

# Address by the President of the Republic before his visit to Central Africa

Paris, Monday 27 February 2023

## **Emmanuel Macron**

Ministers,  
Ambassadors,  
Members of Parliament,  
General,  
Directors,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for being here today, in this quite unusual format, if I may say so. We have journalists – in Paris, Libreville and all the capitals of the African tour that will begin on Wednesday – and here in the Élysée, we have the people involved in our collective action on the African continent.

And I fully assume addressing you here in Paris, before this trip, to try and give a sense of what we have been attempting to do for a little more than five years now. And to try and say, with whom? And for what purpose? And how? And the goal we should aim for is to have a simpler, more comprehensible policy, by ensuring all of these partners' State administrations work better, and also by having a policy that fully brings together businesspeople, innovators, athletes, artists and scientists, in a policy that aims not just to work between governments, but must fully take on board the concept of directly working with civil society in the countries of Africa. And here we have a good number of players in our policy with Africa, a lot of whom will be accompanying me in this trip starting Wednesday, or who have travelled with me on previous trips.

Just under six years ago, in November 2017, in a lecture hall at Joseph Ki-Zerbo University in Ouagadougou, I started my speech quoting the words of Thomas Sankara and announcing that France no longer had an Africa policy. These words still ring true. But they are certainly no longer enough to address the deep upheaval and transformations that we have experienced in recent years.

Time spent on the African continent is irreplaceable. I made 17 trips there, and was welcomed in 21 countries. From the Shrine in Lagos to the churches of Lalibela, not to mention the many meetings held with our African partners in Paris and around the world. I will not draw an overarching conclusion, as a single African reality only exists in the very many reductive stereotypes. I will only make one requirement, which is to show deep humility towards what is happening on the African continent.

It is an unprecedented situation in history: a number of staggering challenges must be urgently dealt with. They range from security and the climate to demographic challenges with young people arriving, and in every African State, they must be offered a future. States and administrations must be consolidated, with massive investment in education, health, employment, training and the energy transition. This must all be done while under more pressure than others from climate change and its effects, the terrorism offensive, and economic, health and geopolitical shocks. I believe I can say that no other region in the world has been subjected to this obligation of a result in the space of one or two generations, as the African continent is today.

This is why, a few days ahead of this trip, once again on the African continent, I decided that the priority was not to give another speech on African soil but rather try, in as clear a way as possible, to defend what we are doing there and the consistency of our action, and strengthen this desire for Africa in France. That is why many business leaders, scientists, artists and athletes are also here today. We must collectively take stock of the challenges that are very close to us, but not make apocalyptic predictions or engage in anxiety-inducing panic.

On each of my trips, I have had the occasion to see that the African land is anything but a land of despair and resignation. It is a land of optimism and proactivism.

This proximity and energy should inspire us and encourage us to realize the strength that lies in our advantage of being neighbours to Africa, and to be among the countries that have a unique, human, existential tie to this continent, which is a blessing. Our fate is entwined with that of the African continent.

If we are capable of seizing this opportunity, we can bind ourselves to the continent that will gradually become one of the youngest and most dynamic economic markets in the world, and which will be one of the major sources of global growth in the decades to come. But also because our young people today are listening to music from Congo, Nigeria, and Côte d'Ivoire, music created and produced on the African continent. That is just the precursor to a cultural, economic, scientific, political and African power, which will continue its build-up. Our economic growth, and our European trade and jobs will increasingly depend on Africa. It is neither good news nor bad news: just a fact. And everything will depend on what we do with that.

That is why I firmly believe that the time has come to make a choice, and decide what relationship we want to have with African countries. Ultimately, when I attempt to keep up with what's going on, which I do occasionally, and try and interpret the times we are living in, which is clearly an interim period, because we inherited many historic difficulties, and we are in a transition without fully realizing that the transition has begun. I will come back to that later.

Ultimately, many would like to tempt us into competition: that is the first option. Competition that for my part I believe to be anachronistic. It would be falling into the trap of power games, or the show of force. As we have seen, some have moved in with their armies and mercenaries.

“Come along and join us, France, this is where you are expected to be, it is your role.” “Go and compete with them, they’re expecting you.” I don’t think so. It is the reassuring interpretation of the past, measuring our influence against the number of military operations; or contenting ourselves with special, exclusive relationships with leaders, or believing that the economic markets are rightfully ours because we were there first; or manoeuvring for advantage to position ourselves at the forefront. That time is past.

It is my firm belief that that would be a dead end. Those who would take that path are holding onto nostalgia, and specifically the nostalgia we wanted to break away from in 2017, but without yet having the means to settle the past. That is the story of the past decade of our involvement in Mali, which cost us the ultimate sacrifice.

Our soldiers, alongside Malian soldiers and African armies, won victories against the terrorist groups. And today I want to pay tribute to our soldiers, our wounded, and those who were killed over there. It was, and continues to be, a great source of pride shared with the Allies who joined us. But that was not the role of our soldiers. It was not France’s role to be the sole provider of political solutions after the military solution. We took on, unintentionally, an immense responsibility. It means that today, we are conflated with the rejection affecting the Malian political class, which has failed to set its country back on track. This is the trap that, if we are not careful, could be laid elsewhere.

That is why, under no circumstances will I allow the sacrifice of our soldiers to be stained once more with the same conflation, and under no circumstances will I allow that to happen again, whereby a spiral of unaccountability and substitution turns France into the perfect scapegoat.

To ensure history does not repeat itself, there is another path that we have now been taking for six years. Another path that does not reduce Africa to a land to compete in or make money from, and means seeing African countries as partners with whom we have shared interests and responsibilities. A path to building a new, balanced, reciprocal and responsible relationship.

This was the course we set in Ouagadougou in 2017, and we have stayed that course. We have kept our promises by facing up to our past, in Rwanda, Algeria and Cameroon, with a Franco-Cameroonian committee that will begin its work. We kept them by reforming the CFA franc, by withdrawing ourselves from the governance of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), and by demonstrating that this currency is indeed an African currency that could, if the ECOWAS governments wished, pave the way for a single currency that would take another name. We are prepared for that.

We kept those promises by supporting African scientific excellence in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, in the African Crisis Centre, the Institut Pasteur in Dakar and Professor Muyembe’s National Institute for Biological Research, which I will have the privilege of visiting in a few days, and also by developing vaccine production centres, such as those we launched in South Africa and several other countries.

We have kept our promises in the sporting arena, by building new partnerships to train athletes on the African continent and roll out sports facilities. And we are going to continue doing so, and accelerate it, from football to judo and basketball to many other sports.

We have kept our promises by speeding up the change in how France looks at the African continent, including in our schools and textbooks, thanks to the determination of N’Goné Fall and the 2020 Africa Season. We will continue this dynamic of reconnecting with African contemporary creation in all its forms. In France, that will be the role of the future *Maison des Mondes Africains*, which will organise a forum on African cultural and creative industries next autumn. On the African continent, that will be the role of our cultural institutes, our cooperation network, and our Alliance Française branches: to become once more the crucible of Franco-African proximity and the changing perspective.

Our institutes must be the places where everybody is welcome, and we take on any risk. The kinds of places where artists such as Fela Kuti shared their music with the world; artists like Papa Wemba – and we will be in Kinshasa in a few days – and a painter like Moké, artists who had their first successes and gained recognition there. It is the strength of this network that we want to maintain.

We have also kept the Ouagadougou promises: thanks to the intellectual enlightenment of Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr and the work of the teams at the Musée du Quai Branly, we returned the objects of the Abomey Treasures to Benin. We will go even further, as a framework law will be put forward in the coming weeks by the Minister of Culture to our Parliament. Based on the recommendations from the work done by Jean-Luc Martinez, who I thank, this framework law will establish, with our national representation, the methodology and criteria to carry out further returns to African countries who request them, through a cultural and scientific partnership to receive and preserve these works. Côte d’Ivoire has already completed such a request. I would like this approach to be a part of a broader, European initiative, like the Franco-German fund that we launched to develop research on the origins of African works in our collections.

We have also, over the years, supported African entrepreneurship by allocating more than €3 billion between 2019 and 2022 through the Choose Africa initiative. We will step up this effort by further targeting French and African businesses faced with risk and which are unable to access the credit or capital of a few hundred thousand euros that would save them. That is the objective of MEET Africa 2 – I know that some of you present were selected – which supports those with high-risk projects. That will also be the role of our public investment bank and the Agence Française de Développement, to set up a new programme together, called Choose Africa 2. This programme will focus on that, and particularly in the fields of culture, sport, agriculture and digital technology, drawing on everything we did with Digital Africa in recent years, will increase the number of opportunities. We will further de-risk French investments in Africa with these mechanisms, and speed up the growth of small African businesses that are between the formal and informal economy. And based on Senegal’s successful model, which

we have begun to replicate in several African countries, this initiative will also be a lever supporting a genuine innovation policy with all countries that want to be involved.

Lastly, we have laid the foundations in recent years for a Euro-African axis, which took shape at the Brussels summit in February 2022, under the French Presidency of the Council of the EU. And it was by using this Euro-African axis that we succeeded in earmarking and redeploying the special drawing rights for Africa at the Summit on the Financing of African Economies in Paris, in May 2021. We also launched vaccine production on the African continent, with South Africa in particular, as I mentioned before. That is another reason why I'm delighted to count on the commitment of European Commissioners Thierry Breton and Jutta Urpilainen, who will be with us in a few days in DRC. It is a truly European team that we wish to put in place.

As you can see, by drawing up this outline, if I may, I want to say here today how much we have changed things that seemed completely taboo in the past few years. When I was at that same university in Ouagadougou, all the students questioned me, spoke to me about the CFA franc, the return of works of art, our inability to support African entrepreneurship. All of that, we have done it in the past few years, with strength and commitment. Of course, we must not get ahead of ourselves, today we are still halfway through the process. It is a very uncomfortable situation, where we continue to be, in a way, accountable for the past, with a policy that very clearly aimed for change and which sometimes lost the support that was very useful, because we wanted to change the method without seeing the full results of the policy that we had launched.

And so we are indeed accountable for the past, without yet having succeeded in being persuasive enough about the shape of our common future. That is why the trip we will take together in a few days is so important. It comes at a time when we are bringing to a close a chapter of our history in Africa, a chapter that in my view was marked by two things that we are going to dramatically change.

Firstly, it was marked by the central role played by the security and military question, and the pre-eminence of security issues as a framework. This pre-eminence, and the role it continued to play, cast a shadow once more in recent years, as a pretext used by many of our opponents or those who wanted to push their own propaganda to say: "France is here and it is a purely security-related agenda". The aim of this new phase we are entering, this new era, is to set up our security presence as partners so that it can be a part of this new partnership. I wish to thank the Minister for the Armed Forces and the Joint Chief of Staff for the work they have done in recent months, to truly reflect on and prepare this new security partnership. I will come back to that later.

The second major change that we will effect will be to shift from an assistance approach to a social investment and partnership-based approach. I believe that by continuing and stepping up the work already underway we can ward off this nascent opposition between the supposedly Western North and a Global South, which are said to no longer have shared approaches. I strongly reject that notion, and we have to prove that it is wrong. We demonstrated it through a

new method which we have now also begun. The G7 in Biarritz was prepared with the African countries which I invited. We also did this at the G20 in Bali, where we brought together all African countries before we started to work together via an ongoing conversation of sorts. And it was exactly the same thing we did when we launched the ACT-A Initiative, designed with the African Union Bureau, in a dialogue which was also unprecedented. And we will now do the same thing.

At the Summit we will organize in Paris on 23 June, we will consolidate this shift from an assistance to a social investment approach. On the new South-North partnership, it is precisely because it is with Africa, but also with India and Barbados, that we can form a new pact to set out a new international financial architecture to fight inequalities and fund the climate transition. And so for me, this event we are inaugurating involves seeing the change through, being demanding on ourselves and accepting to fully get rid of the reactions, habits and language which are today somewhat holding us back. To adopt a much clearer position of modesty, listening and ambition. In essence, to clearly state in all fields that Africa is not a private preserve and even less so a continent where Europeans and French can dictate a development framework, but rather a continent where we must build respectful, balanced, responsible relations to together fight for joint causes such as the climate. And I believe that these should be the very terms for our renewed partnership, which run contrary to predatory approaches, be they military, security or financial, which are currently being sought by other countries.

So for this partnership model to be a success, we must first build a new military partnership model. We have worked hard over the past few months to develop it, and then discuss it and work on it with our African partners. Over the last few weeks, I have met all the leaders concerned right here. The Minister and the Army Chief of Staff have begun discussions. A tour will follow. In essence, our approach is that our model must not be that of military bases as they exist today. In the future, our presence will be within bases, schools and academies which will be co-administered by French staff who will remain in place, but in a reduced capacity, and African staff who can also host other partners under their own conditions should they so wish.

In line with the discussions which I have held with my counterparts in recent weeks, this shift will begin in the coming months based on the very principle of co-building, with a noticeable reduction in our staff and at the same time an increased presence of our African partners at these bases.

This will require our African partners to very clearly set out their military and security needs, and then that we increase our training, support and equipment provision to the highest possible levels. In this way, this partnership will enable us to rebuild a model of proximity and interconnection between our armies, reflected in increased efforts from France in terms of training and equipment, as I have said.

Secondly, this new partnership, this shift will involve changing our actions and communication in terms of what we deploy, first and foremost by being more responsive, more visible and thus

easier to understand. Here too, we must take responsibility for our failures, but also better recognize our success. And we must admit that we do have a flaw. We French are too divided. And all too often, parochial approaches trump national ones. We must all act together for this to be visible and so that France, regardless of the entity, be it administrative or corporate, provides concrete solutions in the country to meet the need of young people to provide better education and respond to energy and climate transition issues, to respond to sporting needs, and it must be clear that it is France which has set it up.

We are divided, so we are hard to understand and perhaps not sufficiently substantive. So in the near future we will have to change our method and implement projects which are more concrete and tangible, particularly in locations where our partners need our support. There must be education, not simply by building walls, but by increasing our training for teachers and high educational standards, by providing increased vocational training, which is a request from many countries, including many where we have had only a small presence. Vocational training, health, climate, gender equality, support for entrepreneurship, culture, digital technology. With this new method, we must simplify what we are providing and listen much more carefully, work more closely with civil society and provide the highest-quality services possible, and in essence do so with two new methods: work on the ground, as we did in Montpellier where we listened to young people and African civil society, as the Minister Delegate did in her various trips over the past few months, for which I thank her. And then to rally support from the others and show that working as Europeans and even internationally is fruitful, which is exactly what we will do in Libreville in a few days' time, with a joint position. From this year, an initial €40 million fund will be made available to our embassies in French-speaking African countries to demonstrate that we can make this shift. And that is my mission for our ambassadors: to show that we have a concrete partnership and to adopt a proactive communication policy, which is self-assured without being arrogant.

We must also see this change through because we have interests to protect. And I believe that when we talk about Africa, it is much better for that to be clearly stated. We are not there for the common good. We have shared challenges. Climate change is a shared challenge. Trying to help young people in Africa build a better future is a shared challenge because it will also be our problem if we fail to do so. But we will protect our interests and that is what a mutual, balanced partnership is all about. We don't take people for fools. We don't say "We're coming to your country to do good because you don't know what is right for you or how to implement it". No. We go there to protect our interests and we do so while respecting the interests of the African countries where we are established. In fact, it is the approach whereby, from the outset, the Presidential Council for Africa has each time set out its recommendations and proposed measures, and I would like to thank all its members for their commitment since 2017.

Our interests are first and foremost democracy. France is a country which supports democracy and freedom, in Africa and beyond. A country which talks to everyone, including political opponents. A country which prefers solid institutions to providential individuals. A country which believes that military coups can never be alternatives to democracy. And, as many African intellectuals have recalled, democracy also has African origins. So our role is not to

impose or proclaim our values, but to help networks of intellectuals and civic actors to maintain democracy by drawing on democratic practices from their society. That will be the role of the Innovation Foundation for Democracy which was set up in Johannesburg at the end of last year and will hold influence across the continent and once again, I would like to thank Professor Achille Mbembe for his work, his commitment, his proposals and everything he has already built with his teams, which he will continue to do. But it is precisely that spirit that we must maintain. We must not give up on what I believe is in the interests of France and democracy. But we must do so respectfully while taking account of the history of the continent and in particular the stakeholders which must implement it.

It is clearly also in our interests to provide new economic ambitions on the continent of Africa. I would like to welcome the large, high-quality economic delegation, and thank all chairs, directors and directors-general of major French groups for your attendance, and in your presence I must emphatically state that while our economic partnership with Africa is indeed solid, we must be under no illusions about our economic presence in Africa and how it is perceived.

We are heading in the wrong direction. And it is largely our own fault because we have all too often focused on reaping the benefits in terms of our relationship with Africa. We believed that since we were France, even when we were doing something badly, even when we were more expensive than the others, even when the financial solutions were not as good, we would continue to be accepted. But now it is a land of competition. Some parties compete using other means — which I object to — and we are opposed when financing itself becomes a way to weaken economies. That is why we fought to have a framework within the G20. But apart from that, and I say this because I have seen it myself, we still have too many companies who do not produce their best-quality work because they are in Africa. This policy will no longer work. And in all sincerity, I will no longer defend companies which are not prepared to compete.

When the President of the French Republic is being welcomed to a country and he is joined by a low-ranking corporate representative to meet an African President, nobody can claim that this is a mark of respect. This does not happen, for example, when we go to Germany, Poland, the Gulf States or China. Africa has become a land of competition. The French economic world must wake up and realize that we must compete. CEOs must travel to Africa when a major contract is agreed and when we win a contract, it must be delivered on time, with high-quality work. And if there are problems, we must have clear knowledge of their source. I am not saying that everyone is perfect and sometimes our African partners too fail to deliver on promises made to our government. That is a reality, and I state that clearly to them. But I have trouble telling them when it is us who have been at fault. And so on that point, all Parties must wake up because other countries which were not as active a few years ago, which do not have better resources than us, are managing to position themselves simply because they are taking African countries seriously.

I also want a new generation of French, African and Franco-African entrepreneurs to seek new forms of cooperation and a new philosophy which must be that of co-industrialization. That is

the very essence of the Pass Africa programme. I know that several laureates are here today, and I believe it is a very important programme which will enable us to develop this entrepreneurship. And it is this approach of building and helping new stakeholders and reaping the benefits in a very pragmatic sense, as France has strong diasporas and networks of entrepreneurs with ties to Africa, who have good knowledge of it and who have their own connections there. We must simply give them the tools to roll out their activity and achieve success on the continent.

It is also in our interests to act collectively with our European allies and position Europe as a partner of reference on major defence and security issues. That is at the very core of what we will do beyond the pivot which I mentioned earlier.

It is the same thing we want to do in terms of financing African infrastructure. It is only with this lever that we can truly have a level playing field in terms of competing with other actors. Several of you are working in that area, for which I sincerely thank you. But it is by using this lever that we can convince our African partners to adopt the standards to which our companies can work and produce high-quality infrastructure which we want to promote as part of the G20. It is the very approach which the European Union adopted with the Global Gateway, and which we then used at the G7 with the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment and €600 billion which will be invested by 2027. These are huge financial levers, but it is also the G20 framework, which is responsible, sustainable, public finance framework for these infrastructures. That is why we must also travel together, talk together, act together, and each time we mobilize this European-African theme, we have kept our promises.

Finally, we have assets to bring to the table. The innovation of our SMEs, our research and scientific excellence, our universities, our military training, our artists, our sportspeople, our young people active in volunteering, and among all those, as I was saying, we have our diasporas. Each of you here today can identify with that list.

So the good news is that it is not so much the President of the French Republic that Africa is awaiting, but it is you, and that was the message which was clearly sent at the Montpellier Summit. It is also the message which I have heard throughout Africa, and which I heard again last July when talking to young Cameroonians. Several of you were with me on that trip. Everyone had the same questions: Where are the young French people in this partnership? Where are the French schools and universities? Why don't French entrepreneurs invest more? Why do French football clubs and the national team play all over the world except Africa? Why don't French museums collaborate more with us? It is also for that reason that you will be alongside me, because I alone do not have the answers to those questions. And so a credible, effective, long-term response must be provided. And we will provide this response, which is why our work over the past six years has been very important, not simply for our interests in Africa, but also, in my humble opinion, for our responses to the challenges in Africa. Such as our plans for Libreville, which will no doubt be addressed in the questions, on the issue of climate and forest biodiversity. But I think it is important for France. We can make a success of this new partnership if we recognize the part of Africanness which is in France. The role and

the position of our diasporas. And if we recognize the fact that Africa is no longer France's private preserve, that France has duties, interests, friendships to build, maintain, strengthen, to pursue solid policies in each of the fields you represent here today.

That is why I have come here and that is the work we will carry out over the next four years: recognizing our interests, promoting them, implementing stronger human ties at the heart of this partnership, strengthening ties between civil societies and together building an agenda on climate issues, education and health, which are important to us all. Economic, scientific, academic, cultural and sporting ties.

While I have no sense of nostalgia for Françafrique, I do not want a gap or vacuum to be created in its wake. Just as much as myself and beyond my own contribution, you will be the heartbeat of this partnership and your own commitment will give full meaning to the political choice made with our Parliament to enhance and permanently establish this partnership policy, here too with unprecedented financing. This is not a policy involving a lifeless instrument, it is a policy of solidarity, it is also a policy for French people, it is a policy which must enable us to find partners and allies to influence global balances. And it is also for that reason, if this policy is a success, if next June we succeed in this summit for the new South-North partnership, that we will manage to ward off this emerging narrative of double standards between Ukraine and the rest of the world, including Africa. The narrative of a division, as I was saying, between the West and the Global South. If we allow this narrative to take root, or if we somehow document it, it would be terrible for a country like ours. Because as I said at the start, our destinies are linked by what we are, by who the French people are, by our geography and by our future.

Thank you for your attention.