

From "Made in Europe" to "Made with Common Values": A Path to Equitable Trade Relations

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For years, trade between Europe and Africa has been shaped by familiar dynamics: European markets importing African commodities, while exporting manufactured goods and technology back to the continent. Embedded in this are power dynamics, history and a 'business as usual' approach.

Yet, recent shifts in global trade policies, have intensified Europe's push towards "strategic autonomy" and "self-sufficiency", embodied in initiatives such as the *Net Zero Industry Act*, the upcoming review of the *Public Procurement Directive*, and *Industrial Decarbonisation Act*. While primarily aimed at reducing dependence on major rivals like China and the United States, these policies risk inadvertently sidelining African economies.

The core issue lies in Europe's new "non-price criteria," a policy mechanism designed to ultimately give preference to "*Made in Europe*" solutions. The intention is to bolster local industries, but if African partners are not involved, this could create a scenario where long-standing cooperation is lost, and African countries face economic isolation. Such outcomes would conflict with Europe's stated goals of equitable and inclusive growth, undermining decades of development and diplomatic efforts.

The concept of "Made with Common Values" presents an alternative, advocating for a cooperative model founded not on geographical origin but on shared principles—such as environmental sustainability, labour rights, transparency, and ethical governance. This approach would not only maintain existing African-European partnerships but deepen them. A positive future lies in grounding trade relationships in mutual respect and joint responsibility, rather than geographical preference alone.

Why shared values matter

The "Made with Common Values" framework moves beyond symbolic cooperation, embedding practical criteria directly into procurement and trade agreements. This

idea is similar to the "[Data Free Flow with Trust](#)" concept championed by Japan. "Data Free Flow with Trust" successfully gathered support from over 70 countries to build mutual trust around data governance. The "Common Values" approach emphasises clear, agreed-upon standards and trust-based collaboration. Essentially common values are about 'what', not 'how' – essentially establishing the goal of what is to be done, with freedom in how to achieve it.

Such an approach could benefit African and European stakeholders alike, we are stronger together. For instance, in renewable energy, where both continents have ambitious goals, collaborative value chains could combine Europe's technological leadership with Africa's abundant renewable resources, creating win-win scenarios rather than competitive tensions.

An example of a working partnership with Common Values

The Net Zero Industry Act (NZIA) prescribes that a certain share of auctions for specified renewable energy technologies must include:

- i) pre-qualification criteria on responsible business conduct, cybersecurity and data security, and the ability to deliver projects fully and on time, and
- ii) pre-qualification or award criteria to assess the auction's sustainability and resilience contribution.

Details of these specifications are currently being drafted.

At the same time the EU and South Africa entered a first clean trade partnership (clean trade partnerships are also initiated/framed by NZIA). So let's use this first partnership as an example of 'Made With Common Values'.

See: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eet/news/von-der-leyn-pitches-new-trade-pact-with-south-africa-to-bolster-clean-industry/>

See: [Opening remarks by the President at the plenary session of the EU-South Africa Summit](#)

Three concrete steps toward equitable trade

To operationalise this vision, European and African policymakers can take tangible actions in at least the following three ways:

1. Upcoming EU legislation, particularly the Industrial Decarbonisation Act expected in December 2025 and the public procurement directive review in 2026, should explicitly integrate the “Made with Common Values” criteria. Public consultations are ongoing, offering a critical window to advocate for inclusive definitions.
2. Both continents should convene high-level dialogues aligning with key policy milestones, beyond the upcoming AU-EU Ministerial Meeting, in May of this year. Positioning “Made with Common Values” prominently on the agenda can shift discussions from abstract ideals to concrete policy commitments.
3. To ensure genuine inclusivity, European regulatory frameworks must avoid overly burdensome complexity. Simplifying compliance requirements and offering transparent, equitable access for African businesses - especially SMEs - can reduce entry barriers and enhance genuine participation.

Conclusion

Europe’s pursuit of strategic autonomy need not come at Africa’s expense. By redefining cooperation around common values rather than geography, both continents can navigate global economic uncertainties together, fostering deeper integration and sustainable growth. Moving from "Made in Europe" to "Made with Common Values" isn't merely a semantic shift - it’s a fundamental recalibration toward true partnership.

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