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There is always something new emerging from Africa¹

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the political and economic significance of Africa for a declining Europe, from a Greek vision and perspective. We argue that major ongoing developments (covid-19 included) and those prospectively announced pose dilemmas and the burden of engineering of choice, to decision-makers. As there are no country-level solutions that could be sufficient to address contemporary complex issues such as migration flows, pandemics, sustainable growth, climate change and multiple inequalities, we explore a possible new moral basis for future Euro-African coordination and collaboration.

Introduction

It was the Greeks who first turned an observation into a proverb. The phrase chosen as a title has carried different meanings over the centuries; today, it can be applied with confidence to the enterprise and attainments of anyone who deals with economic intelligence regarding Africa. The COVID-19 day after will make us all reflect on a central question: How we want our world to be on that day? If it will be a window of opportunity for improving global wellbeing and governance it will depend on our individual and collective responsibility to grab it. This paper argues that Africa is emerging and in doing so, Africa meets Greece's spirit first. Old and almost forgotten human and spiritual bonds between Africa and Greece need to get revitalized as they have been always pacific and harmoniously complementary. We're talking about forge a moral basis for Europe's new start with Africa, in a context of high uncertainty.

The political and economic significance of Africa is essential to Europe and to Greece in particular.

As 21st century's global challenges, they cannot be addressed without a conjunction with an African perspective. Climate change, geographical distribution of resources, health and security issues cannot simply ignore numbers and the African dimension. For instance, the projected African population growth for the years to come will be huge, as people living on the continent are expected to double from approx. 1 billion today to 2 billion by 2050 (UN, 2019). By then, it is estimated that more than

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50% of Africans will be younger than 18. They will need jobs, estimated to a rate of 20 million annually, in order to cater the basic needs of the young generations.

Dilemma no 1: Migration and brain-drain or in-situ creation of jobs?

Here lies the burden of dilemmas for both Europe and Africa, as they both will have to dialogue and debate on causes and effects and hopefully they will be able to set up arrangements leading to win-win options for their people as they never did before. At the political level, the political dialogue could involve African Union and European Union, in parallel with a civic dialogue between institutions such as Union des Conseils Économiques d'Afrique (Ucesa) and European Economic and Social Council (EESC).

Greece, a southern EU country-member, feels the pressure of demography and instabilities from neighboring Africa as much as African countries feel the pressure of inequalities and poverty. For both, these are exogenous factors as they do not dispose the keys of saluting them. Most of the time their asymmetric character tend to shape the future of this part of the world as did historically, in a negative way. However, the main driver for prioritizing Africa and bringing it at the core of the European perspective is related with the need of European economy for manpower.

In the meantime, 21st century gives peoples some hope for improvement, digitalization creates already knowledge societies everywhere and provides unprecedented opportunities for 'forgotten' regions and nations changing the bets in the game. Then, COVID-19 changes the game, it broke a 30 years global equilibrium and inevitably poses the following fundamental dilemma. Which one of the three constituents of the old triplet will prevail over the other two: liberté- fraternité- égalité? The answer to this will define social relations within the nations as well as between the nations.

Dilemma no 2: Gains-drain or gains-remain for Africa is the question.

As labour in the continent will be cheaper than in Europe, as resources are abundant, what if economic activities would concentrate, redirect and develop inside Africa?

In addition, there is also a growing market within the African continent, which may be attractive for **direct foreign investments**, in principal. According to the McKinsey Global Institute (2019) increased consumption by Africa's growing middle class means consumer spending will hit \$1.4 trillion by 2020.

Structural change³ for African economies is needed but as they are still ‘traditional’, **time is the critical parameter** for them to catch up the train of transition to future. Hence, a central question arises: is it possible for an economy that hasn’t met 3rd or 2nd or even 1st industrial revolution, to get into the 4th?

Germany for instance prepared the transition from one industrial revolution to the next gradually in time (j-shift) but African countries as well as Greece have to run and pass over some steps. They need to concentrate their efforts to the opportunities, where they have **competitive advantage**⁴.

All in all, African economies as well as Greece need adequate strategies and a vision, in order to get the means of their future. However, nothing in a transition process is simple and without sacrifices. You have to abandon something in the short term to gain at the long term.

Greeks in Africa

The economic significance if the above is increasing, represents huge potential for Greek private sector activities as well, in many different areas such as retail, shipping business and maritime transport.

The presence of Greeks in Africa has historical but not colonial roots.

Apart from antiquity and byzantine presence, from early 18th Century already Greek communities were established from Tanzania to South Africa and from Congo to Ethiopia, not to mention the over the centuries presence of Greeks in Egypt and North Africa. Another parameter of Greek -African relations consists of the aid for development provided by Greece in the frame of UN development goals especially for sub-Saharan countries (Ivory Coast, Liberia, Benin, and Nigeria). Within the frame of World Food Program, Greece contributes with humanitarian aid in West African countries and mostly to the European Development Fund which finances major projects in Africa (i.e. Sudan, Angola, Niger, Zimbabwe, Peoples Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, and Nigeria).

Greeks have developed significant business activities⁵, for example in Ethiopia in the fields of drilling and constructions, coffee plantations and export, pharmaceuticals, fruit exports, furniture, home appliances, etc. In Nigeria, dominant position in the field of flour production holds a Greek company which is one of the greatest flour producers in the whole sub-Saharan Africa. Other important Greek companies with perennial presence in the area are active in the fields of construction, batteries and

³ See: Author’s intervention at the AICESIS Conference on the Future of Work, Bucharest, 2019.

⁴ RBV theory explains the central role of human resources in creating value.

⁵ For further details see: Hellenic-Africa Chamber of Commerce and Development, www.helafrican-chamber.gr

mobile phones, food and snacks, information technology, production of pipes and tubes, cosmetics and the banking sector, as well.

Last but not least, a special case is shipping, where Greeks are world champions, for example, a large part of Nigeria's oil and gas exports is carried out by Greek ships, while major Greek shipping companies are active throughout the region with considerable value added to Africa's effort to integrate new global economy.

The political significance of Africa is also a major consideration as it is time to gain its place according to its weight (Clerc, 2019). For doing so, it needs **stable political conditions that will have to go hand in hand with an inclusive economic development**. Consequently, for Greece and for European Union as a whole, it is vital to support any relevant process towards more stability in Africa, less inequalities, to engage stronger in green and blue investments, to drive more societal projects, to proceed with more direct transfers for infrastructure and to foster innovative entrepreneurship. All in all, to generate more inclusive growth in an aristotelean harmonious 'win-win' basis.

Institutional preconditions

Historically, no society had the types of institutions required for modern economic growth, though a few had elements of them for quite long periods (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2019). Growth arose when institutional transitions took place. Historical dynamics of institutions in Africa have been different. Processes of state formation seem to have been delayed relative to Eurasia. These initial institutions interacted in an asymmetric way with a series of shocks that hit Africa. Let's hope that Covid-19 will not harm Africa that much. The fact is that African countries emerged at independence with a complex path dependent set of institutions that were probably anachronistic, introvert and **very weak to enhance 'neoterism'**.

Is the picture clear?

To reduce **ambiguity**, we consider **the following fields** as essential part of the effort needed, when talking about a genuine 'win-win' relationship between Africa and Europe: a) the existence of a common and strong commitment to move rapidly ahead, b) an honest sharing of intentions from all parties d) good governance providing genuine assessments e) accurate data and information availability, f) transparency and confidence.

The goal is to create conditions of objectivity for all sides (Plato’s search for ‘αλήθεια’ the idea of truth).

Conclusions

The new European Commission presidency called recently to build with Africa “a partnership between equals” and also the new European Council’s presidency expressed the will to “write together the new pages for an optimistic and positive future”.

The above statements despite all good intentions are subjected to doubt as **good intentions** have always been the case historically. What has been missing in practice was the credit of them.

Unexpectedly, EU’s attention for a new approach towards Africa was recently expressed in the European Economic and Social Committee’s (2020: 3) joint declaration with some other national ESCs (the Greek one included) which has been adopted on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Shuman Declaration: This strategy, as the Schuman Declaration already clearly stated, must be “offered to the world as a whole without distinction or exception, with the aim of contributing to raising living standards and to promoting peaceful achievements. With increased resources Europe will be able to pursue the achievement of one of its essential tasks, namely, the development of the African continent”. Today more than yesterday, the new strategy for a common Euro-African renaissance is the greatest geopolitical opportunity we have before us”.

However, **three present developments** tend to become drivers for a change: one is related with the fear of migration flows in relation to demographic burst in the continent, the fear of COVID-19 is the second one and third, the run for market shares in a promising Africa emerging, once COVID-19 pandemic being stopped. A crowding is yet observed with China, the Gulf countries, India, Turkey and after Brexit Britain. European Union nevertheless still remains the principal investor in Africa and its main commercial partner.

We argue that a “reset” is possible and the context is favorable for a new start (Guerraoui & Affaya, 2019). The Cotonou’s agreement which defines EU – ACP relations expires and its revision could be the occasion for a new start. African Union asks for Africa to be treated as a whole (Maghreb and South Africa included). To overcome criticism from all sides and mostly to overcome antagonism between notions of “eurocentrism” versus “afrocentrism” (Molefi, 1998), objectivity is needed.

What Greeks have to offer in building an “equal to equal partnership” is the ideological background with “humanism” and “dialogue”, as foundations of the forthcoming “Eurafrica”. Greek nation successfully reacted to recent COVID-19 crisis and revealed how amazingly

effective could this nation be when it comes to use its inherent reflexes and cultural values: solidarity between generations and the fact that for Greeks, humans come first.

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