

INTERVIEW: Dr. Paolo Raffone

Africa and Its Fight for Self-Determination

This is the edited transcript of an Aug. 22 interview with Dr. Paolo Raffone for EIR and the Schiller Institute by Claudio Celani, Co-Editor of the EIR Strategic Alert Service. Dr. Raffone is the founder and general manager of the Italian Center for International Perspectives (CIPI) in Brussels, a research and consultancy nonprofit corporation on European and global strategic and economic affairs. He has participated in several development cooperation missions of the European Union in democratic transitions, human rights, and electoral processes in Africa and Central Asia. The interview has been translated from Italian. Subheads have been added.



Council for Inclusive Capitalism

Dr. Paolo Raffone, founder of the CIPI Foundation.

Claudio Celani: You are a keen observer of Africa. How do you see the current situation on the continent, with the dynamic toward the BRICS, the Chinese presence, and the discrediting of Western countries?

Dr. Paolo Raffone: Africa is a continent with booming demographics and fairly sustained average economic growth, albeit unevenly distributed among the continent's 54 states. This trend began about two decades ago coinciding with increased interest, investment and trade with China and India. The decline of Western influence in Africa, mainly European, and more specifically French, began in 1994 with the genocide in Rwanda, worsened with the “war on terror” launched by the U.S. and allies in 2001, and finally became irreversible after the NATO invasion of Libya and the killing of Gaddafi in 2011.

Today, Western credibility in Africa is at an all-time low. Moreover, the development cooperation policies promoted by the EU in tandem with UN, World Bank-IMF, and USAID have not only failed to produce tangible and useful results but, instead, through the method of conditionalities have imposed institutional, economic and social reforms divorced from the African context and reality. It is no coincidence that from Africa these policies are perceived as neo-colonial.

Finally, while institutional cooperation supported democratization programs and electoral systems and funded NGO networks for the promotion of rights and diversity (especially gender), European capitalist

companies continued business as usual through the appropriation of African natural wealth while also deeply damaging the environment and nature. Congo (DRC), Angola, and Nigeria, but also Niger and Chad provide glaring examples. The old generations of (corrupt) post-colonial rulers are gone. In their place, new generations of rulers, no less autocratic than their predecessors, are more educated and embody a network of African technocrats much more capable of thinking in systemic terms.

BRICS: A New Platform for Africa's Development

This explains the revival of de-ideologized ideas of pan-Africanism and the attraction of most African countries to trade relations with China and India. The BRICS offer a platform in which, at least in principle, African countries can move as equals with the founders, without conditionality and starting from the continent's needs.

The success of the BRICS will be measured by the degree of prudence and sensitivity that China and India in particular show to their African partners. As we await the conclusions of the BRICS negotiations underway these days, we can already see that the West is out while China, India, and Russia are in and to stay in for the long haul. Crucial will be the ability of the BRICS to deal with internal threats on the African continent, particularly the various strands of “terrorism,” links to

transnational organized crime organizations, and interference by Western states and capitalist companies.

Celani: Let us discuss the latest developments involving the so-called coup in Niger. Can we talk about an attempt to regain sovereignty and the general tendency of African countries to get rid of a colonization that was never eradicated?

Dr. Raffone: In the specific case of Niger, the armed forces brought together in the ruling junta have received predominantly American training. Different is the case in the other Sahel countries where military juntas have taken over the governing junta. With the exception of Chad, where there has been a transition led by clearly French-trained militaries, all Sahel countries led by military juntas have one common ground: the presence and exploitation by France is over. In different ways these countries maintain open relations with the United States.

The most obvious case is Niger, which accepted the arrival of the new U.S. ambassador although without exchanging credentials. At the same time, the French ambassador had to take shelter in Chad, and the French armed forces must leave the territory in the coming weeks. Case in point is Mali, since it has a long border with [pro-Russian and anti-French] Algeria, and hosts Russian PMC Wagner forces. With or without military juntas in power, there is a desire in most African countries to go it alone, without the cumbersome presence of former European colonizers.

‘France’s Sphere of Influence in Africa Is Finished’

Celani: How do you see the American reaction to the developments in Niger? What about France’s future in Africa?

Dr. Raffone: The United States is acting pragmatically as part of protecting its strategic interests vis-à-vis China and Russia on the African continent. In fact, the U.S. presence, although reduced compared to the past, is also useful for Africans both with respect to China and Russia and with respect to former European colonizers, primarily France. *Françafrique, c’est fini* [France’s sphere of influence in Africa is finished — ed.] headlined the respected magazine *Hérodote*. It is no mystery that for some years large sectors of the French armed forces have been very irritated with the civilian leadership of the *République*. The French military has long suggested, following De Gaulle’s example, withdrawing from Africa, as happened in Algeria.

Celani: Several African countries appear to be cooperating to use oil and gas for their development. There is talk of an oil-gas pipeline system for Central Africa. How do you see this development?

Dr. Raffone: These developments, among others accompanied and supported by China, can only have a positive impact on African economies. Evidently to some (Western oil and gas companies) these developments do not suit them at all. I would not be surprised if the interests of these companies create conditions of serious

destabilization and violence....

The Sinister Murder of Muammar Qaddafi

Celani: The issue of infrastructure is on the agenda in any discussion of development on the continent. In this regard, you recalled in a recent article that Qaddafi had plans to build continental infrastructure to further Africa’s independence. What lessons are to be learned from his assassination?

Dr. Raffone: Qaddafi’s murder was deliberate and illegal in pursuit of the sinister economic interest of certain European companies; a short-sighted and disastrous



U.S Navy/Jesse B. Awalt

Muammar Qaddafi, leader of Libya (1969-2011), had plans to build continental infrastructure to further Africa’s independence. His murder was deliberate and illegal.

operation on all fronts that did not favor those who supported it. Conditions in Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, and the Sahel do not see the interests of those who led the war of aggression against Libya and the barbaric murder of its leader prevailing. In some ways, the 2011 Anglo-French-led NATO operation in Libya was far more disastrous in its medium- and long-term effects than the terribly misguided U.S.-allied operation in Iraq in 2003.



Italian Government

Giorgia Meloni, Prime Minister of Italy, has proposed an as yet undisclosed “Mattei Plan” that is to take a holistic approach in relations with African countries of interest to Italy, and to turn Italy into an energy hub between North Africa and Europe.

Celani: The APPO [African Petroleum Producers’ Organization], the association of eighteen oil and gas producers, through its secretary general, Omar Farouk Ibrahim, sees the West’s so-called energy transition as a direct threat to Africa’s security and development. For them, the threat is not China, but the West’s Malthusian policy. Are they right?

Dr. Raffone: I cannot tell if they are right. Such a statement should be contextualized and analyzed using primary sources. From the perspective of African oil and gas producers, who have been “patronized” by Western companies for decades, it is understandable to react to draconian and extremely fast-track plans announced by the EU to reduce fossil energy. It seems to me that it is clear to many that the EU’s so-called “transition” and “green deal” will be significantly delayed. There is no doubt that the financial deal underlying those plans will have an impact on the availability of investment in the fossil energy sector, including in Africa. Large countries (and markets), such as China and India, will replace the Europeans in relations with APPO producers for the next two or three decades.

Celani: How do you see China’s policy in Africa and its future evolution—economic (Belt and Road) and political (mediation in conflicts) aspects?

Dr. Raffone: This question would require a lengthy discussion that is not possible in this context. I simply point out that China is transforming its plans toward

Africa, reducing state direct investment, increasing bilateral trade compartments, and asking Chinese private companies to invest more in Africa. For domestic reasons, China sees Africa not only as a supplier of raw materials and agriculture, but as a possible location for Chinese manufacturing. The proliferation of agreements to create “economic and trade cooperation zones” testifies to this change of approach in Sino-African relations. However, these are medium- and long-term processes.

Will the EU Follow the Schizophrenic U.S. Policy?

Celani: How do you see EU policy in Africa? Apart from the energy transition we mentioned earlier, Brussels sees China as a threat and has launched the [Global Gateway](#), but so far many words and little action.

Dr. Raffone: The EU, pressed by the United States, has hastily declared that China is a threat, a “systemic competitor.” However, in recent weeks, the governments of European states have had these statements predominantly made by [EU Commission President] Ursula von der Leyen corrected. In fact, the head of European diplomacy, Josep Borrell, in consultation with the European Council, announced that the “EU Global Gateway” and the BIS [Bank for International Settlements] are complementary and not alternatives. In addition, he announced that he will visit China in the near future.

On the other hand, the United States, after the wise counsel of Henry Kissinger, is also trying to reopen a trade dialogue with China. While the White House goes in this direction, neoconservative elements of the administration, particularly the State Department, insist on China’s containment, defense of Taiwan’s “freedom,” and promote military cooperation agreements in the Indo-Pacific. I personally hope that the Europeans will not follow the United States in a schizophrenic and dangerous policy toward China after the dramatic and failed adventure in Ukraine.

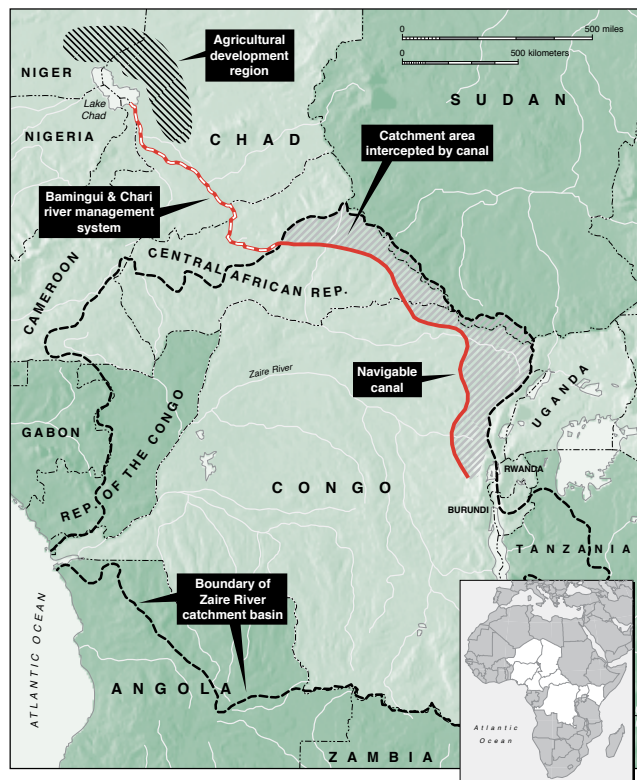
Celani: This is where the so-called [Mattei Plan](#) launched by the Italian government [of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni] comes in. We are waiting to see its contents, but from the indications that have emerged so far, it does not look like a game-changer. Or does it?

Dr. Raffone: So far only the title is known. For the Meloni government, already facing various difficulties in holding its majority, failing on the “Mattei Plan” risks ending the government experience.

Celani: Are you aware of the Transaqua project for transferring water from the Congo River Basin to the Lake Chad Basin, to which the Italian government had previously committed itself, but then stalled amidst the changes in *Palazzo Chigi* [seat of the Italian Council of Ministers in Rome —ed.]? The fact that the leading countries in the proposal, Nigeria and Chad, but also the Lake Chad Basin Commission itself, of which all riparian countries are members, were not even invited to Rome for the July conference does not bode well.

Dr. Raffone: The erratic discontinuity of Italian foreign policy no longer surprises me.

The Transaqua Project as Proposed by Bonifica



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