



# REPORT

**Carbon bargain: Where does Europe stand in Africa's energy game?**

**ECFR, Online**

**Océane Vermeulen  
Research Assistant**



European Business Council for Africa and the  
Mediterranean (EBCAM)



[www.ebcam.eu](http://www.ebcam.eu)



+32 456 79 11 50



Avenue Toison d'Or 77  
1060 Brussels - Belgium

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On 12 February 2026, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) hosted a webinar discussing how Africa's evolving energy landscape is reshaping relations with Europe and other global actors. The discussion focused on Africa's energy transition, shifting geopolitical competition, and how Europe can remain a credible and effective partner as African countries assert their own development priorities.

The panel featured:

- Andrei Marcu, Executive Director, European Roundtable on Climate Change and Sustainable Transition
- Maddalena Procopio, Senior Policy Fellow, Africa Programme, ECFR
- Clement Sefa-Nyarko, Lecturer in Security, Development and Leadership in Africa, African Leadership Centre, School of Global Affairs, King's College London
- Sarah Logan, Visiting Fellow, Africa Programme, ECFR (Moderator)

Three main messages emerged from the discussion.

First, African governments are not rejecting energy transition goals but are challenging externally imposed timelines that may conflict with domestic development priorities. Many governments prioritise energy security, industrialisation and reliable baseload power, often maintaining diversified energy mixes that include gas or nuclear options. However, structural constraints such as limited institutional capacity and weak domestic energy infrastructure continue to limit countries' bargaining power despite growing international competition.

Second, global competition in Africa's energy sector is intensifying. While Europe promotes decarbonisation, the United States focuses on securing critical minerals, China maintains strong positions in renewable technologies and mineral value chains, and Gulf countries continue investing in hydrocarbons. This competition expands African countries' options but does not automatically translate into stronger leverage.

Third, persistent financing imbalances hinder progress. Climate finance continues to favour mitigation projects with predictable returns, whereas adaptation and resilience projects remain underfunded due to limited commercial profitability, leaving them dependent on public and development finance institutions.

From a European perspective, the EU retains structural advantages, including trade relations, regulatory influence, and development financing capacity. However, speakers warned that Europe risks losing influence if regulatory and climate policies, such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), are perceived as misaligned with African industrialisation needs. Implementation gaps and slow delivery also contrast with the faster infrastructure financing approaches adopted by competing partners.



To remain competitive, Europe was encouraged to recalibrate its approach by:

- Aligning decarbonisation objectives with African industrial development priorities;
- Supporting local value addition and processing of energy and mineral resources;
- Deploying development finance more flexibly to mobilise private investment through risk-sharing mechanisms.

Speakers stressed that future partnerships should be measured by tangible outcomes, particularly improved energy access, industrial capacity, and long-term infrastructure investments rather than solely export-oriented flagship projects.

The discussion concluded that Europe–Africa energy cooperation remains essential but must adapt to a multipolar energy order. For partnerships to stay credible, financial commitments must match political rhetoric, and cooperation must accommodate differentiated development and transition pathways across African countries.