aid development with third countries. A model that has evolved, and - let me say - improved, from "donor-recipient" towards a peer-to-peer cooperation and dialogue based on complementary interests.

The narrative has changed. Old-fashioned formula such as "north-south", "developed - developing" have been replaced with universal, encompassing and ambitious strategic goals set out in the 2030 Agenda, our common blueprint for sustainable progress.

Indeed, the 2030 Agenda is the best tool to implement the new approach on development, because, no matter our geographical and cultural background, we are all facing the same challenges:

- climate change,
- demography,
- digitalisation,
- poverty eradication,
- security,

We need to act together, as a united Europe, if we want to be successful.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The new Commission has placed sustainable partnerships with our neighbouring continents at the core of its external action.

In this respect, I strongly welcome the commitments taken by Commissioner Urpiainen to build a comprehensive agenda for Africa, to conclude negotiations on the post-Cotonou agreement and link cooperation and development with the new pact on migration.

Africa is young and well connected, and has great potential. The future of Africa is the future of Europe and as former President Junker said "EU-Africa partnership is an investment in our shared future".

Let's not forget that the EU is already Africa's first partner in development, trade, foreign investment.

I would like to take the opportunity to recall some landmark moments that give an indication of the rapid changes that Africa is undergoing.

Few weeks ago, Abiy Ahmed, the prime minister of Ethiopia, the first country that I visited under the scope of my "Africa rEUnissance" agenda last May, was awarded the Nobel Prize for having forged a peace deal with Eritrea, putting an end to 30-year guerrilla war between the two countries.

This prize blows winds of hope across the continent and opens up new opportunities to ensure stability and security not only for Ethiopia and Eritrea but also for other African countries.

Africa is also moving forward in terms of economic integration and growth.

Six of the world's 10 fastest-growing economies are in Africa.

The publication "Africa's development dynamics 2019" recently issued by the African Union and the OECD shows that the continent's GDP growth is expected to reach 3.6% in 2019 and that final consumption is expected to rise to 6.7%.

Again, in July this year, the operational phase of the African Continental Free Trade Area was launched, creating the largest (geographically speaking) single continent-wide market for goods and services in the world. Fifty-five countries will progressively come together into one internal market, hence contributing to the movement of capital and the well-being of the people.
Rwanda, a country that 15 years ago experienced a devastating genocide, has since 2004 implemented profound reforms to ensure security and stability, fight against corruption, eradicate poverty and attract foreign investments.

This year the **first entirely homemade smartphone factory** in Africa opened in Kigali, the country's capital. The plant employs 200 people of which 90% are Rwandan and 60% are women and the plant will give a boost to the country's ambitions to become a regional technology hub.

At the same time we should assess Africa's rapid economic growth with cautious. We cannot forget that the region is also facing increasing challenges: threats to multilateralism and peace, the development of infrastructure including education, transport, energy and digitalisation.

Moreover, economic performance varies greatly from country to country and has still not translated into quality jobs, a reduction in inequality or greater prosperity in most sub-Saharan African countries.

Projections based on current trends find that, by 2030, 376 million Africans – almost a quarter of the region's population – will remain in poverty. Sub-Saharan Africa, with a poverty rate of above 30%, is home to most of the world's poor, and, in contrast to other regions, the total number of people living in poverty is increasing.

China's extreme poverty rate has faded away almost completely in the last 30 years, as its global influence has grown in an unprecedented change. Isn't it time for Africa to follow this path over the next 30 years?

In this context, the EU can offer its developing partners a sound alternative to non-reciprocal models, with a partnership rooted in a foundation of the universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity and based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law. In other words, we can be better partners by building our relationship on shared values and principles.

Dear friends,

Let me finally recall that today debate is linked to the adoption of the EESC's own-initiative opinion on "External aid, investment and trade as instruments to reduce the reasons of economic migration, with a special focus on Africa".

Around 85% of migrants are living in the developing countries.

According to IOM last World Migration report, in 2019 over 21 million Africans were living in another African country, a significant increase from 2015, when around 18.5 million Africans were estimated to be living within the region.

The number of Africans living in different regions also grew during the same period, from around 17 million in 2015 to nearly 19 million in 2019.

Most refugees and asylum seekers on African the continent are hosted in neighbouring countries within the region and the largest internal displacements in Africa in 2018 took place in sub-Saharan Africa, with the majority displaced by conflict, not disasters.

In light of these developments, we see the need for strong European institutions, deeper social and economic integration and more effective multilateral cooperation.

Far too often the opposite has been the case and progress has been halted by short-sighted national decisions.

The time for courage has come. This is the time to build up international partnerships that serve the Planet, the People and bring Peace and Prosperity.