



South Africa's links with Europe are developing and deepening.

EPA/VOLMIER HOSLET

South Africa-EU: A strategic partnership based on shared values and interests

South Africa | Johannesburg: The year 2014 was an important milestone for South Africa and its relations with its important strategic partner, the European Union (EU). It was the 20th anniversary of South Africa's freedom and democracy, and the 15th anniversary of the South Africa-EU Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA). Signed in 1999, the TDCA is the most comprehensive developmental framework that the post-1994 democratic South Africa entered into with a trading partner and forms the legal base for cooperation in areas of trade, political dialogue and development cooperation with the EU.

Through the TDCA, South Africa was able to accelerate its integration into the global economy and lay the foundation for a comprehensive template of relations with the EU. As a single customs area, the EU remains South Africa's largest, regional trading partner. At the peak of its trade with the EU in 2003, South African exports to the EU market made up 44% of its total global exports. South Africa is the EU's largest trading partner in Africa, however, with the onset of the global financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis, the demand for South African exports has plummeted to 25%. The bilateral trade relations provided for under the TDCA will be replaced by a regional trade regime under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), negotiated between the EU and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) EPA configuration. After more than 10 years of negotiations, the SADC EPA group and the EU concluded the protracted negotiations with the initialling of the agreement in July 2014 in Pretoria. This has marked a new milestone in the evolving relationship between the SADC EPA Group and its largest trade and investment partner, the EU. We look forward to strengthening this relationship on the basis of the new agreement and working with our European partners to support our growth and development objectives, as outlined in the SADC Regional Indicative Plan.

Since 2004, South Africa has been a beneficiary of generous development assistance from the EU through the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), whose objective is to bring added value through innovation, pilot programmes, capacity development, and the sharing of skills and knowledge. The year 2013 marked the end of the 2007-2013 programming cycle with the indicative allocation of €980m fully committed, which allowed for these objectives to be implemented.

Following discussions during the Summit in July 2013, we agreed to focus the Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) on employment creation, education, training, and innovation and building a capable and developmental state. In support of this programme the EU has formally committed €241m for the period 2014-2020 under the DCI to help South Africa address the eradication of poverty.

In addition to the DCI funding, it is important to mention that South Africa has benefited immensely from the EU's investment arm, the European Investment Bank (EIB). The EIB has provided competitive loans of over €2bn to support infrastructure and SMME development in South Africa. This includes loans for municipal infrastructure, water supply, housing, manufacturing, natural gas, SMME support, telecommunications and electrical power. We will continue to leverage the excellent relations we have with the EIB to access loans at favourable rates in order to finance infrastructure projects.

Beyond aid, we believe that our partnership with the EU should contribute meaningfully to skills transfer and technological exchanges. Through a myriad of policy interventions incorporated in our National Development Plan (NDP), South Africa seeks to develop the skills base of its people and enhance its technological advancement in order to build a dynamic, knowledge-based economy. We believe that the privileged relationship we enjoy with the EU, a centre for knowledge, high-end skills, technology and innovation will enhance our capacity both in the private and public sectors.

Beyond the usual bilateral trade and cooperation, South Africa and the EU identified the need to extend their cooperation to include Africa and global peace and development issues. Following wide-ranging discussions we agreed on the framework for a strategic partnership which finds expression in the Strategic Plan adopted in May 2007. Thus, the South Africa-EU relation reached its apogee with the historic first summit held in the EU-trio format in July 2007 in Bordeaux, France.

The Strategic Partnership is buttressed by shared, common values, including the promotion of democracy, good governance, human rights, the rule of law and, peace and security and sustainable development across both regions. Our common conviction to a rules-based multilateral system rather than power-based unilateralism has enabled our cooperation and collaboration in international affairs. Since the inaugural Bordeaux summit we have had six summits during which we have discussed inter alia, African security and development challenges; the global economic crisis; Climate Change; and the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Through our annual dialogue and summits, we have impacted positively on AU efforts to address peace and security challenges affecting the African continent. Our bilateral efforts have reinforced and complemented those of the AU in Somalia, the Sahel Region, the Great Lakes Region, and in the Central African Republic (CAR). All this has taken place within the framework of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) that is underpinned by the doctrine of African solutions to African problems.

In the face of the global financial and Eurozone economic crisis we have agreed to take joint actions within the framework of the G20 to help stem an impending global recession. Given the extent of its integration into the global economy, South Africa has been negatively affected by the global economic downturn. In this regard, together with our European partners we are taking conscious and deliberate measures to stimulate growth in our respective economies. Recovery in Europe and higher growth in South Africa will contribute to overall efforts to stabilise the global economy.

Together with our European partners, we realise that the current climate change negotiations and the conclusion of an agreement at COP21 in Paris in 2015 is a strategic issue with far reaching implications for development and sustainability of countries. During our dialogue with the EU we have stressed that the political deal reached in Paris must ensure environmental integrity without compromising the development space of developing countries. The 2015 agreement should ensure ambitious and equitable action by all parties, reaffirming the leadership in such action by those parties with the greatest responsibilities and highest capabilities. Differentiation and equity are the key political issues in the negotiations. We remain hopeful that the Paris deal be more than just a political declaration, but a legally binding commitment.

With the expiry of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) upon us, we maintain that the UN development agenda beyond 2015 should be closely aligned with, and build upon, existing development programmes and agendas, including the MDGs. Furthermore, the eradication of poverty and hunger, as well as combating inequality at all levels, is essential to create a more prosperous and sustainable future for all. In our various interactions with the EU, we have stressed that it should be acknowledged that countries have different starting points, national priorities and regional circumstances. Therefore we affirm the principles of Rio, including Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), along with Equity and the Right to Development. We also reaffirm the importance of integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development, namely, inclusive economic growth, social development and environmental sustainability, in a balanced manner, without emphasising one over the other. We are hopeful that the post-2015 development agenda adopted at the UN General Assembly in September 2014 will reflect these elements.

We are convinced that our strategic partnership with the EU is not a relationship of convenience or expediency, but one that is based on principles and shared values inspired by a common vision for a peaceful and better world in which all enjoy human dignity. Our relationship with the EU is like Beethoven's legendary ninth symphony, it will endure forever. It is an essential element in the tapestry of our foreign policy.