



Weekly Briefing

**Serbia external relations briefing:
Reviving of Serbian-African relations:
Africa Day in Belgrade
Ivona Ladjevac**


China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.

Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Ju Weiwei

Kiadásért felelős személy: Feng Zhongping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.

 +36 1 5858 690

 office@china-cee.eu

 china-cee.eu

Reviving of Serbian-African relations: Africa Day in Belgrade

Summary

During the time of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, one of the characteristics of its foreign policy was excellent relations with Africa. Those relations were built on sharing same position in the cold-war era, when both African countries and Yugoslavia chose the non-aligned path. Basically, that path was relying on the United Nations Charter and principles of peaceful coexistence. No matter to the fact that the Republic of Serbia, as the successor state of the SFRY, currently has only status of an observer country within the Non-Aligned Movement, it kept its course related to African countries. In October 2021, Serbia hosted a gathering of the leaders of 120 states that are members of the non-aligned movement, marking the 60th anniversary of its founding. Respecting distinctiveness of African continent, Serbia is constantly working on upgrading this relation. Celebrating 2023 Africa Day had additional value: 60th anniversary of the Organization of African Unity.

Introduction

In 2017, the Government of the Republic of Serbia declared May 25 as the Day of Friendship with the Peoples of Africa, in commemoration of that date in 1963, when the Organization of African Unity was founded, as an instrument for realizing the aspirations of African peoples for freedom, independence and progress. Such determination also arises from sharing numerous historical ties between Serbia and African countries and nations, which represent an outstanding base for building relations of not only closer cooperation and even greater understanding, but also relations of strategic partnership based on a peaceful and measured foreign policy, in line with the respect for international law and basic principles of the UN Charter. Since 2017, it has been celebrated every year, which is entrusted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

New strength of an old friendship

The Republic of Serbia is proud of its cooperation with the African countries that dates back to the beginning of the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement, because these mutual

relations have always been based on solid foundations of unity, mutual understanding and support, cooperation and solidarity.

However, mutual understanding and support started even before the UN and the NAM and goes even beyond it. Namely, it is less known that Belgrade was the only capital in Europe where mass demonstrations against the Italian occupation of Ethiopia were organized before the Second World War, that the citizens of Zambia protested in the capital Lusaka for 72 days during the NATO aggression against the FRY in 1999, that at the end of the 1980s, the then SFR Yugoslavia was the world's largest exporter of cocoa, thanks to barter arrangements with African countries.¹

Mr. Ivica Dačić, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, on 2023 Africa Day, said that this day is a symbol of Serbian desire to nurture and care for relations with Africa, and that is why Serbian Government decided to include it in the calendar of the most important days of the year.

“For these reasons, our relations have a promising future, because the Republic of Serbia is strongly committed to developing comprehensive cooperation with African countries and, in accordance with its capabilities, is committed to further strengthening political and economic ties, but also the links in the field of culture, education, sports and other spheres of common interest”, Serbian minister added.²

Considering that the world of today is characterized by constant crisis and an unpredictable environment, connected with great global challenges, there is no doubt that this is the right moment to confirm old and proven friendships. Since alliance and understanding between Serbian and African people were born in the heroic times of the anti-colonial and liberation struggle, in times like this both the alliance and understanding can get stronger. The unpredictable international dynamics reminds us to nurture historical alliances in order to jointly devise answers to current challenges.

Serbia has the necessary experience, sensitivity and reliability in contact with close and friendly African nations and states. Although the ties between Africa and Europe are millennial and civilizational, at the same time, in significant segments of previous centuries, they were burdened by the conquering and colonial past. This kind of discriminatory and imperial

¹“Povratak Srbije na kontinent budućnosti”, *Politika*, 12/07/2022, <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/483210/Povratak-Srbije-na-kontinent-buducnosti>, accessed on: 27/05/2023.

² Serbia proud of cooperation with African countries, Government of the Republic of Serbia, May 25, 2023, <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/en/141851/serbia-proud-of-cooperation-with-african-countries.php>, accessed on: 27/05/2023.

relationship was and remains unknown, foreign and repulsive to Serbia. Serbia has always and in every way helped the struggle for decolonization and the liberation of the oppressed people. As in the past, Serbia does not have any hidden plans in Africa and African countries today.

Africa represents the continent of the future, whose enormous potentials are finally, after centuries of lagging behind, beginning to be fully activated. The strong economic growth of many African countries and the demographic expansion accompanied by the rapid reduction of the poverty rate raise their self-confidence, as well as their ambitions in foreign policy.³ When these trends of today meet with the traditional affection of Africans towards Serbia due to selflessly provided support in the era of decolonization, but also after that when Yugoslavia actively participated in the infrastructural and general economic development of those countries, space opens up for generous valorization, as both economically and politically, which certainly go hand in hand.⁴

The Republic of Serbia is especially grateful to the African countries that, almost all, respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Serbia and do not recognize the unilaterally declared independence of “Kosovo”.

In the wake of decades of experience and examples of good practice in equal cooperation, as conceived and practiced through the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, Serbia renewed old friendships and once again set out on recognizable paths of alliance with Africa.

Former President of Serbia, Mr. Boris Tadić and his head of diplomacy, Mr. Vuk Jeremić, in order to revive ties with the Non-Aligned Movement, among other things, organized a solemn conference in 2011 on the occasion of half a century of that movement. Many were surprised even by the fact that the Non-Aligned still exist at all, but also by such an intention in foreign policy, which was predominantly directed towards the West, European integration and the renewal of relations with the USA. It was ten years after the fall of Milošević, shortly after the unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence, and at a time when the Euro-enthusiastic

³ Africa's pre-Covid-19 top five performing economies are projected to grow by more than 5.5% on average in 2023-2024 and to reclaim their position among the world's 10 fastest-growing economies. These countries are Rwanda (7.9%), Côte d'Ivoire (7.1%), Benin (6.4%), Ethiopia (6.0%), and Tanzania (5.6%). See more: “Africa's economic growth to outpace global forecast in 2023-2024 – African Development Bank biannual report”, African Development Bank, [https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/africas-economic-growth-outpace-global-forecast-2023-2024-african-development-bank-biannual-report-58293#:~:text=Africa's%20pre%20Covid%2019%20top,%2C%20and%20Tanzania%20\(5.6%25\)](https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/africas-economic-growth-outpace-global-forecast-2023-2024-african-development-bank-biannual-report-58293#:~:text=Africa's%20pre%20Covid%2019%20top,%2C%20and%20Tanzania%20(5.6%25),), accessed on: 27/05/2023.

⁴ “Jugoslovensko nasleđe značajan kapital Srbije na afričkom kontinentu“, Biznis.rs, 02/02/2023, <https://biznis.rs/biznis/infrastruktura/jugoslovensko-nasledje-znacajan-kapital-srbije-na-africkom-kontinentu/>, accessed on: 27/05/2023.

fervor of Serbian citizens is already starting to fade.⁵ Vuk Jeremić revived the “World in Serbia” program - the arrival of foreigners to our country for education, usually from countries of the Global South, former and current non-aligned.⁶

On May 25th 2023 in Belgrade was also marked six decades since the formation of the then Organization of African Unity, the African Union today.

Since its formation, the African Union has contributed significantly to the peace and stability of the African continent. In that respect the role of the African Union should and can be decisive for relevant African issues in the 21st century. The international reputation of Serbia exceeds the classic parameters of size and strength, and represents a recognizable trump card on the international stage and an attractive force for competent global actors. Therefore, Serbia will continue to be a link in cooperation of the African Union with different regions.

All these proves that Serbia pays special attention to Africa in creating its foreign policy. One of the examples is the case with Serbia's candidacy for the organization of EXPO 2027, where strives to be an “African candidate” and to logistically and conceptually support the participation of these countries in the exhibition if it is selected.

It is noteworthy that in 2022, during its mandate of the UNESCO Executive Council, the Republic of Serbia became one of the founders of the Group of Friends for Priority Africa in UNESCO.⁷ Serbia advocates the most comprehensive and substantial support to UNESCO Africa, not only for the sake of the well-being of African countries, but also for the benefit of the organization's entire membership.

Serbia will continue to participate in peacekeeping missions on the continent, with the desire that there would be as few of them as possible in future, as well as in humanitarian and development activities and with scholarships for African students at universities within the before mentioned framework of the “World in Serbia” project.

Although political and security issues are, often with reason, high on the scale of foreign policy priorities, the revival and worthy presentation of African traditions and cultural heritage is of inestimable importance. Serbia is proud to have, since 1977, the Museum of African Art in Belgrade. It is very likely to be the only anti-colonial museum of African art in Europe,

⁵ “Povratak Srbije na kontinent budućnosti”, *Politika*, op.cit.

⁶ “Strani studenti u Srbiji: Povratak nesvrstanih”, B92, 03/02/2020, https://www.b92.net/bbc/index.php?yyyy=2020&mm=02&dd=03&nav_id=1650063, accessed on: 27/05/2023.

⁷ “Priority Africa”, *UNESCO*, <https://www.unesco.org/en/africa>, accessed on: 27/05/2023.

whose exhibition consists exclusively of objects obtained as (private or state) gifts or through regular commercial means.

Conclusion

Although having balanced foreign policy is not something that great power(s) approve(s), last few years Serbia added an extra foreign policy priority - reviving relations with African countries. Bearing in mind that majority of African states didn't recognize so called Kosovo, support of these countries to Serbia is of vital interest. Despite popular opinion, most African countries still have the strength to resist the sometimes very strong pressures of the collective West. Regardless of poverty, the overwhelming majority of African countries have shown that they have their own attitude and dignity in international relations.⁸

⁸ "Afrika na strani Srbije i međunarodnog prava", *Politika*, 23/07/2023, <https://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/512775/Afrika-na-strani-Srbije-i-medunarodnog-prava>, accessed on:27/05/2023.