A comparison of the EU and AU in the field of peace and security – partners and rivals?[1]

Katalin Horváth[2]

Abstract:

The intention of this paper is to examine how the European Union and the African Union are developing in parallel as voluntary integration projects, and how they compare with regard to the respective development of their defence policies, Union level military forces and strategies for the future.

The author looks at the EU and AU as peace projects, their efforts regarding crisis management and territorial defence, the structures they use to further their integration, and also cooperation with each other. Remarkable parallel processes and also problems are found with respect to the financing, generation and use of forces. The paper compares the standby forces of the two organisations, namely the Battlegroups and the Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC) in the EU, and the African Standby Force (ASF) in Africa.

The author assesses the priorities, strategies, levels of ambition of the EU and the AU, taking into account their geopolitical situations, military alliance membership, and their potential regarding their size, population, resources, amounting to advantages and disadvantages with regard to reaching potential great power status in the future.

According to the author's assessment, the topic of cooperation and/or rivalry between the European Union and the African Union is a topic to watch, as the two continents come from very different histories but develop in remarkably similar ways, which might point to structural patterns working at deep levels.

Keywords:

African Union; European Union; integration; military; peace operations.

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[2] PhD-student, Doctoral School for Safety and Security Sciences, University of Óbuda; ORCID: 0009-0002-2837-7216; matkovsky32@gmail.com.

Introduction

In this paper I will examine specifically the EU-AU cooperation in the field of peace and security, with emphasis on strategic and institutional developments, analysed in the context of what this might mean for political and defence integration of both continents and how those processes might influence each other.

The partnership and cooperation between the EU and the African Union (AU) has started in 2000, with the first Africa-EU summit that was held in Cairo. There have been 6 Africa-EU summits since then, the last one in 2022. This cooperation of the two continents is wide in scope, encompassing issues ranging from trade and investment through human rights, development, migration, sustainable economic growth to peace and security. The cooperation has been institutionalized for about a quarter of a century now, and it is time to examine how this process has developed, what results it has brought and what the direction for the future might be (Brujić, 2024; Abebe and Maalim, 2020).

The partnership and cooperation of the EU and the AU is bringing together 27 and 55 Member States, respectively, which is altogether 82 countries. Out of the 195 states in the world, 193 are Member States of the United Nations, meaning that the EU and AU Member States together count for 42 % of all the states on the planet. That is, Africa and Europe together mount to almost half of the political communities of our world, and there is huge, so far largely untapped potential in their cooperation.

Since about the 1990s the EU started developing and applying its cooperation in the field of foreign and defence policy (the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy) in earnest. That meant moving away from the exclusively national foreign, security and defence policies of the Member States (while those continue as well, in parallel) and starting to act, with a mixed tracked record, but more and more, as a true Union. At the same time, the states in Africa have established their own organisations for cooperation and integration. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) has been established in 1963, not long after the historic year of 1960, when most African states have declared their independence and the colonial rule of European powers has ended. In 2002, the 55 African states have established the AU, as a successor to the OAU (Besenyő, 2021).

There are also 8 Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa, which are key institutions in the integration framework of the AU. The RECs, and a myriad other groups of economic, monetary and defence integration in Africa (Türke 2022) have overlapping membership (only 6 countries in Africa out of the 55 are members of only one REC, some countries are members of 5 RECs at the same time). This makes both cooperation and analysis much harder and more complicated, but it also shows how powerful the centrifugal forces are not only in Europe, but also in Africa, pointing towards processes of integration that are not due to outside forces, but are organic and driven by political, economic and defence interests of the Member States of both Unions.

The African Union

The AU sits at the top of the African integration framework, built on an institutional structure with very remarkable similarities to the EU institutions (Iroulo and Boateng, 2023; Stapel, 2022):

- the EU Commission has a counterpart in the AU Commission;

- the EU and AU both have regular meetings of Heads of State and Government;

- the EU Council has a counterpart in the AU, the Executive Council;

- the EU COREPER (Comité de Représentants Permanents) is analogous to the AU Permanent Representatives Committee;

- the Political and Security Committee (PSC) in the EU corresponds to the Peace and Security Council in the AU (also PSC), although the AU PSC is a more complex body that can sit at the level of permanent representatives, ministers and heads of state and government as well;

- the Specialized Technical Committees of the AU are similar to the EU Council preparatory bodies, although much less numerous;

- the European Parliament is mirrored in the Pan-African Parliament of the AU;

- not to mention the African Central Bank, the African Investment Bank, the AU Economic, Social and Cultural Council, the African Court of Justice, and other institutions, all obvious counterparts to parallel EU structures. The AU and EU have also established delegations to each other, to Brussels and Addis-Ababa, the seat of the AU, respectively.

The EU-AU Joint Vision for 2030 was adopted at the last summit in 2022. The European Commission and the AU Commission joint meetings take place regularly, the 11th such meeting took place in 2022. These meetings are dedicated to implementing the joint commitments agreed at the EU-AU summits. There are regular joint ministerial meetings, multilateral dialogues on mutually agreed priorities, strategies and implementation plans. The EU PSC and the AU PSC also hold regular joint meetings, discussing peace and security issues of common interest, the last EU-AU PSC meeting took place in May 2023.

The AU Constitutive Act of 2000, signed in Togo, established the AU and its institutions. It has established, at the same time, the common defence and security policy of the AU as well. It has defined in Article 3, as objectives of the AU, defending the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of its Member States, and also, promoting peace, security and stability on the continent. In 2005, the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union has adopted the African Union

Non-Aggression and Common Defence Pact. This Pact has an "African Article V", if we compare this to the Washington Treaty that established NATO, or an "African Mutual Assistance Clause", if we compare it to the Lisbon Treaty of the EU. It specifies in Article 2 c) that "any aggression, or threat of aggression against any Member State shall be deemed to constitute a threat or aggression against all Member States of the Union". In Article 4 b), it says: "State Parties undertake, individually or collectively, to respond by all available means to aggression or threats of aggression against any Member State". The AU Common Defence Pact is not without its predecessors, either, Türke for example mentions the 1981 Protocol Relating to Mutual Assistance on Defence of the ECOWAS, one of the major RECs in Africa (Türke 2022).

The AU Common Defence Pact goes further than the NATO treaty, which only provides for collective defence in Article V. It also goes further than the EU's Lisbon Treaty, which itself has a higher ambition than collective defence (provided for in its mutual assistance clause in Article 42.7) in its provision for a future common defence in Article 42.2. The EU common defence article merely says that the Common Security and Defence Policy of the EU "will lead to a common defence when the European Council, acting unanimously, so decides", not specifying how or by what means that would happen. The words "European army" do not figure in the Lisbon Treaty at all (Aniche, 2020; Willa, 2019).

However, the AU Common Defence Pact, in Article 4 d), explicitly provides for an African Army, saying: "State Parties undertake to establish an African Army at the final stage of the political and economic integration of the Continent". The Pact also specifies how to get to the African Army: "In the meantime, State Parties will make best efforts to address the challenges of common defence and security through the effective implementation of the Common African Defence and Security Policy, including the early establishment and operationalisation of the African Standby Force" (AU Non-Aggression and Common Defence Pact, 2017).

Agenda 2063 and African integration

The Agenda 2063 document, adopted in 2013 and envisaging a strategy for the development and integration of Africa for the next 50 years, goes even further. It declares that the goal by is to unite Africa, either in a confederation or a federation. It encompasses all important policies, in a whole of government approach, clearly aiming for the ultimate objective, a "United States of Africa"-type entity, and defining what intermediate steps need to be taken to get there: the free flow of people, goods and capital, customs union, monetary union, financial union, economic union, political union. If that sounds very familiar, the reasons I believe are twofold (The Agenda 2063, 2013). One is that the AU has one example of a voluntary association, cooperation and progressive integration of independent, sovereign states, and that is the EU. In this vein, we can say that Africa is "copying" Europe's strategy for surviving and staying relevant,

and able to defend its values and interests in a globalized, multipolar world. In other words, Africa is using the EU as a blueprint for regional integration. The other reason is that in today's world, there is not a whole lot of other ways independent, sovereign states can get to the next level: unite, federate, become a great power, or, a modern "empire", if you will. In the past, empires were created by military conquest, but that was before the solidifying of states, boundaries and international law which penalizes war. Now, the only way to "get big" is through political, economic and military unions, based on the free will of participating states, which become Member States of a Union (both in Europe and in Africa) voluntarily, based on treaties and institutions. (Not to mention that this is also partly how the United States of America was created.)

The economic, political and military integration process of the EU and the AU are processes that are running in parallel to each other. We have seen above the eerie similarities in the legal bases, institutions and processes. However, the AU has three advantages compared to the EU, regarding the speed and potential perspectives of the integration process. The first one is related to geography, which is that Europe is a (rather big) peninsula of Asia, the Western part of the huge Eurasian land mass. It is surrounded by water in the North, West and South, but has a long, vulnerable flatland border to the East, and two very big Eastern neighbours, Russia and China, sharing the same continent. Africa, on the other hand can be considered an island continent, which is connected to the Middle East only through the small Sinai Peninsula. That means it has natural borders that defend it from a conventional, large scale land forces attack from the outside (Waldman, 2023; Outhwaite, 2020).

The second and third advantages are related to history. Paradoxically, Africa's weakness might in the future become its strength. Africa does not have nation states, like Europe does, its development has been slow and stunted due to numerous factors, the chief of those being colonialism and economic exploitation. Since most of Africa's borders have been literally drawn by a ruler on the map by colonial powers, cutting through the territories of tribes, African states are traditionally weak and rife with internal ethnic and religious conflict, civil wars, coups d'état and terrorism. Both economic and political development are weak, to the point where many African states are unable to even control their own territories, and provide essential services to the population, making them in effect failed states. This means that the forces of integration do not have to fight against strong, established, in many cases very old nation states that naturally resist the threat to their sovereignty, even if the threat is not through armed attack, but through being offered the advantage of sharing that sovereignty and exercising it through a larger political entity as part of a Union. Strong nation states are an impediment to European integration, but no strong nation states exist in Africa (Cleland, 1990).

The third advantage is that Africa does not have the sort of relationship with the US that Europe does. In terms of defence integration, that means that in the EU, any defence

union has to be established progressively, in the face of resistance by the US within the framework of NATO, which the US claims has been defending Europe for 75 years and will continue to do so. This is true, but NATO has also been a way of keeping Europe down, and turning it from a potential rival to the US into allies of the US, who are conveniently divided and weak (the principle and practice of divide and conquer still works). Since this has for decades paid a very considerable "peace dividend" to Europeans who could spend much less on their own defence and spend more on the welfare state, it is an uphill struggle to say no to a good deal and for Europeans to start paying for and taking seriously their own defence. The Russian-Ukrainian war has been a rude awakening to the military weakness and fragmentation of Europe and compared to the last 20-30 years, now significant steps are being made to make progress on European defence (Besenyő, 2024). However, this process, although gathering momentum, is still weak and whether or not a European defence union can be achieved seems doubtful. The words "European army" are still a taboo in Brussels and in most Member States.

Compared to this situation, Africa is not part of a military alliance led by the up to recently only superpower on the planet, so it is freer than Europe to choose its own path. Of course, the US, China, Russia and the EU are all present in Africa and are pursuing their own interests, but neither of them are recruiting African states into military alliances with them (Bustamante, 2023).

This leads us to an analysis of what the AU has been doing with the above mentioned freedom to choose Africa's future. The AU's objectives are clear and long term, stated in Agenda 2063: "pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity pursued under Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance", „social and economic development, continental and regional integration, democratic governance and peace and security amongst other issues aimed at repositioning Africa to becoming a dominant player in the global arena", based on, among other things, a „fully functional and operational APSA" (African Peace and Security Architecture).

The African Peace and Security Architecture

As the 2018 EU Court of Auditors report summarizes, APSA is a

> "set of institutions, legislation and procedures designed to address conflict prevention and promote peace and security on the African continent. The Constitutive Act of the African Union lays down the legal basis for the APSA. The Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, adopted by the AU member states in 2002, defines its structure, objectives and principles. Ten African sub-regional organisations (SROs), to which their respective member states conferred a mandate to act in the area of peace and security, also play a role in the APSA. Eight are Regional Economic Communities

(RECs), and two are Regional Mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution (RMs)" (2018 EU Court of Auditors report).

The 8 RECs are the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The 2 RMs are the Eastern Africa Standby Force Coordination Mechanism (EASFCOM) and the North African Regional Capability (NARC).

Decision-making in APSA belongs to the AU PSC (Peace and Security Council), which is supported by and can rely on the 5 pillars of APSA: the AU commission, the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force and the AU Peace Fund. So, besides political decision-making and the bureaucracy needed for that, what Africa needs and has created for peace and stability is not surprisingly the same that every other state or regional international organization on the way to becoming a federal state needs: an army and money to support that army. The African Standby Force is the first try at creating that army, and the AU Peace Fund is the first try at creating an African defence budget (Adeyeye, 2024).

Financing

The AU Peace Fund was established by Article 21 of the Protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the AU in 2002. It was to be funded by money from the AU budget and voluntary contributions from AU Member States. Many of those Member States did not pay their contributions to the AU budget in time and in full, leaving the AU and also the Peace Fund significantly underfunded, to the point that Africa had to rely on donors to fill the gap, and the donor was mostly the EU, through varying financial instruments. The African Peace Facility (APF) has been established by the EU in 2003, and it has been integrated into the European Peace Facility (EPF) in 2021 (Erforth and Keijzer, 2023). The EU has also used the European Development Fund, the European Fund for Sustainable Development, the Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, and several other instruments to support Africa financially. These funds in 2021 have been all merged into one financial instrument, the NDICI: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument. (NDICI, as its name suggests, is not only for Africa, but all other regions as well that the EU wants to support, but Africa is a large part of it.)

The EU approach to supporting African peace and security is to support local solutions, meaning that the EU supports Africa by training, capacity building and financial contributions, and also by EU-led peace operations, but expects African forces

to do peace operations increasingly independently and encourages AU-led peace operations. Until the AU can take over, the EU is trying to involve the Africans by doing joint peace operations with them, for example in the Central African Republic, Mali and Somalia, with varying degrees of effectiveness (Plank 2022).

The African Standby Force

The African Standby Force has been established, together with the other pillars of the APSA (except for the AU Commission) by the Protocol relating to the establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the AU in 2002 in Durban. It was supposed to be a multidisciplinary force, composed of civilian and military components standing by in their countries of origin, ready to deploy rapidly when needed. Its tasks were defined as conflict prevention, peace operations, humanitarian assistance and any other task the AU PSC may have mandated it to carry out (Adeyeye, 2024). The chain of command of the ASF was remarkably more developed (at least on paper) than the chain of command of the analogous battlegroups and the Rapid Deployment Capacity of the EU, which are still to be decided on an ad hoc basis in case of use in an operation (which has never happened so far) and which rely on national commands to be augmented and turned into an EU command only in case of activation.

The ASF chain of command since its inception was designed to be subordinated to the AU Commission, and also, integrated the military and civilian components, placing military contingents under a force commander subordinated to the AU Commission, and placing the civilian components under a special representative, also subordinated to the AU Commission. This means that at least on paper the AU has solved two problems that the EU is still grappling with: it has integrated military and civilian peace operations and commands, and it has created a genuine AU operational headquarters (the ASF headquarters in Addis Ababa), which the EU has still not been able to do, despite 20 years of debates on these issues. The EU only has the MPCC (Military Planning and Conduct Capacity) in Brussels (which is a far cry from being an operational headquarters), and the above-mentioned national headquarters of Member States.

However, 22 years after the creation of the ASF, its track record is not better than the similar standby forces of the EU, namely the Battlegroups (which have never been used) and the Rapid Deployment Capacity (which is supposed to reach Full Operational Capability in 2025, but it did not manage to amount to much more than the merging of the two Battlegroups previously on standby at the same time). The ASF has never been used either as it was intended, which is to deploy it to manage crises in Africa, based on the 5 regions and the 5 ASF brigades corresponding to those regions (North, West, East, South and Central). The reasons for the failure of the ASF concept and the need for its fundamental overhaul, which is happening at the time of writing this article, are remarkably similar to the reasons for the failure of the EU Battlegroups (which is supposed to be remedied by the EU RDC).

In the ASF's case, AU Member States preferred to use for peace operations forces generated in the framework of regional economic communities (RECs) and regional mechanisms (RMs), and not even all of these, using some more, and some not at all. Sometimes African states simply used coalitions of the willing outside any established AU or REC frameworks. The reason for this was that AU Member States engaging in a costly peace operation wanted to be directly involved in the decision-making regarding that operation, not through the Peace and Security Council of the AU (which does not comprise all 55 Member States, but only 15 elected members at any point in time). The other major reason is that AU Member States do not really like to deploy forces outside their region, first, because they do not have strong enough interests to be engaged far away, and second, because deploying that far is very expensive and (as is also the case regarding the EU battlegroups) the cost of deploying and carrying out the operation falls mostly on the participating Member States (de Coning 2023).

This points to the same structural weakness in both Unions: if there is no central, Union level defence budget that fully funds operations, Member States will use their own forces according to national/state priorities, not Union priorities. Also, AU Member States will spare their own defence budgets and not spend it on managing crises in other AU Member States. In parallel, EU Member States are also reluctant to spend their defence budgets on crisis management operations outside the EU, in areas of the world where some EU Member States do have strong interests, but most have no interest at all. That is one of the most important reasons for the failure of the Battlegroup concept and the regular force generation problems that operations face.

Crisis management versus territorial defence in the EU and in the AU

Europe has a surface area of roughly 20 million square kilometres and a population of roughly 750 million people, and the EU itself has about half of that: 10 million square kilometres and 450 million people. Africa is a simpler case, because all of its 55 countries are Member States of the African Union, meaning we can count only once: Africa is about 30 million square kilometres and has about 1.5 billion people. So, if we are comparing strictly the two Unions, the AU is roughly 3 times the size of the EU in terms of both size and population. The political level of ambition of the EU regarding defence is ambiguous, hovering somewhere between crisis management only, leaving territorial defence to national armed forces and NATO (so, in effect, the US) and tentative attempts at territorial defence (the EU Global Strategy defines 'protect the Union and its citizens" as one of the three strategic objectives). There is no European army, only national armed forces. Even for crisis management, the forces available to the EU through a structured process, pre-assigned are very limited, currently to one brigade size force, the RDC, and between 2004 and the present to (first one, then two) battalion sized battle groups. That is not even remotely enough for crisis management, which is why EU peace operations still operate based on force generation by Member States

(voluntary contributions) and the financing of these operations is funded also mostly by the Member States in a costs lie where they fall scheme (Besenyo, 2019). The common costs of these operations is still only around 15 %, and is financed through an off-budget financial instrument, the European Peace Facility (EPF). However, the EU has one characteristic that makes it very different from the AU, and also, is the basis of very wide popular support to the European integration project: EU Member States are not fighting each other, and also, there is and there was no violent conflict (civil war) in the EU since its inception. The EU has been very successful as a peace project, and also as an economic powerhouse. This means, crises happen elsewhere, outside the Union, so crisis management is not a survival issue for the EU, but a contribution to international peace and stability (and a stable neighbourhood, which the EU desperately needs), in the spirit of the UN Charter.

The territorial defence of the EU is another matter altogether, which still, for most of its Member States, is entrusted to NATO. If the EU did make the big leap to common defence, it would require a European army at least on par with the US armed forces, on account of the roughly comparable size and population of the two (the EU is actually slightly bigger than the US). At the moment, the EU does not have an ambition to take the decision and move to a common defence. However, the Russian-Ukrainian war has already had a strong effect and the EU, slowly and bureaucratically, as usual, is moving toward developing its military capabilities and defence technological and industrial base. These EU efforts are by now not only for crisis management, but territorial defence as well, in the spirit of the implementation plan of the EU Global Strategy, adopted in 2016, that can be summarized as "act with partners when possible, act autonomously when necessary". The talk in Brussels is moving from "strategic autonomy" to strategic sovereignty" (Tocci, 2016; European Union Global Strategy, 2016).

Africa, on the other hand does have a stated objective, adopted by its Heads of State and Government, both to establish a political union, and a confederate or federate state, and an African army to go with it. This strategy established in 2013 in Agenda 2063 is very long term, 50 years into the future (out of which 11 years have already passed), which is reminiscent of the Chinese practice of planning 50 years ahead. (While even the longest term European planning does not look beyond 10-15 years into the future, and is typically only for 4-5 years, that is, the next European/national elections.) Territorial defence for Africa, at the African level is a huge ambition and undertaking and it is doubtful whether anything close to that could be achieved, even in 50 years.

Coming to peace operations in Africa, or in other words, the crisis management level of ambition and requirements, we also find a bleak picture. There are grave obstacles to be faced by African peace operations, or crisis management operations. Number one is obviously the lack of funds, due to the very weak economic performance of most African states and the need for the EU as a donor to even get off the ground (Besenyő, 2019; Besenyő 2021). The 2018 EU court of auditors report on the functioning of APSA

showed that EU financial support was mostly used for salaries and did not even begin to cover the actual operational needs of African forces. Number two is the lack of the forces themselves, because even a few brigades of the AU/SROs are nothing compared to the amount of forces managing all violent conflicts in Africa would need.

If Africa wants to put into practice the principle of "Africa belongs to the Africans" that AU documents and especially Agenda 2063 are built on, and realize the desired African ownership, including the ambition for Africa to become a dominant player in the world, it has to go a very very long way indeed. The EU has adopted a policy of "African solutions to African problems", which dovetails with the AU ambition, and means the EU wants to support Africans to stand on their own feet, not dominate them. The EU of course does this not only based on values, but interests as well: it is in the European interest to have a southern neighbour that is peaceful and prosperous, and as such, is not a drain on European resources and a source of illegal mass migration to Europe, contributing to the potential destabilization of Europe by upending its political, social and cultural structures.

This brings us to one the greatest difference between what we mean by crisis management or peace operations in Europe and in Africa: the EU, internally, is at peace. The military threats the EU faces are coming from the outside, all the wars in Europe are happening in the East, outside EU borders. Africa is in contrast the continent that has, on a par with the Middle East, the highest incidents of wars, civil wars, terrorism, violent conflict, unlawful and violent changes of government in the world. (Africa alone is where about half the violent conflicts in the world happen.)

All this means that the traditional distinction between crisis management as something that has to be done externally, and territorial defence, which would have to be done internally, is something that for the last 80 years belonged to the politically and economically most developed regions of the world, North America and Europe. Africa is not so lucky, and after the end of colonialism in the 1960s, the threats to its long term peace, stability and prosperity are not coming from the outside, but from the inside. Nobody is planning or threatening to invade Africa, or individual African countries. It would not make any sense, and it is simply not needed any more. That mode of domination by outside actors has long ago gone out of fashion, at least in Africa, where revisionist powers have no self-defence, sphere of influence or identity reasons to invade. What Africa experiences now from great powers is economic and political influence and exploitation, without military conquest. This is much less overt, but at times not much less damaging than colonialism has been.

Consequently, crisis management for Africa is an internal issue, and is a much bigger challenge than territorial defence, which for the foreseeable future is not needed. The African army, if ever created, would have internal crisis management as the main task, a sort of "policing" function, much more than a classic territorial defence function. Not to mention the "projecting influence and protecting African political and economic

interests outside Africa" function, which would come into play if Africa ever became a great power. This, if African integration could happen, would absolutely be possible, based on the size and resources of the continent. However, this is so far into the future as to be pure science fiction at the moment.

The AU has launched an initiative called "Silencing the guns", which originally was meant to be achieved by 2020, and has now been extended until 2030 (Achu Check and Hlanyane, 2021). Ending dozens of ongoing wars will obviously not happen until 2030 either, but the fact the African countries working together within the AU, copying the only similar peace project they have as an example, the EU, is important and grounds for optimism.

Conclusion

Africa has enormous potential, both regarding its human resources (unlike Europe, its population is young and the work force is enormous) and its natural resources, its geopolitical situation as a continent almost entirely surrounded by oceans, and as a continent that succeeded in creating an integration framework in the African Union that spans all 55 of its states. Africa is economically still very underdeveloped, and it is further weakened by the artificial borders of its states, not even remotely reflecting the ethnic and religious affiliation of its people. However, this can also be a blessing, as there are no strong and old nation states in Africa and its integration process, if it can be backed by strong political will and gather momentum, can go more smoothly and can in theory even overtake that of Europe. Africa is also not held back by a military alliance dominated by an outside power, as it is non-aligned and independent in a way that Europe has not been since the Second World War.

It remains to be seen what Africa will make of this chance and whether in the next few decades it will secure itself a place as one of the great powers, or it will remain what it always has been so far: the playground of the great powers. The interplay between the EU and the AU, the two Unions, the two potential great powers in the making, and whether they will be partners or rivals in the long run will be a rich field of study for the future.

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Contributors

Katalin Horváth is a PhD student at the University of Óbuda and has been a practitioner of defence policy and defence planning at the Hungarian Ministry of Defence, Department for Defence Policy for 25 years. She has been representing Hungary as

defence counsellor in the EU Politico-Military Group and NATO Defence Policy and Planning Committee and she has been a head of unit for military capabilities at the MOD. She has recently started to work in the field of defence industrial policy and is currently working at the Hungarian Permanent Representation to the EU, sitting in the EU defence industry working group as defence industry counsellor for Hungary. She specializes in European defence.

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