

6th EU-Africa Business Forum Joint Business Declaration Abidjan, 27 November 2017

The 6th EU-Africa Business Forum (EABF) took place on 27 November 2017 in Abidjan. Organised back-to-back with the 5th AU-EU Summit, the EABF brought together more than 1000 representatives from the African and European business and political leaders. Discussions revolved around how to stimulate more investment for jobs in Africa and to collaborate closely to support the continent in its efforts for economic development while making the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) a reality for its people. The forum was the culmination of wider mobilisation in Europe and Africa that took place over the previous year, bringing together public and private sector constituencies. Inputs and recommendations tabled by the private sector highlighted:

- The importance of continuity of sustainable economic development policies;
- The expected benefits from supporting the common interests of an EU-Africa business agenda;
- The need to strengthen business organizations;
- The benefits of a more permanent and structured arrangement, comprising dialogues of private and public actors; this would help to achieve synergies and ensure better implementation of the economic development measures adopted by both regions.

An important concern of policy makers is how to reconcile the business objectives of the private sector with the public policy objectives of "Investing in Job Creation for Youth". Discussions focused on the sectors of agribusiness, sustainable energy and the digital economy. We discussed how to increase investment and improve value chains, how to support viable and sustainable industrialisation, how to increase productivity and how to connect to micro-, small- and medium-size enterprises (MSMEs). The discussions also covered the need to articulate and explain the business investment objectives and to achieve maximum impact, also with the support from the European External Investment Plan (EIP).

Our deliberations are summarised below as the key general messages for the 5th AU-EU Summit:

- The business sector is ready to scale up and facilitate investment in critical areas, support productivity and competitiveness to create prosperity, if the right policy environment is in place. We look forward to an improved climate for investment by both European and African investors, which will also contribute to progress in achieving the SDGs. Agriculture and manufacturing should be among the priority sectors for viable business initiatives and for creating more and better jobs. European and African business organisations and companies are keen to encourage public policy measures to facilitate investment flows that contribute to sustained economic growth. We count on a rapid and efficient deployment of the important resources of the EIP to accelerate the implementation of the joint vision of prosperity for both our continents.
- By establishing more dynamic private sector activities, including in partnership with the public sector, we welcome measures to control risks, remove barriers, improve labour mobility, share knowledge, promote and use the digital economy to better integrate our economies and societies. This should enable the younger generation to thrive, and should support African entrepreneurs and businesses to also expand their activities across the continent. We will work together with authorities to promote experience and best practice sharing to create new jobs in the African continent.

- Public and private sector organisations should work together to identify new and innovative ways for SMEs in Africa to access finance and support to help grow domestic businesses across the continent.
- We also call for a larger and more flexible supply of microcredit in order to satisfy the need for investment capital, particularly for MSMEs. This will be especially important to support the large number of women entrepreneurs in many African countries since access to capital is a key challenge for many of them. We are ready to participate in the design of micro credit programmes that take into account both banking realities and development objectives.
- The European governments, which share the objectives of African development, should encourage their companies to engage in business activities in Africa through practical measures, such as providing political dialogue and guarantee instruments for trade and investment.
- To improve the general business environments in their countries, African governments are invited to maintain their efforts to ensure legal certainty and stability, smooth and transparent administrative procedures with good governance, and upholding social and environmental standards in public calls for tenders. Furthermore, the implementation of joint initiatives within the G20 framework such as the “Compact with Africa” should be pursued efficiently to improve investment conditions for the private sector such as sustainable investments in infrastructure.
- We invite public authorities to work together with private bodies to promote entrepreneurship, and develop efficient strategies that allow an easy transition from school to work. A better integration of education systems with the business world, through mechanisms which further develop work-based learning, such as apprenticeship schemes and Technical and Vocational Education and Training programmes, can go a long way to reduce skills gaps and enhance opportunities for the youth in both rural and urban areas. Some good practices of “Dual System Professional Training” which exist in Europe, can be tested in, adapted and transferred to Africa with the support of European enterprises, particularly SMEs.
- We call for the creation of additional exchange programmes between African school systems, universities, enterprises and technical institutes with European enterprises. The mobility between African and European students and employees should be encouraged strategically following the tested format of the Erasmus exchange schemes, like Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs (EYE), Erasmus Pro and MobiliseSME.
- The private sector sees the untapped potential of women as entrepreneurs, professionals in and leading executives of African companies and wishes to work with public authorities on focussed training and empowerment programmes, to enhance this huge potential for modern economies and societies.
- We welcome platforms, such as the Sustainable Business For Africa (SB4A), which offer the opportunity for us to break new ground for public private sector dialogue and partnerships, embracing transparency, accountability, connectivity, open access and citizens' trust. This structured dialogue, which aims to include all voices, will help us to frame better a shared vision on how to improve conditions for investment and market development, which translate into inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Within SB4A, structured sectorial

dialogues, such as an agri-business platform, will be envisaged. In this context initiatives like Food&Drink Africa are welcome.

- Sustainable energy: Africa needs universal access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and secure energy in order to develop and grow. “Business as usual” is not going to bridge the financial gap between existing investments and what is needed to meet the SDGs. There is also a need to enhance bilateral dialogues among business, authorities and research institutions to speed up activities to closely link research and the commercialisation of cutting-edge technologies. Innovative finance instruments should be used to reduce risks, create more decentralised energy production, (e.g. in agriculture and in cooperative schemes with SMEs), as well as large-scale investments and the development of a stable climate for major infrastructural energy investments.
- Digital economy: connectivity remains a challenge that affects African countries’ development. Digitalisation and better infrastructure needs to be accelerated urgently. Enhanced collaboration is needed between government and business to address technological disruption and harness the huge development opportunity that digital technology and services offer. As such, cooperation in digital infrastructure should become one of the flagship activities of the EU-Africa business cooperation.
- Africa and Europe need to strengthen their high-tech cooperation, by making better use of ICT solutions for the urgent challenges facing the two continents. In this line, we propose to the governments of the Member States of the African Union and the European Union, a broad initiative to cooperate for installing Earth observation satellites to better monitor climate and environmental developments, improve water management and fight illegal deforestation, fishing and human trafficking in Africa.
- Agriculture and agribusiness: there is an urgent need for public policies to attract investments and to implement climate smart agriculture. Innovative technology and data can help farming communities to thrive through better market access, enabling products to be sold at higher post-harvest prices and can encourage the interest of the young in the sector. Cooperation between Africa and the EU is essential to transform African agriculture and feed a growing population.
- We call for the institutionalised establishment of a consultative forum for SMEs, where the needs and interests of European and African SMEs can be communicated directly to political decision makers and administrators within the EU and the AU.
- We want to have the opportunity to break new ground for public private sector dialogue and partnerships, embracing transparency, accountability, connectivity, open access and citizens’ trust. Such a dialogue will help us frame better a shared vision on how to improve conditions for investment and market development, which translate into inclusive and sustainable economic growth.
- We believe that an institutional mechanism providing continuity to the strategic partnership between Europe and Africa is needed, in order to guarantee an effective follow-up of proposals tabled by the public and private sectors from both continents. The creation of a working group composed of public and private sector representatives is highly recommended for the short term. Such a working group should establish a common plan of action for future activities and oversee the implementation of existing recommendations and pertinent measures for the benefit of both sides.

- We trust that the collective voice of business organisations, as expressed with this Joint Business Declaration of the 6th EABF, will be taken into consideration by the political leadership and contribute to successful discussions during the 5th AU-EU Summit. As representatives of European and African businesses, we look forward to continuing business-to-business and business-to-government cooperation and dialogue in the most efficient and constructive manner.