



Summary report from the Afrika Club of June 21, 2022

The Russian-Ukraine war and Africa

Contributions from:

- **Maureen Ndih** (zoom), President of Cameroon Association of English-speaking Journalists, Radio Africa TV Correspondent, Douala
- **Irene Horejs**, former EU Ambassador and former Director for Africa, Asia and Latin America in the European Commission, DG ECHO (Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid)
- **Belachew Gebrewold** (zoom), Head of Department & Studies, MCI - The Entrepreneurial University Group, Innsbruck

Moderation: **Margit Maximilian**, Africa Correspondent, Austrian Broadcasting Company

Report: **Carla Diem**

The Afrika Club is an initiative by Radio Afrika TV (RATV), African Diaspora Youth Forum in Europe (ADYFE), the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC) and former ambassador Georg Lennkh.



Franz Schmidjell welcomes the participants, in particular the guests participating via Zoom from Duala and Innsbruck. The topic of discussion is the Russian-Ukraine war and its implications for Africa, including: How do African leaders position themselves in this conflict and what are their interests? What are the effects of the rising energy and food prices? How could a famine be prevented? Some African embassies have been invited to join the discussion but have declined.

Margit Maximilian (moderator) stated that because of the media coverage, we mostly see the European perspective, but not the African one. There, they either choose neutrality or the pro-aggressor side. She asked if there is pressure from the US and if African countries want to have both relations with the West as well as the East. She questioned what stance Africa should take and whether the anti-western resentment has increased due to the war.

Maureen Ndi answers that the war can be felt in every aspect of life, and everybody can feel the insecurity due to the dependency on Western economies. Local goods could not compete against western imports and over 60% of the wheat used in Africa is imported. The lack of indigenous sources of wheat in Africa makes wheat-products very expensive. There needs to be a lot of investing in this area and a rethinking of the economic model in Africa, one that is not entirely dependent on Europe. Additionally, governments need to think about own fertilizer production since Africa is depending on those as well. Some Nigerian elites have already invested in the oil and fertilizer industry which should be highlighted positively.

Belachew Gebrewold states that the Ukraine war is a disaster for the African population. First, he mentions that the African political elites will profit from the war. Second, not all African political elites are taking the Russian side, but some believe in the narrative that the West has provoked Russia which furthers the Anti-West resentment in the African population. Many are not only pro-Russian but they are also becoming increasingly anti-Western. Third, democracy in Africa is going to suffer the most. Development organizations have defined democracy as an essential condition for their help but due to the likely rise of other actors in the international field, the standard for democracy will be loosened. African countries will therefore undergo an antidemocratic development which has Russia and China as role models. Fourth, Russia and China exploit the period of colonization in Africa for their own advantage by comparing it to the war in Ukraine. This misrepresents history and downplays the brutality, degradation, and dehumanization Africans faced during times of colonialism and slavery.

Discussion participants: Concerning the support of Africa by Russia, one participant questioned if it really is as strong as Gebrewold painted the picture. Another one added that it might also be a calculated vote to not lose economic interest from the eastern powers. Military involvement from Russia and the maintenance of Russian weapons delivered in the past may also play a big role. Another one stated that the war is not entirely about Ukraine, it is more about the bipolarity just like in Afghanistan which also led to a normative decay.

Margit Maximilian then introduced Irene Horejs and asks why the effects of the war are more intense in Africa than in other parts of the world and what African states could do to support food security.



Irene Horejs underlined that Africans suffer the highest (non-military) collateral damage from this war. The impact is particularly high on food security and to date, 70% of the population of East, West and Central Africa have become food insecure due to the combined effect of climate change, COVID 19 and the war. Additionally, the fuel crisis is affecting transport and cooking oil costs which affect the urban population more severely. As a result, many African governments fear social unrest. African countries are most affected because many of them are import dependent for food, wheat and fertilizer from Russia and Ukraine and do not have the local capacity to produce it on their own. The most import dependent countries are Egypt, Nigeria, Benin, Senegal, Tanzania, the Republic of Congo, and Mozambique. Due to the scarcity of crops, food prices have increased by approximately 20% since the beginning of the war. Such a price hike would normally boost local production but due to the scarcity of inputs and the climate crisis, local production cannot cope with increased demand.

The World Food Programme (WFP) usually buys 50% of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine and the war has a strong impact on the programme's capacity to provide food to the different crises around the world.

African governments have taken different measures to cope with the crisis: some have introduced restrictions on food prices and exports, others have introduced support for vulnerable households and subsidies for cooking oil.

The African Union has called to consider this crisis also as an opportunity, to develop local production and to foster an intra African food market taking advantage of the recently established AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area). NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development), the socio-economic flagship Programme of the African Union, also called to increase African owned investment in key areas of agriculture and natural resource extraction. In this context, the African Development Bank has already earmarked one billion US-Dollar to finance local production and related infrastructure. However, there are big obstacles for African countries to effectively implement such policies. In particular due to the lack of fiscal space (given their high indebtedness). In this context, it would be very important that rich countries pass on their newly allocated Special Drawing Rights (SDR) with the IMF to African countries.

The EU has increased its humanitarian aid for the Sahel region and has also reallocated 600 million Euros from unused EDF funds.

Schmidjell adds that Russia had a share of 24 % and Ukraine of 9 % in world wheat export. African importers argue that they have problems because of the sanctions (SWIFT payments etc). Concerning the price hikes for wheat and grain we should differentiate between war-related hikes and structural causes. Prices started to rise in mid-2020. Some structural reasons are climate related droughts or floods, growing global meat consumption, grain for biofuels, food speculations, low agricultural productivity and storage losses. He hopes that the mentioned African institutions and governments will implement the support programmes for domestic food production and processing.

Discussion participants: One participant also highlighted the use of cyber war as an effective tool to push a pro-Russian narrative that influenced the African population. Another conclusion was that Africa is in dire need of alternatives that can only be implemented by the deconstruction of the food system. They should have long-term discussions about how to build their own food systems. One participant also highlighted how African relations with China affect the current situation. Furthermore, there is very little trade among African countries which also hinders the local production of food and fertilizers. Nevertheless, Niger, Algeria and Nigeria have been building a pipeline for easy transport of alternative resources. Lastly, it has been concluded that a more transactional relationship between the EU and Africa might be useful and Africa should use opportunities that arise through the crisis