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Redefining Spain-Africa relations: for a sustainable and fair future and shared development between Spain and Africa

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Abstract:

Africa is at a turning point in its history and faces a series of complex challenges and trends that shape its geopolitical, economic, social and governance landscape. In a convulsive and constantly changing world, it is attracting the attention of the world's major powers and becoming a geopolitical epicenter.
In 2025, the African continent faces a series of structural and circumstantial challenges that require priority attention, from security and governance to economic development and climate change.
In this dynamic and changing scenario, Spain has the opportunity and the responsibility to define its own policy towards Africa, based on mutual respect, cooperation and shared benefit. We must stop seeing Africa as an object of intervention and start treating its representatives as diverse and equal partners in the construction of a fairer and more sustainable world order.

Keywords:

Africa, Geopolitics, Security, Development, Governance, Sustainability, Natural resources.

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Introduction

The following considerations derive from the daily readings that, from Casa África's public diplomacy institution, are carried out by accessing information generated in different national and international media and which, in several languages (Spanish, English, French, Portuguese), are collected in the daily dossier that the Casa sends free of charge to almost a thousand subscribers by email. As a result of this informative monitoring, each week I prepare a series of articles that are published in print and *online* media, both Canarian and national, which reflect the news trends and current events on the African continent from the point of view of the media that cover it.

Although Casa África is neither a *think tank* nor an academic centre, much of its work is based on the proven work of think tanks, universities and analysts who devote their efforts and time to better knowing and understanding what is happening on the African continent. To conclude this text, I take the liberty of attaching a series of articles of my own that I consider to be of interest because of their relation to the issues dealt with in this chapter. They were published in the second half of this year and are reproduced as an annex to this text.

Casa África is a public consortium based in the autonomous community of the Canary Islands, which was created in 2006 and whose work is summarised in the phrase "Africa and Spain, ever closer". The reading of the article entitled "Setting Casa África's course" (*"Marcando el rumbo de Casa África*", published on 8 November 2024) aims to familiarise the general public with the configuration of the guidelines that define Casa África's work. These lines are defined in Casa África's Strategic Plan, a document approved by the Casa África's Governing Council on 19 December 2024 and agreed with civil society, institutions and experts in public consultation that will govern the Casa's action until 2028.

Africa is at a turning point in its history. It faces a number of complex challenges and trends that shape its geopolitical, economic, social and governance landscape. Political instability, economic crises, armed conflicts, the legacy of colonialism and social disparities are some of the obstacles the continent must overcome to achieve sustainable and inclusive development. The climate crisis further aggravates the situation and negatively impacts human security and development on the continent.

In a convulsive and ever-changing world, Africa emerges as a geopolitical epicentre attracting the attention of the world's major powers. This has been seen more often than not in 2024, with constant gestures that denote an evident growing interest due to a convergence of factors ranging from its economic growth to the abundance of strategic natural resources, the demographic boom of a young population and the continent's growing influence in global affairs.

In this dynamic and changing scenario, Spain has the opportunity and the responsibility to define its own policy towards Africa based on mutual respect, cooperation and shared benefit. To achieve this, it is essential to understand the complexities of the continent, listen to African voices and build a solid and lasting relationship that benefits both parties.

In this regard, our country presented its new strategy for Africa in the Council of Ministers on 17 September 2024 under the title "Spain-Africa 2025-2028. Working together through a strategic relationship". An ambitious document that proposes one hundred lines of action grouped into five strategic objectives: strengthening a relationship that facilitates joint action, growing towards sustainable African development focused on young people, connecting societies and economies in Africa, Spain and the world, protecting, guaranteeing the security of populations, and living together in open societies with solid and inclusive institutions. The importance of this strategy is reflected in the fact that the Prime Minister himself, Pedro Sánchez, was present at its public presentation to society on 5 December 2024, along with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, José Manuel Albares, and other people from Spain linked to foreign policy in Africa, including the undersigned.

The African continent faces a number of structural and conjunctural challenges in 2025 that require priority attention. From security and governance to economic development and climate change, Africa is the scene of problems that also have global repercussions.

One example is the threat of jihadism, which remains latent, with a projection of significant expansion towards the coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea. Political instability in the Sahel countries (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso), marked by a series of coups d'état and the weakening of cooperation mechanisms such as ECOWAS, aggravates regional tensions. Persistent armed conflicts in Sudan, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel continue to wreak havoc, while the protracted crisis in Libya adds fuel to insecurity in a vast area.

Overcoming challenges such as these and seizing opportunities will depend on the ability of African countries to take control of their own destiny, promote regional cooperation, build strong and fair institutions, and invest in human development, innovation and sustainability.

The international community must play a supportive role in this process by respecting the sovereignty of African countries and promoting equitable and mutually beneficial relations. Africa must stop seeing itself as an object of intervention and start treating its representatives as diverse and equal partners in building a more just and sustainable world order.

On the other hand, it is important to analyse the evolution of Spanish Africanism and to outline guidelines for future action.

New colonialism

Africa is undoubtedly a key continent recognised in the global strategic landscape for the opportunities it presents in terms of economic growth, energy wealth, vast mineral and water reserves, extensive fertile land, demographic development and cultural richness[1] . This strategic orientation is also influenced by instability, terrorism, organised crime and other threats to the stability and development of the continent and its environment. In other words, external interventions in Africa are often driven by these geopolitical and economic interests while African countries face persistent poverty, inequality and dependence on the export of raw materials. [2]

This "resource curse"[3] remains a reality and the continent's wealth mainly benefits external actors[4] . External competition for Africa's resources also results in support for authoritarian regimes that serve foreign interests, the instrumentalisation of international

[1] OECD (2024). *Africa's Development Dynamics 2024: Skills, Jobs and Productivity* [online]. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1787/df06c7a4-en
[2] WEF (2023). *Why Africa will become a prominent player in global geopolitics* [online]. World Economic Forum. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/07/why-africa-will-become-a-prominent-player-in-global-geopolitics/
[3] Sachs, J. D. and Warner, A. M. (1995). *Natural Resource Abundance and Economic Growth* [online]. National Bureau of Economic Research. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://www.nber.org/papers/w5398
[4] Arezki, R. *et al.* (2024) The import channel of the resource curse [online] *World Bank blogs*. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/developmenttalk/the-import-channel-of-the-resource-curse

bodies to legitimise military interventions, and the imposition of economic policies that perpetuate dependency.[5]

The growing influence of global powers such as China and Russia on the continent challenges the traditional hegemony of the West, particularly France in its former colonies, and means that, geopolitically, Africa is at a crossroads. The war in Ukraine, for example, has further highlighted this dynamic, with African countries showing a reluctance to automatically align themselves with the West, leading to criticism and confusion.[6]

Although Africa's future depends - to some extent - on these external geostrategic interests, it should not be guided by them but by its own objectives. The term "new colonialism" in Africa refers to the growing foreign influence in Africa's political and economic affairs, the exploitation of natural resources and the cases of detriment to the continent's sustainable development[7] . External actors, including the EU and Spain, must be allies and not repeat neither the mistakes of colonialism, nor the models of cooperation and investment that have already shown limited results in terms of governance, security and in the daily lives of citizens in Africa. Africa can no longer be treated as a puppet continent, the scene of power struggles and without a voice in the international arena.

A new diplomacy

For centuries, diplomacy has been central in shaping international relations, facilitating peaceful negotiations and conflict resolution, and fostering global cooperation. In today's world, however, diplomacy faces new trends and challenges that are redefining its future. Moreover, the rise of nationalism and populist movements, and even the use of digital

[5] Alaminos, M. Á. and Marquina, A. (2022). AFRICA: Competition and substitution in an environment strategic rivalry [online]. *UNISCI Journal*. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://www.unisci.es/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/UNISCIDP60-1ALAMINOS-MARQ.pdf

[6] UNDP (2022). *The impact of the war in Ukraine on sustainable development in Africa* [online]. Regional Bureau for Africa UNDP. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/impact-war-ukraine-sustainable-development-africa

[7] Obikwelu, I. J., Messina, G.-M. and Odumegwu, A. C. (2023). The Effects of Neocolonialism [online]. *PanAfrican Journal of Governance and Development*. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://www.ajol.info/index.php/pajgd/article/view/260278 and Whelan, O. (2022). Neocolonialism: The Remnants of Foreign Exploitation in Africa [online]. *The Science Survey.* [Accessed: 2025]. Available from: https://thesciencesurvey.com/editorial/2023/07/21/neocolonialism-the-remnants-of-foreign-exploitation-in-africa/

and technological tools, are driving the transformation of diplomacy, forcing it to adapt and evolve. [8]

At the same time, multilateralism is being challenged globally by its ineffectiveness in conflict resolution, by nationalist movements[9] and by slow progress in addressing the climate crisis[10] . It is increasingly obvious that global cooperation frameworks have not kept pace with these developments and that their toolbox, rules and approaches need updating.

While the stated intention of international bodies and global powers is often to promote peace, democracy and development, the reality is that their actions have often had negative consequences, exacerbating instability and perpetuating the continent's dependency. The UN Security Council - without permanent representation from African countries - makes decisions on military interventions and sanctions that often have devastating consequences for civilian populations[11]. Lack of adequate funding for peace operations and post-conflict reconstruction, as well as inefficiency and bureaucracy, limit the effectiveness of such interventions [12] [13] .

Moreover, the international community is criticised for applying double standards in its interventions in Africa, acting more forcefully when its interests are at stake and showing indifference to human rights violations and humanitarian crises that do not directly affect them. Selective condemnation of coups, the imposition of economic sanctions that affect civilian populations and the lack of support for genuine African-led development initiatives generate mistrust and resentment. France, in particular, must abandon the *Françafrique* policy, characterised by military interventionism, support for authoritarian regimes and the

[8] Diplo (2024). *Digital geopolitics: new environment for diplomatic activities* [online]. Diplo Foundation. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://www.diplomacy.edu/topics/digital-diplomacy/#geopolitical-and-geoeconomic-environment-for-diplomatic-activities
[9] Diplomacia.org (2024a): *How does populism impact on international diplomacy?* [online]. Diplomacy.org [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://diplomacia.org/blog/como-impacta-el-populismo-en-la-diplomacia-internacional
[10] Diplomacy.org (2024b). *The challenges of climate diplomacy in the context of global climate change* [online]. Diplomacy.org [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://diplomacia.org/blog/los-desafios-de-la-diplomacia-climatica-en-el-contexto-del-cambio-climatico-global
[11] United Nations (2024). *Africa deserves permanent membership in the Security Council* [online]. UN. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://news.un.org/es/story/2024/08/1531956
[12] United Nations (n. d.). *Financing of peacekeeping operations.* [online]. UN. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://peacekeeping.un.org/es/how-we-are-funded
[13] United Nations (n. d.). *The transition from peace operations* [online]. UN. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://peacekeeping.un.org/es/transitioning-peace-operations-0

perpetuation of economic dependence[14] . France's disproportionate influence on the decisions of international bodies such as ECOWAS and the UN generates mistrust and limits the sovereignty of African countries.

Regarding the EU, a recent CIDOB report criticises the three strategies implemented by the EU in the Sahel since 2011 for its securitarian approach, which has been ineffective and worsened the situation. The report identifies key problems as: the securitisation of security, migration and climate change; the negative effects of this securitarian approach; internal tensions within the EU; and the gap between rhetoric and practice.

The report argues that securitisation has simplified the causes of instability, prioritising military responses over political and development solutions. Migration and climate policies have generated tensions and reduced local economic opportunities. Moreover, the EU's internal dynamics and lack of local ownership have affected the effectiveness of its strategies. The report concludes that the EU should adopt a less securitarian approach and focus more on the root causes of instability by incorporating local knowledge and promoting a more reciprocal pragmatism. Indeed, top-down approaches, without genuine involvement of civil society and EU actors in decision-making that affects Africans, should be a thing of the past, as they contribute to a disconnect between European strategies and realities on the ground and to European irrelevance in Africa.

The AU itself advocates international cooperation that respects the sovereignty of African countries and promotes equitable and beneficial development for all parties involved. It also emphasises the importance of strengthening African institutions and further promoting regional integration in order to resist new forms of neo-colonialism.[15]

Therefore, it seems necessary to reiterate the obvious: partnerships with the continent must always be based on respect and in-depth knowledge of Africa without damaging African unity, self-determination and freedom for Africans. Europe must stop imposing its own solutions and agendas and start listening to and learning from African voices. The diversity of perspectives and experiences on the continent offers a rich source of knowledge and wisdom to address global challenges. It is crucial to support African

[14] Saldaña, E. (2023). What is Francophobia? [online]. *The World Order*. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://elordenmundial.com/que-es-francafrica/

[15] African Union (2015). Our Aspirations for the Africa We Want [online]. *Agenda 2063.* [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://au.int/agenda2063/aspirations

leadership in the search for home-grown and global solutions and to promote intercultural dialogue based on mutual respect and mutual learning.

Africa and Spain: a new differentiated and grounded model

Spain, within the framework of the EU - but also with its own voice - aspires to be one of those actors in the rapprochement between Europe and Africa, well aware not only of what it can contribute to Africa, but also of all that the continent offers the country. Africa is our neighbour, and, in many ways, we are inextricably linked: there is a mutual dependence and a less complex historical relationship than in other bilateral relations of European countries with African countries. These facts make the Africa-Spain nexus a strategic partnership on both shores.

In this configuration, it is essential to vindicate the fact that Casa África is located in the Canary Islands for logistical and social reasons and that the Canary Islands can play a central role in this Spanish-African nexus. The archipelago is a community with a privileged relationship with the African continent, of whose western Atlantic coast it forms part. The Canary Islands form part of the Macaronesian region (Cape Verde, Madeira, the Azores and the Canary Islands) and are located in the maritime environment of West Africa, at the exit of the Gulf of Guinea and close to countries such as Morocco, Mauritania, Senegal and Equatorial Guinea, with which it has long-standing relations of all kinds. Aware of the importance of this link, two decades ago the government of the autonomous community of the Canary Islands created a general directorate dedicated to its relations with the African continent, a decision that is also a commitment to look towards Africa and innovate through tools such as training and artistic programmes, educational experiences and trade agreements that bring us closer together.

For Spain to play a central role in building a fairer world and to act as a bridge between Africa and Europe, becoming a trusted partner and friend of the continent, it needs to know much more about Africa and access this knowledge through the academic, cultural and other types of production taking place on the African continent. It must take a critical stance against the simplistic narrative of internal complexities and promote a discourse

of its own that recognises the diversity of perspectives and Africa's capacity to define its future.

This new relationship must recognise the colonial legacy and commitment to historical justice, although Spain, unlike other European powers, had a limited colonial presence in Africa, mainly in Western Sahara and Equatorial Guinea. This fact offers Spain the opportunity to take a leading role in the restitution of cultural property looted during the colonial era and in supporting reparation processes for the damage caused.

The model of collaboration -or partnership- with Africa must always be based on respect and mutual benefit. This can be done by aligning with the international commitments made by both Spain and African countries, such as the *United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*[16] , or even the objectives of the *African Union's Agenda 2063*[17], the AU's master plan for sustainable development and economic growth on the continent.

Peace and security

The security landscape in sub-Saharan Africa is characterised by a complex web of internal conflicts and regional tensions that have, in some cases, become even more internationalised in recent years and complicated from a geopolitical perspective. Three main areas - the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region - exemplify the security challenges facing the continent, exacerbated by the growing involvement of external actors, the erosion of democratic governance and the exploitation of natural resources.

In the Sahel, the power vacuum left by the withdrawal of Western actors has been filled by Russia, whose influence is being consolidated through the now Africa Corps (formerly the Wagner group). The emergence of a military bloc made up of Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali after their respective break with ECOWAS reflects a shift towards anti-Western policies initially very much focused against its former colony and, until a few months ago, priority partner: France. This environment is complicated by the persistence of jihadist

[16] United Nations (2015). *Agenda 2030: Sustainable Development Goals.* [online]. UN. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/
[17] African Union, *op. cit.*

groups that, adapting to local dynamics, are strengthening their links with the affected communities, making counterinsurgency efforts more difficult.

As mentioned above, jihadism remains the main threat in many parts of the African continent and especially in the Sahel. Indeed, there is little discussion of how the security crisis in this part of the world threatens to spread to the Gulf of Guinea littoral countries of Benin, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. In these areas, jihadist groups are exploiting a range of structural vulnerabilities, frustrations of all kinds and resentments against states that do not always respond to the grievances of their citizens as they would like to in order to recruit young men to join their ranks.

While analysts usually refer to and analyse the western part of the Sahel (Mali, Niger, Chad and Burkina Faso) together, one of the world's most intense conflicts, that of Sudan, is now taking place in the eastern part of the Sahel. The civil war in Sudan, which began in April 2023, has triggered an unprecedented security and humanitarian crisis with devastating repercussions at both national and regional levels. The fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has displaced millions of people, generated famine and unleashed a wave of atrocities, especially in the Darfur region. Neighbouring countries, such as Chad and South Sudan, are under extraordinary pressure from the massive influx of refugees and economic instability resulting from the conflict.

The international character of this confrontation further aggravates the situation. The RSF is significantly supported, among others, by the United Arab Emirates, while Egypt supports the SAF to a lesser extent. At the same time, the involvement of armed groups from Chad and South Sudan introduces cross-border dynamics that threaten to extend the conflict beyond Sudanese borders. This involvement of external actors not only perpetuates the war, but also complicates diplomatic efforts to establish a ceasefire. This is compounded by the internal fragmentation of both sides, composed of various factions with fluctuating loyalties, which makes negotiation difficult and increases the risk of prolonging the conflict.

All these factors mean that the short-term prospects for peace are bleak and Sudan is on the brink of a total collapse, with significant regional implications. The stability of Chad and South Sudan is at stake, and the continuation of the war puts at risk not only the

integrity of the Sudanese state, but also the security of the Horn of Africa as a whole. The international community faces the challenge of redoubling its efforts to push for a peace agreement while mobilising humanitarian resources to meet the growing needs of the affected population.

In the Horn of Africa, the escalating conflict in Sudan underlines the deep internal fractures and their regional impact. At the same time, agreements such as the one signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland add to the tension. This memorandum, which grants Ethiopia maritime access in exchange for support for Somaliland's independence, puts at risk the stability of Somalia, whose territorial integrity is threatened by these strategic alliances.

Meanwhile, the Great Lakes region faces a significant deterioration in relations between the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda. Rwanda's support for the M23 rebel group has intensified fighting, generating massive displacement and undermining peace efforts. The withdrawal of UN peacekeepers in the DRC, in addition to the deployment of SADC troops, reveals the difficulties of coordinating effective international responses amid growing geopolitical rivalry.

Taken together, these conflicts highlight not only the security fragility of African states, but also the global trend towards a decline in effective multilateralism and respect for international humanitarian law. The combination of internal factors, such as weak social contracts, and external factors, such as the intervention of foreign powers, shapes a security landscape in which stability seems increasingly distant.

Spain can advocate greater participation by African countries in international forums and the reform of institutions such as the UN Security Council to ensure fairer representation and a level playing field for all. In this context, multipolarity and the expansion of partners on the African continent should not be seen as a threat, but rather as an opportunity to diversify its alliances and promote a multilateral approach in our relations with Africa.

In terms of security, and in both general and specific cases, the Western perspective conceives of Africa, and in particular the Sahel, as a peripheral and problematic area that threatens Europe's security. The Sahel, in particular, has become an epicentre of jihadism, with armed groups operating in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger

on a large scale. The inability of states in the region to contain the jihadist threat, despite support from France and other countries, has led to instability and spurred coups d'état.

Instead of prioritising military security and replicating the French model of direct military intervention, Spain can adopt an approach of peace promotion, human security and conflict prevention by addressing the root causes of poverty, inequality, social exclusion and environmental degradation. It can also prioritise support for peace and security initiatives led by African actors, such as the African Union and sub-regional organisations. This would involve strengthening African capacities in areas such as mediation, conflict resolution and the development of effective and accountable security forces. Supporting transitional justice processes in post-conflict countries, promoting reconciliation, truth, justice and reparations, is another way. Spain can contribute to the development and strengthening of early warning mechanisms at the regional and continental level by sharing its experience and providing technical and financial support.

Governance

Political instability and coups d'état are a constant in many African countries. Fragile institutions, corruption and lack of transparency undermine democracy and the rule of law. Although there have been advances in democratisation since the 1990s, with the opening of multiparty politics and alternation of power in some countries, the reality is that the "façade" of the Western democratic model is often copied without a real deep transformation[18] [19]. Western pressure to hold elections periodically, sometimes in adverse contexts, can be counterproductive. Citizen participation and the building of strong institutions are essential for effective and legitimate governance. There is a divorce between political and economic elites and African societies that needs to be taken into account when supporting certain regimes that are not seen as legitimate by their populations.

[18] Mateos, O. (2018). Sub-Saharan Africa: democratisation, despite everything [online]. In: CIDOB (2018). *CIDOB International Yearbook 2018*. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://www.cidob.org/publicaciones/africa-subsahariana-democratizacion-pesar-de-todo

[19] Pérez, Á. (2004). Democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa [online]. *Grupo de Estudios Estratégicos.* [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: http://www.gees.org/articulos/democracia-en-africa-subsahariana

Growing citizen awareness and social mobilisation, evidenced in protests and movements across the continent, are driving the demand for greater transparency, inclusive growth, accountability and social justice. Academics and civil society in Africa play a crucial role in transforming the harmful dynamics that continue to plague the continent. Although they are constrained by numerous limitations, such as lack of resources, government repression, internal fragmentation and the influence of external actors, their work is critical to promoting positive change on the continent.

Governance in Africa faces challenges such as conflict and distrust of institutions: 21 countries, representing 47.9% of the African population, show lower levels of governance than in 2014. On the other hand, 33 countries, covering 52.1% of the continent's population, have made progress in this decade. These are the findings of the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) 2024[20] . With international support and cooperation, there is potential for significant progress, and Spain must continue to collaborate in strengthening African institutions. This can include training civil servants and supporting administrative decentralisation, but it is crucial that this is done together with civil society. Civil society already plays a leading role in promoting democracy, human rights and sustainable development on the continent, but these organisations face challenges such as government repression and lack of resources[21].

Sustainable economic development

Since the beginning of the 21st century, Africa has experienced the second highest economic growth rate in the world, second only to Asia. According to the United Nations, Africa's economic growth will remain moderate after gradually slowing between 2021 and 2023. However, recent efforts to stabilise the economy are expected to start bearing fruit from the second half of 2024, particularly in some of the larger economies. The continent's economic activity is expected to move from a sluggish 3 % in 2024 to 3.2 % in 2025[22].

[20] Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2024). *Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG)* [online]. Mo Ibrahim Foundation. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/our-research/iiag
[21] Lecumberri, B. (2024). Governing well: conflicts and distrust in institutions tarnish Africa's progress [online]. *El País*. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://elpais.com/planeta-futuro/2024-10-23/gobernar-bien-los-conflictos-y-la-desconfianza-en-las-instituciones-empanan-los-progresos-de-africa.html
[22] United Nations (2024). *Trade and Development Report 2024. Rethinking development in the age of discontent* [online]. UN. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdr2024_en.pdf

However, the region faces a number of development challenges, including extreme poverty, which affects around 466 million Africans, according to the World Bank[23] . In recent times, increased conflict and violence across the region has dampened economic activity and climate shocks have exacerbated this fragility. The recent poly-crisis, which includes climate issues, the covid-19 pandemic and conflict, has accelerated the rise in debt, keeping the region at high risk of debt overhang. One cannot look away from the growing external debt of many African countries, especially to private creditors (not China, as the media tries to sell us), which poses a threat to their economic stability. Dependence on high-interest loans can lead to a spiral of indebtedness that further limits the ability of governments to invest in development and meet the needs of their populations.

Despite these challenges, Africa is also experiencing positive trends. The growing youth population represents a huge potential for development, with a dynamic and entrepreneurial workforce[24].

The AU, through Agenda 2063, promotes economic development, self-reliance and economic independence. One of the most important recent initiatives is the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), in force since 2019. This represents a great opportunity for the continent - and also for Spain - with a market of 1.3 billion people and a GDP of more than 2.7 trillion euros. Supporting Africa's own economic governance is a priority to foster mutually beneficial relations.

Europe must also abandon unfavourable trade practices that perpetuate Africa's economic dependence. Monoculture, such as rice cultivation in Senegal and Mauritania, increases vulnerability to global market fluctuations[25]. It is an example of the legacy of the colonial past that shows that the quest for economic diversification, and thus greater economic independence for Africa, still has some way to go.

On the other hand, it is necessary to promote fair trade agreements, facilitate access to European markets for African products and invest in the development of local capacities

[23] World Bank (2024a). *Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report Pathways Out of the Polycrisis* [online]. World Bank. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-prosperity-and-planet
[24] World Bank (2024b). *Africa's pulse. An analysis of issues shaping africa's economic future* [online]. World Bank. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/baea7aea-da11-45e8-82ec-101ac5f1e6ab/content
[25] Aldekoa, X., Borràs, E. and Aragó, L. (2024). A thousand rice canoes [online]. *La Vanguardia*. [Consultation: 2025]. Available at: https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20240818/9874934/mil-cayucos-arroz.html

to add value to raw materials. Spain can support this process through knowledge and technology transfer and increase funding for climate change adaptation projects in Africa by supporting the communities most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. For example, it can provide *know-how* in the fields of renewable energies, sustainable management of natural resources, practices that protect biodiversity, ecosystems and the livelihoods of local communities.

The expansion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) opens up other opportunities for education, innovation and economic development. In this area, particular attention is given to the opportunities and challenges for African countries in the global context. The region is undergoing an accelerated digital transformation that, if properly managed, can improve economic competitiveness, facilitate social development and enhance regional integration. However, disparities in access to technology, poor infrastructure and regulatory challenges remain major obstacles.

According to the *GSMA Mobile Economy Report 2024*, the number of mobile internet users reached 600 million in 2022, and this figure is expected to continue to grow to 800 million by 2025. This increase is mainly driven by smartphone adoption and the expansion of 4G and 5G coverage in key countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria and Egypt[26].

Spain, with its expertise in telecommunications, *fintech*, renewable energy and digital health, has opportunities for investment and collaboration, and can even act as a bridge between Africa and Europe to make the continent a partner for innovation and sustainable development. To maximise these opportunities, it is crucial to address infrastructure challenges, establish sound regulatory frameworks and foster inclusive and sustainable economic growth in the coming decades.

Inclusive social development

Socially, Africa is characterised by great cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as a rapidly growing young population. Inequality, poverty and lack of access to basic services

[26] GSMA (2024). *GSMA Mobile Economy Report 2024* [online]. GSMA. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/connectivity-for-good/mobile-economy/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/260224-The-Mobile-Economy-2024.pdf

such as education and health are major challenges. The legacy of colonialism continues to impact on society, from the imposition of languages and educational models to the persistence of mentalities and power structures. Neo-colonialism perpetuates dependency and limits the ability of African countries to take control of their own destiny. Building a more just, equitable and inclusive society is crucial for human development and the well-being of the population.

Spain can take advantage of its cultural diversity to build bridges of understanding with Africa, promoting intercultural dialogue and cooperation in education, culture and art. It can also support artistic and cultural creation in Africa by encouraging the exchange of experiences and collaboration between artists from both continents.

It is necessary to remember that, until the end of the 20th century, the dominant perspective in Spanish academia in the field of African studies was Eurocentric and imperialist, largely inherited from the Franco era. During Franco's regime, the Institute of African Studies (IDEA, from Spanish Instituto de Estudios Africanos), created in 1945, became the main promoter of knowledge about Africa in Spain. However, IDEA's vision was marked by colonialism and paternalism, projecting a distorted image of African realities. This perspective was reinforced by the scant attention that Spanish academia paid to African history during much of the 20th century, in contrast to other European countries with a greater colonial presence on the continent.

From the 1980s onwards, with the arrival of democracy and the rise of post-colonial theories, a paradigm shift took place in Spanish Africanism. New research centres and groups of historians - known as “pioneers” - emerged and began to question the Eurocentric view of the African past. These researchers focused on recovering the voice of the continent's own inhabitants using new methodologies and sources, such as oral history.

In the 21st century, interest in African history in Spain has continued to grow. The increase in the academic offer, with the creation of specific master's degrees on the continent, has contributed to the training of a new generation of Africanist historians. Despite progress, African history remains a minority field within Spanish academia and there is still a great need for greater institutional support, funding and integration with other research networks in order to consolidate its place in Spanish historiography.

Knowledge should therefore be a central aspect of Spain's strategy with Africa and should include the promotion of the teaching of African languages in Spain, as is done at Casa África with Wolof and Bambara.

The teaching of Spanish

Spanish, one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, is becoming increasingly important in sub-Saharan Africa, a region marked by its cultural, linguistic and economic diversity. Although Spanish has not historically played a predominant role in this region, as is the case with English or French, its relevance is increasing due to educational, diplomatic and commercial factors.

The teaching of Spanish in Africa has become a key tool for opening up new opportunities. With more than 580 million speakers worldwide, Spanish is the second most spoken language by number of native speakers and the third in global use on the Internet. Spain has developed a renewed strategy to promote its teaching in Africa and recognises the potential of the language as a cultural and economic bridge. This strategy focuses on strengthening educational and cultural cooperation, promoting the learning of Spanish and improving the quality of teaching. The initiative includes the opening of new teaching centres, the training of teachers and the creation of teaching materials adapted to local needs.

One of the main drivers of the growth of Spanish in sub-Saharan Africa is its inclusion in the education systems of several countries. Institutions such as the Instituto Cervantes or the Directorate General for Spanish in the World, of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, and alliances with local governments have promoted the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language in a good number of countries.

Spanish is not only an educational and cultural tool, but also a strategic asset in foreign relations, as it facilitates communication and understanding in the diplomatic, commercial and cultural spheres. The promotion of Spanish in Africa strengthens ties between Spain and African countries, creating an environment conducive to dialogue and collaboration in various fields, from economics to science and technology. It is also an asset in the integration processes of Africans who have recently arrived in our country.

A number of institutions and organisations work alongside the Instituto Cervantes, with a network of centres around the world, in key countries such as Morocco, Senegal and Egypt. In the process of expanding to other regions, the Instituto Cervantes does not limit itself to Spanish courses, but also programmes cultural activities aimed at bringing societies closer together.

The Directorate General for Spanish in the World was created in 2021 and is attached to the Secretariat of State for Ibero-America, the Caribbean and Spanish in the World. Since its creation, it has been central to Spain's foreign policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has underlined the relevance of Spanish as a strategic axis for strengthening international relations and promoting Spanish culture and economy in the international arena. Its work includes promoting Spanish in regions where it is not an official language, boosting Spanish as a factor of economic growth and international competitiveness, especially in the context of digitalisation and the knowledge economy, and consolidating Spanish as a language of prestige in diplomacy and international relations. The creation of this Directorate General reflects Spain's commitment to the promotion of its language and culture while recognising Spanish as a key tool for development and cultural cooperation.

The Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) is another key player in the promotion of Spanish in Africa thanks to the funding of teacher training programmes and lectorate scholarships, as well as other actions carried out together with the Instituto Cervantes.

Finally, Casa África focuses on supporting the aforementioned organisations and the organisation of the Africa-Spain hispanists' meetings, as well as the second edition of a monograph on the situation of Spanish teaching in sub-Saharan Africa, research that will be published in 2025 and will reveal shocking data on the growth of Spanish teaching in the neighbouring continent. The first publication of this kind was produced in 2015. It was coordinated by the Spanish Embassy in Kenya, the Cervantes Institute and Casa África, and was carried out in collaboration with AECID and the Spanish embassies in Africa. The first edition of this study revealed that almost 1.5 million people study Spanish in sub-Saharan Africa, and the second edition promises to update and expand this data by providing a detailed overview of the progress and challenges of Spanish language teaching in the region.

Migrations

Far from the image of a mass exodus to Europe that some political parties and other interest groups try to create, the reality is that the majority of African migrants (51.6%) move to other countries within the continent. While Europe is a significant destination for African migrants (27% of those leaving the continent), it is crucial to note that regular migration is in the majority, which contradicts the narrative of mass irregular arrival that is constantly used by the far right. It is also true that irregular migration routes, whether to Europe or to the Gulf countries, present considerable dangers: migrants face violence from smugglers, harsh travel conditions, the risk of becoming victims of trafficking and labour exploitation, and mistreatment by some authorities.

The African-born population represents 15.6 % of the total number of foreign-born people living in Spain and, among them, Moroccans represent more than 73 % of all Africans, well above Senegalese (6.4 %) or Algerians (5.1 %)[27]. Recent studies confirm that the profile of the migrant who mainly arrives in Spain is female and Latin American, as explained by organisations such as the Por Causa Foundation. It is also true that 2024 is already the year with the highest number of irregular migrants arriving in the Canary Islands by sea.

According to data collected by EFE, the islands were, in 2024, the main entry route for irregular migrants to Spain for the fifth consecutive year, and the Canary Islands Route set unprecedented records. The newspaper *El País,* at the beginning of 2025, put the number of people arriving on the islands during the previous year at 45,328. EFE news agency also pointed out that, despite being at record highs, the Canary Route is still far from the Mediterranean records (62,034 entries until November via the central Mediterranean and 63,935 via the eastern Mediterranean). The International Organisation for Migration estimates that almost 1,400 people died or disappeared trying to reach Spain by dinghy or cayuco. However, Caminando Fronteras puts the figure at 10,457 victims, which means twenty-eight lives lost at sea every day on the world's most dangerous route for this type of human movement.

[27] INE (2024). *Continuous Population Statistics (CPS). 1 April 2024. Provisional data* [online]. National Statistics Institute. [Consulted: 2025]. Available at: https://ine.es/dyngs/INEbase/es/operacion.htm?c=Estadistica_C&cid=1254736177095&menu=ultiDatos&idp=1254735572981

Intra-African migratory movements remain in the majority and driven by the search for economic opportunities, are concentrated in countries such as South Africa, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. The most important migration routes to the neighbouring continent are in West and East Africa, where two-way flows are evident, reflecting the temporary nature of labour.

Spain, as part of Europe's southern border, becomes a transit territory for many African migrants seeking to reach countries such as France or Britain, where language can facilitate integration. African immigration to Spain has increased in recent decades, driven mainly by the Moroccan community. Factors such as visa exemptions in the past and the high rate of visa issuance today explain this trend. It is important to bear in mind that migration can also have positive effects for African countries, such as remittances, the acquisition of new skills and knowledge by returning migrants, and the creation of transnational work and support networks.

Migration presents a number of challenges for both African countries and their citizens, such as the loss of human capital (also called "brain drain") and economic destabilisation in countries of origin. While remittances sent by migrants can contribute to their countries' economies, they can also generate economic imbalances. For example, the departure of Senegalese and Mauritanian fishermen due to competition from European boats negatively affects the local economy and generates tensions in coastal communities.

In any case, migration is a long-standing phenomenon that is part of our past, present and, inexorably, future. They should not be characterised as a problem, nor should they be driven, as a primary response, to stop irregular migration for any other reason than the migrants' own security.

In terms of how to address African migration in Spain, in addition to a peremptory need to change discourses and narratives that associate it with problems, massive invasions and conflict, we must refer to examples of countries that have implemented successful migration policies and have shown that migration can be an opportunity. These examples are based on the premise that effective migration management requires an approach that considers the needs of both the receiving country and the migrants.

Experiences to be considered and replicated could include the US Diversity Immigrant Visa or Green Card programme, the Canadian strategy to attract migrants, projects aimed at recruiting *Gastarbeiter* or "guest workers" in Germany, or French policies aimed at increasing its international prestige in areas such as the military (with the Foreign Legion), sports and culture. Since 2010, the Campus France mobility programme has facilitated the selective immigration of young university students, making France the first non-English-speaking country to grant study visas. On the negative side, one can consider the experience of Japan, which has traditionally not favoured immigration and therefore has an impact on the progressive ageing of its society, or the Brexit campaign, which was based on hate narratives presenting immigration as a threat to the security and well-being of the British [28].

According to the Spanish Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia, employment and educational discrimination against the foreign population in our country is costing €17 billion, equivalent to 1.3% of GDP. It points out that discrimination not only has a profound impact on the people affected but also deprives the country of significant economic and social potential. By not fully harnessing the talent and skills of the foreign population, we are missing out on opportunities for growth and innovation that could benefit the whole of Spanish society[29].

The issue of unaccompanied children and adolescents arriving in the Canary Islands, whose swift and effective referral to other Spanish autonomous communities has been a historical demand of the archipelago, deserves a separate chapter. This demand has become even stronger in recent times, following an upturn in the number of arrivals by sea to the islands, which has left almost 5,500 children and young people under the guardianship of the Canary Islands.

[28] Komenan, D. (2021). Destination Schengen [online]. *Black World*. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://mundonegro.es/destino-schengen/

[29] Racism and Xenophobia Observatory (2024). *OBERAXE Report* [online]. Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration. [Consultation: 2025]. Available at: https://www.inclusion.gob.es/w/el-impacto-economico-de-la-discriminacion-laboral-y-educativa-hacia-la-poblacion-extranjera-en-espana-es-de-17.000-millones-de-euros-un-1-3-del-pib

Artificial intelligence and disinformation

Two other areas emerge in the current context that deserve special attention: artificial intelligence (AI) and disinformation. Although disinformation is not a new phenomenon, combined with AI it has the potential to change both the agenda of multilateralism and hitherto known power structures.

Indeed, artificial intelligence is already transforming geopolitics, with countries investing significantly in its development to strengthen their military, economic and social power. States that lead in AI research and development gain significant advantages and influence global economic systems, military capabilities and technological infrastructures. This competition for AI supremacy is redefining alliances and power structures and is becoming a key element in contemporary global power struggles. In developing countries, particularly in Africa, AI adoption can offer significant opportunities for economic growth and improved quality of life, but it also poses unique challenges in terms of infrastructure and access to technology.

Artificial intelligence has become a crucial topic for diplomatic negotiations as countries and international organisations seek to establish global norms and governance frameworks. Diplomats are negotiating treaties and agreements that address the ethical, security and privacy challenges presented by AI. At national, regional and international levels, regulatory frameworks are being developed to maximise the benefits of AI and minimise its risks. International organisations such as the United Nations are increasingly including AI on their agendas and promoting discussions to define acceptable uses, mitigate risks and foster international cooperation in its development[30].

[30] UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation (2019). *The age of digital interdependence: report of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation* [online]. New York, UN. [Accessed: 2025]. Available from: https://www.un.org/en/pdfs/DigitalCooperation-report-for%20web.pdf; United Nations (2024): *Resolution 78/265. Harnessing the opportunities of secure and reliable artificial intelligence systems for sustainable development. General Assembly, 63rd plenary meeting.* New York, UN; United Nations (2024): *Global Digital Compact: rev. 1* [online]. UN. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://www.un.org/techenvoy/global-digital-compact; European Parliament (2022): *Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030* [online]. OJ L 323, 19.12.2022, p. 4-26. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/26514cb9-7f40-11ed-9887-01aa75ed71a1; European Parliament. (2022). *European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade.* European Union; European Commission. (2021). *2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade* [online]. European Union [Accessed: 2025]. Disponible en: https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/9fc32029-7af3-4ea2-8b7a-4cd283e8e89e_en?filename=cellar_12e835e2-81af-11eb-9ac9-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02_DOC_1.pdf&prefLang=es; Unión Europea. (2024). *European Union Artificial Intelligence Act* [online]. European Union. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://artificialintelligenceact.eu/es/; Council of the European Commission. (2023). *European*

In Africa, these negotiations are highly relevant because the continent seeks to balance technological development with the protection of its resources and the sovereignty of its nations. In addition, it is important to note that data infrastructure in Africa is in need of significant development. Currently, the entire continent has fewer data centres than the Netherlands, which is a clear indicator of the deep digital divide. Due to this lack of infrastructure, African countries are forced to store their data abroad, mainly in Europe and North America, and increasingly in China. This practice not only raises serious security and privacy concerns, but also severely limits Africa's ability to harness its own data to drive economic growth and foster innovation[31].

Ethical challenges posed by artificial intelligence include issues of fairness, accountability and transparency. AI systems make decisions that can have a significant impact on individuals and communities, raising concerns about discrimination and bias that existed previously. The ethical development of AI is therefore a key issue on the international agenda, with ongoing efforts to create standards to ensure that AI systems operate fairly and without unintended harmful consequences.

For developing countries, and particularly in Africa, it is crucial that these standards consider the rights and needs of their populations and prevent AI from reproducing existing discrimination. It is worth remembering in this context that the ethics and governance of artificial intelligence are dominated by Western thinking. Since AI is largely developed by countries in the northern hemisphere, discussions on the governance and ethics of AI still lack important voices from the global south. This also means that there are valuable approaches to AI ethics and governance that are not represented and may be overlooked.

Disinformation also presents several significant challenges for diplomacy, as it can distort public perception and international relations, making it difficult to make informed decisions and build trust between nations. The spread of fake news and manipulation of information can exacerbate tensions, create misunderstandings and undermine diplomatic efforts to

Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade 2023/C 23/01. [online]. European Union. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AJOC_2023_023_R_0001; European Commission (.S. f.). *Global Gateway* [online]. European Union. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: EU-Africa: Global Gateway Investment Package - European Commission (europa.eu).

[31] Kurbalija, J. (2024). *Digital sovereignty for Africa?* [Key lecture] [online]. International Affairs Forum. [Accessed: 2025]. Available at: https://www.ia-forum.org/Files/YUHEQT.pdf

resolve conflicts and foster global cooperation. Moreover, the speed and scope of misinformation in the digital age forces diplomats to adapt quickly and to develop effective strategies to counter these threats and protect the integrity of international communication.

The proliferation of fake news and disinformation campaigns is often driven by professional external actors with AI, and the international community must be clear that, particularly in countries in conflict, manipulation of information can have deadly consequences, as disinformation is used to foment instability in fragile environments, fuel armed clashes and jeopardise even the national security of countries.

Disinformation is also a challenge for African countries' own peacetime governance, as it can influence electoral outcomes, delegitimise democratic processes and erode public trust in state institutions and the media. Moreover, if it occurs in a context where democracy has been set back by the manipulation of electoral processes, the extension of military mandates, malpractices, corruption and institutional weakness, it can widen social divisions, jeopardise human rights and negatively affect public goods such as health and the economy. It should also be taken into account that, in recent years, the information scenario has a chaotic character due to the high volume of people without knowledge about the phenomenon of communication - mainly in terms of techniques and ethical responsibility - who send and forward messages through social networks without worrying about whether they are true or not, which can affect the actions, morals or reputation of any person, government or country.

Effective digital cooperation requires strengthening collaborative work, despite current tensions, and laying the foundations for an inclusive digital economy and society. These must be policies and investments that enable people to use technology to build better lives and a more peaceful and trusting world. In addition, it is crucial that multilateralism - or a better model - is multi-stakeholder inclusive, involving not only governments but also a much more diverse range of actors, including civil society, academics, technologists and the private sector. Many more diverse voices need to be included in the discussions, especially from developing countries and traditionally marginalised groups.

Prospects for energy development in Africa

Currently, more than 600 million people in Africa lack access to electricity and almost 970 million have no access to clean cooking fuels. This leads to dependence on traditional biomass, which systematically exacerbates public health problems and limits socio-economic development. In addition, Africa is already facing more severe climate change than other regions, with extreme weather events, water stress and reductions in food production, which in turn contribute to increased migration and regional instability.

In theory, the International Energy Agency's *Africa Energy Outlook* 2022 outlines the desirable Sustainable Africa Scenario (SAS), which utopianistically projects a future in which Africa achieves all energy-related goals, including universal access to modern energy services by 2030 and full implementation of the continent's climate commitments.

Realistically, however, this utopian scenario requires a significant increase in investment in clean energy and strong leadership from African governments.

Objectively, Africa has 60% of the world's best solar resources, but only 1% of global installed solar power capacity. Its projection would mean that solar energy would become the most competitive energy source for the continent by 2030. Achieving universal access to electricity in Africa requires connecting 90 million people per year by 2030, a rate three times higher than today. The most viable solutions include the expansion of national grids, as well as stand-alone solar systems and mini grids in rural areas.

Energy efficiency is a key parameter for moderating demand growth and keeping costs affordable. Efficient energy use can reduce demand for electricity and alleviate pressure on existing infrastructure. Africa will not be able to grow from an industrial perspective and will struggle to industrialise its economy; energy demand has to grow in sectors such as agriculture, transport and manufacturing. Without electrification of agriculture, for example, it is not possible to increase productivity or generate industrial sectors for processing primary agricultural products.

There is a clear need for increased investment in Africa's energy sector, which is estimated to require more than $190 billion annually by 2030. Two thirds of this investment needs to be directed towards clean energy. Investment in energy

infrastructure is not only essential to boost electrification, but also to strengthen energy security and reduce dependence on fossil fuel imports.

Africa needs to dramatically increase its investment in renewable energy and energy efficiency in order to meet its development goals and combat climate change. Growth opportunities, particularly in solar energy and green hydrogen, can transform the continent by modernising it and enabling the generation of downstream industries, but this will require the continued support of international institutions and a strong local policy framework.

The reality is that energy development in Africa is one of the key priorities for both the UN SDGs and the EU's external policies. Africa has abundant and diversified energy resources, including vast fossil fuel reserves, high wind and solar potential, as well as significant hydropower resources. However, as previously stated and as we would like to consciously reiterate, more than 600 million people lack access to electricity according to data from the African Union and the International Energy Agency. It is true that investments in renewable energy have increased in recent decades, but it is also true that they represent only a fraction of the total potential.

It should be noted that Spain, with its privileged geographical position and political relations with countries in West and North Africa, is in a position to contribute to a proactive approach that leads to the support of energy infrastructures that guarantee sustainability and promote the very energy agency we are referring to.

In this line of reasoning, it is necessary to highlight the value of the European Union programme known as Global Gateway, promoted by the European Commission and the EU High Representative. It is conceived as a new European strategy to promote smart, clean and secure links in the digital, energy and transport sectors, as well as to boost health, education and research systems and, subsidiarily, with a view to very ambitious objectives such as the ecological transition, the digitalisation of society or greater development cooperation.

An example is the agreements signed between the EU and various African countries, such as the one adopted in June 2023 between the European Union and Mauritania, which launched the Affordable, Clean and Green Electricity programme. Access to energy

is a strategic priority for Mauritania, a country with a low overall rate of access to electricity (48 %) and significant inequality in access to electricity between urban areas (82 %) and rural areas (6 %), high production costs largely due to dependence on fossil fuels, an underdeveloped electricity grid and challenging integration of renewable energies into the national grid.

In this regard, the agreement signed in the last days of 2024 by Jozef Sikela, European Commissioner for International Partnerships, and the Mauritanian government is noteworthy, which focuses on priority areas of financing such as green hydrogen and economic growth, health and social protection, and migration management. Commissioner Sikela saw the agreement as a sign that the EU is delivering on its promises quickly and effectively, and that it goes beyond simple financial commitments to build strong and mutually beneficial partnerships on which African countries can build to promote inclusive development, strengthen social cohesion and stability, and stimulate sustainable growth.

Many other examples of bilateral energy relations between African and European countries could be given, but one that makes use of funding derived from the Global Gateway project is the Green Hydrogen Strategy and Roadmap for Kenya. In it the EU commits significant financial amounts in grants to finance public and private industries in green hydrogen in Kenya, with the consequent upstream development of its renewable energy industry, bringing with it the consolidation of sustainable agricultural value chains for climate resilience and environmental protection.

These and similar considerations in relation to climate change, the African electricity gap and the early warning and awareness-raising systems essential for disaster prevention linked to the climate issue appear in some of the attached articles and are among the key concerns in my reflections on the present and future of the African continent and its development.

The war in Ukraine made evident the importance of Europe for the supply of cereals and grains from the African continent, but it also made it clear that Africa is positioning itself as the place the whole world is looking to today: a space that can become not only Europe's energy lifeline, but also an opportunity to revalue our country's geostrategic role.

Conclusion

The relationship between Spain and Africa is at a turning point and marked by the opportunity to establish a partnership based on historical justice, mutual respect and shared benefit. Spain can play a key role as a bridge, promoting an approach that moves away from past models of intervention and prioritises genuine and equitable cooperation and addressing shared priorities such as governance, security, sustainable development, migration management and the digital revolution.

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