



FRIEDRICH NAUMANN  
FOUNDATION *For Freedom.*



# LETTERS TO EUROPE

## AFRICAN YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE OF AFRO - EURO RELATIONS



OPINION PAPER

# IMPRINT

## Publisher

Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom  
50 Ennis Road  
Parkview, Johannesburg  
2196  
[www.freiheit.org/sub-saharan-africa](http://www.freiheit.org/sub-saharan-africa)

## Content

Letters from students at the African Leadership Academy  
1050 Printech Ave, Honeydew, Roodepoort, 2040

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## Date

July 2023

## Notes on using this publication

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## SYNOPSIS

A group of African students and alumni of the African Leadership Academy participated in a comprehensive interview regarding the perspectives of African youth on Europe. The interview aimed to explore the students' insights and gather their opinions on the challenges that exist in the relations between the two continents. The students were specifically requested to address potential solutions from their own perspectives. During the interviews, the students focused on examining the relations between the European Union and several African countries, namely Tunisia, Malawi, Uganda, Lesotho, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe. Throughout their discussions, the students emphasised the significance of various key issues, including trade, equality, inclusivity, and human rights.



## ABOUT #RESHAPEEUROPE

Europe is facing a multitude of serious challenges: The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the Covid pandemic represent the most recent crises, which have detrimental effects on people's lives and our liberal order. Within its own borders, anti-democratic populism and illiberal developments are challenging the EU as a self-proclaimed "community of values". In the new world order, which is characterised by strategic rivalry between authoritarian states on the one hand and liberal democracies on the other, these are alarming signals. Whether Europe succeeds in facing up to these challenges is therefore of global significance. The EU must show that free and democratic societies are best equipped to master major challenges.

Following the motto "Reshape Europe," the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom has been running a global dialogue since 2022, on how Europe can become more resilient in order to stand up to the enemies of freedom worldwide. This requires bold steps that strengthen the EU internally as well as externally: How can the EU strengthen European defense capabilities and thus make the EU a serious global player in security policy? How can the EU's economic power be strengthened and its supply of raw materials and energy become less dependent on authoritarian regimes? What can the EU learn from other world regions in this regard? How to truly integrate and unite the EU politically so that it, together with its partners, is capable of defending the liberal world order as a global actor with a common voice?



## ABOUT #RESHAPEEUROPE ... CONTINUES

As a global foundation, FNF looks beyond Europe's borders when answering these questions and involve our international network of expertise and partners. Around the world, we are looking for answers to defend the free world - what are we waiting for?

Therefore the inclusion of the young voices from Africa representing the African Leadership Academy speaking under this umbrella, and being part of a global dialogue giving insights on what African youth would like the future corporations between Africa and the EU should be like is a crucial one, as the EU seeks solutions to geo-political challenges of our time.



## PARTNERSHIP WITH THE AFRICAN LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

African Leadership Academy (ALA) seeks to transform Africa through ethical and entrepreneurial leadership by addressing the continent's challenges, promoting growth, and transforming the livelihood of people on the continent.

The ALA curriculum offers its students from across the continent an opportunity to build their critical thinking skills through a multidisciplinary programme focusing on leadership, entrepreneurship, African studies, writing and rhetoric. They are creating problem solvers to prepare them for their leadership journey on the continent.

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom is partnering up with ALA on a series of events and initiatives in 2023. The objective of this partnership is to support and enhance the programme objectives between FNF and ALA, leveraging of each other's networks, expertise, and resources to drive and promote youth leadership initiatives for African youth.



# ALA STUDENT'S LETTERS TO EUROPE





A black and white portrait of a young woman with braided hair, wearing glasses and a dark blazer over a collared shirt. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is plain white.

**TANATSIWA CHRISTABEL  
DUBE, ZIMBABWE  
AFRICAN LEADERSHIP  
ACADEMY**

A graphic featuring a blue, stylized runner silhouette in motion, surrounded by several blue stars. A pink banner with the text 'RESHAPE EUROPE' is positioned over the runner.

**RESHAPE  
EUROPE**

# LETTERS TO EUROPE

## TANATSIWA CHRISTABEL DUBE, ZIMBABWE

Young people in Zimbabwe perceive Europe as a developed region offering abundant job and personal growth prospects. Consequently, many young Zimbabweans aspire to migrate to Europe in pursuit of educational and employment opportunities, as well as personal and social development. However, contemporary African-European relations face significant challenges, primarily centered around disparities in education. Specifically, European schools are highly technologically advanced, whereas African schools, particularly in less developed regions, still rely on traditional pen and paper methods, lacking adequate technological infrastructure.

This glaring economic and educational gap hinders effective Afro-Euro relations. Enhanced cooperation between Africa and Europe would result in increased opportunities for young individuals to foster mobility that can lead to positive change not only globally, but also within individuals' home countries. Europe, in particular, can serve as a valuable platform for training and personal development, enabling individuals to acquire new skills and knowledge that can be applied back in Africa. Cooperation should focus on various fields, with the education sector being the primary area of concern due to its significant gap and crucial importance. Additionally,

collaboration should be sought in addressing unemployment and improving the employment sector, as these efforts would contribute to the overall development of Africa. Moreover, both regions should extend support to each other in matters of diplomacy, particularly with regard to social welfare, as many African countries still lag behind in safeguarding human rights within their borders.





**DAVID MANGULUTI,  
MALAWI  
AFRICAN LEADERSHIP  
ACADEMY**

**RESHAPE  
EUROPE**



# LETTERS TO EUROPE

## DAVID MANGULUTI, MALAWI

I believe the general perception of Europe, particularly in Malawi based on my personal experience, was that Europeans were considered superior to Africans due to their technological advancements and stronger economies. It seemed like they had a higher standard of living and more effective policies compared to African countries, including Malawi. This perception led us to believe that Europe was something we should aspire to become. However, my perception has since changed.

Currently, I believe one of the main challenges in African-European relations is inequality, particularly in trade negotiations. Trade and economy play a significant role in shaping how nations are perceived. The perception of a nation by other countries plays a significant role in shaping its image. For example, America is widely regarded as an economic powerhouse, symbolising the American dream and setting a standard for others to aspire to. Similarly, Great Britain is seen as a benchmark due to the strength of the British pound. Consequently, these economic disparities create a power imbalance among nations.

To illustrate this point, I would like to refer to my research on Malawi's agricultural industry, particularly the significant role tobacco plays as one of our country's major exports.

Malawi exports over \$100 million worth of tobacco annually, primarily to the Netherlands. However, the price per kilogram of tobacco grown is merely \$2.73. Hence, utilising efficient techniques, one kilogram can produce 800 cigarettes. Clearly, 800 cigarettes are not valued at \$2.73, so there exists an inequality in trade.



# LETTERS TO EUROPE

## DAVID MANGULUTI, MALAWI ... CONTINUES

This inequality plays a crucial role in shaping power imbalances within society, the economy, and even in our perception of ourselves and Europe.

I believe it is essential to address this issue and transform trade policies to foster more equitable exchanges between continents. Cooperation is a valuable trait, and I am in favour of African countries collaborating with European countries. However, the current approach must be altered. There needs to be a level playing field, where both parties are considered equal.

As I mentioned before, establishing a power balance is crucial. We should aim for trade partnerships rather than a relationship akin to a subservient donkey and its master. If that comparison is clear, it's crucial for us to truly appreciate one another as trade partners and as participants in the global economic market.

We need to prioritise building social unity, facilitating unrestricted economic exchange, and guaranteeing a prosperous future for everyone. While trade can expand into various areas and increase in magnitude, the manner in which it is conducted must evolve to ensure that all parties are on an equal footing.



A black and white portrait of a young woman with braided hair, wearing a dark blazer over a collared shirt. The background is plain white.

**ADDISHIWOT DAGNEW,  
ETHIOPIA  
AFRICAN LEADERSHIP  
ACADEMY**

A graphic featuring a blue 3D running figure on a pink background, surrounded by blue stars. A banner with the text 'RESHAPE EUROPE' is positioned above the figure.

**RESHAPE  
EUROPE**

# LETTERS TO EUROPE

## DADDISHIWOT DAGNEW, ETHIOPIA

So, Europe is widely regarded as a model for development in various aspects such as infrastructure, education, educational opportunities, curriculum, and governmental systems. Consequently, many sectors in our country look up to Europe as a benchmark for development. As a result, our infrastructure, educational curriculum, engineering practices, and even our democratic system are largely influenced by the European model.

In the 21st century, the main challenges in Africa-European relations arise due to the increased interconnectedness brought about by globalisation. As a continent and as individual countries, we have become closely intertwined. An example of this interconnectedness is evident in the Ukraine and Russian war, which had a significant impact on the global economy, causing it to slow down by 3.1%. This slowdown had adverse effects on the African continent as well.

The continent is heavily involved in the production of energy products, food products, and fuels, which may lead to higher prices. We find ourselves in a state of high dependence, where the actions of one country significantly impact others.

When considering whether Africa should increase collaboration with the European Union, I believe there are merits to both approaches. Many African countries maintain strong economic ties with their former colonisers, resulting in a substantial economic dependency. By creating opportunities to foster relationships with other European countries and non-European nations, we could decrease this dependency and establish a more balanced power dynamic between Africa and European nations. Additionally, strengthening our ties with Europe could contribute to a more economically self-reliant African continent.



A black and white portrait of Janice Nkajja, a young woman with her hair pulled back, wearing a dark jacket over a collared shirt. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

**JANICE NKAJJA, UGANDA  
AFRICAN LEADERSHIP  
ACADEMY**

A graphic illustration featuring a blue, low-poly running figure on a pink background. The figure is surrounded by several blue stars. A pink banner with the text 'RESHAPE EUROPE' is positioned over the figure's midsection.

**RESHAPE  
EUROPE**



# LETTERS TO EUROPE

## JANICE NKAJJA, UGANDA

I believe that one of the major challenges in African-European relationships today revolves around the controversy surrounding the perception and understanding of the African continent. On a daily basis, as I browse through my social media, I come across numerous videos where individuals are asked to name a country in Africa. Surprisingly, some people respond with "Wakanda," a fictional place created by the Western world, representing a misguided portrayal of African culture and identity. This discrepancy between perception and reality poses a significant hurdle.

In Africa, we receive extensive education about Europe, its culture, language, and the history associated with colonialism. However, the same level of education and understanding is often lacking on the European side, resulting in a significant knowledge and information gap. Consequently, this knowledge gap can lead to racism and a lack of comprehension regarding African culture and its people. These issues are further amplified by the proliferation of videos on the internet that perpetuate misconceptions.

There are people who make comments or ask questions like, "Do you ride buses? Do you ride elephants to school?"

Do you have clean and safe water?" It's undeniable that many African children and people face disadvantages, and certain resources are limited for some individuals. However, the misinformation circulating about the African continent is incredibly misleading and frustrating for those who know that it doesn't reflect the reality of Africa. One of the biggest challenges we face is this information gap that portrays Africa as a place of struggle and failure, and the rest of the world often forms their impression of Africa based on these misconceptions, without making an effort to learn more about the true Africa. I believe this information gap is a significant obstacle in the relationship between Africa and Europe as a whole.

Should African countries seek alternative cooperation? Africa, as a whole, has a longstanding history with Europe. In my case, I am from Uganda, which used to be a British protectorate. The relationships we established with the Western world have significantly shaped our country and its identity. Our constitution, currency, and



# LETTERS TO EUROPE

## JANICE NKAJJA, UGANDA ... CONTINUES

even the languages we use - English being the official language in Uganda - reflect this influence. Therefore, it would be extremely difficult for me to suggest cutting ties with Europe because, in practical terms, it's not feasible. Our roots are deeply entwined with the European world, and we have acquired knowledge and experiences from the Western civilisation. So, it's not about cutting off completely because we need people and nations. We must learn to work together. However, Africa should strive for more independence as a continent. We realise that we have our own distinct identity and beliefs. If we continue to heavily rely on Western nations, it will be challenging to maintain a strong sense of who we are. Our identity is being eroded by allowing these nations to impose their ideologies, cultures, and beliefs on us.

I understand the importance of learning and appreciating other people's perspectives, but Africa's mistake lies in accepting everything without discerning what we truly need to foster our continent's growth. Instead, what I believe is that Africa should strive for greater independence and self-reliance.

I believe one of the biggest challenges hindering Africa's growth is our over-reliance on systems that do not effectively serve us.

To truly progress, we need to decolonise our minds. Drawing from my African Studies class, I strongly feel that Africa and Europe should collaborate in the field of agriculture. This sector holds immense potential for the economic growth of our continent. Africa boasts abundant agricultural resources, but unfortunately, many young individuals are not given the opportunity to explore them due to societal perceptions created by the education system. Being a farmer or pursuing agri-tech is often seen as uncool. However, I firmly believe that agriculture has the potential to become popular and a significant driving force for production and industrialisation. Moreover, when agriculture thrives, it stimulates growth in various other sectors. Unemployment levels will automatically drop.

I feel Africa's not fully utilised this particular sector and we can use it predominantly to dominate the food industry across the world.



A black and white portrait of a young man with dark hair, smiling. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a collared shirt. The background is plain white.

**AHMED BRANSI, TUNISIA**  
**AFRICAN LEADERSHIP**  
**ACADEMY**

A graphic illustration featuring a blue, stylized human figure in a running pose. The figure is surrounded by several blue stars of varying sizes. A pink banner with the text 'RESHAPE EUROPE' is positioned across the middle of the graphic. The background of the graphic is a light pink color.

**RESHAPE**  
**EUROPE**

# LETTERS TO EUROPE

## AHMED BRANSI, TUNISIA

There are several factors that influence the perception of Europe in my country. One important aspect is the geographical proximity of Lake Tunisia, located in North Africa, to Europe, particularly Italy. Each country has its own perspective, but for young people in my country, Europe is often seen as a haven or a dream destination where they can escape and improve their lives. Unfortunately, this perception is sometimes misguided, as Tunisia is a significant source of illegal immigration to Europe, especially Italy, and the outcomes are typically unfavourable in about 80% of cases.

However, considering the high unemployment rates in my country, which hover around 15% to 16%, it's understandable that people are driven to seek illegal immigration to Europe. In terms of African-European relations, the main challenge lies in the fact that Europe, due to its relative prosperity, becomes an attractive destination for individuals seeking better opportunities. It is essential to recognise that this issue is complex and multifaceted. There are still instances of Westernised neocolonialism present, where Europe continues to exploit Africa.

One notable example is France, which exerts influence over more than a dozen countries that still use the French currency, despite decades since the end of colonisation. The main issue lies in achieving a more balanced relationship, as Africa currently faces economic dependence on Europe. Moreover, there are exploitation practices not only from Europe but also from the Western world in general, and increasingly from China towards Africa. Overcoming these two challenges is crucial to improving the relations between Europe and Africa.

Should Africa and Europe cooperate more, or should Africa explore other options? In my opinion, the question of cooperation between Africa and Europe may not be the most pressing concern for the African continent at this time. Instead, the fundamental question should be how to improve Africa itself. Before considering potential trading or partnership opportunities, it is essential to focus on internal improvements as a continent.



# LETTERS TO EUROPE

## AHMED BRANSI, TUNISIA ... CONTINUES

The key issue lies in enhancing Africa's economic landscape, rather than simply choosing to partner with Europe, Russia, China, or any other country. The primary challenge is that the economic development of African countries tends to rely heavily on external dependencies. Whether Africa partners with Europe or not, the underlying problem remains the same. The current economic schemes in place hinder Africa from fully benefiting from any economic partnership since it perpetuates dependence on other nations. Therefore, the utmost importance lies in transforming the continent's economic structure to achieve true progress, regardless of external partners. However, I believe the continent should explore and evaluate all available options, be it within Europe or elsewhere such as Asia, the US, or Latin America. Diversifying partnerships is always beneficial.



A black and white portrait of a young man with short hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket over a dark shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

**ADEM AMIR EZZEDINI,  
TUNISIA  
AFRICAN LEADERSHIP  
ACADEMY**

A graphic logo for 'Reshape Europe'. It features a blue silhouette of a person running to the right, surrounded by several blue stars. The text 'RESHAPE EUROPE' is written in white on a blue banner that curves across the bottom of the graphic.

**RESHAPE  
EUROPE**

# LETTERS TO EUROPE

## ADEM AMIR EZZEDINI, TUNISIA

There are several factors that shape the perception of Tunisians towards the EU. One significant factor is the history of colonisation, which has had a profound influence on the relationship between Tunisia and Europe, as well as how people perceive Europe.

In my opinion, some individuals in my country view Europe as a land of opportunities or a place where dreams can come true. Unfortunately, many people who lack qualifications or specific skills aspire to immigrate, leading to a phenomenon of immigration that needs to be understood. These individuals are often driven by the idea that they will find what they are searching for or achieve their dream life in Europe. However, it is important to acknowledge that there is another group of people who recognise that this perception is not the reality. They believe that only individuals with the necessary documents and qualifications can truly contribute to other countries, including Europe. It seems that there are also people who don't view Europe as a utopian dreamland, and they are aware of the significant role colonisation played in shaping Tunisia's perception and relations with Europe.

France, for example, colonised Tunisia for over 40 years, impacting various aspects such as the educational

system, geopolitical relations, and trade. Consequently, a significant portion of Tunisia's trade with Europe is with France. These individuals believe that colonisation has contributed to depriving Tunisia of its resources, as France invaded Tunisia and exploited many of its resources. Therefore, there are two contrasting perspectives among Tunisians regarding how they perceive Europe, with the association of colonisation often being made. They might also associate it with technological advancements, improvements in the educational sector, or other sectors. I believe this perception is a result of the aftermath of colonisation, which created a hierarchy between Western countries and our own. So, when you ask me about how the media contributes to these views and representations, I personally feel that Europe is still trying to maintain a dominant or superior role in geopolitical relations.



# LETTERS TO EUROPE

## ADEM AMIR EZZEDINI, TUNISIA ... CONTINUES

Recently, Tunisia has experienced some political instability after our President, Kais Saïed, implemented new rules regarding his position and the functioning of our parliament. European countries in the European Union have been making statements about how they believe things should be done or expressing their judgments on the matter. I think it's natural for countries to have their own judgments and opinions. However, there is a point where countries start intervening in the internal affairs of other countries. So, when European countries make claims about our president or the issues in our country, it seems like they are trying to assert or maintain a hierarchical position in geopolitical relations or in their relationship with Tunisia. I believe it is important for us to look ahead and communicate on the same level, rather than allowing wealthier nations to dictate how things should be done or how they view Indonesia. In today's interconnected world, many countries have valuable contributions to offer. For example, we have seen the rise of global players like China and Egypt, as well as numerous African countries making advancements in fields such as technology and agriculture.

Historically, European countries have played a significant role in shaping international relations, often due to their colonial past and its aftermath.

However, I believe it is still possible to cooperate with Europe and find common ground. This could involve a process of reconciliation, where we explore ways to move forward together. In the past, colonisation took place, resulting in certain events and consequences.

It is important to acknowledge and take responsibility for this historical context. Looking towards the future, it is crucial to foster equal contributions in various aspects. Specifically, as African countries, we should prioritise enhancing collaboration and cooperation within our own continent before seeking involvement from external nations. Once a strong foundation of cooperation is established among African countries, we can then explore opportunities for partnerships with regions such as Europe, Asia, or the Middle East.





A black and white portrait of a smiling woman with her hair in braids, wearing a dark beanie and a dark jacket. The background is plain white.

**LETSABISA VANESSA  
MOTSOENE, LESOTHO  
AFRICAN LEADERSHIP  
ACADEMY**

A graphic featuring a blue, stylized runner silhouette in motion, surrounded by several blue stars. A pink banner with the text 'RESHAPE EUROPE' is positioned across the runner.

**RESHAPE  
EUROPE**

# LETTERS TO EUROPE

## LETSABISA VANESSA MOTSOENE, LESOTHO

In my country, Europe is perceived as highly developed and better in many aspects. It is commonly believed that if you receive an education in Europe, you have secured a prosperous future. This perception is particularly strong among the people of Lesotho, who admire everything European. When we see depictions of Europe in movies, we are amazed by the beauty and allure of places like France, often referred to as the "City of Love." It seems like a world where life is inherently better. This sentiment is shared by many of us, although I'm not sure if I still feel the same way personally.

Nevertheless, it is the prevailing opinion in our society. Africa, on the other hand, has long been associated with underdevelopment. Therefore, it is considered a great achievement when the top students from our country go to college in Europe and choose not to return. It symbolises breaking free from our country and experiencing freedom elsewhere. So that's what attracts people to Europe.

I believe one reason is that movies portray Europe with better buildings, offices, and abundant food on the table, which creates the perception that everyone there is living well. This constant exposure to information through social media platforms like Twitter .

and TikTok contributes to the idea that Europe is the place to be. Media plays a significant role in shaping this perception, as we often see people going to Europe and never returning, which further reinforces the belief that Europe is a desirable destination. When comparing Europe and Africa, it's important to consider these general opinions. There is a significant disparity between Europe and Africa, particularly from my perspective. Europe is generally considered more developed, while Africa is seen as underdeveloped to a large extent. This divide is so pronounced that some of us in Africa do not wish to associate ourselves with the continent as a whole. Despite initiatives like the EU Africa summits aimed at assisting Africa in areas such as food security, healthcare, and vaccine donations, I believe there is still much more that can be done.

At my school, ALA (African Leadership Academy), we focus on African studies



# LETTERS TO EUROPE

## LETSABISA VANESSA MOTSOENE, LESOTHO ... CONTINUES

and engage in decolonial thinking, exploring ways to liberate ourselves from such power dynamics. It is disheartening to witness how people back home still view Europe and Africa, where Europe is often seen as the boss and Africa as the subordinate. However, in reality, we have witnessed efforts to bridge the gap and strive for a more balanced relationship between the two continents. African and European leaders are actively working towards finding solutions, and despite the lingering effects of colonialism, I remain hopeful for a better future.

Some people may be discouraged by the Berlin Conference and its consequences, but I believe there is still room for optimism. It is my belief that African and European countries should strengthen their cooperation while also exploring opportunities beyond their current focus.

Perhaps, looking elsewhere can provide fresh perspectives and alternatives. Personally, I find the concept of colonisation deeply troubling, as it has left lasting scars on our history. It is unjust that the effects of colonialism continue to affect us today. If you offer me a school in France now, I'll still want to go. I am aware of this fact and I hold this perspective, but my desire to go remains strong.

It feels like there are deep-rooted attachments that are difficult to abandon. It's as if breaking free from those attachments would require us to shift our focus towards the US, and everything would feel unfamiliar. International relations can be quite challenging, but if I had to suggest a direction to explore, I would actually recommend looking towards Africa.



## CONCLUSION

The African Leadership Academy alumni "Letters to Europe" conclude that Africa and the EU should prioritise cooperation in education and addressing unemployment. Both regions should support each other in diplomacy and human rights. It is crucial to establish a balanced trade partnership and ensure mutual benefit. Africa should reduce dependency on former colonisers and seek collaboration with other nations. Africa should strive for independence and economic development while acknowledging the impact of colonialism. Cooperation within Africa should be prioritised before engaging with external partners. Breaking free from colonial legacies and focusing on Africa's growth is vital.





#ReshapeEurope