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# Central & Eastern Europe and EU–Africa relations after 2020

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# Summary

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- Despite the postponement of the sixth EU-Africa Summit because of the COVID-19 pandemic, this is a period of intense Africa focus for the EU, with the development of a new EU Strategy with Africa and the finalization of negotiations on the post-Cotonou partnership agreement between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states. For the first time since they joined the EU, Central and Eastern European countries are participating in these negotiations, and have an opportunity to help shape the future relationship between the EU and Africa.
  - Central and Eastern European countries place an emphasis on migration control, an issue that is sparking frustration both within the EU and among African countries – and which may limit the breadth of the partnership, or even lead to a failure of the negotiations. At the same time, there is scope for some Central and Eastern European countries to find common ground with African states on areas of digitalization, gender, peace and security, and civil society, all of which will be priority areas within the EU–Africa partnership.
  - Central and Eastern European member states’ principal external priority remains the development of the Eastern Neighbourhood states – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – and the Balkans, reflecting historical links and commitment to partnership, and, above all, concerns for security in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region in a context of increased Russian assertion.
  - Even so, the newer EU member states’ engagement with African partners is gradually evolving, although progress is uneven and the commitment of senior government figures is not always assured. Given the importance of African partnership for the EU, Central and Eastern European countries are expected to further their efforts to connect with African states in the coming years.
  - In turn, sub-Saharan African countries are becoming aware of the relevance of Central and Eastern European member states’ transition experience to African countries’ development efforts, and this may lead them to seek more active partnerships with Central and Eastern European countries.
  - The transition perspectives of Central and Eastern European states can help shape the EU’s overall policies and strategies with regard to its partnership with Africa. At present, however, the EU institutions and more established EU member states do not seem much inclined to understand and draw on the newer member states’ experiences of transition.

- Central and Eastern European EU member states can play a much more relevant role in EU–Africa relations if EU institutions and more established EU member states treat them as full member states, rather than continue to look on them as accession countries, and use their history of partnerships with African countries, their transition experience and current development challenges as a springboard for developing genuinely equal relations with Africa.

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# 01

# Introduction

**The potential exists for Central and Eastern European states to influence a departure from a top-down, donor–recipient dynamic in EU–Africa relations, towards a more equal partnership.**

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There has been a significant evolution in relations between Africa and an enlarged European Union (EU) in recent years, as African and European leaders have urged a departure from a top-down, donor–recipient dynamic towards a more equal relationship based on trade, investment and partnership. With negotiations for a new post-Cotonou Partnership Agreement and a renewed Joint Africa-EU Strategy now due to be concluded in 2021, there is the potential for a critical reset.<sup>1</sup>

The negotiations are taking place at a time of significant volatility for the EU. Even before the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the context was shaped by the UK's withdrawal from the bloc and the redrafting of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF – the EU's long-term budget); the rise of populism and growing influence of the extreme right;<sup>2</sup> and the perspectives of the Central and Eastern European member states, which are for the first time helping to set the legal basis underpinning the EU's relations with Africa. Many of these internal dynamics have been concentrated around migration and the increased securitization of the EU's development policies. Now the pandemic could potentially cause EU member states and African countries alike to become more inward-looking, while at the same time heightening the development challenges facing many African states.

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<sup>1</sup> Kaul, I. (2020), 'Want to take the Africa-EU Partnership to the Next Level? Press the Reset Button', *CESifo Forum*, 21(2): pp. 16–21; and Amare, T. (2020), 'Africa needs a strategy for Europe', Chatham House Expert Comment, <https://ecdpm.org/great-insights/navigating-eu-au-post-covid/africa-strategy-europe>.

<sup>2</sup> The 2019 election brought an unprecedented number of right-wing populist politicians into the European Parliament, while in the last 10 years several EU states have elected governments that have gone beyond a right-leaning perspective to a departure from basic democratic principles. See the 2019 European Parliament election results, at <https://www.european-elections.eu/election-results>; and Cianetti, L., Dawson, J. and Hanley, S. (2018), 'Rethinking "democratic backsliding" in Central and Eastern Europe', *East European Politics*, 34(3): pp. 243–56, doi:10.1080/21599165.2018.1491401.

An enlarged EU is a new EU. Most of the newer member states – 13 in total – which joined successively in 2004,<sup>3</sup> 2007<sup>4</sup> and 2013,<sup>5</sup> were part of the communist bloc, and all have participated in each of the processes highlighted above. This paper explores how this series of enlargements<sup>6</sup> has influenced EU relations with Africa, the ways in which former communist countries are reconnecting with African countries as EU member states,<sup>7</sup> and how they can add value to the EU’s evolving partnership with African states.

As part of the research for this paper, 35 semi-structured interviews<sup>8</sup> were conducted with policymakers at meetings in Brussels and Bucharest, as well as online. The paper begins with an exploration of current dynamics within the EU, and the negotiations that are currently in progress between the EU and African states.

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<sup>3</sup> Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

<sup>4</sup> Bulgaria and Romania.

<sup>5</sup> Croatia.

<sup>6</sup> The research focuses primarily on Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

<sup>7</sup> Chmiel, O. (2018), *The Engagement of Visegrád Countries in EU-Africa Relations*, German Development Institute Discussion Papers 24/2018, Bonn: German Development Institute/Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE); Cibian, S. (2017), *Central and Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for Sustained Re-engagement*, Research Paper, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2017/05/central-and-eastern-europe-and-sub-saharan-africa>.

<sup>8</sup> Covering countries such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Ethiopia, Ghana, Hungary, Nigeria, Poland, Romania, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and, also the African Union, the OACP, the EU institutions, the International Organization for Migration, and CONCORD Europe.

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# 02

## The state of relations in 2020

**The complex and at times difficult context in which EU–Africa relations are being redefined has been further compounded by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

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For the EU, 2020 was set to be a pivotal year for relations with Africa – the ‘Africa year’. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced delay in the EU’s timetable, with the sixth African Union (AU)-EU summit, which was due to take place in October, now postponed until 2021. However, the fundamental point – that this is a crucial period for the reshaping of the relationship between the EU and Africa – remains valid: EU–Africa relations are dependent on an interplay of diplomatic, trade and investment, development and security affairs, all of which are currently being reviewed and redefined. The coming period will see the conclusion of negotiations on a post-Cotonou Partnership Agreement between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states (which in April 2020 became the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States – OACPS),<sup>9</sup> as well as discussions on the new EU Strategy with Africa, the deferred AU-EU Summit, and joint efforts to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>9</sup> See OACPS (2020), ‘The African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States becomes the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States on 5 April 2020’, <http://www.acp.int/content/african-caribbean-and-pacific-group-states-becomes-organisation-african-caribbean-and-pacifi>.

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### Box 1. The Cotonou Partnership Agreement<sup>10</sup> and the post-Cotonou negotiations

The Cotonou Partnership Agreement represents the legal basis for the political, trade, and development relations between the member states of what is now the OACPS and the EU. The agreement entered into force in 2003, and is set to expire at the end of 2020. In all, 49 sub-Saharan African countries and 30 Caribbean and Pacific states are signatories, with Cuba being the only non-participating ACP state. Four North African states (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia) are included in the southern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, a different EU instrument.

The Cotonou Agreement is built on a set of mutually assumed principles regarding the equality of partners, ACP countries' ownership of their own development policies, participation of multiple actors, including local authorities and civil society organizations, and adherence to principles of good governance and human rights.

The agreement is implemented through a set of joint institutions, including: the OACPS Council of Ministers; the OACPS Committee of Ambassadors; the OACPS-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly; the joint ministerial trade committee; and the joint development finance cooperation committee.

The political dimension of the Cotonou Agreement aims to enhance discussions on topics such as human rights, good governance, peacebuilding, security, including terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, and migration.

In the domain of economic and trade cooperation, the agreement facilitates the negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and ACP regions.

The development cooperation component of the Cotonou Agreement is financed through the European Development Fund (EDF). The 11th EDF, which covers 2014–20 and thus is the last under the Cotonou Agreement, has a budget of €30.5 billion. The EDF is not included in the main EU budget: it is funded by the direct contributions of EU member states, and managed by the European Commission.

Negotiations for a new partnership agreement began in 2018, in anticipation of the original expiry date of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (29 February 2020). The application of the Cotonou Agreement, already extended to 31 December 2020, is set to be extended again. Negotiations remained ongoing in November 2020, and are now expected to be concluded in 2021.

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This intense period of negotiation comes at a time when the EU–Africa relationship is increasingly complex and contested. In contrast to the political climate when the terms of the Cotonou Agreement were being concluded, in the immediate post-Cold War period, the EU is now facing competition from emerging powers such as China, India, Turkey, the Arab states and Russia,<sup>11</sup> and may struggle to attract the attention of some African states. The EU has also been absorbed by its

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<sup>10</sup> EUR-Lex (2020), *Cotonou Agreement*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Ar12101>; European Council (undated), *Cotonou Agreement*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/cotonou-agreement>.

<sup>11</sup> Carmody, P. (2016), *The New Scramble for Africa*, 2nd edn, Cambridge: Polity Press.

own challenges<sup>12</sup> – notably the deep global economic and financial crisis of 2008,<sup>13</sup> which carried major long-term consequences for the southern EU member states,<sup>14</sup> a securitized migration crisis that has polarized the EU<sup>15</sup> and contributed to an upsurge in populist and extreme right-wing political forces,<sup>16</sup> and, not least, the Brexit process.<sup>17</sup>

The already difficult context has been further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The escalating transmission of the coronavirus led initially to lockdowns and border closures in most EU member states, including those participating in the Schengen Area,<sup>18</sup> and caused many member states to become inward-looking. After an initial period of silence, the European Council committed to supporting EU member states in their recovery from the crisis (by means of Next Generation EU, a fund of €750 billion) as well as the EU's external partners (through the €36 billion Team Europe package).<sup>19</sup>

## The post-Cotonou process

The so-called 'post-Cotonou' negotiations<sup>20</sup> for a new OACPS–EU partnership agreement were launched in September 2018 in New York; the Cotonou Agreement<sup>21</sup> is now set to expire on 31 December 2020, following two revisions and an extension. Negotiations have been complex and rather difficult,<sup>22</sup> in part due to the priorities of newer EU member states. To date, the parties have reached

<sup>12</sup> Dinan, D., Nugent, N. and Paterson, W. E. (eds) (2017), *The European Union in Crisis*, London: Palgrave; Berend, I. T. (2017), *The Contemporary Crisis of the European Union: Prospects for the future*, Abingdon: Routledge.

<sup>13</sup> Youngs, R. (2014), *The Uncertain Legacy of Crisis: European Foreign Policy Faces the Future*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

<sup>14</sup> Di Mascio, F. and Natalini, A. (2015), 'Fiscal Retrenchment in Southern Europe: Changing patterns of public management in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain', *Public Management Review*, 17(1): pp. 129–48, doi:10.1080/14719037.2013.790275.

<sup>15</sup> Pastore, F. and Henry, G. (2016), 'Explaining the Crisis of the European Migration and Asylum Regime', *Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 51(1): pp. 44–57, doi:10.1080/03932729.2016.1118609.

<sup>16</sup> Brubaker, R. (2017), 'Between nationalism and civilizationism: the European populist moment in comparative perspective', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(8): pp. 1191–226, doi:10.1080/01419870.2017.1294700.

<sup>17</sup> Naumescu, V. (2020), 'The Post-Brexit EU as a Global Actor: Reconsidering Security', *Romanian Journal of European Affairs*, 20(1): pp. 21–36, <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=859435>; De Ville, F. and Siles-Brügge, G. (2019), 'The Impact of Brexit on EU Policies', *Politics and Governance*, 7(3): doi:10.17645/pag.v7i3.2129.

<sup>18</sup> SchengenVisaInfo.com (n.d.), 'Schengen Agreement', <https://www.schengenvisa.info.com/schengen-agreement>.

<sup>19</sup> European Council (2020), 'COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic', <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/coronavirus>; and European Council (2020), '"Team Europe" global response to COVID-19: Council welcomes the mobilisation of almost €36 billion and approves conclusions', <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/ro/press/press-releases/2020/06/08/team-europe-global-response-to-covid-19-council-welcomes-the-mobilisation-of-almost-36-billion-and-approvesconclusions>.

<sup>20</sup> Institutionally, the negotiations are based on mandates issued by the two parties (the OACPS and the EU) and are led by chief negotiators on both sides. Rounds of discussions take place where the structure and content of the new agreement are decided. In the background, each party informs its member states about progress achieved. For the EU mandate, see European Council (2018), *Negotiating directives for a Partnership Agreement between the European Union and its Member States of the one part, and with countries of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, of the other part*, 21 June 2018, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8094-2018-ADD-1/en/pdf>; and for the ACP mandate, see ACP Group of States (2018), *ACP Negotiating Mandate for a Post-Cotonou Partnership Agreement with the European Union*, 30 May 2018, [http://www.acp.int/sites/acpsec.waw.be/files/acpdoc/public-documents/ACP0001118\\_%20ACP\\_Negotiating\\_Mandate\\_EN.pdf](http://www.acp.int/sites/acpsec.waw.be/files/acpdoc/public-documents/ACP0001118_%20ACP_Negotiating_Mandate_EN.pdf). The chief negotiator for the OACPS is Prof. Robert Dussey, Togo's Minister of Foreign Affairs, African Integration and Togolese Abroad and Chair of the OACPS Ministerial Central Negotiating Group. On the EU side, negotiations are led by Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen. See also European Council (n.d.), 'Timeline: steps towards a new EU-ACP partnership after 2020', <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/cotonou-agreement/timeline-new-cotonou-agreement>.

<sup>21</sup> European Commission (2014), *The Cotonou Agreement and multiannual financial framework 2014–20*, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/03\\_01/pdf/mn3012634\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/03_01/pdf/mn3012634_en.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Research interviews, Brussels, 2020; Fox, B. (2020), 'Post-Cotonou delays complicate EU's new African vision', EURACTIV, 13 May 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/africa/news/post-cotonou-delays-complicate-eus-new-african-vision>.

a partial agreement on the so-called ‘common foundations’, specifying common values and principles, and strategic priority areas.<sup>23</sup> However, the entire process was brought to a standstill right at the outset, when Hungary and Poland blocked the adoption of the EU negotiating mandate for several months, insisting on a core focus on migration<sup>24</sup> – one of the most impactful actions of newer member states since enlargement, as far as EU–Africa relations are concerned,<sup>25</sup> and indicative of an increasing tendency in the politics of the EU to seek to stem migration into Europe. This is a trend that African partners find troubling.<sup>26</sup> As one interview subject noted: ‘The main challenge is we Africans, we are not ready to receive back migrants, refugees [...] On the African side, our interest is to receive more development aid focusing on [...] job creation.’<sup>27</sup>

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## Box 2. Migration and political dynamics

Migration has proved to be a key factor challenging the progress of the post-Cotonou negotiations. While migration is a long-standing topic on the OACPS–EU agenda, the current focus, as expressed by a group of EU member states (led by Hungary and Poland) has disrupted the negotiations between EU and OACPS partners, as well as intra-EU discussions.

The migration crisis of late 2015 has fundamentally transformed EU policies on migration, politicizing this topic and consolidating a populist and extreme right-wing discourse that depicts migration as a threat to the security of the EU and of particular EU member states. Certain European leaders, such as Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, have based their electoral campaigns on securitizing migration and depicting migrants as the main threats to a Christian national and European identity. Such countries, although subject to relatively low migration flows, are rejecting calls from the EU for solidarity on the topic and have refused to take part in EU migration policies that include migrant quotas.

While Central and Eastern European countries such as Hungary and Poland are at the forefront of such policy perspectives, several other countries (established and newer EU member states alike) have given their tacit approval to such an approach, leaving it to the EU institutions and some more progressive EU member states to counter such tendencies.

While ACP countries understand that such discourses are primarily embedded in national-level electoral dynamics, they are nevertheless seeing their impact on EU policies and development budgets, with significant negative influence on ACP states’ immediate national interests.

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<sup>23</sup> The key points of contention, such as migration, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, are still to be finalized.

<sup>24</sup> Barbière, C. (2018), ‘MEPs condemn Hungary’s post-Cotonou agreement blockade’, EURACTIV, 18 June 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/africa/news/meps-condemn-hungarys-post-cotonou-agreement-blockade>.

<sup>25</sup> Field interviews, Brussels, 2020; Fox, B. (2018), ‘Impasse on migration clouds EU–Africa relations’, in *EU–ACP Relations After Cotonou Agreement: Re-set, Re-launch or Retreat?* EURACTIV Special Report, 29 August–4 September 2018, <https://en.euractiv.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/special-report/EURACTIV-Special-Report-EU-ACP-Relations-after-Cotonou-agreement.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Research interview, 2020.

For African states, the key challenges have been deciding on whether to maintain the framework of the ACP Group or to engage in negotiations within the framework of the AU – a choice with deep structural implications,<sup>28</sup> notably as to whether northern African countries should join those of sub-Saharan Africa in a continent-to-continent partnership, or remain as part of the EU's Southern Neighbourhood (and thus separate from sub-Saharan Africa). The latter option was selected, which safeguarded the existence of the ACP Group. Other sensitive areas, as noted by those interviewed for this paper, relate to the role of civil society, human rights, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), as well as migration.<sup>29</sup> While these areas are unlikely to block the progress of the post-Cotonou negotiations (although that possibility does exist), they are expected to be among the last aspects to be agreed at the highest political level; or to be omitted from the eventual agreement and instead resolved at bilateral level.<sup>30</sup>

## The perception among African states is that the EU is pushing for a set of agreements that do not sufficiently address their interests.

A further complicating factor is going to be the closure of the European Development Fund (EDF, the development assistance budget provided directly by EU member states and managed by the European Commission: see Box 1) and its replacement by the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)<sup>31</sup> of the next MFF, which will be in force for the period 2021–27. In practice, this means that the post-Cotonou agreement will be left without a self-financing mechanism, reducing incentives for ACP states to fully engage while increasing the decision-making role of the European institutions.

In addition, the post-Cotonou negotiation process overlaps with the parallel negotiations of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) that define terms of trade between the EU and African regional blocs.<sup>32</sup> The latter have been delayed by diverging interests between African states, lack of clarity on the trade benefits for African partners,<sup>33</sup> and the perception among African states that the EU is pushing for a set of agreements that do not sufficiently address their interests.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>28</sup> De Groof, E. and Bossuyt, J. (2019), *Mixed messages from Europe and Africa stand in the way of an intercontinental deal*, Discussion Paper No. 239, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), February 2019, <https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/DP239-North-Africas-double-pursuit-Part-2-Final.pdf>; Medinilla, A. and Bossuyt, J. (2019), *Africa-EU relations and post-Cotonou: African collective action or further fragmentation of partnerships?*, Briefing Note No. 110, ECDPM, March 2019, <https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/BN-110-Africa-EU-relations-post-CotonouAfrica-EU-relations-and-post-Cotonou-african-collective-action-fragmentation-partnerships-ECDPM-March-2019.pdf>; Carbone, M. (2018), 'Caught between the ACP and the AU: Africa's relations with the European Union in a post-Cotonou Agreement context', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 25(4): pp. 481–96, doi:10.1080/10220461.2018.1551153.

<sup>29</sup> Research interviews, Brussels, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Research interviews, Brussels, 2020.

<sup>31</sup> The budget allocated for sub-Saharan Africa is the largest from the geographic components, reaching €26 billion in the version of the MFF that was adopted by the European Council on 21 July 2020. See ECDPM (2020), 'Crunching the numbers of the long-term EU budget', 22 July 2020, <https://ecdpm.org/multimedia/crunching-numbers-long-term-eu-budget>.

<sup>32</sup> The EPAs were necessary, as the Cotonou provisions on trade needed to be upgraded in response to current World Trade Organization regulations.

<sup>33</sup> Stender, F., Berger, A., Brandi, C. and Schwab, J. (2020), *The trade effects of the economic partnership agreements between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of states: Early empirical insights from panel data*, German Development Institute Discussion Papers 7/2020, Bonn: German Development Institute/Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE).

<sup>34</sup> Research interviews, 2020.

## The EU Strategy with Africa

2020 is also the year in which the EU Strategy *for* Africa became the EU Strategy *with* Africa, signalling efforts by the EU and its member states to engage differently with their African counterparts in developing the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES). The emphasis on a different kind of partnership was also reflected in the replacement of the European Commission's International Cooperation and Development portfolio with the office of European Commissioner for International Partnerships, to which role Jutta Urpilainen was appointed in late 2019.

The first draft of the new EU Strategy with Africa was published in March 2020.<sup>35</sup> It highlights the EU's perspective on key areas of engagement with Africa, notably green transition and energy access, digital transformation, sustainable growth and jobs, peace and governance, and migration and mobility.<sup>36</sup> The launch of the document followed the 10th AU-EU Commission-to-Commission Meeting, which took place in Addis Ababa in February 2020, with the participation of 22 EU Commissioners and nine from the AU.<sup>37</sup> It marked the first external visit of the new EU College of Commissioners,<sup>38</sup> demonstrating a strong commitment on the part of Ursula von der Leyen, the new president of the EU Commission, to the EU's partnership with Africa. Visiting Addis Ababa in December 2019, shortly after taking up her new EU post, von der Leyen had stated: 'I have chosen Africa for my very first visit outside of Europe. I hope my presence at the African Union can send a strong political message. Because the African continent and the African Union matter to the European Union and to the European Commission.'<sup>39</sup>

Although the EU's efforts to generate a strategic document emphasize its commitment to this process, it has not succeeded in generating broad buy-in. Most of the newer member states did not contribute to the development of the document,<sup>40</sup> and it was received with mixed feelings by African observers, many of whom perceived it as incomplete, insufficiently in line with African aspirations,<sup>41</sup> and lacking a financial commitment.<sup>42</sup> It is also unclear how the strategy document will relate to the post-Cotonou process, and how they both fit with the EU's new financing arrangements for development.

<sup>35</sup> European Commission (2020), 'EU paves the way for a stronger, more ambitious partnership with Africa', Press Release, 9 March 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_373](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_373).

<sup>36</sup> European Commission (2020), *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa*, Brussels: Publications Office of the EU, 9 March 2020, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/55817dfb-61eb-11ea-b735-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-121312283>.

<sup>37</sup> European Commission (2020), '10th African Union Commission – European Commission Meeting – Joint Communique', Press Release, 29 February 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT\\_20\\_365](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_20_365).

<sup>38</sup> European Commission (2019), 'A record number of College members travel to Addis Ababa for the 10th European Union-African Union Commission-to-Commission meeting', Press release, 25 February 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_317](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_317).

<sup>39</sup> European Commission (2020), 'Remarks by President von der Leyen at the joint press statement with Moussa Faki, Chairperson of the African Union Commission', Speech, 7 December 2019, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech\\_19\\_6697](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_19_6697).

<sup>40</sup> Field interview, Brussels, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Marks, S. (2020), 'African Union to EU: We've got our own strategy, thanks', Politico, 27 February 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/commission-in-africa-ursula-von-der-leyen-frans-timmermans-moussa-faki>.

<sup>42</sup> Horn, M.-L. (2020), 'The EU's Africa strategy falls short', International Politics and Society, 1 April 2020, <https://www.ips-journal.eu/regions/africa/article/show/the-eus-africa-strategy-falls-short-4196>.

While the newer EU member states did not play a key role in shaping the strategy, digitalization is a key area of interest for Estonia, as well as for Lithuania and Slovenia. In addition, Slovenia – which is likely to see the organization of the sixth AU-EU Summit in 2021, during its presidency of the Council of the EU<sup>43</sup> – has expressed a key interest in supporting the development of small and medium-sized enterprises and civil society groups. Peace and security comprise a key area of interest for the newer member states in general, while migration and mobility are priority concerns for Hungary, Poland and several other EU member states.

## The impact of COVID-19

As 2020 has progressed, the COVID-19 pandemic is taking a great toll on the countries of the EU.<sup>44</sup> It is expected to have an even greater impact on developing countries, including most countries in Africa,<sup>45</sup> not least through multiple economic consequences. These might include the further decline of commodity prices and of the overall volumes of trade and investment; potential increases in debt in the middle term; a reduction in global remittances;<sup>46</sup> economic recession; and an increase in poverty and food insecurity, putting further pressure on conflict-affected regions.

**The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to have an even greater impact on developing countries, including most countries in Africa, not least through multiple economic consequences.**

At the same time, the COVID-19 context offers a window of opportunity for the EU and African countries to build a ‘partnership of equals’<sup>47</sup> and show genuine commitment to mutual solidarity. After a slow start,<sup>48</sup> EU institutions are taking steps to articulate an approach to supporting EU member states and their external partners.<sup>49</sup> The budgets put forward by the EU for mitigating the impact of the pandemic suggest that the EU aims to step up its multilateral engagement, in terms of both showing solidarity in the context of the pandemic and asserting a greater measure of leadership at multilateral level.

<sup>43</sup> Slovenia is due to hold the presidency of the Council of the EU in July–December 2021.

<sup>44</sup> For up-to-date statistics on the pandemic, see the World Health Organization Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard, <https://covid19.who.int>; and Johns Hopkins University, Coronavirus Resource Center website, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Jayaram, K., Leke, A., Ooko-Ombaka, A. and Ying, S. (2020), ‘Tackling COVID-19 in Africa: An unfolding health and economic crisis that demands bold action’, McKinsey & Company, 1 April 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/middle-east-and-africa/tackling-covid-19-in-africa>.

<sup>46</sup> Bisong, A., Ahairwe, P. E. and Njoroge, E. (2020), *The impact of COVID-19 on remittances for development in Africa*, Discussion Paper No. 269, ECDPM, May 2020, <https://ecdpm.org/wp-content/uploads/Impact-COVID-19-remittances-development-Africa-ECDPM-discussion-paper-269-May-2020.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> The European Think Tanks Group (2020), ‘Towards a new Africa-Europe partnership after the Corona crisis’, EURACTIV, 30 April 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/africa/opinion/towards-a-new-africa-europe-partnership-after-the-corona-crisis>.

<sup>48</sup> Volkin, S. (2020), ‘COVID-19 and a Splintered European Union’, Johns Hopkins University, 10 April 2020, <https://hub.jhu.edu/2020/04/10/matthias-matthijs-european-union-covid-19-response>.

<sup>49</sup> European Commission (2020), ‘Coronavirus Response’, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en).

However, the pandemic is expected to have a deep impact on political openness, as well as on African states' capacity for collaborative engagement. For example, while South Africa put forward an ambitious plan for its leadership of the AU (which began in February 2020), the pandemic has significantly affected the agenda. Furthermore, while the EU has pressed for quicker progress in the post-Cotonou negotiations, African countries have been less keen to advance quickly, and the deadlines have once again been pushed back.

There is a risk, too, in the context of the pandemic, that ties between African states and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe will weaken unless they are able to use the current window of opportunity to forge partnerships that can establish new supply chains for commodities needed in the immediate COVID-19 context or as part of the recovery from the pandemic.<sup>50</sup> A further concern, in both regions, is that governments that tend towards authoritarianism may exploit the potential, through restrictions related to the fight against the coronavirus, to consolidate their grip on power.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Fortunato, P. (2020), 'How COVID-19 is changing global value chains', 2 September 2020, <https://unctad.org/news/how-covid-19-changing-global-value-chains> and Martin, N. (2020) 'As coronavirus disrupts supply chains, could Africa profit?', Deutsche Welle, 14 May 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/as-coronavirus-disrupts-supply-chains-could-africa-profit/a-53435112>.

<sup>51</sup> Research interviews, 2020. See also Maerz, S. F., Lührmann, A., Hellmeier, S., Grah, S. and Lindberg, S. I. (2020), 'State of the world 2019: autocratization surges – resistance grows', *Democratization*, 27(6): pp. 909–27, doi:10.1080/13510347.2020.1758670; Thomson, S. and Ip, E. C. (2020), 'COVID-19 emergency measures and the impending authoritarian pandemic', *Journal of Law and the Biosciences*, 29 September 2020, lsaa064: pp. 1–33, doi:10.1093/jlb/lsaa064.

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# 03

## The impact of EU internal dynamics

**If Central and Eastern European member states have not prioritized engagement with African countries, neither have the EU institutions made sufficient efforts to foster this engagement.**

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The ambitious reset of EU–Africa relations has thus proceeded more slowly than anticipated, and the Cotonou Agreement will be extended once again.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, the progress of the post-Cotonou negotiations says much about the dynamics of the EU and its leadership. Difficulties in the adoption of the EU negotiating mandate; the contradiction inherent in calling for a different kind of partnership while using approaches little changed from those in the past; the initial hesitation over announcing a united EU response to the consequences of COVID-19, both internally and in support of African countries; and a confused response to the increasingly important role played by China in Africa have all been evident in the course of the post-Cotonou and Africa-EU Strategy negotiations. If the EU is to assert leadership at the multilateral level and engage differently with external partners, it needs to first rethink its internal dynamics.

The EU has admitted 13 new members since 2004. The presence of these states has changed the dynamic of the bloc, bringing a more significant focus both on internal cohesion and on the Eastern Neighbourhood, including the Black Sea region, as well as new perspectives and experiences pertaining to virtually every policy area, including foreign affairs, security, trade and development. While the admission of members from the former communist bloc has increased the policy

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<sup>52</sup> Laporte, G. (2020), 'The AU-EU Summit didn't prove immune to COVID-19 – but that may be a blessing in disguise', ECDPM Commentary, 14 September 2020, <https://ecdpm.org/talking-points/au-eu-summit-not-immune-covid-19-blessing-disguise>; Morgan, E. (2020), 'OACPS/EU Post Cotonou Negotiations: extending the finish deadline', Caricom Today, 25 August 2020, <https://today.caricom.org/2020/08/20/oacps-eu-post-cotonou-negotiations-extending-the-finish-timeline>.

relevance of Central and Eastern Europe and its neighbourhood, Brexit<sup>53</sup> has impacted budgets and opened the way for greater French and German influence within the EU.<sup>54</sup> Both EU enlargement and the departure of the UK have led to the prioritization of security and defence policies.<sup>55</sup> The last decade has also seen a move away from consensus-based decision-making in the EU, towards contestation, politicization both at EU and national levels, and increasingly intense negotiations at institutional level.<sup>56</sup>

The content of EU policies and positions towards Africa should reflect the perspectives of the 27 member states. This is not the case, however. If the newer member states have not prioritized engagement with African countries, neither have the EU institutions made sufficient efforts to bring about such engagement.

To date, representatives of the Central and Eastern European region have twice been appointed to the key European Commission post responsible for development. One of these, Andris Piebalgs of Latvia, who served as commissioner for development in 2010–14, played a role in enhancing the role of the private sector in EU development policy.<sup>57</sup> Also Donald Tusk had a central role in Poland's re-emerging relations with African countries and continued to play an important role in EU–Africa relations as president of the European Council between 2014 and 2019.<sup>58</sup> Central and Eastern European member states are somewhat influential in the European Parliament,<sup>59</sup> and, through their participation in the informal groups,<sup>60</sup> shape the work of the Council of the EU.<sup>61</sup> But, overall, the newer member states' influence remains limited, and has not had a significant impact on current negotiations with Africa, which, rather than breaking new ground, seem instead to be replicating an older way of doing business, ingrained in previous Partnership

<sup>53</sup> Price, S. (2019), 'The Impact of Brexit on EU Development Policy', *Politics and Governance*, 7(3), doi:10.17645/pag.v7i3.2149.

<sup>54</sup> Krotz, U. and Schild, J. (2018), 'Back to the future? Franco-German bilateralism in Europe's post-Brexit union', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(8): pp. 1174–93, doi:10.1080/13501763.2018.1467951; Research interview, 2020.

<sup>55</sup> Kasper, A. and Mölder, H. (2020), 'The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy in Facing New Security Challenges and Its Impact on Cyber Defence', in Troitiño, D. R., Kerikmäe, T., Martín de la Guardia, R. and Pérez Sánchez, G. Á. (eds) (2020), *The EU in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities for the European Integration Process*, Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

<sup>56</sup> Schmidt, V. A. (2019) 'Politicization in the EU: between national politics and EU political dynamics', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 26(7): pp. 1018–36; Roos, C. (2019), 'Opposition or consensus in the Justice and Home Affairs Council? The how and why of increasing member state contestation over EU policy', *Journal of European Integration*, 41(5): pp. 569–86.

<sup>57</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>58</sup> European Council (2020), 'Biography of Donald Tusk', Last reviewed on January 22, 2020 and European Council (2017), 'Opening remarks by President Donald Tusk opening the 5th African Union-European Union summit in Abidjan', Statements and Remarks, 29 November 2017.

<sup>59</sup> See recent reports on the EU Strategy with Africa and the EU's engagement in Mali, for example: European Parliament, Committee on Foreign Affairs (2020), *Draft Opinion of the Committee on Foreign Affairs for the Committee on Development on a new EU-Africa Strategy – a partnership for inclusive and sustainable development*, 2020/2041 (INI), 18 May 2020, Rapporteur for opinion, Anna Fotyga, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-PA-652358\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-PA-652358_EN.pdf) and Amendments 1–234, ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-AM-653741\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-AM-653741_EN.pdf)), 2 July 2020; European Parliament, Committee on Foreign Affairs (2020), *Draft Report on EU-African security cooperation in the Sahel region, West Africa and the Horn of Africa*, 2020/2002 (INI), 14 April 2020, Rapporteur: Javier Nart, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-PR-646966\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-PR-646966_EN.pdf) and Amendments 1–360 ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-AM-650694\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-AM-650694_EN.pdf)), 7 May 2020, and 361–489 ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-AM-650695\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/AFET-AM-650695_EN.pdf)), also 7 May 2020.

<sup>60</sup> Member states traditionally create informal groups on the margins of the Council of the EU, in order to consult and align on certain policies. For fuller detail on the role of informal governance in the EU, see Kleine, M. (2013) *Informal Governance in the European Union: How Governments Make International Organizations Work*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

<sup>61</sup> Bassiri Tabrizi, A. (2018), 'Informal Groups of States: A Growing Role in EU Foreign Policy After Brexit?', *RUSI Journal*, 163(4): pp. 62–70.

Agreements. Moving on from this state of affairs is important not only for the unity of the EU, but also for the value that it brings to African partners and for the chances it has to withstand the challenges posed by the rise of the China and other emerging economies in sub-Saharan Africa and beyond.

**Policy differences between newer and longer-established EU member states are often less significant than might be assumed. Newer EU member states do not form their own bloc within the wider union, and tend to align differently with key EU member states on specific areas of interest.**

Policy differences between newer and longer-established EU member states are often less significant than might be assumed. Newer EU member states do not form their own bloc within the wider union,<sup>62</sup> and tend to align differently with key EU member states on specific areas of interest.<sup>63</sup> Notably, however, the newer EU member states have few current connections with Africa. Concerned over regional dynamics and the increasing assertiveness of Russia,<sup>64</sup> their priority has been to direct greater EU attention and resources towards the east, and to emphasize the relevance of the Eastern Neighbourhood for the EU's foreign, security and development policies. They are active and assertive in negotiations in Brussels,<sup>65</sup> and in advocating for EU engagement in and support for the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Black Sea region. As one interviewee put it: '[I]t is difficult to argue against it when you have the Central and Eastern European countries who are emotionally attached to that region'.<sup>66</sup> This focus has always been understood to be in competition with that on sub-Saharan Africa. Clashing intra-EU values have been further highlighted by the ongoing migration crisis – an issue that cuts well beyond the realms of foreign and defence policies and which, as already noted, has materially affected current negotiations between the EU and African partners.

Even so, the accession of Central and Eastern European states to the EU has also brought significant opportunities for the EU–Africa relationship. The newer member states bring to the table their experience as recipients of development aid from the EU and other donors. That experience is valuable in furthering a better

<sup>62</sup> Partial exceptions are the Visegrád Four (V4) group (comprising the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) and the Baltic States (see Ivanauskas, L., Kovaliova, E., Makauskaitė, M. and Narkutė, G. (2020), 'Evolution of Icelandic and Czech development cooperation in the context of OECD DAC membership: Potential directions for the Baltics,' Vilnius: AfriKo – Africa Research and Consultancy Centre, [https://www.afriko.lt/wp-content/uploads/OECD\\_DAC\\_Potential-directions-for-the-Baltics.pdf](https://www.afriko.lt/wp-content/uploads/OECD_DAC_Potential-directions-for-the-Baltics.pdf)), which are aligning in some policy areas and, at times, acting in a unitary fashion. In recent years, some of the V4 countries have also displayed significant anti-democratic tendencies and a willingness to confront the established EU institutions.

<sup>63</sup> As occurred, for example, when member states rallied around France on the occasion of its emphasizing defence and security in the Sahel (research interview, 2020), and around Germany on addressing the Libyan and Ukrainian crises – see von Weitershausen, I., Schäfer, D. and Wessels, W. (2020), 'A "Primus Inter Pares" in EU Foreign Policy? – German Leadership in the European Council during the Libyan and Ukrainian Crises', *German Politics*, 29(1): pp. 42–58, doi:10.1080/09644008.2019.1583328, or when the group of northern and smaller member states emphasized a more leftist-oriented development approach (research interview, 2020).

<sup>64</sup> Moldovan, M. (2016), 'Risks and Threats About the Stability of the States from East European Spring Insecurity', *Review of the Air Force Academy*, No. 1 (31), [http://ns.afahc.ro/ro/revista/2016\\_1/Moldovan\\_2016\\_1.pdf](http://ns.afahc.ro/ro/revista/2016_1/Moldovan_2016_1.pdf).

<sup>65</sup> Research interviews, Brussels, 2020.

<sup>66</sup> Research interview, 2020.

understanding of the effects and impact of EU support for democratization and development, as well as the limitations of current instruments and practices. Such experience has the potential to influence a move away from the traditional EU approach to relations with Africa. Central and Eastern European countries could draw on their own experience to lead the way in engaging African partners in the process of developing a new, more equal partnership. In other words, Central and Eastern European countries have a chance to be ‘real facilitators in moving towards a new vision of partnership’,<sup>67</sup> and to help shape a more equal partnership in practice.

Central and Eastern European member states also have considerable potential to enhance EU–Africa relations for the future. Relevant factors here are a lack of ‘colonial baggage’, significant connections dating from the Cold War era<sup>68</sup> and the provision of support for liberation movements, as well as technical assistance for industrial development and scholarships for a large number of students. Nonetheless, relations between sub-Saharan African partners and Central and Eastern European EU member states<sup>69</sup> – broken down across the political, economic, security and development spheres – are evolving in a volatile context. Recent events, including the financial and migration crises, have moved Africa up the foreign policy agendas of Central and Eastern European countries,<sup>70</sup> but have generated a rather paradoxical approach – some Central and Eastern European leaders emphasize aspects such as migration control within the EU institutions, affecting African interests in a negative manner, while bilaterally aiming to develop closer political, defence, trade and investment relations with African countries.

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<sup>67</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Cibian (2017), *Central and Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for Sustained Re-engagement*.

<sup>69</sup> Previous Chatham House research papers have looked in more depth at the re-emerging relations between the two regions and at the potential for collaboration on trade and investment. See Cibian (2017), *Central and Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for Sustained Re-engagement* and Kurtagic, D. (2019), *Central and Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa: The Potential of Investment Partnerships for Mutual Benefit*, Research Paper, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/10/central-and-eastern-europe-and-sub-saharan-africa>. In late 2020 Nkirote Laiboni’s research for Chatham House is exploring the potential for sharing with African partners the lessons learnt on labour mobility by Central and Eastern European countries during their EU integration process, and Hanna Desta’s research is analysing the potential for collaboration among the countries in the two regions in the field of digitalization.

<sup>70</sup> Tarrósy, I. and Vörös, Z. (2020), ‘Hungary’s Pragmatic Foreign Policy in a Post-American World’, *Politics in Central Europe*, 16(s1), doi:10.2478/pce-2020-0006.

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# 04 Mutual engagement

**Although there is engagement in areas of shared interest, a common perception in both Africa and Central and Eastern Europe is that each region is to some degree neglecting the other.**

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Bilateral political relations between Central and Eastern European member states and sub-Saharan African countries have seen a revival since the early 2000s,<sup>71</sup> driven by different factors. The newer EU member states had to put in place development assistance policies – including, in a few instances, assistance towards sub-Saharan African countries – when they joined the EU, which many Central and Eastern European countries perceived as a burden.<sup>72</sup> Competition for the non-permanent seats on the UN Security Council has prompted visits by presidents of Central and Eastern European countries to sub-Saharan Africa; and, while holding the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU, each country has sat at the centre of the EU policy-making process, including with regard to relations with sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, that the first external visit of the recently appointed College

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<sup>71</sup> There has been a steady increase in bilateral visits and in the establishment of diplomatic missions in Africa on the part of Central and Eastern European countries (see Appendix). The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia have (re)opened or are considering (re)opening embassies in sub-Saharan African countries such as Angola, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal, Sudan and Tanzania. A similar trend has developed on the sub-Saharan African side, although the expansion of relations has not proceeded with the same intensity: Ghana, for example, has opened an embassy in the Czech Republic, and Ethiopia is reported to be considering opening an embassy in either Austria, the Czech Republic or Poland.

<sup>72</sup> Research interview, 2020; Lightfoot, S. and Szent-Iványi, B. (2014) 'Reluctant Donors? The Europeanization of International Development Policies in the New Member States', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 52(6): pp. 1257–72, doi:10.1111/jcms.12141; Horký-Hlucháň, O. and Lightfoot, S. (eds) (2015), *Development Cooperation of the 'New' EU Member States: Beyond Europeanization*, EADI Global Development Series, London: Palgrave Macmillan; Lightfoot, S. (2010), 'The Europeanisation of International Development Policies: The Case of Central and Eastern European States', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 6(2): pp. 329–50, doi:10.1080/09668130903506854.

of Commissioners to Addis Ababa was perceived by some of the newer Central and Eastern European EU member states as sending a strong political message with regard to the need to strengthen their own focus on African countries.<sup>73</sup>

Collaboration also takes place at global forums, such as at the UN – an example being the UN Group of Friends on Security Sector Reform, co-chaired by Slovakia and South Africa. The Visegrád Four countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) have a special focus on connecting with African regional organizations, notably with the East African Community. Estonia and Lithuania are pursuing an engagement strategy in the field of digitalization. Multilateral forums such as the UN General Assembly and the EU-Africa Summit are increasingly used as venues for meetings. And Central and Eastern European countries are providing greater assistance in areas related to education, migration, security and defence, and refugee management.<sup>74</sup>

### **Central and Eastern European leaders retain an almost exclusive focus on the EU itself and on the NATO alliance, while sub-Saharan African states have many more external partners competing for their attention.**

However, there are significant challenges that limit the breadth and depth of relations between Central and Eastern European and sub-Saharan African countries. First and foremost, high-level officials in both regions have often failed to fully engage in their own country's efforts to strengthen Central and Eastern Europe-sub-Saharan African relations. Central and Eastern European leaders retain an almost exclusive focus on the EU itself and on the NATO alliance, while sub-Saharan African states have many more external partners competing for their attention. In research interviews, a common perception among participants from both regions was that each was to some degree neglecting the other, arising primarily from low levels of mutual knowledge and understanding.<sup>75</sup>

In reality, several Central and Eastern European countries maintain embassies that cover more than one sub-Saharan African country (indeed, some cover more than 10 countries) with limited resources – including staff resources – and, by many accounts, little support from their national governments. This leaves diplomatic missions with little capacity to monitor and engage fully with each of the countries to which they are accredited. Furthermore, some Central and Eastern European countries do not have any embassies in sub-Saharan Africa. Under the new EU development policies that make trade and investment a top priority, it is likely that Central and Eastern European ministries of finance and development banks will begin to increase their engagement on sub-Saharan Africa. Even so, their ability to engage effectively is likely to be hindered by their inexperience and

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<sup>73</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>74</sup> Research interviews, 2020.

<sup>75</sup> Research interviews, 2020.

lack of awareness of the context in which they will be operating. EU delegations can, however, often play a constructive role by sharing information with relevant Central and Eastern European institutions.

Relations in general remain inconsistent, and dependent on the political will and priorities of each country's leadership. In the case of Poland, for example, there was a significant opening-up towards sub-Saharan African countries in 2007–14, under the premiership of Donald Tusk, but relations were scaled back after he left office. A lack of consistency has also been evident on the part of sub-Saharan African countries. As one African diplomat commented: 'We have not developed a very strategic and coordinated thinking on our relations with Central and Eastern European countries. I think this will be developed over the years.'<sup>76</sup>

Migration is a key point of contention, with the approach of some Central and Eastern European countries described by one interview subject as 'upsetting' to African partners.<sup>77</sup> A recent degree of falling back in relations may be connected to Central and Eastern European countries' focus on migration. Although not directly connected to differences over migration, a high-level visit to Angola by representatives of Hungary was cancelled by the Angolan government, while Poland's long-standing involvement in the development of Angola's Academy of Fisheries and Marine Sciences has come to an abrupt end.<sup>78</sup>

## Economic relations

Economic relations constitute a key area of interest for countries in both regions, and previous research suggests considerable potential for cooperation on trade and investment.<sup>79</sup> But trade is an EU competence, which makes bilateral engagement in dialogue with specific Central and Eastern European countries less attractive for sub-Saharan African states.

Overall volumes of trade and investment have seen an upward trend in the last decade, and specific areas of engagement have been identified. Estonia is leading the way on digitalization, which is an area of interest for several Central and Eastern European and sub-Saharan African countries. Bulgaria and Poland have engaged in agro-industry in East Africa. Hungarian and Slovenian companies are implementing projects for sub-Saharan African partners involving biometric passports and other documents requiring embedded security features. Several Central and Eastern European countries are engaged in trade in arms and military equipment with sub-Saharan African partners. At the same time, South African investments are significant in Central and Eastern European countries in areas such as real estate, online platforms, shopping malls, and beer and plastics manufacturing.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>77</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>78</sup> Research interviews, 2020.

<sup>79</sup> Kurtagic (2019), *Central and Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa: The Potential of Investment Partnerships for Mutual Benefit*; Cibian (2017), *Central and Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for Sustained Re-engagement*.

<sup>80</sup> Research interviews, 2016 and 2020.

However, while South African investments are perceived to thrive in the newer EU member states,<sup>81</sup> Central and Eastern European institutions and businesses are struggling to expand trade and investment in South Africa and other African markets. As one interviewee put it: ‘Some of the investment projects are not doing well, they are not rising to the initial expectations.’<sup>82</sup> A number of these challenges stem from dynamics internal to Central and Eastern Europe, while others are driven by the particular nature of sub-Saharan African markets. In South Africa, for instance, the regulation structure of the private sector is perceived to favour investments and trade by BRIC countries, to the detriment of European partners.<sup>83</sup>

In 2018 the Hungarian government announced that it was to close some of its state-owned foreign trade offices (the so-called ‘trading houses’) in sub-Saharan Africa. The decision, ascribed by some observers to mismanagement,<sup>84</sup> underscores that certain strategies for penetrating sub-Saharan African markets have been less successful than others.

## Central and Eastern European countries have been less bold than other investors in approaching African markets.

From a Central and Eastern European perspective, several states have found it difficult to mobilize their private sector to trade with and invest in sub-Saharan African partner countries, reflecting both a low level of mutual awareness and contact between Central and Eastern European and sub-Saharan African countries, and limited infrastructure for promoting trade and investment. Central and Eastern European countries have been less bold than other investors in approaching African markets. A lack of relevant local contacts, coupled with insufficient presence on the ground, have put Central and Eastern European countries at a disadvantage compared with more established investors. Thus, Central and Eastern European trade with Africa is often mediated through Western European or Middle Eastern companies.<sup>85</sup> This may prove an effective strategy in terms of finding an entry point into African markets and identifying reliable local contacts, but it also limits the scope of engagement. Central and Eastern European countries also encounter protective measures on the part of competitors, including Western European EU member states that are already present in sub-Saharan African markets, which may put pressure on African partner countries to restrict their own engagement with Central and Eastern European countries.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>82</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>83</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>84</sup> Sarnyai, G. (2018), ‘The Hungarian Government Announces the Closure of Several Foreign Trade Offices’, *Hungary Today*, 27 July 2018, <https://hungarytoday.hu/the-hungarian-government-announces-the-closure-of-several-foreign-trade-offices>.

<sup>85</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>86</sup> Research interview, 2020.

## Security and military relations

The security and military dimensions of relations between Central and Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan African have a long history, and remain important at both bilateral and multilateral levels. Most Central and Eastern European countries produce and export arms and military equipment, and can also offer training for African military personnel.<sup>87</sup> At multilateral level, Central and Eastern European countries have been active in EU and UN missions in African countries.<sup>88</sup> Most recently, the Czech Republic assumed the leadership of the EU mission in Mali,<sup>89</sup> to which several Central and Eastern European countries are contributing military personnel.<sup>90</sup>

However, the proximity of Russia dominates the security thinking of Central and Eastern European states – which perceive a threat from an assertive Russia that, in their view, the EU does not take seriously enough, according to an interview conducted for this study<sup>91</sup> – and significantly limits Central and Eastern European countries' engagement on priorities other than the Eastern Neighbourhood.

Nevertheless, Central and Eastern European countries aim to act as pillars of security in their region and within the EU. They are willing to contribute to peacekeeping missions, including in African countries.<sup>92</sup> Such participation is also linked to concerns about migration into Europe, and, notably, to the commitment of some Central and Eastern European countries to address the drivers of migration.

## Development and humanitarian assistance relations

A key characteristic of the newer EU member states is that their development assistance approach is based on building relationships of equals. All of the Central and Eastern European countries studied as part of the research for this paper were themselves recipients of development assistance before they joined the EU. As a consequence, they have experienced the unequal nature of traditional donor–recipient relations, and do not want to replicate this in their own position as donors.<sup>93</sup>

Central and Eastern European countries see their development policies as serving foreign policy and trade objectives. As Africa is not a key focus of foreign policy for Central and Eastern European countries, African countries have not been

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<sup>87</sup> Holtom, P. and Pavesi, I. (2018), *Small Arms Survey, Trade Update 2018: Sub-Saharan Africa in Focus*, Geneva: Small Arms Survey, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/S-Trade-Update/SAS-Trade-Update-2018.pdf>.

<sup>88</sup> Besenyő, J. (2020), 'Participation of V4 countries in African peacekeeping missions', *Security and Defence Quarterly*, 29(2): pp. 7–19, <https://securityanddefence.pl/Participation-of-V4-countries-in-African-peacekeeping-missions,120053,0,2.html>.

<sup>89</sup> EUTM Mali (2020), 'A New Commander', 12 June 2020, <https://eutmmali.eu/a-new-commander>; Radio Prague International (2020), 'Czech army to take charge of EU training mission in Mali', 20 November 2019, <https://english.radio.cz/czech-army-take-charge-eu-training-mission-mali-8114950>.

<sup>90</sup> EUTM Mali (undated), 'Contributing Countries', <https://eutmmali.eu/eutm-mali-mission>.

<sup>91</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>92</sup> With the exception of Poland, which has significantly reduced its participation to EU missions in Africa. Research interview, 2020.

<sup>93</sup> Research interview, 2020.

prioritized as development partners until relatively recently, and through the 2000s, in the early years of their bilateral engagement on development policies, Central and Eastern European countries mostly focused on countries in their neighbourhood.<sup>94</sup> Today, however, most Central and Eastern European donors also include sub-Saharan Africa, and Africa in general, among their priorities. The focus on stemming migration has also driven development spending. An example is Hungary's support for Uganda in the field of refugee management, which, with a programme value amounting to €16.1 million, constitutes the largest development project yet to be offered by Hungary.<sup>95</sup>

The commitment to equality in development relations that is evident in Central and Eastern Europe's engagement with partner countries (in both the Eastern Neighbourhood and sub-Saharan Africa) seems to override trade and investment objectives, which may position Central and Eastern European countries as less assertive than their Western European and BRICS counterparts in these fields. At the same time, such a commitment appears subordinate to security concerns, which may also explain why the migration crisis triggered increased engagement in sub-Saharan Africa from 2015.

While budgets are rather limited, a further key asset of Central and Eastern European countries in development cooperation is their transition experience. Such experience includes the transformation of centralized Central and Eastern European economies into functional market economies, the creation and implementation of democratic political institutions, and the transformation of a totalitarian state bureaucracy into a more democratic institutional apparatus, strengthening the independence of the judiciary and civil society, and protecting individual freedoms.

However, after more than 15 years as bilateral donors, some Central and Eastern European countries have come to feel that their development contributions are not leading to a strengthening of business ties, which has been their initial objective.<sup>96</sup> Some voices also question the relevance of the Central and Eastern European transition experience to Africa, with expertise being concentrated among specific individuals (who are often no longer in office), not institutions, and in light of a transformed global environment that may no longer value such transition experiences, which makes the sharing of lessons learned more difficult.<sup>97</sup> A further challenge for the efficacy of Central and Eastern European countries as donors stems from the lack of coherence between their foreign and development policies, notably around migration.

<sup>94</sup> Opršal, Z., Harmáček, J., Vítová, P. et al. (2020) 'Polish and Czech foreign aid: a "mélange" of geopolitical and developmental objectives', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 30 March 2020, doi:10.1057/s41268-020-00192-x.

<sup>95</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2020), 'Hungary is realising the largest foreign development programme in its history in Uganda', News release, 12 March 2019, <https://www.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-and-trade/news/hungary-is-realising-the-largest-foreign-development-programme-in-its-history-in-uganda>.

<sup>96</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>97</sup> Research interviews, 2020; Szent-Iványi, B. and Végh, Z. (2018), 'Is transition experience enough? The donor-side effectiveness of Czech and Polish democracy aid to Georgia', *Democratization*, 25(4): pp. 614–32, doi:10.1080/13510347.2017.1404989; Szent-Iványi, B. (2014), 'The EU's Support for Democratic Governance in the Eastern Neighbourhood: The Role of Transition Experience from the New Member States', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 66(7): pp. 1102–21, doi: 10.1080/09668136.2014.927646; Horký, O. (2012), 'The Transfer of the Central and Eastern European "Transition Experience" to the South: Myth or Reality?', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 13(1): pp. 17–32, doi: 10.1080/15705854.2011.649165.

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# 05

## Conclusion: rethinking current relations

**Drawing on the transition experiences of Central and Eastern European members can help shape the EU's approach to its relations with Africa in ways that better meet the goal of an equal partnership.**

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Despite challenges across all policy areas, the engagement of EU member states from Central and Eastern Europe in sub-Saharan Africa presents significant opportunities. In an increasingly complex global environment, multilateral alliances are key for maintaining a global community of states that share the values of the EU. And not least in the context of a changing transatlantic partnership,<sup>98</sup> EU relations with African states become all the more salient. Central and Eastern European member states can help enable a stronger and more genuine partnership between the two regions.

As already noted, EU delegations can and do support member states in forging connections with partners in Africa.<sup>99</sup> However, if the EU aims to have a more robust engagement with African countries, then that role must be expanded to include different formal and informal ways of working together, including joint representation, that would enable Central and Eastern European member states to build a greater presence in African countries. Furthermore, the EU's European External Action Service – the bloc's diplomatic service – could implement special programmes targeting diplomats, academics, civil society workers and students

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<sup>98</sup> Mazur, S. K. (2020), 'Doubtful Ally or Ally Full of Doubts? The Course of Transatlantic Relations under Donald Trump's Presidency', *Studia Europejskie/Studies in European Affairs*, 2/2020: pp. 9–23, <http://cejsh.icm.edu.pl/cejsh/element/bwmeta1.element.desklight-12959bd3-6df9-4e54-8ee6-b48aee75edaf>.

<sup>99</sup> Research interview, 2020.

from Central and Eastern European member states (as well as other members that want to expand their relations with African partners) for placements, internships, etc., related to its work with Africa. Such initiatives would help increase expertise among participating states and boost the potential for participating states' ongoing engagement with Africa. Increasing Central and Eastern European member states' capacity to engage with African regional organizations could also help build opportunities for relationship-building, alongside engagement at bilateral level through the countries' own diplomatic institutions or via EU delegations.

Given the period of relative disengagement since the early 1990s, shoring up diplomatic capacity is not, by itself, enough to achieve the deep mutual understanding and high-level political commitment that are essential to building productive and sustainable relations between Central and Eastern European and African states. Political dialogue, the forging of agreements, memorandums of understanding and sectoral cooperation, as well as establishing a network of honorary consulates, are all important factors that can help countries to reconnect and better understand each other's perspectives, hopes and needs.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, sustained partnerships between research and education, media, business, youth organizations, and national and local authorities all have a key role to play.

## **Ensuring consistency in political relations between Central and Eastern European states and Africa will also be contingent on finding areas of common interest, most pressingly on migration, trade and investment.**

Ensuring consistency in political relations between Central and Eastern European states and Africa will also be contingent on finding areas of common interest, most pressingly on migration, trade and investment.<sup>101</sup> The internal politics of Central and Eastern European countries demand a focus on migration, which is also a key area of interest for sub-Saharan African countries given critical issues that are often in tension with one another, such as remittances and concerns about the loss of highly skilled workers to more advanced economies. Job creation in sub-Saharan Africa can play an important role in addressing strategic concerns for both continents.

Furthermore, the EU is faced with development challenges in many of its own regions – notably including Central and Eastern Europe – and can engage in a more equal partnership with its African partners by bringing together EU and African communities that share similar development challenges with the aim of fostering different forms of 'co-development'. This could establish an equal footing for collaboration, as well as form a bridge between the EU's external and internal policies and funding instruments, and could enable newer member states to play a meaningful role in the EU's engagement with African partners. Such an approach would also enable the development of capacity for engagement within Africa

<sup>100</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>101</sup> Research interview, 2020.

and Central and Eastern Europe alike, and would counter the perception among Central and Eastern European member states that the EU, in the words of one interview subject, ‘has never been interested in helping us build such capacity [for engaging with African countries]’.<sup>102</sup>

Despite criticism regarding the relevance of Central and Eastern European transition experiences, they are seen by many, from both regions, as important. According to one interviewee, ‘The transition experience is really relevant, through conversation with people, they themselves felt they learnt so much, we are not using it enough.’<sup>103</sup> Central and Eastern European member states, as well as EU institutions, should design better mechanisms for making the transition experience more visible and available for potentially interested sub-Saharan African partner countries. Showcasing past successes could make these insights more appealing, for instance the sharing of Slovakia’s devolution experience with Kenya, or the Polish experience of building the country’s first stock exchange with Ethiopia.<sup>104</sup> Numerous further examples can be identified within the Eastern Neighbourhood and the Balkans.<sup>105</sup>

Indeed, there are early signs that Central and Eastern European countries have started to draw on their communist-era experiences in supporting African countries. Hungary has relaunched its higher education scholarship programme, offering almost 900 scholarships annually to African countries,<sup>106</sup> and collaboration in the field of education is expanding beyond offering scholarships to establishing joint degrees, including doctoral degrees, and to offering technical assistance in developing educational institutions. Interviewees from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia have all mentioned the relevance of the educational sector for bilateral relations with African countries.<sup>107</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Central and Eastern European countries should use their own experiences and influence within the EU to ensure that its policies and approach to the ongoing negotiations with Africa reflect the goal of an equal partnership between European and African states. Developed as part of a wider project focusing on relations between Africa and Central and Eastern Europe, this paper has argued that Central and Eastern European EU member states can play a much more relevant role in EU–Africa relations. However that will only become possible if EU institutions and Western European member states respect them as full member states rather than accession countries, and employ their past history of working with African countries, their transition experiences, and current development challenges to inform progress towards genuinely equal relations with the African continent.

<sup>102</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>103</sup> Research interview, 2020.

<sup>104</sup> Research interviews, 2020.

<sup>105</sup> Lexmann, M. (2016), ‘A new paradigm for sharing transition experience within the EU’s contested democracy support?’, *International Issues and Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, 25(3–4): pp. 3–26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26591966>; Píbilová, I. (2016), ‘Impacts of Czech cancer-fighting projects in Georgia and Serbia: lessons for the Visegrád Four’, *International Issues and Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, 25(3–4): pp. 27–44, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26591967>; Expert Forum (n.d.) *Stronger Judiciary in Eastern Europe: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine*, <https://expertforum.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Raport-BST.pdf>.

<sup>106</sup> Tarrósy and Vörös (2020), ‘Hungary’s Pragmatic Foreign Policy in a Post-American World’.

<sup>107</sup> Research interviews, 2020.

# Appendix: Diplomatic missions

**Table 1.** Central and Eastern European diplomatic missions in sub-Saharan Africa

Diplomatic missions	Host country
Bulgaria	<b>Embassies:</b> Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Ghana, South Africa
Croatia	<b>Embassies:</b> South Africa <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sudan
Czech Republic	<b>Embassies:</b> Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Zambia <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Djibouti, Gabon, The Gambia, Guinea, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Zimbabwe
Estonia	<b>Embassies:</b> – <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Kenya, Mali, Mauritius, South Africa
Hungary	<b>Embassies:</b> Angola, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Botswana, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia
Latvia	<b>Embassies:</b> South Africa <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Ghana
Lithuania	<b>Embassies:</b> South Africa <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda
Poland	<b>Embassies:</b> Angola, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Eritrea, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Diplomatic missions	Host country
Romania	<b>Embassies:</b> Angola, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Zimbabwe <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia.
Slovakia	<b>Embassies:</b> Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Cameroon, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Nigeria, Seychelles, South Africa, Sudan, Togo, Uganda
Slovenia	<b>Embassies:</b> – <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Kenya, Mauritius, South Africa, Uganda

Source: Updated from Cibian (2017), *Central and Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for Sustained Re-engagement*.

**Table 2.** Sub-Saharan African diplomatic missions in Central and Eastern Europe

Host country	Diplomatic missions
Bulgaria	<b>Embassies:</b> Nigeria, <sup>108</sup> South Africa, Sudan <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Cabo Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Mauritius, Seychelles, South Africa, Uganda
Croatia	<b>Embassies:</b> – <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Botswana, Burkina Faso, DRC, Côte d'Ivoire, Namibia, South Africa, Sudan
Czech Republic	<b>Embassies:</b> Angola, DRC, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Angola, Benin, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Namibia, Niger, Seychelles, Sudan
Estonia	<b>Embassies:</b> – <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania
Hungary	<b>Embassies:</b> Angola, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ghana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zambia
Latvia	<b>Embassies:</b> – <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Benin, South Africa
Lithuania	<b>Embassies:</b> – <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Mauritania, Namibia
Poland	<b>Embassies:</b> Angola, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Gambia, Ghana, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Zambia

Host country	Diplomatic missions
Romania	<b>Embassies:</b> Angola, <sup>109</sup> DRC, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Burundi, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Sierra Leone
Slovakia	<b>Embassies:</b> – <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> DRC, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Mali, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda
Slovenia	<b>Embassies:</b> – <b>Consulates and honorary consulates:</b> Angola, Seychelles, South Africa, Zambia

Source: Updated from Cibian (2017), *Central and Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa: Prospects for Sustained Re-engagement*.

<sup>109</sup> Embassy office.

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