



European Economic
and Social Committee

STATEMENT by the President

02/03/2020

Statement by Luca Jahier, President of the European Economic and Social Committee **Thumbs up to the Commission for a successful trip in** **Africa, but more room for civil society is definitely** **needed**

I can only welcome the constructive 10th AUC-EC Commission-to-Commission (C2C) meeting held at the African Union (AU) Headquarters in Addis Ababa on 27 February.

The meeting was clearly a well-framed building block of the enhanced partnership. I regret, however, that the strengthening of links with civil society was not mentioned.

As President of the EESC, I have also put Africa at the centre of my priorities, calling for an *EU-Africa renaissance*. Since the beginning of my term in office in 2018, negotiations on post-Cotonou feature high on my agenda and I have already visited the continent twice, first in Ethiopia then to Senegal, to strengthen links with civil society on the ground.

It is undeniable that the keen and genuine interest to switch from a “donor-recipient” relationship towards genuine peer-to-peer cooperation based on complementary interests cannot be achieved without the full involvement of civil society.

This message was often underlined on the occasion of the high level panel that the EESC organised at its [December plenary](#), where a number of international and EU speakers, including Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen, highlighted the important work carried out by European and African civil society organisations.

The EESC has always played a frontline role in ensuring strong participation of "non-state actors" in the cooperation and partnership process with Africa and is more than willing to update and strengthen

its role in the framework of the upcoming EU- Africa strategy, as already indicated in several EESC opinions

The joint mobilisation of economic, social, cultural and decentralised actors in Africa and Europe will be the key to success, as it was for the construction of the Internal Market in Europe.

Sustainable growth, trade, investment and digitalization; peace, security and governance; migration and mobility; climate change and resilient infrastructure are all issues that can fast-forward the partnership if civil society is given the appropriate voice during the setting up of the cooperation framework.

During my high level missions to the continent, I also stressed the need to prioritise regional infrastructure as an underpinning element of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

The EESC can help maximise synergies between European and African private sectors in view of the upcoming EU-Africa Business Forum, and to promote actions focused on the diversification of African economies, whether on strengthening productive capacity in agriculture or supporting regional and trans-continental transport and promoting digitalization.

I am pleased to see that the two Commissions agreed to intensify efforts to enhance youth skills development and better match skills with the demands of the labour market, particularly in sectors with the highest job creation potential: infrastructure development, digital economy and climate-friendly/green economy, renewable energy, ICT, agri-business and small-scale manufacturing, cultural and creative industries.

As the African proverb says: "One finger cannot pick a stone," we need to act together to swiftly move forward.

That will be finally the beginning of a new era for a shared renaissance of a shared, peaceful and sustainable future. An alliance of what is soon to be more than two billion people, 50% of them younger than 35.

That's the future, the good one.

I trust that these issues will be addressed at the high-level debate that the EESC will hold on 31st March, in the context of its External Relations section, where the new EU-Africa strategy priorities will be discussed and the EU organized civil society will give, once more, its invaluable contribution.

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