

The EU is a miracle and a true

As the European Union (EU) celebrates 60 years of existence, Ambassador Kristian Schmidt, the EU head of delegation to Uganda in an exclusive interview told Umaru Kashaka and Sidney Miria about the bloc's long-term relations with Uganda, the East African region and how they will carry on even after Brexit

578M EUROS IS BEING IMPLEMENTED BETWEEN 2014 AND 2020

WHEN YOU READ NEWSPAPERS OF SCANDALS OF DONOR MONEY BEING SWINDLED; THOSE ARE NOT EU FUNDS. OUR COLLABORATION WITH THE GOVERNMENT IS VIGOROUS AND IT'S DISCIPLINED. I CAN SAY WITH CONFIDENCE THAT OUR FUNDS ARE WELL-IMPLEMENTED

O You have been in Uganda since November 2013 as the EU ambassador. What are some of your enduring impressions of the country?

I would say there are maybe three things that after almost four years that stand out. First of all, of course the people. The combination of the kindness of Ugandans that I have met here, I think that is something that I will remember forever. This is combined with the resilience in the daily struggle because life is not easy for many Ugandans. That I think is impressive. Many Europeans if they have never been in Africa and they think of Africa they might think of a continent that is torn by war, bad governance, etcetera, but what they discover when they come here is that they see people and we are all the same human beings trying and struggling. And I think that is one of my first observations. The second, I would say is the beauty and potential of Uganda as a country. When you travel around Uganda and you see the climate, you see the natural resources it shows potential. Yeah, you really think there is no reason why this country should be lagging behind neighbours, like Rwanda or Kenya. Thirdly, the strengths of the dialogue that we have with the government and political actors in this country. We don't always agree, I mean Uganda's government is responsible for Uganda and I represent Europe. We stand on two different sides but the quality of dialogue, even when we don't agree is something that I have really appreciated during my time here.

What have the past 60 years of the EU meant for Uganda as a country and the East African region?

I think we have come a long way. If you look back 60 years in our history, Europe was created when there were still colonial ties between Europe and Africa. That is now a thing of the past.

We no longer look at the relationship of supremacy or colonial links. European Union was always founded on the principle of equal partnerships with former colonies, so as an institution we never had any colonial hangover. For us, it was always about an equal partnership and that I think is what we now see. Also, as we move from development cooperation towards trade relations and global partnerships some of the issues we now work on with Uganda are global problems that we face together like climate change, security and immigration. It is not about Europeans coming to help Africans in Uganda, it is about us discussing how we manage together global problems.

So, I think we have really come a long way and Uganda and East Africa have come a long way because like Europe, Uganda is now pushing for East African integration. A lot of this is also inspired by the European example. I consider the 60 years a miracle. It is a miracle that in 1950 after the end of the Second World War countries came together and said, "You know what, we were fighting over resources like coal and steel that were part of the war machines of building arms and so coming out of that war European nations agreed to say that we will never let that happen again and to

avoid that we will share those resources". So the European Union started as a coal and steel community with France and Germany agreeing that as former enemies they will now actually share and manage these resources together.

This is the origin of the European Union - sharing management of those resources and putting in place an authority that would oversee that none of the European nations would take control of those resources to start war against others. Can you imagine that in an African context? In fact, in many other places it is going the other way round. Countries are splitting up in order not to share resources. So, the EU is a miracle. Ever since the creation of the EU, there has been no war in Europe.

You recently described mediation and dialogue as the only way of dealing with "unsettled issues in any democracy." What are the unsettled issues in Uganda's democracy?

EU electoral observers were here in February 2016 and they made a number of observations and recommendations on how to ensure that elections in Uganda when they are held are free and fair and that there is a level playing field, but I would rather look at the Supreme Court recommendations when confirming the winner of the elections. And I want to make that absolutely clear, that the Supreme Court confirmed the winner of the elections, but it also made a number of very important recommendations that to my understanding have not yet been addressed.

Those are some of unsettled issues. But I also think and this is a general point I am making not just for Uganda, but also for our own European democracies, that when there is unemployment and difficult challenges facing the nation, the youth and citizens need to see that their leaders are working together to solve those issues.

And here I am also talking about European countries. If unemployed people see that their political leaders are spending their energy fighting each other, rather than finding solutions for the country then no wonder people start voting for anti-establishment, populist leaders who are not the solution. So, I was simply making the observation that you can have bi-partisan discussion when there is relative social peace. Call it national dialogue or whatever you want to call it, but look at the challenges of the nation together. And that you can do in Parliament, but sometimes when there is an overwhelming majority of one-party in Parliament the discussion is not conducive.



So, you can have it during election campaigns, but you can also have it every day of the year. So that was simply my observation that some of the challenges that are still there after the last elections better have it (discussion) now rather than just around elections and look at some of the reforms that would be necessary and the views of the Supreme Court also.

Why don't you engage the opposition and the Government to try and resolve their current political impasse?

We are outsiders; it is your country. We were invited to make recommendations and the observers were here and we took that invitation very seriously. We sent a very competent team that was not only in Kampala but across the country. So our report that was made was a serious attempt from our side to advise the nation of Uganda on how to continue on the path towards democracy. But they are recommendations.

There must be political will on Ugandan side to take them up. We will come back to see what follow up has been done. We have just informed the Prime Minister of Uganda that we are willing and he has said we are welcome to send a follow-up mission. So, probably early next year the observers will come back and look to what extent the recommendations have been taken up. So our engagement is there and our observations will be for everyone to see but whether they are taken up is entirely in the hands of Uganda's political parties.

Since 1975, Uganda and Europe have

enjoyed a solid and vibrant partnership. How far do you wish to see this partnership go by the end of your term of office?

Well, the end of my mandate is about three or four months from now, so I don't have much time left. I have a few regrets and then I have a few things that I am very happy with. Among the regrets I would say that it is a pity that the region has not found consensus on the Economic Partnership Agreement with Europe. Uganda is in favour, so there is not much more that I can do. The issue is with some of the neighbours. I believe that agreement would have paved way for investments in Uganda to help implement Vision 2040 and regional integration.

I regret that conflicts in Burundi and South Sudan are still unsettled, even with our support to the region's efforts to mediate. I regret that very much, because I think Uganda was doing its utmost to strengthen regional collaboration and regional markets, so I feel sorry for Uganda being faced with this unfavourable external environment. It makes it difficult to get your economic plans implemented when your markets in the region are collapsing.

In terms of what I would still like to do before leaving, I would like us to reach a final agreement with the government on our next flagship on infrastructure, which is the Kampala-Jinja expressway, where we have in the last decade been a very strong partner on the northern-corridor all the way from Rwanda to Kenya. We are very close to finalising discussions on how to start up a

friend of Uganda, says Schmidt



The head of the European Union delegation, Kristian Schmidt right welcoming Najidu Sonko and Salmimah Najjuma during an EU meeting with young Ugandans to discuss issues affecting them. This was at the EU headquarters in Kampala. Photo by W. Sanya

private-public partnership to build Kampala-Jinja expressway because I think it is central to the economic future. Then, I also look forward, this one I know will happen, to launch our new flagship programme for northern Uganda called the development initiative for northern Uganda. This is 135m-euro project, so it is huge. I look forward to that because it is one of the successes of peace in northern Uganda settlement, in Karamoja and we have been partners with Uganda all along from the emergency phase to the military aid to settlement with valley dams and vocational training for the lost generation of the Lord's Resistance Army. So, it gives me pleasure that we are now looking at the more long term development initiative with the Government and I hope this flagship project will be launched in June, before I am able to leave the country.

Uganda receives support from the European Development Fund for sustainable development through improved governance and strengthened economic growth. From your assessment, how has Uganda performed in these areas?

First of all, we have a very strong and vibrant portfolio for the 2014-2020 period. It is 578m euros that is being implemented - some of it through the government, some through the private sector and civil society. The implementation is going on well. When you read your own newspapers of scandals of donor money being swindled; those are not EU funds.

Our collaboration with the government is vigorous and it's disciplined. My job, of course, is protecting the EU taxpayers' money and I can say with confidence that our funds are well implemented, thanks to our strong partnership with the Ministry of Finance.

Now, there are areas where I think we

are making more progress than others. It may be easier to build a road than to fix the judiciary. Our policies in infrastructure are well implemented. I definitely think that implementation of our projects in northern Uganda on livelihood and vocational training have been exemplary.

In terms of good governance, we have found a major challenge as we are discussing with the government a sector-reform contract. It is a budget support for good governance. So, we will reward sound finance management. This is of course, with the Ministry of Finance, but also with the line ministries so that they are able to budget and implement in a rigorous manner.

I am not revealing any secrets by saying there are still challenges—the budget is drawn up and not all is implemented according to the plans. So, this is an area where focus has been made, but a lot remains to be done. Then we would like to see, and this is what is under discussion with the government, our partnership in the area of Justice Law and Order (JLOS) because we think this is not just the sector that is consuming salaries for judges. It should not be looked at that way. Justice and justice in particular for the poor who can't afford a lawyer and also investors who need certainty that if they are in a commercial twist they are given a fair trial and the issue is quickly resolved.

These are issues where we believe it is not just a question of social justice, but also economic development that this sector performs a lot better—rooting out corruption and overcoming huge case backlog in courts.

This is not just a question of pumping in more money and I think the Chief Justice has rightly been very clear about that. It is also about the integrity of the judges and their zeal in court. I don't think you can develop a country without having a well-functioning civil judicial sector. Investors need to have trust in institutions in order to take the risk that there is to create a business. So, for that reason we are looking for collaboration with Uganda on that. It is not just a question of pumping in money, it is a question of discipline in implementation and we will support that. So, we need to discuss whether there is sufficient political will to work together on that issue. If that is the case, Europe will be a strong partner.

Britain was part of the EU trade agreements with a number of African countries. With Britain leaving the EU, what is the fate of these agreements?

First of all, I want to make it clear that the UK is still a member of EU and therefore, I still speak on behalf of UK, but it is also clear that the

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referendum is irreversible and the government of the UK has evoked Article 50, which means that at the latest by March 2019 the UK will cease to be a member of EU.

So that is, of course, a decision that the rest of Europe takes note of and we are now negotiating or starting to negotiate the terms of the divorce. Now, on the impact of that on African countries and on Uganda in particular; I can only speak for the EU. Future relations between the UK and Uganda are not my business.

I don't really see that it will change anything, or much. First of all, the terms of our trade relations will not change. Uganda enjoys free access to European markets, this is a decision that was taken by the EU and it will continue to be in force when we are 27 (countries). Even without the United Kingdom, the European market of 27 countries will still have 445 million consumers, so it will remain the second largest economy in the world.

Even after the UK leaves us, we will remain the largest source of foreign direct investment in the world and we will still be the largest development partner in the world. Other major countries are cutting down; Europe is not. And in terms of Ugandan exports, it is only 5% of your export to Europe that goes to the UK. I don't remember the exact figure but I think the UK is number five among European export destinations for Ugandan products. Your biggest markets are Netherlands, Germany, Italy, etcetera. So to answer your question on the impact, I think it will not be very significant.

What are some of the terms you want to see coming out of the Brexit negotiations?

We have to negotiate, first of all, the rights of UK citizens in Europe and of EU citizens in the UK. This is a very important issue because people have lived their lives under the assumption that there is freedom of movement and that they would live in the UK and work in UK while enjoying the rights of European citizens. That is the number one issue in the short term.

Then there are other questions in terms of access to the single market. It is clear that as the UK exits, first of all, we have to settle the dues. You can't just leave and not settle your bills, so that is a financial dimension to the negotiations. Then after that, we have to negotiate the future trade relationship. The UK will leave the European custom union and they need to then negotiate with EU what kind of trade relationship they will have with Europe. Of course, we hope that it will be a close one.

I am sure the UK would also want to maintain some of the research partnerships being undertaken.

You mentioned climate change; in

relation to Uganda. what would you say you are happy with? Are we making progress?

I am happy with the political commitment that Uganda has shown. Contrary to some developed countries, nobody here is questioning whether climate change is happening. Uganda is open on the necessity of working to prevent further climate change and global warming, which means that when Ugandan negotiators go to global summits, you are pushing for binding agreements to limit carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions and I am very happy with that.

It is not something that is a coincidence. Europe has had a lot of political dialogue on climate change with Uganda over the years and when we go to the summits such as the Paris Summit in 2015, the positions of Europe, Uganda and Africa are more or less similar. We need a binding agreement; we need each and every country to take commitments to reduce CO2 emissions and we need to work together

on mitigating the effects of climate change.

Now that also means that Europe as one of the global leaders on climate change negotiations, we also have a strong partnership to work with countries like Uganda who are among the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. I always say Uganda did not cause climate change, the industrialised countries did and so we have a very key and special responsibility to help stem it. So I am very happy with seeing Uganda, yes you have oil but you are aware that fossil fuel is not the future, so renewable energy makes me happy to see the emphasis on for instance solar energy.

As you mark six decades of existence what assurance do you have for Uganda and the budding East African Community?

I can assure you that regional integration is worth the effort. Having nation states talk to each other, there are benefits in terms of peace and prosperity. We started the EU when Europe was on its knees, when youth unemployment was high, when people still had the mindset of former enemies across the border. Well, we have brought down those borders and most Europeans consider their European neighbours their friends, not potential enemies. We never expect to see our neighbours raise arms against us.

To achieve that in only 60 years, when you look at our violent past, as Ugandans you often speak of your violent past; believe me, it is nothing compared to the violent past that Europe had and now we think it is inconceivable to ever be at war again. This ideological defence against nationalism and sectarianism, which is also very much part of Uganda's narrative; I think that we have learnt the same lessons. If you build your identity on 'I am this' as opposed to 'that' you run a risk of ethnic nationalist clashes. We have learnt that, and I think Uganda, as well.

What is your last word?

We are celebrating Europe Week and this year we have tried to make it special in the sense that rather than just having one event, the traditional reception, we want to have a film festival, a sports gala and a conference.

We have an ambitious programme for this year and the theme is the youth, because this year we will have the EU-Africa Summit and the theme will be youth. For Uganda, I can't think of any issue that is more burning and key than listening to youth and creating opportunities for them and empowering them to create their own businesses.

So my last word would be listen to the youth and help them implement their aspirations for the sake of the economy, but also for the sake of political stability.

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