

Revamped Southern Africa Europe CEO Dialogue attracts powerful participants to the continent's major investment platform

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Johannesburg will host the pre-eminent platform for investment between some of Southern Africa and Europe's leading blue-chip companies, government representation and business leaders in Sandton on October 29 and 30.

The European Union (EU), is by a long way, the major trade exporter to Southern Africa and the years' edition of the Southern Africa Europe CEO Dialogue, to be held at Sandton's Maslow Hotel, will seek to strengthen and reinforce this important relationship.

Hosted by The European House Ambrosetti, in partnership with the Gauteng Provincial Government (GPG), the summit was formerly known as the South Africa Italy Summit, but is extending its reach considerably this year.

The European House Ambrosetti is Italy's leading think tank and the Johannesburg summit comes just weeks after its recent global forum on the economy at Italy's Lake Como, which was headlined by former United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton.

Over 250 influential business leaders from Africa and Europe attended the Johannesburg summit last year and some of the Italian companies that participated included Perago, MA Automotive, Building Energy, CNH Industrial, Ferrovie Dello Stato Italiane, Fiera Milano, Terna, Alitalia and Ubi Banca.

The European House Ambrosetti CEO and Managing Partner, Valerio De Molli, said at last year's summit that EU exports towards Southern Africa had reached a value of 72 Billion Euro (R1.18 trillion), almost twice that of the United States of America, the United Arab Emirates and India combined, and 15% more than the Chinese value.

Conversely, De Molli said Southern Africa's exports towards the EU also reached a value of 69 Billion Euro (R1.13 trillion) as at the end of 2017, statistics that emphasised the importance of the Southern Africa Europe CEO Dialogue forum.

According to Eurostat, bilateral trade between Italy and South Africa grew by 18% in the last two years (2016-2018) from 2.9 billion Euros (over R48 billion) to 3.4 billion Euros (over R56 billion).

Exports alone, from Italy to South Africa grew by 26% in the two years (reaching 2 billion Euros (over R33 billion), by a long way the highest compared to any other European countries, as Italian companies continued to show their strong commitment to trade with South Africa and the rest of the African continent.

The ultimate goal of this year's exclusive Summit is to stimulate bilateral investment and expand trade volumes to even greater levels.

Among the top European and African business leaders, politicians and investors who have confirmed their attendance as speakers at the 2019 Southern Africa Europe CEO Dialogue include; former Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta, who is currently the Dean of the Paris School of International Affairs, Italy's current Minister of Education, University and Research, Lorenzo Fioramonti, South Africa's Minister of International Relations, Naledi Pandor, Zimbabwe's Minister of Finance and

Economic Development, Mthuli Ncube, Zambia's Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Christopher Yaluma and Mozambique's Minister of Trade and Industry, Ragendra de Sousa.

With its mission of 'building an exclusive, influential community of leaders for growing their enterprises, countries and continents' the CEO Dialogue will this year focus on themes such as global macro-dynamics; the CEOs' view on African business; regionalisation of businesses and value chains; energy, connectivity and sustainability; new technologies for the future; and skills for development.

Other key figures who will participate in the CEO Dialogue are Gauteng Premier David Makhura, Johannesburg Mayor Herman Mashaba, Old Mutual Chairman Trevor Manuel and the European Commission's Director General for International Cooperation and Development Stefano Manservigi.

Influential business leaders in attendance include Lapo Pistelli, Executive Vice President of International Affairs at major Italian Energy Company, Eni, Africa President of Bosch, Markus Thill, and the CEO of Mozambique's National Hydrocarbons Company, Omar Mithà.

On a visit to Johannesburg last week, The European House Ambrosetti's Senior Partner, Paolo Borzatta, again emphasised the critical nature of the investment relationship between the two regions.

"Europe is still the biggest investor in Africa in general. The EU are the real friends of Africa and South Africa, as compared to BRICS, and the Southern Africa Europe Dialogue is an event where CEO's can better understand what is happening in the African region from a more informed perspective in order to influence their business strategies and to understand where there are areas of collaboration between Europe and African businesses. It is the most important platform for any European businesses looking to invest in Africa," said Borzatta.

Gauteng Premier, David Makhura, said last year that the summit had grown in stature, impact, and reach for all participants and to reflect this growth the summit has changed its format this year.

In addition to the plenary sessions at the dialogue, parallel sessions will include a focus on Higher Education and University Cooperation between Europe and Southern Africa; Energy and Tourism in Mozambique and Property Investments and Real Estate in the City of Johannesburg; while side events will look at Innovative Additive Manufacturing Technology and a look at AgriFuture: Farming the Future.

In the last three editions the Gauteng Province has achieved several results thanks to its support of the Southern Africa Europe CEO Dialogue.

In particular:

- it has been the pivot of the development of stronger business and institutional ties not only between Italy and South Africa, but also between the EU and the SADC;
- it has attracted to Gauteng Province dozens of high-level business and government leaders from several European countries, above all Italy,
- it has signed partnerships and MoUs to improve inter-governmental ties, foster cooperation, integration and attract foreign investments;

- it has been a key pillar of Ambrosetti's global community of leaders, playing a crucial role in the development of the Southern African community, which is increasing its members every year thanks to the involvement of new players from Europe and Italy.