The Future

A strong relationship has evolved between the EU and South Africa since the birth of South African democracy in 1994. The European Union is committed to strengthening its partnership with South Africa towards a mutually beneficial relationship. The Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force in December 2009, opens the way for a more coherent, coordinated and effective EU-South Africa Strategic Partnership. Under the new Treaty, the EU will engage more closely with South Africa on political and security issues, while further strengthening its traditional role as a partner in economic and scientific cooperation, as well as through support for poverty reduction.

More information
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Development cooperation and Multiannual programme

The TDCA agreement, which is overseen by a Joint Cooperation Council, was expanded in 2009 to include provisions on political and economic cooperation. Development cooperation is mapped out in a country strategy paper (CSP) developed jointly by South Africa and the EU, and covering the period 2007-13. Its main objective is to reduce poverty and inequality, while promoting social stability and environmental sustainability. The CSP’s objectives have been translated into a Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP), which focuses on employment creation and capacity development for service delivery and social cohesion. The total indicative budget for the seven-year period amounts to €980 million, the largest EU bilateral envelope worldwide.

Strategic Partnership

The closer ties between South Africa and the EU were consolidated in 2007 with the establishment of a Strategic Partnership, the sole concluded by the EU with an African partner. This Partnership is centred on enhanced political dialogue around issues of shared interest such as climate change, global governance, the global economy, bilateral trade, and peace and security matters. Its Action Plan encompasses sectoral cooperation on a range of issues such as the environment and climate change, science and technology, transport, space, migration, trade, etc.

Annual Summits, Ministerial and Senior officials’ meetings steer the Partnership, along with the EU-South Africa Joint Cooperation Council. They provide an occasion to discuss current bilateral, regional and global issues.

Trade cooperation

The EU as a whole is South Africa’s largest trading partner by far and South Africa is the EU’s 14th largest partner globally. Bilateral trade flows amounted to more than €38.5 billion in 2010, with EU exports of €21.05 billion and imports from South Africa of €17.46 billion. In line with the TDCA, the EU eliminated tariffs on 95% of SA’s goods by end 2010, while SA is expected to do away with tariffs on 86% of EU exports by 2012. South Africa has seen its exports to the EU rise from around €15.8 billion in 2004 to almost €22.2 billion in 2008. The EU is now South Africa’s largest export destination accounting for some 23% of total exports with its economy gradually diversifying away from mainly commodity-based products towards manufactured products. The EU is also South Africa’s main source of imports with a share of 32% of total imports in 2009.

The Republic of South Africa (RSA) is the European Union’s Strategic Partner and the largest trading partner in Africa. With a population of some 50 million and the largest economy in Africa, it is the only African member of the G20 and the BRICS, and a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in 2011-12.

The growing relationship between South Africa and the EU since 1994 has been underpinned by the Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA) covering 90% of bilateral trade in goods, which was signed in 1999 and came fully into force in 2004.

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