

“EurAfrica”: General François Lecointre Suggests that France Must Reconquer its Old Colonial Territories

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In an [interview](#) uploaded onto the YouTube channel of Le Figaro in April 2024, General François Lecointre, the former Chief of Defence Staff of France, made controversial remarks which were interpreted by many as meaning that he desired the recolonisation of Africa.

Lecointre appeared to suggest that France needed to invade and militarily reconquer its old colonial territories including those from which France has recently been unceremoniously ejected. In doing so, he was in fact alluding to a long-held geopolitical concept known as “Eurafrica.”

This idea, which has found expression in Herman Sorgel’s “Atlantropa” and in Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi’s Pan-Europa Movement, is one in which the destinies of the continents of Europe and Africa have been inextricably interwoven.

In earlier years, Eurafrica, which was developed during the age of the colonisation of the African continent by European powers, was explicitly paternalistic and exploitative in its exposition. But even in more recent times, its theoretical enunciations through terms such as “partnership” do not hide its extractivist raison d’être: That Europe requires untrammelled access to Africa’s mineral resources. This has been the demonstrable modus operandi of Eurafrica’s institutionalised application: Via *France-Afrique*, the device through which France managed its shadow empire in post-independence Francophone Africa, and also through the workings of the European Union. For unknown to many Eurafrica lay at the very heart of the creation of the European Economic project in the 1950s. Indeed, the Eurafrica-based relationship between the EU and African states persists to this day, a state of affairs which from the European perspective is threatened by resource-starved China’s expanding presence on the African continent.

During his interview General Lecointre said the following:

We must return and help these African countries. Rebuilding state structures, restoring administrations, and fostering development are all crucial steps.

Many interpreted the word “return” as a direct reference to the recent expulsions of the French military from the Sahelian states of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso, implying that a

resurrection of French power could only be achieved in the foreseeable future by military force. Further, his use of the word “help,” despite its link to fostering development did not strike critics as being predicated on philanthropic motives. Instead, his language, given a paternalistic import, was suggestive of the sort which has been used in the context of an enduring concept which fuses the destinies of Europe and Africa in a political and economic union.

The original concept of Eurafrica was a political project through which African colonies would be merged prior to the process of European integration. The resultant entity would serve as a counterweight to competing continental blocs in the Americas and Asia. Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, the man who created and led the Pan-European Movement, believed European technical advancement and “high culture” would merge with the “primitive” vitalism of Africa to create a geopolitical power bloc. Coudenhove-Kalergi wrote that “Africa has become our closest neighbour and its destiny a part of our own destiny.” He also argued that “the future of Africa depends on what Europe makes of it.” It is therefore not difficult to see Lecointre’s choice of words as forming a continuum of Coudenhove-Kalergi’s approach of the twinning of destinies in an enterprise combining a latter day insistence on a sphere of influence with a modern *Mission civilisatrice*.

However, what Lecointre did not specifically address was the underlying motivation for returning to Africa, which of course is about France regaining and maintaining access to a continent which is abundant in crucial raw materials. It is important therefore to explain France’s two-tier application of Eurafrica as a national endeavour and as part of a supra-national enterprise. This refers respectively to France’s relations with its former colonies through *France-Afrique*, as well as the relationship between the European Union and Africa. In the post war years, Eurafrica was a central tenet of France’s foreign policy strategy aimed at reconciling French efforts in integrating with Europe while maintaining a hold on its African empire. This strategy was clear to one American analyst who stated in the early 1950s that France envisioned an economic link between Europe and Africa “with Paris in control.”

France-Afrique, an expression coined by Felix Houphouët-Boigny of Côte d’Ivoire in 1955, formed the basis through which France’s extraction model was perfected. The *Communaute Française* ensured that France maintained access to a range of natural resources produced by its former colonies including oil, bauxite, tin and uranium. France was able to maintain control of what was a shadow empire in the areas of economics, security and culture. These would be strengthened over the decades through various formal and informal agreements. A key feature of the economic stranglehold France had over most of Africa’s Francophone states was through monetary union. The creation of two sets of currencies, the *Communauté Financière Africaine* in West Africa and the *Coopération Financière en Afrique centrale* in Central Africa, each set of which France is responsible for printing, provided a formidable device for controlling a collection of satrapies.

The CFA has been referred to as a “colonial currency” not only because of the restrictive terms under which it operates, but also because of its effect of stultifying the economic development of participant nations. For instance, the pegging of the currencies to the French Franc in yesteryears and today to the Euro is for African states a debilitating arrangement given the strength of both Franc and Euro. Right from the outset of the creation of CFA in 1945, its overvaluation in French colonies meant that while African countries had the purchasing power to buy products from metropolitan France, they were restricted in their ability to export. But they were for the most part purchasing products

processed from the raw materials they had sold. France at the same time was granted special access to vital raw materials from its colonies in regard to which it had a right of first offer. This arrangement was extremely helpful in reviving the French economy which had been devastated during the Second World War. French control of CFA would also enable it to access raw materials in Africa in its own currency, in the process bypassing the US dollar which had become the de facto world reserve currency.

The CFA system is also an affront to the sovereignty of African subscriber states who do not participate in the process through which monetary policies are decided. The free transferability of the regional currencies was not part of an equal bargain since each nation was for many decades obliged to deposit at least 50 per cent of their foreign exchange reserves with the French treasury, a rule which has been abrogated in West Africa but still applies to the Central African CFA zone. Free transferability also negatively impacts on African nations tied to the monetary system because French individuals and companies who invest in these countries can just as easily divest and repatriate their profits.

Although President Franklin Roosevelt was strident in his insistence that the European powers break up their empires after the end of the Second World War, his successors did not oppose the neocolonial features of *France-Afrique* because it served as a bulwark against the spread of communism in the Cold War era. France was careful to deploy French military forces in each of the countries and it employed economic leverage against recalcitrant political leaders.

The man who “enforced” French hegemony among its former colonies was [Jacques Foccart](#). Known as President Charles de Gaulle’s *Monsieur Afrique*, Foccart was the co-founder of Service d’Action Civique (SAC), a Gaullist militia that specialised in undertaking covert operations in Francophone Africa. He was also influential in the conduct of clandestine operations undertaken by the French foreign intelligence service, once admitting that the French secret service was responsible for assassinating Felix-Roland Moumie, the Cameroonian Marxist leader in Geneva, while the French state was orchestrating a “dirty war” in that country.

Foccart oversaw “Operation Persil” after President [Sekou Toure](#) of Guinea refused to join *Communaute Francaise*, famously declaring that Guineans would prefer “freedom in poverty to riches in slavery.” Toure proceeded to create a central bank and a new currency. In retaliation, France withdrew its civil servants and technical staff during which equipment was destroyed. Then Foccart ordered the SDECE (Service de documentation extérieure et de contre-espionnage) to sabotage the Guinean economy by covertly flooding the country with fake currency. Operation Persil ultimately failed.

In July 1973, President Francois Tombalbaye of Chad led a demonstration in the capital city Fort-Lamy (later N’Djamena in protest against what he alleged to be French interference in the internal affairs of his country. Foccart was reported to have told friends that he intended to “save” Chad and predicted that Tombalbaye’s government would not survive beyond December 1973. He was assassinated in 1975 during a coup d’etat. But *France-Afrique*, later pejoratively spelt as *Franceafrique*, because of its inherent neocolonial basis, weakened over the course of time because of France’s growing commitment to the European Economic project, and the deaths of key figures such as Foccart.

The key tenets of Eurafrika nonetheless survived in France’s relationship with most of its

former colonies and persists in the European Union's relationship with the African continent. For as the Swedish professors Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson explained in their book *Eurafrica: the Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*, the foundation of the original European community of states which evolved into the European Union, was predicated on the principles theorised by Coudenhove-Kalergi. Key to this was the extractivist relations between a group of integrated European nations and the African continent. The rationale for European integration was, Coudenhove-Kalergi effectively argued, to exploit Africa as efficiently as possible. "Africa," he said, "could provide Europe with raw materials for its industry, nutrition for its population, land for its overpopulation, labour for its unemployed, and markets for its products." The unity of Europe as a precondition to the effective exploitation of the African continent was explicitly articulated by French Prime Minister Guy Mollet when he met with US President Dwight Eisenhower in February 1952. Mollet stated that he wanted Africa to be integrated into the European project through French and German capital, Italian labour, American and German machinery and French administrative expertise.

Both academics have thus challenged what they refer to as the Immaculate Conception narrative of the EU's founding. This holds that tired of cyclical wars often centred on the rivalry between France and Germany, a group of Western European states grouped together to form an economic association of states which would "unite for peace, freedom and democracy."

But there were clues that the creation first of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951, and then of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Commission (EURATOM) in 1957 were not simply a peace project. For instance, at the time of the EEC's establishment in 1957, a headline in the French newspaper *Le Monde* proclaimed the development to be a "First step towards Eurafrica".

There were many other similarly worded headlines. One, a short dispatch from Rome by a correspondent for the International News Service (INS) which was published in *The Rockland County Journal News* on March 26th, 1957, reflected Kalergi's twin idea of a union with Africa being predicated on mineral resource exploitation and the formation of a geopolitical bloc able to hold its own against rival continental power blocs. Titled "Signing of Unity Treaties Seen Step Toward Eurafrica", the writer reflected the former by stating "...the pacts contain the seeds of an even bigger dream, a 'Eur-Africa' pooling of European and African marketing and political schemes", and the latter which noted that "one aim of the two pacts is to raise the level of manufacturing methods in all of the nations in all so that 'Little Europe' and its 160,000,000 population will be able to compete on equal terms with the United States and Russia."

As Jean-Michel de Lattre wrote in *Politique etrangere* in 1955: "It is in Africa that Europe will be made".

France and its vast colonial empire in Africa would be central to this. In an article written 5 years earlier in the May 16th edition of the *Edmonton Journal*, which was titled "French Idea Of Eurafrica", George W. Herald expounded on the meaning of Eurafrica. It meant, he wrote, "that the French would like to link colonial Africa to the forthcoming Federation of Europe." And given that France controlled most of these colonies, Herald continued, "If that area and a federated Europe could be welded into one supra-national community, they say, unprecedented new vistas would be opened to future generations."

He stressed that geological experts had asserted that the “mineral wealth buried south and west of the Sahara is virtually inexhaustible.” These he informed his readers included gold, diamonds, uranium, copper, lead, zinc, mercury, iron ore, phosphate and sulphur. It was also clear that at this stage France was not at all keen to pursue a course of decolonisation and was actively opposing independence movements in Tunisia and Morocco. It also did not appear to Herald to be enthusiastic about embarking on what he termed a “share-the-wealth” programme with other European states. The reluctance to embark on decolonisation and the unwillingness to give up the primacy of French access to the mineral wealth of her African colonies of course went against the key tenets of Eurafrica established by Coudenhove-Kalergi including that which insisted that those European states such as Germany which had been dispossessed of its African colonies would be granted access to African resources in order to solidify the unity of a future European Union. France of course relented by granting its colonies independence under the stringent condition of joining the *Communaute Francaise*.

In an era of decolonisation, the purveyors of Eurafrica needed to portray the concept as being one which was far removed from the naked exploitation of Africa as had been the motive behind the division of the continent at the [Berlin Conference](#) of 1884-1885. The members of the Common Market, as the EEC was often referred, were quite conscious of the colonial backdrop to their formation and were at pains to explain that the relationship with Africa was not the story of a one way street of exploitation which socialist and communist ideologues were often keen to assert. Thus, in July 1962 it was announced in Brussels that associated African states would receive \$1,000 million in development aid which would double the amount that they had received since its inception in 1957. The overall package which included guarantees related to price stabilisation for African raw materials and unrestricted, tariff-free access for African products to the Common Market one newspaper reported had “great political significance in counteracting communist propaganda that (the Common Market) is an instrument of neocolonialism.”

While as mentioned earlier, the burdens associated with increased integration in the European project weakened *France-Afrique*, the European Community, as it then was styled, nonetheless continued to plot an economic path that bound it to Africa and also to other nations which today are referred to as the “Global South” in preference to the previous designation of “Third World”.

First, was the Yaoundé Convention of 1963, which was signed between the EEC and the Associated African States and Madagascar. A second Yaoundé Convention was signed in 1969 which included Mauritius, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Prior to this in 1966, the military government of Nigeria [signed](#) an agreement with the EEC which granted it the status of an Associate Member State. And building up on this the Lome Conventions of 1975 and 1979 were signed with the ACP Group consisting of African, Caribbean and Pacific states.

All these agreements reflected the extractivist model, with the Lome Convention aiming to transform the economies of the African and other states into “quasi-industrialised” ones. Although the combined agreements signed in Yaoundé and Lome were essentially dismantled following American claims that the provisions were incompatible with those of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the EU, Hansen and Jonsson remind, continues to aggressively exploit minerals on the African continent including the oilfields of Libya, the goldmines of Ghana, and the mines of the Democratic Republic of Congo, one of Africa’s most minerally endowed countries.

The idea of Eurafrica is being brought back to public consciousness because of the rise of China as an economic power and an increasingly multipolar world. Although European trade and investment far outstrips that of China in Africa, the EU has been rattled by the challenges posed to its access to African raw materials by raw material-hungry China's increasing presence on the continent. This has been magnified by the increased animus between resource-rich Russia and the EU which has imposed an extraordinary range of sanctions on the country over its conflict with Ukraine.

The European Commission's Raw Materials Initiative launched in 2011 was a response to what is perceived as the threat posed by China, a country on which it was heavily dependent on rare earth minerals, lithium and magnesium. The idea behind this is to create a list every three years of designated Critical Raw Materials (CRMs) which are utilised in energy transition and digital technologies. This enables an assessment to be made of those which are at risk of short supply or of disruption in the supply chain. The European Critical Raw Materials Act came into force in May 2024. The Act acknowledges that the EU "will never be self-sufficient in supplying such raw materials and will continue to rely on imports for a majority of its consumption."

Given the drift of geopolitical currents, it has been clear for some time to many political and economic analysts that the historical criticality of the EU's relationship with Africa needed to be re-emphasised. This was reflected in the headline of an article in *The Economist* in September 2018 which was titled "The rebirth of Eurafrica" ("[Why Europe should focus on its growing interdependence with Africa](#)" in its online edition). 2018 also saw the launching of the Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Development and Jobs and in the following year, the European Commission stressed that Africa was the EU's global priority. Under the new president, Ursula von der Leyen, a policy paper titled "Comprehensive Strategy with Africa" was presented. Using words which resonated with past enunciations of Eurafrica, Josep Borrell, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, said "A part of Europe's future is at stake in Africa. To face our modern challenges, we need a strong Africa, and Africa needs a strong Europe."

Yet, despite these positively expressed sentiments, including former German Chancellor Angela Merkel's pledged commitment to launching "a Marshall Plan for Africa," the aura of an exploitative motive remains. For example, in 2021 when speaking of the need for the EU to become "a more active global player" in formulating a strategy to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), von der Leyen [remarked](#) that "It doesn't make sense for the EU to build that perfect road between a Chinese-financed copper mine and a Chinese-financed harbour."

Her words, Peo Hansen, argues encapsulate the Eurafrican mentality and expose that "agency, sovereignty and autonomy are alien to the EU concept of Africa." It is such attitudes particularly those predicated on the exploitative mechanism of *Franceafrrique* which have caused the military regimes in Sahelian West Africa to boot out the French. It is also the reason many African states have been turning to China and Russia, both presently building BRICS as an alternative to the EU and other Western institutions which they assert are not respectful to the specific needs and interests of Africans.

Eurafrica in both its theory and application is the antithesis of the spirit of [multipolarity](#) in which, in contrast to the hegemonic and neocolonial models of the EU and Bretton Woods institutions, is predicated on an equal partnership and respect for national sovereignty.

It is also worth noting that the EU has often not lived up to its concept as a peace project. For while the EU has succeeded in keeping the peace as far as wars among its member states are concerned, it chose to be silent and inert while the Algerian war raged. Oil and gas rich Algeria was at the time of the uprising of the Front de libération nationale (FLN) considered to be part of Metropolitan France, but no voices were raised in Brussels over the widespread atrocities including massacres and torture committed by the French armed forces. What is more, French state-sponsored terrorism was brought to European soil by "[La Main Rouge](#)" (The Red Hand), a terror group which was actually a covert arm of the French state. Under the auspices of the Foreign Intelligence Service, the Red Hand assassinated several key Algerian figures in the FLN, as well as West German arms dealers suspected of supplying weapons and munitions to the FLN.

The EU has also served to give cover to the illegal military adventures embarked upon by NATO, a military organisation to which most of its member states belong. This has included the destruction of the Libyan state which was led by Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. The voices of independent spirited political leaders such as the Austrian Bruno Kreisky and the German Willy Brandt, both of whom Peo Hansen noted "spoke in the name of Europe," are virtually non-existent.

This clarification of the colonial origins of the EU and its fundamentally extractivist relationship with the African continent needs to be correctly understood by Africa's political leaders and the policymakers who have uniformly pursued the resource rental model as the default basis of running their economies. Contentment with an arrangement in which African states possess no ambition further than selling their minerals and raw materials to developed countries and supra-national entities such as the EU only serve to relegate them to the permanent state of unequal partners. It not only places limits on their ability to exercise economic statecraft, but it also sets a perpetual barrier on maximising national prosperity. There cannot be a future in leasing mining rights to their resources when they would be infinitely better off by extracting their resources and developing such resources into products that can then be sold on the world market under a single currency regime.

Eurafrica would be a much sounder concept if it were shorn of its neocolonial trappings. But for Africa and Europe to operate in genuine equal partnership, much of the onus in achieving this state of affairs will be on Africans who must embark on a quest to transform their consumer orientated, resource-based economies into productive ones by developing for themselves industrial base economies.

A note:

The origins of the EU are both fascinating and multifaceted. But the official narrative of it being guided to birth by the efforts of Robert Schuman whose plan was inspired by the ideas of Jean Monnet is incomplete. The bringing to fruition of the dream of a federated Europe owed a great deal to the covert efforts of the United States through the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and its precursor the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) both of which funded the post war European Movement. This has been backed up by [scholarly research](#). The United States believed that a united Europe would serve as a bulwark to the spread of communism and provide a means for rehabilitating the successor state to Nazi Germany. It was envisaged as a means through which the United States could control Europe in an age of US global domination.

However, despite its foundational association with the idea of Eurafica, the claim that it was

purposefully set up to engineer the genocide of white Europe is one without any basis in fact. While Coudenhove-Kalergi, himself of mixed European and Japanese descent, predicted the development of a Eurasian-Negroid race with an appearance similar to that of the Ancient Egyptians, this was not an integral component of his specific project to unite Europe in a mission to exploit Africa. That Eurafrica was not a concept inexorably attached to racial interbreeding is clear from the fact that the British fascist leader Oswald Mosley incorporated his own vision of Eurafrica as part of his "Third Position." At its inception, the Common Market acted with stealth and decisiveness in ensuring that Muslim Arab Algerians, as mentioned earlier then citizens of a country considered as Metropolitan France, did not have the same rights as other citizens in the European Economic Community.

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