

## **Europe-Africa: A new era**

### **Louis Michel – European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid**

We are just a few days away from an historic Summit that will see all 27 Member States of the European Union line up alongside 53 African countries in Lisbon on 8 and 9 December. This summit will open up new horizons for the Euro-African partnership. An overhaul of the relationship between our two continents is long overdue.

Africa has now entered the era of globalisation. For the first time in more than thirty years, it has registered a real growth rate of more than 5% for the fourth year in a row. Thanks to its abundant resources of raw materials and oil, Africa is once again being courted by all the global powers, with the United States and China leading the way. It is no longer regarded as a "burden", but as an opportunity. In fact Africa has become both a challenge and a major partner, both economically and politically, for us all.

Africa is also asserting itself as an international force in the making that wants to wield influence. The African Union is becoming the institutional framework for governance on the continent, with an agenda that no longer just includes internal African problems, but also the major challenges of the 21st century, such as climate change, energy and the technology revolution.

These far-reaching changes mean Europe and Africa need to fundamentally re-shape their partnership around three main components.

Firstly, I believe that the Europe-Africa relationship must be based on the principle of a balanced sharing of responsibility between partners with equal rights and duties. This will mean a break with Afro-pessimism and the charitable, paternalistic attitudes that have so blighted our partnership. Africa is not Europe's private domain, nor the domain of the bleeding hearts. Together, we should be able to engage in a more honest and more open political dialogue, that will allow us to tackle together even thorny issues, like human rights (which does not come down to Zimbabwe alone), corruption, migration, and even farm subsidies and the brain drain, in a climate of respect and trust, not drama and dogma.

In addition, the Europe-Africa relationship needs a comprehensive agenda that goes beyond development. This will entail dialogue and cooperation on issues of common interest such as governance, trade, infrastructure, the private sector, energy and culture. This is the approach put forward in the Joint Strategy and Action Plan drawn up by the EU and the AU for the Summit. Our cooperation will enable us to define jointly our common interests and to make a joint case for them in international institutions, so giving us greater potential influence.

Finally, we need to modernise our development policy in Africa. Aid is not an end in itself, it should be an investment that fosters the economic growth necessary to tackle poverty. The feature common to the spectacular success stories of countries like Rwanda or Tanzania is the combination of a clear, long-term national vision of equitable economic development with good governance and substantial, well-structured development aid. It is such virtuous circles that we have to replicate in Africa. At the urging of the European Commission, the EU has thoroughly revised its development policy since 2005. Following its decision to allocate 0.7% of its GNP to development aid by 2015, the EU has pledged that half of the extra €20 billion thus allocated would go to Africa. And we are on track to do this.

The Commission also intends to improve the overall effectiveness of EU aid to Africa by making a better division of labour between Member States so as to avoid spreading aid too thinly. The other key component of our aid is to make African countries take greater responsibility for their choices on development and governance.

The final aim is to step up aid for trade measures. Africa's share of world trade has fallen in absolute terms from 5% twenty years ago to its current level of 2%. The objective of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) is to help reverse this trend and stimulate the African economies. EPAs are designed to promote trade by creating better integrated regional markets and by gradually, and asymmetrically, liberalising trade in goods and services between these regions and Europe. This is not misguided, malicious liberalisation, it is managed liberalisation. Any African region will still be able to protect products that it considers sensitive. EPAs will be accompanied by substantial additional aid (€2 billion a year) to support trade, while €5.6 billion has been earmarked to build the infrastructure needed to connect up regional markets and make them function. No other power in the world does as much as Europe to help Africa and to support its trade through a substantial development dimension.

Any change provokes resistance. But I hope and believe that together Europeans and Africans, through this new partnership, will be able to recognise their common interests and destiny in the globalised world.