

# Africa Must Unite

By Dr. Cheikh Tidiane Gadio



In today's African political scene, the most striking debate is about the urgency of setting up a continental Union Government in order to accelerate the pace of Africa's economic and political integration with the ultimate goal of paving the road to the United States of Africa.

This debate, though vigorous and sometimes heated, is far from being a new debate. Back in May 1963, the visionary leader and illustrious son of Africa late President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, made at the founding Addis Ababa meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), a memorable and historical speech entitled "A Union Government for a United Africa".

In his memorable speech, which is the African continent's version of the famous "I have a dream", the Panafricanist leader Kwame Nkrumah made a strong case for the urgent need of an "African federal state". However, Nkrumah

met with great resistance from some African leaders who either did not understand his vision or were partisans of a different model of gradual federalism. These leaders such as Nyerere of Tanzania and Leopold Senghor of Senegal made the case for primary regional federations based on cultural and linguistic affinities to prepare for a wider continental political unity later in the process. Maliyimu Julius Nyerere's vision is today inherited and promoted by President Museveni of Uganda.

President Senghor's case is even more striking. A true African federalist, Senghor is the theorist of the struggle against what he called "an attempt to balkanize the African continent" by the

outgoing colonial masters. One remembers that French colonial Africa was a fully integrated political and economic entity comprising all of West African French colonies. The same institutional arrangement was set for central African French colonies. However before granting independence, France chose to break the federations and encourage the creation of tiny, hardly viable and "balkanized" small states.

Senghor who wrote in the Senegalese constitution that his country was ready "to partially or totally give up her sovereignty to build African unity" was however an opponent to Kwame Nkrumah's continental federalism. He instead promoted gradualism under the concept of "concentric circles" which means

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that African countries should unite first on the basis of affinities and shared cultural, political and social values and grow their federation like a progressively widening circle to encompass other countries or other existing federations.

He and Modibo KEITA tried to merge Senegal and French Sudan into the MALI federation but the project was aborted after eight months having lost steam with the last minute defection of Dahomey (today's Benin), Upper Volta (today's Burkina Faso) and Niger.

Today, with the end of the era of the OAU and the advent of the African Union launched by the 9-9-99 Declaration (September 09, 1999) in Syrte (Libya), African leaders have engaged in a renewed and strong political commitment to African economic and political integration which ultimate goal is the proclamation of the United States of Africa.

After nine years of a heated debate (2000-2009), African leaders have reconciled their two main camps (the continental Nkrumah federalists vs. the gradual federalists) into a single camp of united and devoted African federalists. The argument has moved from the need to erect a federal state to the negotiation on how best to achieve it, and what is reasonable but effective pace in building the African federal state! Such pace should help avoid break-up and assure continental unity and common progress toward the ultimate goal of a United States of Africa.

This debate on African federalism was recandled by the hard work of African leaders such as President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, Mouamar El Khadafi of Libya, Olusegun Obasanjo (then president of Nigeria), Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania, Thabo Mbeki and his successor President Motlhante of South Africa, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Helen Sirlef Johnson of Liberia, Amadou Toumani Toure of Mali, Idriss Deby of Chad, Yayi Boni of Benin, Bai Koroma of Sierra Leone, just to name a few.

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**Dr. Cheikh Tidiane GADIO, Senior Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Senegal greeting great African leader Nelson Mandela**

It all started when President Wade, as a newly elected president of Senegal, attended in July 2000 the Lome Summit of the AU. He then strongly criticized the new organisation for not having promoted a real continental executive body with real powers, real federal ministers and a true federal Prime Minister, in order to lead the continent towards the United States of Africa.

His argument was that Nkrumah had the right vision from the beginning and was not unfortunately successful in convincing other African Heads of States of the necessity to immediately build a continent-wide federal state in order to avoid balkanization, marginalization and crystallization of emerging newly independent African states which did not have then instruments of international sovereignty such as embassies or a seat at the United Nations.

For President Wade, Africa -which had huge empires and federal states during the ancient Egypto-nubian era of our ancestors until the middle age Mandigo and Fulani empires- is a coherent historical entity which can and "must unite" as Nkrumah entitled his cornerstone book "AFRICA MUST UNITE".

With 1/3 of world known natural resources, and almost a billion population with 50 per cent under 17 years old, with a large territory that is three times and a half China and is bigger than the landmass of China, India, the United States and the European Union combined, a United Africa can aspire to be among the next few world new global players such as India, China, Brazil and the United States of America.

A more accurate idea of the size of the African continent is that it is spread over 31 700 000 km<sup>2</sup>, that is about three billion hectares out of 13400000000 hectares that make up the entire Earth.



The black continent can at once contain the United States of America, Europe, China, India, Japan, the two Koreas, Cuba, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore! It is four times the size of China.

This vast African territory has «only» 850 million inhabitants, which, in reality, makes it an under populated continent compared to China for example which has double that figure.

**Natural Resources**

To dwell on the immensity and extreme diversity of the natural resources of Africa is not necessary. Everything is found there:

- Lush tropical forests constituting a major part of the «World’s Green Lungs»
- All kinds of plants that exist in the world, especially those producing fruits and vegetables, as well as coffee, cacao, bananas, pineapple, rubber, cotton etc.
- Abundant wild and domestic fauna including halieutic resources;
- Water resources in huge quantities on the surface (rivers, lakes, streams etc) and underground, not to mention the opening up to the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and the Mediterranean sea;
- Sub soil containing an infinite variety of minerals from hydrocarbons to precious stones, ranging from ferrous and non ferrous metals, which have strategic value : copper iron, cobalt, zinc, bauxite, platinum, manganese, chrome, aluminium, tin, uranium, mercury, gold, diamonds germanium, iridium, paladium, colombo, tautalite, marble etc.

Paradoxically, in spite of this considerable geo-economic potential, Africa accounts for negligible quantity in global economic production and in the international exchange of goods, services and capital.

It contributes only 1.6 per cent to global trade, having regressed from two per cent some years ago. Yet,

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at the time of Independence, Africa (excluding South Africa) represented for nine per cent of international trade, almost matching its demographic figures at the time.

Its agricultural production is still marginal as Africa has chronic food shortage, with 20 to 25 billion US Dollars worth of food imports, out of which 500 million US Dollars worth is agricultural produce.

And yet at the time of Independence, the continent was self sufficient and even exported agricultural produce.

Industrial production does not fare any better, as, besides extractive industries (oil and gas especially), production of manufactured goods remains feeble, even if South Africa and the Maghreb are doing well in the sector globally.

In 2002, Africa with its 850 million inhabitants (excluding South Africa) produced as much wealth as Spain which has only 40 million inhabitants. The GNP of France is three times that of the whole of Africa!

**A United Africa : The Only Road to True African Renaissance**

We all know that it is foreseen by experts such as James Wolfensohn (former World Bank President) that in between the next 20-30 years China and India will be the world top super-powers followed by the United States of America. If Africa, according to President Wade, is able to overcome its current division and balkanization by achieving a federal state, and if

it takes on the two major challenges of any development strategy: Infrastructures and education, with its young population and huge natural resources, water and energy potentials Africa join the club of World Leaders, it will feed the world and even lead the world.

For President Wade, coming now to modern Federalism Africa will obviously benefit from all previous experiences of federalism and build its own model of federalism. The Federative Republic of Brazil and the Indian federal model are of particular interest to Africa. India has ethnic, racial, cultural and linguistic diversity, within a large territory and great historical background and civilizations, just like Africa. For that reason the Indian model will be a great inspiration to Africa as many try to portray Africa’s numerous languages and cultures as a liability and not an asset and opportunity.

This advocacy by President Wade was echoed by a vigorous struggle by Khadafi of Libya and a few other leaders to change the governance of the African Union by introducing the old Nkrumah desire to see a common African diplomacy and one foreign minister, a common African trade minister and a common African defence minister.

These three portfolios were strongly debated in the African Union and they help bring back at the forefront the debate on the nature, content and structure of a continental executive body. A first AD-HOC Committee led by President Musevini proposed a limited

number of continental domains of competence for a continental structure (Infrastructure, Panafrican Universities, international trade negotiations and fight against pandemics, etc...). A second committee led by President Obasanjo came up with the most elaborated proposal thus far entitled "A Union Government towards the United States of Africa".

His proposal presented in the Banjul (Gambia) Heads of States Summit in 2006 was finally discussed during the Grand Debate in Accra in July 2007. Proposed by Senegal and backed by more than twenty countries, the Grand Debate was meant to celebrate Nkrumah's homeland 50th anniversary and advance the cause of Panafricanism.

Here is the most significant outcome of the Accra Grand Debate which was a great accelerator of the struggle for a United Africa:

***"We (African Heads of State and Government) agree to accelerate the economic and political integration of the African continent, including the formation of a Union Government for Africa with the ultimate objective of creating the United States of Africa."***

Since then, great progress has been made, especially in identifying the key areas that should be considered continental domains of competence. They have now widening to nine areas:

- Continent-wide poverty reduction (Economy)
- Free movement of people, goods and services (Integration & Intra-African Trade)
- Continental and regional infrastructures (roads, railroads, bridges, energy, Tics) (Infrastructures, Energy and Tics)
- Climatic change, desertification and coastal erosion (Environment)

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- Epidemics and Pandemics such as HIV-AIDs (Health)
- Panafrican Centers of Research and Universities (Higher Education)
- International Trade Negotiations (External Trade Coordination)
- Peace and Security (Peace, Security & Defense Sector)
- Trans national crimes (Terrorism, drugs and arms trafficking) (African Homeland Security).

During the last Addis Ababa Summit in February 2009, a new compromise took place to avoid a fall back to the clash between "die-hard gradualists" and "die-hard federalists". The former did not want to endorse at this stage a "Union Government" because they believe that such a concept will pose "sovereignty issues". The latter were against any set-back and were ready to start a "Union Government" as a "coalition of the willing or the like-minded" which currently is composed of at least 20 countries. They believed that it will be difficult to convince all 53 African states (including Morocco) to sign in on a "United States of Africa Constitution" the same day the same hour, therefore it may be justified to start with those who are ready and leave the door open for the other to join anytime they so wish.

The great compromise was to stay together and not to create "A Union Government" right away, but instead to call it the "African Union Authority" with

a clear mandate to accelerate African political and economic integration. The aim is to complete an eight year process (in the year 2017) that will culminate with a constitutional Conference to consider a draft of a United States of Africa.

The year 2017 is a tentative target year since all the benchmarks and clusters to measure progress towards the emergence of a successful, solid and gradual continental federal state must be met or the deadline will be extended so that critical realism will accompany the dreams of our Panafricanist forefathers who, from the African Diaspora of the Caribbean and the United States, have started in the late 19th century the great historical movement for African Unity and Renaissance.

We can name among the charismatic driving forces of the "utopia": Blyden, Sylvester William, Dubois, Garvey, Padmore, Nkrumah, Professor Cheikh Anta Diop, Modibo Keita, Gamal Nasser, Mohamed the V, Sekou Toure, Jomo Kenyetta, Julius Nyerere, etc.

As we are close to the goal of the "United States of Africa", one might conclude that once again, the struggle for a United Africa has proved that "the utopia of yesterday is always the reality of today". This proves further what was once said by Nelson Mandela about utopia- "It is always impossible until it gets done!" ●

*The author is Senior Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Senegal (a country which joined and signed the Constitution of the upcoming United States of Africa since 1960)*