

“Africa-Europe Partnership in the century of change”

Opening remarks former German Federal President Horst Köhler

in conversation with members of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation

“Now Generation Network”

15 February 2022

Thank you for having me “in conversation”! Hello to all members of the Now Generation Network and everyone following. I am happy to be with you, to learn about your visions and your perspectives. Thanks to Hosh Ibrahim for guiding our discussion. And thanks to Mo Ibrahim for creating this space for discussions. I deeply value the work of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation and more recently of the Africa-Europe Foundation. It is much needed in these times of complexity, crisis – and chances!

The world is in upheaval – with huge consequences both for Africa and Europe: Both continents have to find their place and assert themselves in a world of new great power competition. Together, they represent more than 80 countries. Both need and win from multilateral cooperation to shape a good future for their people. Both continents are challenged – although in different ways – by technological and demographic shifts and by the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. Both have to undergo deep transformations: Africa to create jobs for its youth and build up its prosperity – Europe to make its prosperity sustainable. And I believe they can only thrive together!

Now the relationship between Africa and Europe is at a crossroads. Africa is no longer looking only to Europe. It has options: China, Russia, Turkey and others. But I think that Europe has – rightly so – a broader concept of cooperation to offer. I was glad to see that the first trip of the then new EU Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, was to the African Union in December 2019. I know that the European Commission would like to see a discussion about a new “Africa-Europe-Alliance” on the occasion of the AU-EU-summit in Brussels this week. And it is good that it will also include talks on an “Africa-Europe peace and security architecture”.

I still believe that of history, geographical proximity and their respective interests make Africa and Europe predestined partners in this century of change! I am glad that many surveys (such as Afrobarometer) show that African citizens still express strong inclination towards Europe and the idea of freedom, rule of law and democracy. Europe has to live up to this trust and expectation! What to do?

First: Adopt new attitudes towards each other.

Europe should stop paternalizing Africa and view it as a political *subject* with own identity and own interests. Europe should learn about African institutions, visions, options. It should acknowledge the legacies of colonialism and be curious about the present! Many young Africans assert themselves in a new way. It’s good to have self-confident partners! (Maybe

watching “Black Panther” should be compulsory for European leaders...) Europe should realize that structural reforms are needed in Europe as well as in Africa.

In Africa, I would like more leaders to stop pointing fingers at Europe’s faults and concentrate on their own responsibilities. The Ibrahim Index of African Governance has shown improvements in 36 countries. But progress slowed down and in 2019 (even before the pandemic!), the average score declined for the first time. Ongoing corruption, a series of military coups; the threat of terrorism, criminal gangs and the civil war in Ethiopia have to worry us all. Democracy is tested across the continent. But at the same time, more and more citizens fight for accountability, especially in the young generation!

Second: We should turn the asymmetries between our continents into chances.

The obvious gaps between African and European demography, prosperity, emissions should be made starting points for win-win-cooperation! Let me give you three examples:

1. Sections of the European economy are already suffering from a lack of labor – African youth needs training and jobs! I like the idea of “brain circulation” where young Africans come to Europe to learn and work – and more young Europeans go to Africa to learn and work as well!

2. In Europe, demand for green hydrogen is soaring – many African countries have ideal conditions for production. Africa can help Europe to become climate-neutral, Europe must massively support Africa to leapfrog and industrialize in a climate-friendly way.

3. In Europe, ageing savers are desperately looking for returns. In Africa, there is desperate need for investment. It is time for German and European institutional investors to develop infrastructure bonds for reform-minded countries in Africa.

Finally, I would like to see this old couple – Africa and Europe – leave old habits. They should share – opportunities, ideas and responsibilities. Two big examples:

A continent with 1.2 billion inhabitants and probably around 2.5 billion people in 2050 has to have at least one, better two permanent seats in the UN Security Council. Europe should advocate a reform of the UN Security Council to this purpose!

Another vital topic: illicit financial flows. Every year, an estimated 100 billion US-\$ leave the continent illegally. Mo Ibrahim took the opportunity at the “Summit for Democracy” convened by US-president Biden to remind that Africa in fact is a net creditor to the world! It is first up to African governments to tackle this issue. But Europe and the global North altogether should finally do its part to close “safe havens” for illicit financial flows from Africa.

As Jakkie Cilliers, South-African founder of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) wrote in his book “Africa first”: “African countries need accountable, honest leaders”. Let me add: This applies to Europe as well.

As for Africa, I would be happy if you, the members of the “Now Generation Network”, would make this a core element of your work. And I am very curious now to hear about your priorities, perceptions, your ideas and hopes!