

Welcome by Professor Dr. h. c. Christa Randzio- Plath

The Joint Africa- EU Strategy (JAES) brings us together today in Addis Ababa at a time of crisis and insecurity about world finances and world economy. The G-20 Summit in Toronto committed itself to growth- friendly plans to reduce public deficits, albeit at different speeds in different countries. Little progress has been seen on financial regulation and supervision. No progress could be registered on the financial transaction tax. The only progress on development was the mentioning of the WTO Doha Development Round, the MDG high level meeting in September and the promise to support for growth in low income countries and the creation of a Working Group on development with a mandate to create a development agenda for the G-20 in Seoul. But at the same time the reference to the Gleneagles commitments on aid by the G8 has been dropped. We have to be vigilant on the consequences for development.

The political and public interest in Africa has grown. The profile of Africa has changed and offers differentiating perspectives with 18 countries knowing continuous democratic changes, a number of countries with considerable economic growth rates and new partners of the region like China, India and Brazil. In the multipolar globalised world where is the role for Africa and for Africa and Europe together. Both world regions have common visions especially in view to multilateralism in a multipolar world. Africa with its 53 countries has voice and weight in the world community despite the challenges of poverty and hunger, illiteracy, violence, conflicts and wars, migration, human rights and climate change. Africa is not any longer looked upon only as a crisis continent.

Africa with its 53 countries is an important political partner with a changed profile, with different countries, cultures, people and football teams like the EU with its 27 member states. In Africa there are important developments in democracy and economic development.

The Europe-centred paternalistic approach to Africa has disappeared. The Joint Africa-EU Strategy adopted in Lisbon in 2007 aims at a partnership involving governments, parliaments and civil society. The VENRO members support such a relationship based on partnership. Here, the principles of solidarity and justice come first and foremost. Therefore CSO regard the people of Africa and combating poverty as the focal point of engagement. All policies can and may contribute but there has to be coherence with development as required by the EU Treaty. The JAES has to contribute to this objective as those policies are covered by the agreement. Coherence still is missing. Also the JAES have therefore to pass a stress test on coherence. A report should be presented at the JAES summit.

The new strategic partnership agreement with Africa and the EU as partners on equal footing is especially welcome because the two regions upgrade their relationship at all levels. The eight thematic partnerships in the agreement cover issues of common concern which have already been on the agenda or in other agreements. The JAES has a lot of bottle-necks because of the clumsy institutional framework being without any historical blue print. Therefore results cannot really be presented especially not in view to participation of civil society. Therefore it is clear that a lot of the activities mean

conferences, studies, workshops. This also is true for civil society members and our common project. We concentrate on three thematic partnerships: good governance with a special focus on gender, energy and climate change and regional integration, trade and infrastructure. There has to be more efficiency, dynamism, ownership, firm commitments and responsibility, participation but also more transparency and public communication. Another challenge will be to address our ideas not only to governments and parliaments but to all stakeholders and the people. There is lack of visibility of this partnership.

The European Union has since its foundation underlined its responsibility for Africa because of the colonial past and developed more than once a strategy for Africa. In 2008 rather late but rightly both the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) signed “The Africa- EU Strategic Partnership “, a joint Africa – EU strategy. This is a framework for a new and stronger partnership for long-term, systematic and well integrated cooperation in a world which has become increasingly interdependent. The Africa-EU strategy addresses the challenges in a changed world with accelerated globalization, new dimensions of global problems like climate change, financial and economic crisis and human security in general. The four main objectives of the partnership consist in the Africa-EU partnership to address issues of common concern like peace and security, democratic governance and human rights, trade and regional integration, the Millennium Development Goals.

Our CSO agenda on Africa- EU strategic partnership is rich in expectations and challenges but poor in implementation.

Two and a half years experiences have taught us lessons about promises, agreements and implementation. The ambitious and complex strategy wants to integrate and associate all stakeholders in Africa and in the EU. But apparently there is a lack of ownership in most of the partnerships. Civil society actors are no exception. Our cooperation is interesting but slow and not always it is possible to feed Ministerial Troika meetings with advice from civil society. Hopefully this will change for the EU-Africa Summit in November 2010.

The Civil Society is important for democratisation and civil society in Africa and Europe have to develop their own structures and go their own way to contribute to democracy and common values. Mutual respect is needed but also closer cooperation to play the role and bear the responsibilities the JAES gives to CSI in Africa and Europe. As the agreement underlines “Partners furthermore recognise that the Joint Strategy should be co-owned by European and African non-institutional actors and that these actors can play an important role in taking forward the objectives of the partnership (106). With a view to a people-centred partnership, an appropriate and prominent place needs to be defined in the institutional partnership for civil society and other non-state actors. Africa and the EU will therefore further promote the development of a vibrant and independent civil society and of a systematic dialogue between it and public authorities at all levels (107).

Therefore it is really necessary to organise effective communication with CSO and strengthen their capacity to disseminate information, collect and make use of ideas and proposals from civil society

partners, and encourage the active involvement of non-institutional actors in the implementation and monitoring of the Joint Strategy and its Action Plans. EU and AU Member States, and sub-regional organisations and institutions, will play a key role in this work. But we do not see up to now any promotion and expansion of twinning arrangements in relevant sectors. Funds and occasions are needed. The invitation to CSO to prepare general and sector-specific reports is running empty. Words are not enough to allow an essential contribution for CSO. This may lead to a lack of credibility.

As the Joint Strategy should remain a permanent platform for continued dialogue with stakeholders in Africa and the EU in the years ahead and its implementation is in many fields of the action plans far from satisfactory simplification of structures and concentration of activities is needed to make this important partnership visible.

Our workshop wants to contribute in a spirit of partnership which dates since the German EU Presidency and even before. This workshop aims at the

- Evaluation of the role of Civil Society in the Africa-EU Partnership during the First Action Plan
- Strengthen access and influence of African CSOs to/on the Africa-EU Strategy

Civil Society in Africa and Europe should play an active role in implementing the JAES by participating in the Joint Expert Groups for example. In March 2009, a formal African Civil Society Steering

Group related to the AU-ECOSOCC was set up. In September 2009 the European Civil Society Steering Group, which had been acting as an Interim Steering Group was fixed?

The VENRO project “Prospects for Africa – Europe’s Policies” which set up during the German EU Council Presidency is accompanying the JAES since 2008. The project aims at integrating positions from African partners of the VENRO members. The majority of the African Partners is not member of the ESOSOCC.

A preparatory meeting with African partners in November 2009 formulated the above mentioned aims. It was agreed upon that the workshop is an opportunity of exchange between the different actors of the JAES, especially with ECOSOCC to evaluate and discuss with decision makers the role of Civil Society in the JAES and developing perspectives for stronger engagement of African Civil Society in the JAES. We very much hope that together we will jump a big step forward, intensifying communication, engagement and participation in the partnership. We need to contribute to fill the half- empty glass of success.