

IIFE'S AMBASSADORS FORUM

THE MULTILATERAL ROLE OF EGYPT: REPRESENTATIVE CONTRIBUTION IN SEARCH FOR EQUALITY AND JUSTICE IN THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

Lecture by

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at the

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Director of the Institute of International Politics and Economics

Madame Jelica Gordanic,

Coordinator of Ambassadors' Forum

Excellencies Ambassadors,

Distinguished academics and guests,

I am pleased to be here today at the reputed Institute of International Politics and Economics and to salute Director Professor Dr. Branislav Đorđević, the Board and the members of the Institute for their intellectual contribution to the Belgrade Foreign Policy discussions.

I would also like to recognize Ambassador Namira Negm, Legal Counsel of the African Union and Ambassador Ashraf Swelam, Director General of Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding.

¹ While the main elements of this lecture reflect the official positions that Egypt undertook in the mentioned multilateral forums, the author has also added a number of analytical references which reflect his own opinion resulting from almost 25 years of professional and academic experiences with multilateralism. These references should be read, and referred to, bearing in mind this highlighted context.

Difficult questions should go to them, being the *real* experts, and easy ones to me, being your *guest* in Belgrade!

WHY SPEAK OF MULTILATERALISM HERE IN BELGRADE AND NOW?

It is by no coincidence that we choose the title of our conference today to be “The Multilateral Role of Egypt”.

- **Firstly**, the relationship between Cairo and Belgrade will always be remembered through their mutual leadership in establishing the Non-Aligned Movement, and by this striving, for a more just and equitable and democratic international order.
- **Secondly, in the last 4 years**, Egypt has assumed **3** consecutive leading roles in regional and global institutions, in an **almost unprecedented** three years in a row. This is instructive for exploring the interlinkages and the intricacies of multilateral relations of relevance to all students of international politics.
- **Thirdly**, I have had the honor and a chance to be personally involved in a number of these initiatives, throughout a diplomatic career that spanned for almost 25 years dealing with multilateral relations, ranging from an assisting role in representation to Bretton Woods Institutions to a more engaged contribution to the work of the United Nations in Geneva and New York.
- **Fourthly**, multilateralism is facing mounting challenges these days, which merits our heightened attention to safeguarding this salient dimension of global politics that groups the world together, and strives to safeguard the interests of small and medium states.

Multilateral diplomacy remains an integral subject of global politics. It is the framework governing the participation of our countries in the United Nations and other international organizations and specialized international agencies. It has become more open to the participation of all actors, including civil society institutions that you represent so ably here through your Institute in what is being termed by some, Multistakeholder Diplomacy.

REPRESENTATION AT THE UNSC, AND BY THE UNSC OF THE WIDER MEMBERSHIP

The almost unprecedented four years in a row, three leading multilateral contributions started with Egypt’s elected term in the Security Council, with two years of continuous contribution to the work of the Council. The main framework that governed the contribution of Egypt’s work to the Council is that it was one

of the three African members of the Council (A3), the only Arab member² and one of the members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) caucus. This has led Egypt not only to undertake its intrinsic role in presenting its national vision, but also to play a pivotal role in those geopolitical groups to which it belongs. It rested on the fact that the Council itself, in accordance with Article 24 of the Charter, is mandated to have the primary task of maintaining international peace and security. We should note, however, that in carrying out this task, the Council acts on behalf of the Member States themselves, according to the first paragraph of the said Article; and in consistency with the purposes and principles of the United Nations, as per Article 24(2) of the Charter. Hence, Egypt's membership in the Council was wholly conscious that the decisions of the Council should reflect the collective interest of the general membership of the United Nations as a whole. This influenced the determinants of Egypt's contributions to the Council, as they were solidly based on principled positions emanating from the purposes and principles of the United Nations itself as set out in the Charter, aiming to preserve the independence of the world Organization itself and protect the collective interests of the broader general membership.

In this broader framework of the representation of the general membership, Egypt has been active in stimulating the role of the 10 elected States in the membership of the Council, being one of them. The E10, a more telling nomenclature than the generic 'non-permanent' more general reference, put forward joint resolutions anchoring their co-ownership of the drafting process, which should not be limited to the so-called "pen holders" who had traditionally been restricted to the permanent members, or even only a limited number of them in many cases.

Egypt was keen to be involved, even gradually, in proposing draft resolutions to all member states of the Council. The Resolution on the Protection of Medical Facilities during Conflicts in May 2016³ was the result of cooperation among a number of the E10 and was adopted under Egypt's presidency of the Council, thus consolidating the expansion of ownership of decision-making in line with the other responsibilities of the elected States.

Another avenue of contributing to the substance of outcomes of the UNSC for elected members, even if not penholder, and hence indirectly, is through

² "As Egypt's membership in the UN Security Council came to an end, how did Egyptian diplomacy embark upon defending Arab and African interests?", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, available at <https://www.mfa.gov.eg/English/MediaCenter/News/Pages/Egypt-culminates-in-the-end-of-its-membership-in-the-Security-Council-and-its-chairmanship-of-the-Counter-Terrorism-Committee.aspx>

³ Available at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2286>

subsidiary bodies, of which Egypt chaired three: the Counter-Terrorism Committee and two of the Security Council Sanctions Committees on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Iraq. This process of selection was an important step in reforming the working methods of the Security Council by making it more open to its 15 members, and not only restricted to the P5, as was the case before. It also enhanced transparency in general so that its work will be more accessible to the membership of the General Assembly as a whole. It is worth mentioning that a number of the resolutions put forward by Egypt to the Council were co-sponsored by a large number of the Member States in the General Assembly, such as the resolution unanimously adopted by the Council to combat the terrorist rhetoric⁴, whose concept and idea was presented by Egypt during its first presidency of the UNSC in May 2016.

In this context, Egypt's role as one of the three representatives of the African continent in the Council (the A3), where African issues took precedence, especially in view of being the only African country with concurrent membership in both the UN Security Council and the African Peace and Security Council was immensely important. Accordingly, Egypt was keen to organize a thematic discussion on the structure of African peace and security under Egypt's first presidency of the Council⁵, a pioneering step towards discussing cooperation between the two organizations at the holistic level and more comprehensive framework of conflict resolution, instead of the earlier, or even more traditional, partial view that was limited to peacekeeping as one aspect of the conflict resolution mechanism. In the general debate held in May 2016⁶, the objective was to transcend the limited conflict management approach in order to evaluate opportunities for cooperation in conflict resolution, as a whole, by including the stages of making, maintaining and consolidating peace, taking into account the progress of the African peace and security architecture and the complementarity of its components, as well as an integrated structure for peace and security, in order to examine how these two structures can integrate their roles in the maintenance of international peace and security.

At the same time, the Egyptian delegation in New York hosted the eleventh meeting of the African Peace and Security Council and the United Nations

⁴ Available at [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2354\(2017\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2354(2017))

⁵ "African leaders discuss peace and security in closed meeting" Egypt Today, paragraph 4, available at <http://www.egypttoday.com/Article/2/64517/African-leaders-discuss-peace-and-security-in-closed-meeting>

⁶ "Egypt Role in Peacekeeping Operations" Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, paragraph 16, available at <https://www.mfa.gov.eg/English/ForeignPolicy/Pages/PeacekeepingAndConflictResolution.aspx>

Security Council⁷, also with the participation of the Chairman of the Peacebuilding Commission⁸, which contributed in the same direction to the resolution of African conflicts from a comprehensive perspective of those conflicts.

On the Arab level, under Egypt's first presidency of the Security Council, a joint consultative meeting between the UN Security Council and the Council of the League of Arab States⁹ was held as the first meeting¹⁰ between the two Councils¹¹, despite their establishment more than 70 years ago¹², along with the active participation of the Egyptian delegation in New York to follow up on the Arab issues on the agenda of the Security Council¹³.

AT THE UNSC: THE THEMATIC PRIORITIES

These were the priorities within Egypt's regional and political geographical groups, which went hand in hand with the thematic priorities that were mainly in the areas of counterterrorism and peacekeeping.

As for the fight against terrorism, the delegation of Egypt had the lead in introducing new topics that the Security Council has never dealt with in this regard, such as combating the intellectual foundations on which terrorist acts are based. This was announced by Egypt's first presidency of the Security Council

⁷ UNOAU Bulletin "The United Nations Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council meet for the 11th Annual Joint Consultative Meeting", available at https://unoau.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unoau_bulletin-aug-oct_2017.pdf

⁸ "Dispatches from the Field: 11th AU-UN Annual Joint Consultative Meeting", What's in Blue, available at <https://www.whatsinblue.org/2017/09/dispatches-from-the-field-11th-au-un-annual-joint-consultative-meeting.php>

⁹ "In Cairo, UN Security Council consults with Arab League on regional, global issues" UN News, available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2016/05/529932-cairo-un-security-council-consults-arab-league-regional-global-issues>

¹⁰ "UN Security Council Holds 'Unprecedented' Meeting with Arab League States in Cairo" Egyptian Streets, available at <https://egyptianstreets.com/2016/05/24/un-security-council-holds-unprecedented-meeting-with-arab-league-states-in-cairo/>

¹¹ "Briefing on Cooperation between the UN and the League of Arab States" Security Council Report, available at https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2017-08/briefing_on_cooperation_between_the_un_and_the_league_of_arab_states.php

¹² "Statement by Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry on the occasion of the United Nations Day Cairo, Egyptian Diplomatic Club 22/11/2017", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, available at <https://www.mfa.gov.eg/English/MediaCenter/Pages/StatementsDetails.aspx?StatementID=129>

¹³ Initial efforts were also exerted towards institutionalizing these consultations with regards to regularity of meetings, and methodology of preparations.

in May 2016. In May 2017, the second major contribution was to push for the completion of all aspects of the counterterrorism triangle. The Council had previously focused on combating foreign terrorist fighters on the one hand and combating funding on the other. The initiative of Egypt to push the Council to issue Resolution 2370¹⁴ was issued under its presidency in August 2017 to prevent the access to weapons by terrorists, to complete the third leg of the triangle.

Priority was also given to the thematic issues of peacekeeping; from a comprehensive perspective, linking all phases of conflict prevention, from prevention and peacemaking to peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Egypt's Presidency of the Council in August 2017 organized a general debate on the linkage between peacekeeping operations and the concept of the sustainability of peace as a starting point for the Security Council to discuss the many ideas on the reform and development of peace missions and related United Nations mechanisms, in particular, the integration of the concept of "special political missions" and "Peacekeeping missions" so that the resources of the United Nations Secretariat would be integrated in support of a comprehensive settlement of ongoing conflicts.

A ministerial meeting, hosted by Egypt in May 2016, was one of the first to reflect on the concept of the interdependence of the mechanisms of peace and security under the heading of addressing the continued response of the Security Council to the resolution of conflicts within the framework of the UN Peace and Security Architecture. There is no doubt that this designation considers the mechanisms and resources of the United Nations in an integrated, complementary approach, maximizing their actual impact. Perhaps the main message of this meeting is that there is a continuous spectrum of activities that our global Organization must do to achieve the original goal of a comprehensive and just settlement of these existing international conflicts, together with the prevention of new conflicts or the re-emergence of conflicts that were already settled.

To achieve that goal, we should not only silence the sounds of guns; we should echo the calls for sustainable peace.

Egypt's role in the field of peacekeeping is not confined to conceptual aspects, but its significance is that Egypt's position among the troop-contributing and police-contributing countries during Egypt's two years of membership in the Security Council reflects its commitment to translating its active role in the political arena in the Security Council into action on the ground. During these two years, specifically from September 2015 to September 2017, Egypt's ranking rose from 16th to 8th globally, from third to second for the Francophonie, from ninth to fourth in Africa, from second to first among Arab countries, and from

¹⁴ Available at <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2370>

fourth to second globally for police contributors. At the same time, there was a commitment to expand women's participation, as the number of their police officers has increased four times during this period. The deployment of the first Egyptian military observer was already underway. Therefore, Egypt's commitment to supporting the UN peacekeeping has been enhanced by the fact that statements are accompanied by deeds and that decisions were drawn from the deliberations of the Security Council and the General Assembly to the field of troops and personnel participation.

FROM PEACE AND SECURITY TO DEVELOPMENT: ROUNDING THE MAIN PILLARS OF WORK OF THE UN

We may have gone to length the issues related to peace and security, considering that we focused on membership of the Security Council and considering the centrality of the maintenance of the service and security within the three pillars of the work of the Organization. Yet soon after the completion of the elected term at the UNSC, actually the day after 1 January 2018 when Egypt assumed the Chairmanship of the Group of 77 for the third time since its inception.

Throughout the year, Egypt strove to represent the interests of the Group and its Member States and to advance the Group's objectives and the values of equality and justice to which we aspire in the international system and the United Nations.

2018 turned out to be a critical year for the UN reform efforts in all fields. The pace of reform and the proposals submitted during the past year were exceptional. In 2018, the Group of 77 undertook a leading role in guiding reform toward achieving the desired effectiveness of the UN system, whether through supporting executive actions for the purpose of development or reforming the management and peace and security systems.

With regard to reforming the developmental system, based on the precious proposals of the Secretary-General and his team, the Group has been remarkably active in proposing a clear vision on the reform of the developmental system. The pivot remained "national ownership of developmental priorities", deciding on the support which could be provided by the international system as per national priorities, and saving a rightful place for developmental issues for their own merit, aside from the security and political realms which have their own mechanisms for considerations. Development is, and should remain, the main pillar of the work of the United Nations, with platforms fully devoted to its promotion according to the needs and views of developing countries, the primary addressees of such processes.

Also, the Group played a major role in addressing the reform of the “management and peace and security systems” in the Secretariat. With regard to management system reform, the Group pushed for the implementation of decentralization for the purpose of enabling the Organization to effectively fulfill its commitments. Furthermore, it supported the reinforcement of the accountability and transparency mechanisms, allowing for the efficient review of the Secretariat’s work by the Member States. Concerning the reform of the peace and security related secretariat structures, the Group supported the adoption of a comprehensive approach with a view to attaining harmony and coordination among the Secretariat’s relevant departments and enhance the ability of the Organization to effectively address peace and security challenges, especially via the preventive-diplomacy, focusing on the roots of conflicts, and supporting cooperation with regional organizations. Restructuring of the Secretariat extends beyond administrative aspects and organizational division of work. It entails an intrinsic alteration, even if slight, in the conceptual framework guiding the work of the Organization. For that reason, the jurisdiction of the intergovernmental machinery in overseeing such restructuring should not be overlooked. The contribution of the G77 needs to be looked at in this perspective¹⁵.

IMPLEMENTATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL COMMITMENTS:

Consistent with the global UN engagements in the past few years, especially the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development, the Paris Climate Change Agreement, and a number of programs of action in sustainable development-related areas, the work of the Group of G77 under the presidency of Egypt included following-up over the implementation of these commitments. Well identified priorities included youth employment, eradication of poverty and enhancing capabilities for economic production. Challenges remained for achieving consensus on such issues, especially the orientation by some to revisit already agreed

¹⁵ While such restructuring initializes may end up receiving intergovernmental reform, others may face more resistance including if the source of ideas was from a certain part of the Secretariat. In my period as a delegate at the Permanent Mission in Geneva from 2003 to 2007 recall participating in long and numerous meetings to discuss proposals for merging a number of research and training institutions of the UN. Members of different departments of the Secretariat often approached us with diverging views of the restructuring proposals. Naturally, they were also driven by the potential impact of such a merger be on their own bureaucratic standing. Add to this is that several of these structures had their own governing bodies and other intergovernmental oversight machinery. It was an interesting interplay between the space available for initiative taking by the leadership of Secretariat, the affected spill over departments, and the intergovernmental machinery. A case that probably merits even more analytical study.

international commitment, attempt to limit the inherent responsibility of the international community to support financing development efforts¹⁶.

Egypt exerted strenuous efforts during its presidency regarding climate change and the difficulty that it poses to developing countries in their implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda. As President, on behalf of the developing states, Egypt has undergone negotiations at the “24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Egypt exerted its utmost to push the international efforts for the implementation and employment of all of the provisions of the Paris Climate Change Agreement, especially those concerned with the mobilization of financial resources necessary for supporting developing states’ efforts in facing climate change challenges, technology transfer and capacity building.¹⁷ In the same vein, the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity that was held in Sharm Al-Sheikh, Egypt, in November 2018, was successful in terms of the ability of the Group to include its priorities in the outcomes of the Conference to push for the efforts of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda.¹⁸

South-South cooperation¹⁹ and the efforts of the Group in preparing for the Second High-Level UN Conference on South-South Cooperation that was hosted by Buenos Aires in March 2019, demonstrated the ability of the Group to determine its priorities and synergize between its members. While preparing for such a high-profile conference²⁰, the Group asserted the principles of

¹⁶ The somewhat competing perspectives of levels of analysis for prescribing development strategies, and whether one should on the global systemic level, or rather emphasize the centrality of national measures by the individual state is traditionally addressed in deliberation in multilateral development forums, either explicitly or implicitly. The necessity to adjust global rules and structures to accommodate development needs, and/or the role of provision of assistance and preferential transfer of technology does also appear in the discussions. Often the wording used with regards to such difficult negotiating issues is watered down and reduced to a level of generality, resulting in a lack of full implementation of these commitments. ¹⁷ “statement by Mr. Sameh Shoukry, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt, at the handover ceremony of the Chairmanship of the Group of 77 (New York, 15 January 2019)” available at <https://www.g77.org/statement/getstatement.php?id=190115> “In his statement at the Group of 77 and China chairmanship Handover Ceremony in New York” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, available at <https://www.mfa.gov.eg/English/MediaCenter/News/Pages/Collection.aspx>

¹⁸ “Outcomes (38)”, All in-session documents, COP 14, Convention on Biodiversity, available at <https://www.cbd.int/conferences/2018/cop-14/documents>

¹⁹ “Sc And G77 & China Brainstorming Meeting In Preparation For Bapa+40, 12 September 2018” South Centre, Available At <https://www.southcentre.int/sc-and-g77-china-brainstorming-meeting-in-preparation-for-bapa40-12-september-2018/>

²⁰ “CONCEPT NOTE G77 and China Geneva Chapter - South Centre Brainstorming meeting in preparation of the Second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South

cooperation, and the prism of converging interests that form the basis for South-South cooperation²¹, and hence among developing countries²².

At the beginning of 2018, the Egyptian Presidency prioritized the matter of “emerging technologies and their long-term effects on the interests of developing states”. The discussion in the ministerial meeting of the Group in September 2018 tackled “how the fast-moving technological transformations we are witnessing in today’s world and their effects on all aspects of life have come to represent a structural turning point, whose implications will certainly change lifestyles in various countries”. One such important aspect is their positive and negative effects on the work force. It is not to be forgotten that the access to these currently essential technologies is not equal, which put forth the North-South technological division, and within the same state as well. Throughout 2018, Egypt held briefing sessions with specialized research centers on the said issues, and international organizations, to raise the awareness thereof among the members of the Group and its delegations in New York with an end goal of tackling such issues in a deeper sense²³.

Also, Egypt’s priorities in 2018 included the firm addressing the women’s economic empowerment issue which is at the core of sustainable development efforts. In this context, the Egyptian Presidency “organized two high-level meetings with ministerial participation on the sidelines of the Economic and Social Council committees’ meetings”. In these meetings, the “financial inclusion of women”, as a top important empowerment mechanism, was addressed. Plus,

Cooperation (BAPA+40)”, pages 1 and 2, available at https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Ev_180912_SC-G77-Brainstorming-meeting-BAPA40-prep_EN.pdf

²¹ Debates with regard to the role of South-South cooperation in many UN multilateral forums witness often interesting arguments about where the responsibility rests mostly, and the holistic versus partial approaches to the challenges of development. Often, debates that South-South cooperation should not be seen as diluting North-South cooperation, whereby there is a weighted responsibility on developed countries to support development efforts by developing countries in a commensurate proportion related to the comparative weight in the international economic system. It is not rare as well to hear interventions by developed countries insinuating to new geoeconomic realities, and the ascendancy of emerging economies which should assume a larger share in burden sharing, including if possible through South-South cooperation. A number of these rising economic powers have also embarked on a somewhat voluntary larger role, in a demonstration not only of solidarity, but also to reflect their aspiration for a larger role in another diplomatic platform, either in established multilateral institutions, or in the so-called minilateralism smaller forums.

²² For more information, see <https://www.unsouthsouth.org/>

²³ “President Sisi’s speech before FMs 42nd annual meeting of the Group of 77 States” State Information Service of Egypt, available at <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/135390/President-Sisi’s-speech-before-FMs-42nd-annual-meeting-of-the-Group-of-77-States?lang=en-us>

senior officials shared their experiences across capitals, allowing for the initiation of a shared space based on mutual understanding of the challenges that concern them and suggesting some suitable solutions for the developing countries' circumstances.

This journey of leading the largest group of countries in multilateral diplomacy strove to preserve the policy space for developing countries, and for that matter for all countries in need of such space to realize their legitimate developmental goals. This multilateral role was soon to be complemented by yet another leading contribution. In fact, the “handing over” ceremony for Egypt's chairmanship of the G77 to Palestine was only around a month away from yet another similar ceremony, yet this time it was a “handing in” ceremony to assume the presidency of the African Union.

AU CHAIRMANSHIP

Now that we reviewed two global leadership roles that Egypt has undertaken, we come to the third in a row, which is its current chairmanship of the African Union. Three key priority areas were identified based on their high importance on the African landscape and their relevance to Agenda 2063.

Firstly: pushing forward the regional economic integration portfolio with special emphasis on infrastructure²⁴:

Since the Lagos Plan of Action in the 1980s and the Abuja Declaration in 1991, regional integration has witnessed various degrees of success within the five African regions, yet not achieved the end result of a common African market.

No real integration can be achieved without a proper interconnected infrastructure between African nations and a clearly drafted division of labour between the African Union, regional economic communities and regional mechanisms with the outlined responsibilities for each.

With this in mind and on the way to the first coordination meeting between the AU and RECs in Niamey in July 2019²⁵, Egypt is co-organizing two retreats among the Member States under the title “Road To Niamey” (one already

²⁴ “Egypt sorts out main priorities for Africa's development during its AU presidency” State Information Service of Egypt, paragraph 10, available at <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/137320/Foreign-Ministry-Egypt-sorts-out-main-priorities-for-Africa's-development-during-its-AU-presidency?lang=en-us>

²⁵ “AUC, PRC and RECs sensitization and experience sharing seminar focused on the July 2019 Mid-Year Coordination meeting set to be held in Niger.” African Union Press Releases, available at <https://au.int/sw/node/36353>

convened on 11-12 April 2019²⁶ and the Second in Tunisia on 28-30 April)²⁷ dedicated to having a detailed discussion on the expected deliverables from the Niamey coordination Meeting²⁸.

With the belief that the Niamey meeting is not a goal in itself and that further work is needed on the “Road From Niamey” as opposed to the “Road To Niamey”, Egypt was keen to facilitate organizing other high-level events in the second half of the year, including a high-level event on the margins of the UNGA in September to sensitize the international community about the efforts done by the African continent in this regard and garner international support in addition to crafting a road map with practical steps for the post-Niamey period. From 25 to 29 November, Cairo hosted the African Union Infrastructure Week with more than 600 participants. It was preceded by the Bureau of the Ministerial Committee in charge of infrastructure, energy, transport and tourism on 24 November. Several ideas were proposed, including a list of 10 continental projects from the five regions, electrical grid interconnection and a network of African businesswomen in the field of infrastructure.

Secondly: The African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCFTA)²⁹:

Africa with a population of nearly 1.3 billion individuals and a combined GDP that surpasses 2 trillion dollars has an intra-trade share that does not exceed 13% according to the most optimistic estimates.

With this background in mind, African Leaders signed the ACFTA agreement in 2018 and the ratification of 22 Member States. Now more challenging work is awaiting us on negotiating the technical details of implementation, including

²⁶ “21. COMMENDS the efforts of the PSC in convening, in Cairo, Egypt from 29 to 31 October 2018, a Retreat dedicated to assessing the status of implementation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the African Governance Architecture (AGA), with a view to laying a solid foundation for the reform of the PSC, as called for in Decision Assembly/AU.Dec.635 adopted in January 2017.” DECISION ON THE REPORT OF THE PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL ON ITS ACTIVITIES AND THE STATE OF PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFRICA, available at https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/36461-assembly_au_dec_713_-_748_xxxii_e.pdf

²⁷ “A holistic approach to division of labor to accelerate Africa’s development.” African Union Press Releases, available at <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20190412/holistic-approach-division-labor-accelerate-africas-development>

²⁸ “No shortcut to inclusive prosperity”- Cairo meeting to deliberate division of labour to drive Agenda 2063“African Union Press Releases, available at <https://au.int/sw/node/36340>

²⁹ “Egypt sorts out main priorities for Africa’s development during its AU presidency” State Information Service of Egypt, paragraph 10, available at <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/137320/Foreign-Ministry-Egypt-sorts-out-main-priorities-for-Africa’s-development-during-its-AU-presidency?lang=en-us>

rules of origin and lists of exemptions, etc. These discussions are addressing technical specificities of a free trade area; a discussion that transcends and goes beyond the political announcement of entry into force of an agreement. The expertise accumulated by the AU partners can provide valuable input.

Within this context, Egypt hosted the first intra-African trade fair in December 2018³⁰ and a meeting of the African Ministers of Trade on its margins, where a technical discussion was initiated and is working on collaborating with international partners to avail the necessary expertise for African countries in this regard³¹.

Thirdly: The Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD):

Egypt's choice of this particular priority stems from its conviction that African Nations cannot achieve sustainable peace and realize development while their territories are still mired in or affected by armed conflicts. Relapse to conflict needs to be firmly and effectively addressed and prevented.

Africa is home to 8 ongoing wide-scale conflicts whose impact cuts across the entire continent, where 12 million IDPS (half of the world IDPS population) were forced to flee their homes and millions of others sought refuge in neighbouring countries. This chronic situation of recurring conflicts involves the continent in a vicious circle that hinders any prospect for development or any hope for stability.

The last African Union Assembly marked H.E. President Abd El Fattah Al Sisi with the challenging role of leader on Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD)³². Thus, Egypt is committed at the highest level to making use of its vast experience and contribution in peacekeeping and building and its

³⁰ “First intra-African trade fair kicks off in Cairo“, Ministry of Trade and Industry of Egypt, available at <http://www.mti.gov.eg/English/MediaCenter/News/Pages/First-intra-African-trade-fair-kicks-off-in-Cairo.aspx> “Intra-African Trade Fair (IATF2018) opens Dec 11-17” State Information Service of Egypt, available at [http://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/136622/Intra-African-Trade-Fair-\(IATF2018\)-opens-Dec-11-17?lang=en-us](http://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/136622/Intra-African-Trade-Fair-(IATF2018)-opens-Dec-11-17?lang=en-us)

³¹ The Annex to the Declaration of the meeting is available at https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/36461-assembly_au_dec_713_-_748_xxxii_e.pdf

³² “MANDATES H.E. Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, to be Leader of the revitalization and operationalization of the African Union Policy on PCRD.”, DECISION ON REVITALISING AND OPERATIONALISING THE AFRICAN UNION POLICY ON POST CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT: PRACTICAL POLICY OPTIONS AND ADAPTIVE MEASURES FOR SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT CHALLENGES IN AFRICA, available at https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/36461-assembly_au_dec_713_-_748_xxxii_e.pdf

uninterrupted membership in the peacebuilding commission in the UN for 12 years³³ to garner the international support required to help the African continent out of this loop.

The first step is hosting the AUCPCRD Center in Cairo, whose mandate includes a wide array of activities including conducting studies, developing strategies, and putting forward action plans to enhance reconstruction after conflicts and foster development. Egypt worked hand in hand with the AUC to finalize the host agreement at the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development³⁴, which it hosted in December 2019 as the first version of an annual forum that will gather members from all over the world to discuss peace and development related topics³⁵.

Other priority areas include garnering support for youth initiatives and within this context, the first Arab African youth forum was held in Aswan in March 2019³⁶. The Embassy coordinated with Novi Sad authorities, as the Youth Capital of Europe, for a joint European African Arab Youth event, bringing our continents closer together not only in the present but even more so in the future in which the youth will lead-in.

In addition to the theme of the year chosen by the African Union “Refugees, Returnees And Internally Displaced, Towards Durable Solutions”, Egypt is putting the emphasis by dedicating the celebration of Africa day this year on 25 May across all its embassies in the African continent to this topic too³⁷. Egypt, throughout its year of chairmanship³⁸, aimed to leave a positive impact on the administration of the African Union Commission itself (increased internal coordination, ameliorating work methods and continuing the ongoing reform process) in addition to the aforementioned priority areas that closely affect

³³ “Egypt and Peacekeeping” CCCPA, paragraph 5, available at <https://www.cairopeacekeeping.org/en/egypt-and-peacekeeping>

³⁴ “Egypt to host African Union center on post-conflict reconstruction, development, Xinhua”, 2019-12-11 19:39:54, available at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/11/c_138623478.htm

³⁵ “AU summit 32: Egypt takes the wheel at the AU” ISS PSC Report, Egypt is repositioning itself in sub-Saharan Africa to pursue and protect its strategic interests, paragraphs 3 and 4, available at <https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/au-summit-32-egypt-takes-the-wheel-at-the-au>

³⁶ “Arab and African Youth Platform” State Information Service of Egypt, available at <http://www.sis.gov.eg/Story/137958?lang=en-us>

³⁷ “Egypt Celebrates African Day 2017 on Thursday” State Information Service of Egypt, paragraph 8, available at <http://sis.gov.eg/Story/113139?lang=en-us>

³⁸ It is to be recalled here the extraordinary summit on institutional reform held in Addis Ababa 17-18 November, 1918 preceded by the Executive Council on 14-15 of the same month.

African nations and impact their peoples³⁹. Egypt carried with it the aspirations of the African Union to the wider multilateral forums in which it participated in the continent's name, such as the G20 Summit in Osaka 28-29 June 2019 and the G7 Summit held in France 25-26 August 2019. This is in addition to other forums that grouped all members of the African Union with other global partners such as the African Russian Summit held on 23-24 October 2019 in Sochi. In all such meetings, a representational and facilitative role was part and parcel of the duties of the chairmanship of the Union.

CONCLUSIONS

This representative role of Egypt has become integral to its foreign policy orientation, making the multilateral forums all but home. It is coupled with a clear distinction between attendance, and participation, whereby the latter strives to contribute meaningfully to multilateral processes with a clear view for a more just, equitable, democratic global political and economic order. Our gathering at the Institute promises to be yet another opportunity for this ongoing call, which would echo from Belgrade and Cairo as it did at the heydays of founding the Non-Aligned Movement.

³⁹ See “AU Executive Council concludes, adopting important resolutions on institutional and financial reform” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt, paragraph 3, available at <https://www.mfa.gov.eg/English/MediaCenter/News/Pages/fgfg.aspx>