



DECLARATION OF THE AFRICA-EUROPE FORUM OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS

We, as leaders of local and regional governments of the Member States of the African Union (AU) and of the European Union (EU), meeting on 15 February 2022 in Brussels (Belgium) on the side-line of the 6th EU-Africa Summit of Heads of State and Government:

- **Considering** the persistence of global challenges such as climate change, human pressure on nature resulting in environmental degradation, resources scarcity, extreme poverty, growing inequalities, the multiplication of social tensions and conflicts leading to deterioration of human rights and huge migrations flows, within Africa and outside Africa; and the occurrence of new ones such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other health crises, the questioning of supranational political bodies such as the United Nations or the European Union, and the threat on multilateralism, which is more and more challenged as the preferred mechanism to organise international relations;
- **Aware** of the need to bring more coherence in the partnership between AU and EU by better aligning the development cooperation framework with the trade policy framework, after the adoption of the Africa Free Trade Agreement (AfTA) and the adoption of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe instrument and the Team Europe approach by the European Union and the negotiation of the post-Cotonou Agreement;
- **Taking into consideration** the fact that the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development, the Paris Agreement on climate change and the AU's Agenda 2063 are agreed and shared new perspectives to address most of the aforementioned challenges;
- **Considering** that estimates show that 65% of the 169 targets underpinning the 17 SDGs cannot be reached without engagement of and coordination with local and regional governments;
- Appreciative of the UN recommendation that these agendas must be localised to ensure their implementation and concrete impact on the ground and that the role that local and regional governments (LRGs) be fully recognised in that regard; and of the fact that it is at the level of cities and territories that new patterns of production and consumption can be adopted to favour the transition towards low carbon, energy efficient, sustainable and resilient development model;
- **Acknowledging** the European Charter of local self-government, and the EU's recognition of the role of LRGs in the international cooperation and development policies expressed in the 2013 Communication "Empowering Local Authorities (LAs) in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes"; the European Consensus on Development in 2017, as part of its response to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (2015), as well as the adoption by the AU Heads of State and Government of the African Charter of the Values and principles of decentralisation, local governance and local development, at their conference held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, in June 2014;
- **Recalling** that the AU-EU Summit held in Abidjan in 2017 highlighted equality between women and men and the sustainable improvement of the condition of youth in society as key drivers for inclusive and sustainable development; these are appropriate tools for advancing gender equality at local level in both regions: "European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life" and "Local and Regional Governments' Charter for Gender Equality in Africa (to be officially launched at the 9th Africities Summit in May 2022);



- **Convinced** that for the AU-EU partnership to have meaningful impact on the populations in both Africa and Europe, it must include, mobilise and create synergies between all relevant actors at different levels of public governance, at local, national, continental, and global levels;
- **Emphasising** the importance of decentralised cooperation for a sustainable development in both continents, building on each other's experience and expertise in public administration, institutions and sustainable policies; acknowledging the key role of African and European continental and national associations in bringing together the voice of local and regional governments and in the dialogue with the AU and EU institutions;
- **Acknowledging** the importance of the Framework Partnerships Agreements which support local and regional governments in helping to achieve sustainable, European and global development goals;

Declare the following:

1. **We support** the High-Level permanent political dialogue mechanism represented by the AU-EU Summit of heads of State and Government and the organization of stakeholders' forums as part of the official activities of the Summit, including the AU-EU Forum of leaders of local and regional governments.
2. **We are ready** to contribute to deepening this political dialogue by organising multi-stakeholder consultations with our constituencies, including civil society and the private sector, sharing grassroots experience as we embody the sphere of governance closest to the citizens and to the realities, they live in.
3. **We welcome** the focus put on people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership for a renewed AU-EU partnership, at a moment when both unions are entering a new cycle in their cooperation after the adoption of AfTA by the African Union and the NDICI by the European Union.
4. **We strongly encourage** the involvement of our cities and territories in the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy and other LRGs climate initiatives in order for them to be in a position to efficiently address the ecological crisis and the impact of climate change and their growing pressure on natural resources including water, access to energy and agricultural land in our territories. Furthermore, cities and territories being the most appropriate settings to translate the commitments defined at national level (NDCs) into action, we request that local governments' access to climate finance is facilitated.
5. **We commit** to also give priority to actions addressing the health crisis, and to include a gender approach at all steps of our territorial development and cooperation activities, and to increase investments in our constituencies in the field of youth education and vocational training, creation of decent jobs, and youth entrepreneurship, through a focus on local economic development, as recommended by the 2017 AU-EU Summit of heads of State and Government held in November 2017 Abidjan (Ivory Coast).
6. **We are determined** to embark into the digital transformation of our cities and territories and to take initiatives to identify jobs opportunities offered to youth by the entry of our LRGs in the digital world as well as capacity building programs to allow our cities and territories to catch up with this digital trend. We welcome in that regard the Team Europe approach and ask that its actions put digitalisation among its priority actions.
7. **We resolve** to take part in the management of migration since migrants leave a local government to settle temporally or definitely in another local government within the same country, in a different country in Africa, or outside Africa. We therefore insist on the need to adopt a more developmental perspective to the management of migration, which calls for a more human and right-based treatment of this issue; we believe that more exchanges on practices for the integration of migrants and refugees in municipalities must be encouraged;



8. **We decide** to mobilise the vital forces of our cities and territories, especially young people and women, to participate more actively in local leadership and the realisation of people-centred structural transformation promoted by the AU's Agenda 2063, the new European Consensus on Development, and in the implementation of global agendas adopted by the international community.
9. **We align** from now on our decentralised cooperation actions with the concerns of the AU-EU Partnership, and resolve to communicate demands coming from the people of our local and regional governments in the appropriate fora set up to manage the Partnership Agreement in order to ensure that the renewed AU-EU Partnership is in tune with the expectations and realities experienced by the people of the two unions at the grassroots level.
10. **We insist** on the importance of including representatives of African and European local and regional governments in the framework of the AU-EU high-level dialogue, as state actors, development players and stakeholders fostering regional integration through facilitating cross-borders decentralized cooperation within and between the cities and regions of the two unions.
11. **We call** on the two unions for the partnership to be organised in the framework of their legitimate institutions which governance structures allow for a fair, inclusive and multi-stakeholder dialogue (national governments, parliaments, local and regional governments, civil society, private sector).
12. **We stress** the urgent need for a reshaped, inclusive and effective AU-EU Partnership to counterbalance the emerging risk of absence of appropriate framework in a world under threat of division and conflicts.
13. **We are grateful** for the support received from the AU and the EU for the organisation of the Africa-Europe Forum of LRGs, and request that this Forum is recognised as an official mechanism to follow up the implementation of the AU-EU Partnership integrating the LRGs perspective and therefore, that LRGs and their representative organisations be systematically included and involved in the political dialogue on the AU-EU political partnership.
14. **We further request** that this Declaration is presented at the Summit proceedings and that the spokespersons of the Forum to benefit from the opportunity to present the conclusions and recommendations of the Forum's work to the Heads of State and Government of the two unions.

Adopted in Brussels, 15 February 2022

The Africa-Europe Forum of Local and Regional Governments