

Africa in the Wider World

Editor

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8 | Europe and Africa

Where Demographics and Insecurity Collide

Heather A. Conley and Jean-Francois Pactet

When one thinks of the relationship between Europe and Africa today, two images that come to mind are of French military forces intervening in the Sahel region and Libyan immigrants attempting to reach the Italian island of Lampedusa on unnavigable vessels. While increased instability in Africa and migration from Africa to Europe are important dynamics, perhaps an even more profound driver of today's evolving European-African relationship is the dramatically shifting demographic picture in both continents.

When African countries became independent in the 1960s, Africa's entire population was half the size of Europe's, which stood at 277 million. Today, the proportion is now the exact opposite. Africa has twice as many inhabitants as Europe, and its population is expected to increase to 1.9 billion people by 2050. As Africa's population explodes, Europe's is set to decline from 740 million to 726 million within that same timeframe. This population reversal has and will continue to shape all aspects of the relationship, including security, development, and migration issues, with consequences—both positive and negative—that will influence both continents.

On the positive side of the ledger, Africa's population growth will elevate its future geo-economic importance and potential, as the continent has experienced an average GDP growth of 5.2 percent over the period 2003 to 2011. In the last decade alone, six of the world's fastest-growing economies have come from Africa (Angola, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Chad, Mozambique, and Rwanda). Due to its proximity and historical ties, Europe has traditionally been a strong economic partner to Africa in terms of both trade (responsible for 28 percent of African imports and 31 percent of African exports) and official development assistance (representing 45 percent of ODA to Africa). Europe remains Africa's top trading partner and its volume of trade has increased.

Yet Europe is not alone in its increased interest in strengthening economic ties with Africa. China's increased economic engagement in Africa has progressively reduced Europe's share in African markets. Trade between China and the continent surpassed US\$200 billion in 2013, up from \$10 billion in 2000. This trend is expected to persist in the coming years as Europe faces increased global economic competition in Africa, and African countries expand their economic ties with a broader set of trading partners, some of whom place less emphasis in their relationships on human rights, transparency, or good governance.

Africa's dramatic population spike—combined with increased political and sectarian unrest and climate change-related stresses—have contributed to an increase in migration to Europe. Although most African migrants remain in Africa as they move from one country to another, beyond Africa European countries are their most sought-after destinations abroad. It is estimated that 7 million African migrants currently reside

in Europe, providing their countries of origin with a vital source of income through remittances. Remittance flows in fact have become so great that in 2012, they constituted the largest wealth flows to Africa ahead of foreign direct investment and official development assistance.

While European remittances have been a financial boon for Africa, the presence of increasing numbers of migrants has created a significant political backlash in Europe. Europe's ongoing economic woes have caused a growing number of Europeans to blame immigrants for the lack of jobs (unemployment in some countries has exceeded 25 percent, with youth unemployment hovering near 60 percent in countries such as Greece and Spain). As migration issues rise to the forefront of political debate, xenophobic parties are on the rise, as evidenced by the outcome of recent European Parliamentary elections. Greece's neo-fascist Golden Dawn Party won an impressive 9.4 percent of the vote; however, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and France's Front National earned the most votes, with 26.8 percent and 24.9 percent respectively, soundly defeating parties currently in government.

Changing demographic dynamics, economic insecurity, and rising anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe have led some governments to call for enhanced border controls in recent years. Many European leaders blame the European Union for failing to develop a pan-European immigration policy, and in 2012 the EU home affairs ministers unanimously voted to allow countries to temporarily reinstate border restrictions in the face of extreme security risks. At the present time, the EU country through which the immigrant first enters the bloc must provide humanitarian and refugee assistance, placing an extraordinary burden on southern European states that have been most deeply impacted by the ongoing economic crisis. Immigrant reception centers, particularly in the economically devastated south, are overcrowded well beyond their maximum capacity. Spain's immigrant reception facility in Melilla, for example, houses nearly 2,000 people, four times the number it was designed to accommodate. Meanwhile, Italy has received approximately 50,000 refugees in the first six months of 2014 alone, well in excess of the 40,000 it counted over the whole of the preceding year.

Political unrest, terrorism, and sectarian strife that stretch from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East have significantly contributed to these migration outflows. In part to counter this trend, the European Union and several other European nations have concentrated their efforts on development and security cooperation with countries that are considered the primary sources of these migration flows. The task is daunting as many of these countries or regions contain "gray zones" that harbor criminal networks, drug and human traffickers, and, in some cases, terrorists. Nonetheless, the European Union has conducted 15 peacekeeping missions and invested more than €1.2 billion in peace support operations in Africa through the African Peace Facility (APF). France in particular has played a leading role in several of these crises by sending 4,500 and 1,600 ground troops to Mali and the Central African Republic, respectively, under the auspices of a UN mandate; providing €976 million in development assistance; and rallying support from other European countries. The French and European military and development response is grounded in the conviction that allowing extremists and terrorists to establish safe havens in these gray zones will lead to the progressive expansion of these areas of instability, creating even larger outflows of migrants to Europe and ultimately posing a direct security threat to Europe.

As violence has spread across the Sahel and parts of the Horn of Africa, security issues have come to dominate the EU-Africa agenda. In April 2014, leaders from over 60 European and African nations agreed to expand cooperation between EU and African institutions and to operationalize the African Standby Force that is designed to enhance the African Union's ability to internally respond to conflicts. Similarly, at the December 2013 Paris Summit on Peace and Security in Africa, the European Union and its African partners committed to increase their cooperation toward addressing the root causes of conflict, including poverty, radicalization, and trafficking; and supporting international and African efforts to combat them. In particular, European heads of state and government called for a major international mobilization to increase the level and predictability of financing for African peacekeeping operations.

The kidnapping of more than 200 girls in Nigeria by Boko Haram, the shelling of innocent civilian enclaves by militias in Libya, and Al-Shabaab attacks in Kenya serve as important reminders of the high costs paid by African civilians caught in the midst of conflict as well as the causal links between regional instability and immigration outflows to Europe. In order for Europe to both reap the economic benefit of a growing Africa while confronting growing security challenges in the region, future European policy toward Africa must better integrate the interdependency between security, development, demography, and good governance. As Africa increasingly opens itself toward a more globalized and networked world, Europe has the tools to contribute to African security, encourage human development, and foster economic prosperity in Africa. Should rampant anti-immigrant sentiment and political demagoguery in Europe remain unchecked, however, Europe may seek to limit its engagement with Africa while still being forced to confront the humanitarian and security consequences of African instability via increased immigration and amplified security threats.