Morocco rejoins the African Union

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Morocco has rejoined the African Union (AU) after 33 years as the organisation’s 55th member. This means that the AU has unified the continent again and now includes every country in Africa. Nonetheless, the dispute over the Western Sahara, which originally provoked Morocco to leave, remains unsolved.

Morocco left the Organisation of African Unity (which later became the AU) in 1984 in protest of the admission of Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) to the body. Morocco only needed a simple majority to rejoin the AU. While 39 countries supported Morocco’s bid, nine countries voted against it. “From the moment that Morocco did not impose conditions ... we take their word for it and accept that Morocco be admitted to the African Union,” declared SADR Foreign Minister Mohamed Salem Ould Salek. The unconditional return is a clear success for Moroccan diplomacy. In an AU press release, King Mohammed VI of Morocco said that it was high time Morocco came back home. “Africa is indispensable to Morocco and Morocco is indispensable to Africa,” he declared. Beyond the Western Sahara dispute, Morocco’s decision to return to the AU is motivated by its desire to exercise influence within this African institution. Morocco has become an active player in support of the process of regional integration. It has concluded various bilateral cooperation agreements with West African countries, notably in agricultural sector investments. Long-standing plans to build a trans-African gas pipeline from West Africa through Morocco to supply Europe might finally be become a reality.

Morocco also regularly contributes to African peacekeeping missions and supports intra-regional student mobility through scholarships for African students.

Find out more: https://issafrica.org/iss-today/mohammed-goes-to-the-mountain
LIPTAKO-GOURMA: NEW JOINT TASK FORCE

Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali have a plan to create a new joint task force to fight insecurity in the Liptako-Gourma area. The decision was taken on 24 January in Niamey during the second Extra-ordinary Conference of Heads of State of the Integrated Development Authority of the Liptako-Gourma region. “We have decided to pool our intelligence resources, our (military) operational capacities to deal with the security situation in this area,” declared President Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger. The operational headquarters will be based in Niamey and the chief of defence will rotate among the three countries. The Liptako-Gourma zone is a semi-arid area of the Sahel covering some 370 000 km². The region is at risk of becoming a sanctuary for terrorist groups and criminals of all kinds. The new joint task force is following the example of the mixed multinational force created in 2015 by Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria to fight Boko Haram in the Lake Chad basin.

▶ Read the statement of Niger’s president: www.presidence.ne/article/discours-de-son-excellence-monsieur-issoufou-mahamadou-president-de-la-republique-du-niger#sthash.eD5N4vXg.dpbo

MOROCCO, NIGERIA PLAN FOR A TRANS-AFRICAN GAS PIPELINE

The Regional Energy Cooperation Summit was held in Abidjan from 26-27 January with the theme: “Promoting cross-border co-operation and regional integration.” Organised by EnergyNet, in collaboration with ECOWAS and its Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (ECREEE) along with the West Africa Power Pool (WAPP), the summit aimed to connect government representatives with private sector investors and experts, and to identify opportunities for regional cooperation between West African countries. An ambitious flagship project, the long-awaited construction of a trans-African gas pipeline connecting Nigeria via Morocco to Europe, might finally advance. The project was officially announced in December 2016 during a visit of King Mohammed VI to Nigeria. The 4 000 km pipeline will run along the Gulf of Guinea countries and will help create industrial hubs, and thereby will also boost regional economic integration beyond the energy sector. The precise set-up and location have not yet been identified. “Morocco and Nigeria are eager to work with all countries in West Africa to ensure their economies and people benefit from the project,” indicates a memorandum of understanding between Morocco and Nigeria. The idea of a trans-Saharan gas pipeline was already proposed in the 1970s with a goal of diversifying Europe’s gas resources. An intergovernmental agreement, signed in 2009 between NNPC (Nigeria) and Sonatrach (Algeria), intended to connect Nigeria to Algeria via Niger. However, there has been little progress on this project.

G20 AIMS TO IMPROVE WATER USE

G20 agriculture ministers met on 22 January in Berlin to discuss their contributions to global food security and improved nutrition. They approved a 2017 action plan entitled, “Towards food and water security: Fostering sustainability, advancing innovation,” in which they pledged to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the COP21 Paris Agreement. The G20 places special emphasis on better integration of sustainable use and management of water in food and agricultural policies. Crop production, livestock and aquaculture account for 70% of global freshwater use. According to a recent OECD report, by 2050, worldwide water demand will increase by 55%. In their declaration, G20 ministers encourage investment in water management, irrigation systems, water storage, manure management, soil health, land-management practices and agricultural innovation. Other priority areas include actions to protect water and water-related ecosystems, measures to reduce food loss and waste, and improvement of data and information for sustainable water and soil management.


GERMANY PROPOSES MARSHALL PLAN WITH AFRICA

“The humanity of the world can be measured against the fate of Africa,” declared Horst Köhler, the former German president, more than 10 years ago. Germany is now making the African continent a focus of its G20 presidency. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development published a draft report called, “Cornerstones of a Marshall Plan with Africa,” advocating for a new partnership between Africa and Europe. Ten starting points have been put forward for discussion, mainly focusing on youth, employment, private sector engagement, African ownership and solutions. The Ministry is encouraging an open discussion and is seeking feedback on its Marshall Plan draft until 26 February 2017.

▶ Share your feedback: marshallplan@bmz.bund.de

OPINION: IS AFRICA STILL BOOMING?

The average growth of African economies was estimated at a record low of 1.4% in 2016 and only a moderate increase is expected in 2017. However, there are two African models: while oil exporters and resource-rich countries such as Angola, Nigeria and South Africa, have experienced a strong recession, other less natural resources dependant countries (notably francophone West Africa) benefitted from an above-average growth rate, reaching up to 8% (Côte d’Ivoire). Despite the economic slow-down, Africa has enormous unexploited development potential. The continent needs to adjust to the current situation and invest in its future, explained Roger Nord, Deputy Director of the IMF’s African Department, in an article published on the Ideas4Development blog.

▶ Read the article: http://ideas4development.org/afrique-en-essor
The SIX Regions of the African Union

With the return of Morocco decided on 30 January 2017, all African states are now members of the African Union. The 55 members are grouped into five geographic regions (North, South, West, East and Central). The diaspora was constituted as the sixth region in 2003 to encourage the participation of people of African origin living outside the continent.

West Africa is, with its 15 members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) the region with the largest number of countries. It is also the most populous region, with an estimated 350 million people in 2015. Nigeria counts for more than half of West Africa’s population. It is expected to become the world’s third most populous country by 2050, following China and India. The African Union recognizes eight regional economic communities (UMA, COMESA, CEN-SAD, EAC, ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD and SADC). They are closely integrated with the African Union’s work and serve as its building blocks. Despite many challenges, ECOWAS is among the best-performing economic communities on the continent.

MOUSSA FAkI MAhAMAT, Chair of AU Commission

On 30 January 2017, the former Prime Minister of Chad, Moussa Faki Mahamat was elected as the fifth chairperson of the African Union Commission, replacing his South African predecessor Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. In a tight race involving seven rounds of voting, the Central African candidate finally won the required two-thirds majority.

He emerged the winner over Kenyan Foreign Minister, Amina Mohammed and is the second Central African to occupy this top position, following Jean Ping from Gabon (2008-12). Born in 1960 in Biltine, a town in eastern Chad, Moussa Faki Mahamat holds a bachelor’s degree in public law from the University of N’Djamena (1986) and a post-graduate diploma in public law from the Université Marien Ngouabi Brazzaville, Congo (1992). During his time in Congo-Brazzaville, he joined the political military group opposing the government of Hissène Habré, the Democratic Revolutionary Council headed by Acheikh Ibn-Oumar. A close ally of President Idriss Déby, Moussa Faki Mahamat started his political career in the early 1990s. He served in the Ministry of Rural Development as the Head of Administrative and Financial services from 1992-94. Subsequently, he became the Minister for Planning and Cooperation and was appointed the Director-General of the National Sugar Company from 1996-99. Later, he took on the role of Director of the Presidential Cabinet from 1999-2002. After a year in a subsequent post as the Minister of Public Works and Transport, he served as Prime Minister from 2003-05. Since 2008, he has been Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Chadian diplomat is known in African political circles for his fight against Islamist militants in Mali, Nigeria and the Sahel. During his four-year mandate with the African Union Commission, he aims to place development and security at the top of the continental agenda, and to streamline the commission’s bureaucracy, in particular, by strengthening its implementation capacity. Of the 1,800 resolutions adopted by the AU Commission since 2002, less than 15% have been implemented. Advocating a strong leadership, Moussa Faki Mahamat intends to defend Africa’s place in the world during “turbulent times.”