

Drawing attention to the necessity for a fresh start was spot-on. I also agree that too much is often asked from government. What government can bring is assistance and funding. With funding, we will be in a good position.

Nothing will give more satisfaction than noting that the UK is entering an “age of optimism” with the mantra of global Britain becoming a reality. However, we will not achieve positive results by carrying on as in days of old: relying on historical associations which, with today’s digital world and the proximity of near-neighbour markets, have not stood by for the UK to return to the fold.

It can be said that we carry certain advantages in Africa and can reasonably expect a warm welcome in traditional Anglo-African markets. We should not, however, take anything for granted. We must compete and explore new marketplaces. The bedrock to success must surely be expressed in terms of identifying and fulfilling overseas market opportunities in non-traditional locations. Africa is made up of disparate associations past—anglophone, francophone, lusophone and North African—all rich in culture and opportunity.

My contribution today attempts to move away from Commonwealth links and look to opportunities often overlooked by British interests. The francophone world is keen to extend dialogue beyond the clutches of Paris and is looking to link with the Anglo-Saxon world.

The francophone Africa region, once the preserve of France, presents increased opportunity for investors and businesses. With increased investment in infrastructure and improved business environments, it is expected to show some of the fastest regional growth rates in Africa. As an example of increased infrastructure spending and diversification, Côte d’Ivoire is projected to be the fastest-growing economy. Cameroon represents a market of more than 50 million people, making francophone Africa viewed as a must-do region. Ernst and Young has identified Côte d’Ivoire with agriculture, Senegal with tourism, and countries such as Cameroon, Gabon and the Republic of Congo as reliant on the oil and gas industry. Mining is also growing in prominence in countries such as Burkina Faso and Niger. In terms of a regional hub, I normally associate either Casablanca, Abidjan or Dakar as good places from which to make inroads into the francophone world.

Moving on, the African Continental Free Trade Area is making Africa’s Portuguese-speaking countries an attractive destination for investor interest, with incentives for investors. Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique and São Tomé are diverse. They have a common heritage and language, and all have close ties with Portugal and Brazil. Public-private sector partnership investments and technical assistance projects are enabling the private sector with access to finance. Although our excellent ambassador in Lisbon, Chris Sainty, will probably not thank me for saying so, Portugal could be considered a gateway.

I wish to conclude with a final word on north Africa. Africa is Africa and should not be defined in terms of sub-Saharan Africa, which, by definition, excludes the important markets that stretch from the Maghreb to the Arab-speaking countries of Libya and Egypt. North Africa is a region of strategic importance to us, not least as an important energy provider. The Government might wish to consider, for example, unlocking energy supplies to the UK by supporting the trans-Saharan pipeline project, long in the making but not as complicated it seems, with the strategy of just joining up the dots of the disparate pipelines that exist from, for example, Nigeria up to the Mediterranean.

Many opportunities for trade exist, beyond building regional value chains but integrating them into global value chains. Regional economic integration, combined with new technologies, would bring a plethora of opportunities.

I urge the establishment of a global unit in DTI, should one not currently exist, to identify opportunities that transcend language and legal frameworks, possibly providing a matchmaker operation as a winning formula centred around all-important local partnership, which is essential in avoiding pitfalls and providing solutions to local complexities.