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The Jean Monnet Network: enhancing the international visibility and understanding of the European Union.

A South African, Southern African, Sub-Saharan Perspective

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Presence, visibility and activities in SSA

The Jean Monnet Network leaves almost no footprint in the Sub-Saharan African (SSA) intellectual environment. Academics, particularly in the fields of political science, economy, history and law are generally speaking, only vaguely aware of its existence. Its existence and role in this part of the world are almost totally absent, resulting in low to almost zero visibility and no impact on intellectual life and the developmental agenda in the sub-continent.

This state of affairs is not totally due to lack of trying or effort on the part of some universities, especially in South Africa (SA), the most developed country in the SSA context. Efforts by some SA universities to introduce it were unsuccessful, mostly, it seems, because of complicated procedural/ administrative/bureaucratic requirements, unique local circumstances, as well as the dearth of academically qualified experts in European Area Studies,

particularly the European Union. Pretoria University's Department of Political Sciences applied twice for participation in some of the programmes offered by Jean Monnet, but failed to make it on both occasions because the stringent requirements could not be met. If other SSA universities tried their luck they met the same fate because no Jean Monnet programme exists yet in SSA.

Up to the present, ECSA Southern Africa and the Centre for African and European Studies (CEAS) at the University of Johannesburg are the only institutionalised scholastic efforts to study and promote understanding of the EU in South Africa (SA). In the rest of the SSA, as pointed out, there are no JM programmes in operation. Ad hoc seminars and workshops on the EU do from time to time take place in South Africa, sporadic publications in scientific journals appear from time to time featuring the EU, and in most of the bigger universities it figures, albeit insignificantly, in the curricula. But in general, EU studies are treated as a step child at SA universities, while in the rest of the SSA the situation may even be worse

Low level of visibility/awareness of EU (Image)

A correspondence, albeit no means the dominant factor, seems to exist between the lack of academic/intellectual engagement, through inter alia Jean Monnet programmes, and the exceedingly low visibility/awareness of the EU in SA and elsewhere in the SSA region. Arguably African elite/academic interest could act as an important multiplication factor favouring the EU in SSA, but this opportunity seems to be overlooked in the various aid programmes of the EU in SSA as well as the Jean Monnet programmes.

An empirical survey we carried out about a year ago by Lorenzo Fioramonte and myself, showed that the EU ranked below most countries in terms of media attention, particularly the major powers, including some of the EU's own member states (old Europe), and below multilateral bodies like the UN, World Bank, IMF and the AU. We concluded that the EU's image in South Africa was distant and even marginal: it was scarcely known to the South African public at large and vastly ignored by the country's media. Public opinion surveys revealed that the EU was one of the least known international institutions, despite being South Africa's

and the rest of the SSA region's biggest donor of development aid, largest trading partner and important role player in peace making efforts in the troubled areas of the African continent. Official government documents routinely portray the EU as a partner and ally of African governments, as a model for African integration. Yet civil society organisations, instead of appreciating or praising it, criticise the EU for imposing self-interested developmental and trade policies, particularly the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and the discriminating Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) perceived as being detrimental to the continent.

EU importance and role in SSA more real than apparent

The discrepancy between the EU's image and substantive role (as the facts and figures below will illustrate), in SA in particular (although the same goes for the rest of the SSA) is glaringly obvious when the empirical reality is considered. The caveat which should be added here is that while official relations between SA and most of the SSA region and the EU are amicable and well established, the ideological prevalence of Afro-centrism and Euro-centrism prevent what is called in diplomatic parlance a 'special relationship'. History, particularly colonialism and perceived exploitation, mainly account for this state of affairs. Yet, under circumstances, relations are quite solid, durable and expansive. At the same time it must be noted that these are basically government-to-government, bureaucratically managed and driven relations from which civil society is largely excluded.

General importance of SA-EU Relations

Multilateral and bilateral interaction with the EU is continuously taking place on issues such as economic globalisation, improved market access, debt relief, and the reform of the UN Security Council, disarmament and human rights. The establishment of a constructive North-South Dialogue is also of particular importance to South Africa.

SA relates to the EU at various levels and in many forums. The most important of these is the bilateral relationship followed by the regional and continental dimensions. SA is also a signatory of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement

(CPA), which forms the basis for co-operation between the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of States and the EU. At the regional and continental levels, several processes relate Africa to the EU. These include the Berlin Process (SADC), the Cairo Process (Africa) and NEPAD.

Trade

The EU is one SA's most important economic and trade partners. And SA is the EU's largest trading partner in the SSA. In 2002 it imported goods from the EU worth €12.4 billion and exported goods to the EU worth €15.6 billion.

SA trade relations and development cooperation with the EU are governed by the 2000 Trade, Development and Cooperation (TDCA) agreement, the main objective being the creation of a free trade area a period of 12 years.

Total Trade has developed considerably over the past decade. It increased from R 56.5 Billion in 1994 and reached R278 billion in 2006. In 2006 South Africa exports to the EU -15 amounted to R124 billion. The EU ranked as South Africa's number one exporting region for 2006 and 2007. South Africa's total imports from the EU-15 amounted to R154 billion in 2006, also ranking number one. By contrast, South Africa accounts for only 1.5% of the EU's external trade. South Africa's trade deficit with the EU-15 equalled R30 billion in 2006.

Europe continues to be the most important source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in South Africa, accounting for around 80% of total FDI in 2005. Moreover, the EU accounted for approximately 66% of net foreign investment in South Africa in 2003-2004, and in 2005 the EU'S share of total assets held by foreigners in South Africa amounted to approximately 60%.

South Africa, as a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), is participating in the negotiation of the SADC-EPA with the EU. The planned revision of the trade chapter of the TDCA has been fully subsumed into the SADC-EPA process

RSA-EU Strategic Partnership and Joint Action Plan

South Africa and the EU established a Strategic Partnership on 14 May 2007 in Brussels through the adoption of the Joint Action Plan. The Joint Action Plan develops a strategic partnership that significantly enhances existing cooperation on issues of mutual interest at bilateral, regional, continental or global levels. One of the guiding principles for the Strategic Partnership is that it must support South Africa's national, regional and African priorities and programmes to eradicate poverty and underdevelopment, such as the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA), the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) and Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE). This is further emphasised in the stated objective of the development partnership between South Africa and the EU to develop the Second Economy and to closer link it to the First Economy. The broader policy dialogue with the EU and its member states includes the sharing of experiences of the regional policy of the EU, employment and social affairs, macro-economic dialogue and education and training.

EU Strategy for Africa

In December 2005, the Heads of State and Government of the EU adopted a new Strategy for Africa, with the title "The EU and Africa: Towards a Strategic Partnership". This new Strategy was drawn up on the basis of a proposal from the Commission, which was presented in October the same year.

The purpose of this Strategy was to give the EU a comprehensive, integrated and long-term framework for its relations with the African continent. It was designed to guide interaction between the whole of Europe and Africa at all levels: pan-African institutions such as the African Union, regional organisations, as well as with African countries.

EU-Africa Cooperation

The foremost expression of co-operation between Africa and the EU is by way of the Africa-Europe Summit. The first Africa-Europe Summit was held in Cairo in April 2000 under the aegis of the OAU and the European Community. The Summit adopted both the Cairo Declaration and the Cairo Plan of Action. The Plan of Action outlined a host of priority actions which are intended to contribute to the achievement of the principles contained in the Declaration.

The 2nd EU – Africa Summit, was eventually held on 8 to 9 December 2007 in Lisbon. The Summit adopted the Joint EU-Africa Strategy, which is a focused, political document that sets out the vision for African-European relations. It is clustered into four themes: Peace and Security; Governance and Human Rights; Trade and Regional Integration and key Development Issues.

EU-NEPAD

A dialogue, based on regular working sessions has been established between the European Commission and the NEPAD Secretariat. .

In addition the European Commission approved a proposal for a Partnership on Infrastructure between the European Union (EU) and Africa. This Partnership was aimed at responding to the aims set out by the AU and NEPAD. The EU-Africa Partnership on Infrastructure lay at the heart of the EU Strategy for Africa, which the European Council approved in December 2005. A total of €5.6 billion was allocated to the Partnership.

EU-SADC Cooperation

SADC and the EU signed a Declaration in Berlin, Germany, on 6 September 1994, with the overall objective to contribute to peace, democracy and sustainable development in Southern Africa through further developing of relations between the two regions and establishing a comprehensive dialogue. The Berlin Initiative comprises of the Ministerial Conferences held every two years, as well as the Joint Committee of Senior Officials and the Joint Steering Committee, which meets in the interim.

What shall be done?

By all indications Africa is important element of EU foreign relations architecture and global strategy aimed at greater recognition and leverage and regional security. This is confirmed by the Strategic Partnership arrangement is particular.

Unfortunately for the EU, there is a wide discrepancy between aspirations and reality.

Obviously, there is a wide discrepancy between the substance of EU relations with SA and the SSA region as a whole and the public, civil society, recognition it receives. EU good deeds do not translate into a better image. On the one hand it seems that the EU role in SA and the SSA region is almost taken for granted by African officialdom, thinking perhaps that the EU needs African cooperation for its own critical strategic and economic reasons, rather than the reverse. Africa is neither hot nor cold in its relations with the EU. On the other hand, the EU officialdom do not seem much concerned about this, sending out the message, perhaps unintentionally, that civil society is really of little consequence in the policy equation. Perhaps the Commission might argue that, on the basis of what I stated above about the substance of existing relations, that official bilateral relations are on desired level in any case and that there is really nothing to be concerned about.

I do not think, however, that self-congratulatory stand-patting would be a wise posture on the part of the EU; if it takes a stable long term relationship with SSA seriously, and I believe it does, there is a need for reflection and change.

Let me conclude with some general observations and suggestions.

- Main problem: EU/SSA relations are basically elitist/bureaucratic, intergovernmental, and top-down; civil society, particularly universities and the intellectual elite, by-and-large not involved; little or no dialogue/engagement with civil society to cultivate support base and develop potential multipliers to carry the EU message.
- The low, almost zero, level of civil society participation is indicative of the inadequacy of present approach and the

strategies and leadership of the EU missions in African Capitals in particular.

- More effort should be made to bring EU/SSA interrelations (policies, actions, ideals, successes) into the public domain, so that people can understand it is also about them, their interests.
- Access procedures to Jean Monnet programmes are exceedingly difficult and even prohibitive for Africans who might otherwise be interested to engage Jean Monnet programmes.
- The Chinese example of successful engagement with leaders of public opinion/multipliers of public opinion (intellectuals/scholars/media) in SSA is perhaps worth looking at. Also the German *Stiftungs* (Konrad Adenauer, Fredrich Ebert, etc) operate successfully in Africa and their examples could be looked at.
- *Jean Monnet programmes for Africa should be 'indigenised', empowered by way of special 'developmental' dispensation tailor-made to the unique circumstances of Africa.*

In conclusion: there seems no easy answer available at this stage but I would suggest that a special study/investigation is launched in collaboration with the key African role players and on the basis of conclusions reached, the existing Jean Monnet policy is reviewed and adapted to accommodate SSA more adequately to the benefit both sides.
