

FROM DEPENDENCY TO PARTNERSHIP: WHERE ARE AU–EU RELATIONS HEADING?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief considers the prospects of the relationship between the AU and the EU maturing beyond the traditional dependency model. Although great progress has been made since the EU was established and its relationship with predominantly ex-colonies has been given specific structure and content, the EU still sets the agenda and scope of financial assistance to implement this. The policy brief provides an overview of the proposed agenda and likely outcomes of the fifth AU–EU Summit of Heads of State and Government, which takes place in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, in November 2017. Despite advances, the AU–EU relationship is not yet a true partnership. The brief makes recommendations towards attaining the partnership goal.

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the relationship between EU member states and those of the AU has been pursued bilaterally and dictated by past colonial ties and rules of engagement. Efforts to establish a lasting relationship between Europe and its former colonies were initiated with the creation of the [1963 Yaoundé Convention](#) (with 18 African countries and six European nations), established to promote economic development of African countries. This was later replaced by the [1975 Lomé Convention](#), to include former British colonies in

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the AU–EU relationship to move beyond dependency, the 2017 Abidjan Summit and subsequent engagements should strive to ensure the following.

- 1 The AU should submit a proposed agenda to the EU for response ahead of the summit, rather than wait for the EU to set the agenda and respond to agenda items.
- 2 The agenda should be short and precise, with defined key outcomes.
- 3 Self-financing mechanisms currently under discussion at the AU should be pursued with determination to allow the continent to master its own development without donor dependency.
- 4 Youth should be empowered to engage at meaningful levels and have exposure to key dialogues at an early stage, which will capacitate them to assume leadership over their destiny, rather than having to wait for older generations to take the lead.

the Caribbean and the Pacific (known as the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, or the ACP). The Lomé Convention was then replaced by the [2000 Cotonou Agreement](#), which will run until 2020.

There has been a parallel effort to strengthen the multi-lateral relationship between the AU and the EU at an institutional level, to address a broader compendium of interests. Initiated in 2000, the [EU–Africa Strategic Partnership](#) has held three-yearly summits since 2007. The [Joint Africa–EU Strategy](#) (JAES) was signed in 2007 at the [second Africa–EU Summit](#) in Lisbon. With Morocco recently joining the AU in January 2017, the summit is now known as the AU–EU Summit, reflecting a true inter-institutional partnership.

The fifth AU–EU Summit takes place in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, on 28–29 November 2017. Its stated objective is to build stronger mutual engagement and increased bilateral and international cooperation, based on common values and shared interests; to promote security on land and on sea, and to join forces in the fight against transnational threats; and to promote sustainable and inclusive economic development in Africa, to create the jobs that the continent so desperately needs.²

Since the [first Africa–EU Summit](#) in Cairo in 2000, hopes have been expressed that this relationship will evolve from its legacy of continuously providing African countries with development aid to one of a true partnership, with both parties enjoying equal status in setting the agenda. However, many African countries still perceive themselves as being dependent on donor aid, and the relationship has struggled to graduate into one of mutual respect and responsibility. This policy brief examines the history of the JAES, and speculates on its future evolution post-Abidjan.

HISTORY OF THE JAES

The first attempt to move beyond bilateral relationships between African and European countries came with the [1957 Treaty of Rome](#) that established the European Economic Community (EEC), which would later evolve into the EU. The [Schuman Declaration](#) on 9 May 1950 said:³

With increased resources Europe will be able to pursue the achievement of one of its essential tasks, namely, the development of the African continent ... it may be the leaven from which may grow a wider and deeper

community between countries long opposed to one another by sanguinary divisions.

The French foreign minister was discussing pooling German and French coal and steel production. This historic declaration is considered the first step towards the creation of the EU, with high hopes for mutually beneficial development.

The 18 African countries that signed the Yaoundé Convention were predominantly French-speaking – as the UK was not a signatory to the Treaty of Rome – and France’s ambition of maintaining associations with its ex-colonies set the agenda. Once Britain joined the EEC in 1973 its ex-colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific became the ACP grouping, and the Lomé Convention was signed in February 1975. A big departure from Yaoundé was that the trade relationship became non-reciprocal. The 68 original ACP countries grew to 79, and became reliant on duty-free access to European markets for their commodity exports, with no expectation of reciprocity. As benefits were extended, development aid increased through various programmes and instruments, in the hope it would help to develop ACP economies and ensure stable political environments. The XEU⁴ 3 billion (\$3.8 billion) in aid offered to the ACP countries under the first Lomé Convention (1975–1980) was only second to EEC members’ spending on their [Common Agricultural Policy](#).⁵ The Lomé Convention lasted until 2000,⁶ after which the WTO finally ruled that its trade preferences were incompatible with WTO rules. Consequently, Europe had to extend the benefits to all WTO member states or develop a reciprocal relationship with the ACP. The EU chose the latter.

In 2012 Kaye Whiteman wrote:⁷

A fundamental question thus has to be posed when looking at the more than thirty years between the signing of the first Lomé Convention in 1975 and the launch of the Europe Africa Strategy in Lisbon in 2007: Was the new deal of Lomé a real future model for relations, or was it only a myth to cover and justify increasingly anachronistic postcolonial relations?

Thirty years of Lomé entrenched a relationship of dependency and beneficial treatment on the ACP side. Efforts to replace Lomé’s non-reciprocal trade provisions under the 2002 Cotonou Agreement with reciprocal economic partnership agreements (EPAs) have been incredibly difficult. As of October 2017, just 13 countries have concluded an EPA with the EU. The only region to

conclude one is SADC, and even then the EPA excludes some SADC member states.⁸ The long, hard years of negotiating the EPAs have negatively affected the AU–EU relationship, and the road towards full reciprocity and equal partnership will be long.

DITCHING DEPENDENCY?

Outside of the Lomé and Cotonou conventions, the AU–EU summits have emphasised that, even if only symbolically, an equal partnership is desirable and achievable. The JAES that emerged from the 2007 Lisbon Summit aspired to be a concrete implementation strategy to give substance to summit discussions and serve as the outcome of these meetings.

The JAES covers eight distinct intervention areas, with the overall objective to help attain the UN [Millennium Development Goals](#) by 2015. Other goals include peace and security, investment, regional integration, and good governance. Although there may have been a strong focus on partnership during the summit, all intervention and outcome objectives deal with the African continent, with European financial support for implementation.

The JAES has attempted to foster a people-centred approach by giving civil society organisations (CSOs) the mandate to monitor the strategy's implementation. However, despite CSOs' active participation in designing the JAES, follow-up and monitoring has been weak at best. Only 40% of the JAES's intended activities have taken place. Both the AU and the EU seek to narrow the focus of the overly broad JAES at the 2017 Summit. Accordingly, the AU has proposed only three to five priority areas, with flagship projects attainable over three years. This should allow the AU–EU Summit to have tangible outcomes. However, reducing the focus of the summit will not improve the dependency relationship. These areas still focus on where the African continent needs assistance from the EU to develop or strengthen, and none reflects what the EU might learn from African experiences.

KEY ISSUES AT THE 2017 AU–EU SUMMIT

Youth issues will feature prominently at the summit, whose overall theme is 'Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in the Youth'. The challenges facing African youth are regarded as closely linked to the EU's inward migration crisis, making migration another key summit focus. To create better opportunities for the

youth in Africa, the topic of investments into Africa and the creation of value chains on the continent will also receive significant attention. Investment in Africa's energy grid is also a key priority, as without access to energy Africa will neither realise the [AU's Agenda 2063](#) 50-year development vision nor will it achieve the UN [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The EU is supporting African youth participation both at a Youth Summit, which was held in October 2017 in Abidjan, as well as at the main summit to promote knowledge of inter-institutional processes and international forums. One hundred and twenty organisations were invited to express interest and provide input regarding what the youth expect of the main AU–EU Summit. Thirty-six of these CSOs will eventually contribute to the new 2018 JAES emerging from the summit.

MIGRATION

Significant steps have been taken by the AU and the EU to address the current migration crisis, and the summit will most likely endorse and support key initiatives such as the [Rabat Process](#) and [Khartoum Process](#), which respectively focus on West and North African countries, and the Horn of Africa. The summit takes place within the context of the 2015 Valletta Dialogue, which established the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), the financing mechanism to tackle migration issues. The Joint Valletta Action Plan that emerged from the Valletta Dialogue has five priority domains.⁹

- Development benefits of migration and addressing root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement
- Legal migration and mobility
- Protection of migrants and asylum seekers
- Prevention of and fight against irregular migration, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings
- Return, readmission and reintegration.

It is important that these domains be implemented concurrently. However, African leaders have expressed concern at their lack of input and participation in designing the EUTF, which is perceived by some African partners as an EU-imposed migration agenda that skews EU aid-effectiveness principles.¹⁰

INVESTMENT

Creating job opportunities for African youth is a major objective of the investment topic at the summit. African economies have been unable to create enough jobs, which are vital to stem the migration flow within and outside of the continent. Creating investment opportunities are within a bilateral rather than multilateral context. Reducing the summit agenda and focusing on individual countries, rather than Africa as a collective, supports the approach taken under the [German Marshall Plan for Africa](#) as well as the [G20's Compact with Africa](#).

CONCLUSION

The original group of six European nations and 18 new African states has developed into a formidable relationship, representing all EU member states and all of Africa. In the past, the many areas for potential cooperation and need on the African continent have resembled something of a shopping list, with only a few issues ever being addressed between summits. Streamlining the key areas that Africa and Europe can address jointly could result in concrete outcomes that will see African youth benefiting from increased opportunities in Africa and Europe without having to resort to illegal means to attain a living income. The visible and physical impact of the migration crisis in Europe has placed the plight of the African continent and the urgent need to find solutions at the top of the domestic European political agenda. Finding mutually researched and agreed-upon solutions that involve both immediate opportunities in Europe and long-term economic development in Africa should lead to a partnership that both parties aspire to – one of equality without dependency.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Talitha Bertelsmann-Scott is a Senior Research Fellow at SAIIA. She thanks Hanneke van der Westhuizen, Programme Officer for the Economic Diplomacy team at SAIIA, for excellent research support.
- 2 European Commission, International Cooperation and Development, 'EU proposes enhanced partnership with Africa on peace and security, and job creation for youth', 4 May 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/news-and-events/proposal-renewed-impetus-africa-eu-partnership_en, accessed 2 October 2017.
- 3 EU, 'The Schumann Declaration – 9 May 1950, Full text', https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/europe-day/schuman-declaration_en, accessed 17 October 2017.

- 4 XEU is the currency code for the obsolete European Currency Unit. The European Currency Unit was a basket of the European Community member states' currencies, before being replaced by the euro on 1 January 1999, at parity.
- 5 Mutasa C, 'A critique of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy,' in Adebajo A & K Whiteman (eds), *The EU and Africa: From Eurafrique to Afro-Europa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2012, p. 245.
- 6 The Lomé Convention was followed by the Cotonou Agreement and will expire in 2020.
- 7 Whiteman K, 'The rise and fall of Eurafrique: From the Berlin conference of 1884–1885 to the Tripoli EU-Africa Summit of 2010', in Adebajo A & K Whiteman (eds), *op. cit.*
- 8 The SADC EPA (economic partnership agreement) group only includes Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa. However, Angola has not signed the EPA, so effectively the SADC EPA consists of the member states of the Southern African Customs Union and Mozambique.
- 9 See http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21839/action_plan_en.pdf.
- 10 Castillejo C, 'The European Union Trust Fund for Africa: What Implications for Future EU Development Policy?', Briefing Paper, 5/2017. Bonn: German Development Institute, 2017.

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