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**Bait and Switch:**  
The European Union's Incoherency  
Towards Africa

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# **Bait and Switch: The European Union's Incoherency Towards Africa**

**Ian Taylor**



## **Executive Summary**

The EU's relations with Africa remain dominated by notions of partnerships via development cooperation and inconsistencies regarding economic dealings that often exert powerfully negative images of the EU as a collective unit that gives with one hand but that takes back with the other. The hegemony of neoliberalism within the EU serves the broad interests of outwardly-orientated fractions of the EU's ruling elites and navigating the tensions that this creates in any consistent set of development policies remains a key challenge to the EU-Africa relationship, particularly when these same actors practice de facto mercantilism in certain areas of policy whilst proclaiming their commitment to liberalisation. Such hypocrisy invites scorn and resentment within Africa. Handicapped by the divergent interests of its various members, the question remains whether the EU can move from individual action to a genuinely common set of policies towards the continent—beyond the rhetoric.

## Introduction

Due to the colonial legacy, Europe as a continent has a special and peculiar relationship with Africa. As Chabal (2009: 20) notes, 'it is in Africa that [the Europeans] most clearly revealed their own vision of mankind, extolled most loudly their own colonial (missionary) project, deployed most skilfully their own justification for enslaving and exploiting "others", justified most casuistically their own sense of racial superiority and, today, revel in their most self-serving display of guilt and regret'. As the European Union (EU) has developed as a supra-national organization, this particular past and present encounter with Africa has been continually negotiated.

Despite repeated protestations by many African elites since independence to break free from the colonial past and the ties that bind Africa and Europe together, it remains a fact that for most Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, the EU remains the main trading partner and the EU absorbs around 85% of Africa's agricultural exports and 75% of SSA's overall trade. Even with the rise of interest in the continent by the United States, China and India (the latter two eagerly seized upon in some quarters as finally proffering up the chance to move on from Europe), the EU continues to be Africa's key partner and a major source of developmental assistance. The EU is thus a most important factor in Africa's international relations and will remain so for at least the short to medium-term.

Of note, the EU officially presents itself as a qualitatively distinct actor in global affairs (see Söderbaum and van Langenhove, 2007). Indeed:

The underlying assumption of this self-perception is that the EU, in its global action, follows values and approaches that are somehow different from those of nation states—especially the USA, but also individual EU member states—which are mainly or exclusively concerned with their national interests. In the same vein the EU would also be different from international institutions such as the IMF or the World Bank, and from regional organizations, such as Mercosur, which are chiefly concerned with economic policies (Fioramonti and Poletti, 2008: 167; see also Smith, 2003).

However, 'In spite of this self-representation, the EU's international action in policy sectors such as trade and investment, as well as in democracy promotion, is quite controversial, multifaceted and, often, inconsistent' (ibid.). This paper seeks to outline some of the reasons why this is so, with particular reference to EU-SSA relations. In doing so, some caveats are in order. Firstly, this paper focuses on SSA and not relations with North Africa (see Gillespie and Youngs, 2002; Gomez, 2003). Secondly, this paper chiefly concerns itself with economic issues and does not discuss the increasing emergence of the EU's role in conflict prevention (see Olsen, 2002; Stewart, 2006; Merlingen and Ostrauskaite, 2008). Finally, it should be understood that throughout the paper the term "European Union" is used although in fact, between 1957-1993, the organization's predecessor was the European Economic Community (EEC) and, in addition, the EU is actually made up of three pillars: the European Community (EC); the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP); and the Police and Judicial Co-operation in Criminal Matters (Bomberg, Peterson, and Stubb, 2008).

## Understanding EU-Africa Relations

Since the end of the Cold War, momentous changes within the international system have

impacted on EU-SSA relations. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the break-up of the socialist bloc has led to the creation of over 150 million “new poor” in Eastern Europe and arguably a loss of geopolitical importance for many African countries. The subsequent failure of the “peace dividend” to materialise, and the escalation of conflicts in Africa in the 1990s led to a sharp increase in EU humanitarian aid, but this led to a diversion of scarce resources away from long-term development. And perhaps crucially, European integration and enlargement has arguably continued to push African development concerns into the background (Zielonka, 2001). The EU's membership increased from 15 countries to 25 on May 1, 2004, then 27 in 2007, with hundreds of thousands of migrants from within Europe every year now seeking employment, primarily in Western Europe, and often in competition with African migrants (Tsebelis, 2008). At the same time, the cost of enlargement has been calculated at €67bn, whilst all of the new members have no colonial heritage in Africa and need persuading why the EU should divert resources to that continent. Colonial guilt on the part of some member states of the EU perpetually encounters the notion that EU-Africa ties have moved into a postcolonial phase (Khadiagala 2000: 83). So EU-SSA relations are going through a process of flux.

According to Hurt (2004) a number of different approaches to the relationship between the EU and SSA exist. The officially sanctioned EU view springs from liberalism and seeks to advance the notion that the relationship is based on mutually beneficial terms grounded in cooperation and interdependence (see Gruhn 1976; Zartman 1976). This in itself is derivative of liberal understandings vis-à-vis integration (Chivvis, 2003). From this viewpoint, exploitative relations are absent and rather, Africa's development is dependent upon greater integration into the global economy, which the EU can help facilitate, on mutually advantageous conditions for both parties. As the EU's Strategy for Africa put it:

The purpose of the EU's action is to work in partnership with the nations of Africa to promote peace and prosperity for all their citizens. ...The Strategy will further reinforce the basic principles that govern this relationship, most prominently *equality, partnership and ownership*...Key to the success of the partnership will be its ability to cement the bonds between the two continents beyond the formal political and economic interaction...objectives should be supplemented, especially for those countries closer to the EU, by support for economic integration and political cooperation with the EU. Taken together, these measures constitute the EU's common, comprehensive and coherent response to Africa's development challenges (EU, 2005: 3).

A radically different interpretation of the EU's relationship with SSA emerges from Dependency Theory, a critique particularly strong in the 1970s and early 1980s (see Galtung 1976). This approach sees the relationship as being emblematic of typical core-periphery relations and springing from the historical colonial relationship between Europe and Africa—a process that some authors see as having left a legacy of underdevelopment on the African continent (Rodney, 1972). In short, the colonisation process resulted in Africa's economies being oriented more toward the needs of European capital than the requirements of the local. This was the quintessential definition of dependency. Rather than picture an ahistorical “level playing field”, as favoured by liberalism, whereby each social formation needed to simply go through the ideal-type stages of growth, Dependency Theory rather asserted that Europe had an advantage from the start in that they never had to—at least in modern times—experience colonial rule nor, attempt to integrate themselves into a global economy already replete with richer and more powerful competitors. Comparing then the experiences of Europe and Africa, certainly at the early stages of development, was a futile exercise.

Critically, Dependency Theory also pointed out that the relationships of dependency crafted during the Age of Expansionism by the European metropolises were continued long after “official” rule by the colonisers was over. This was recognised early on by some African elites—Nkrumah (1965) being a famous example. According to Dependency theorists, only by recognising this can a true appreciation of Europe-Africa relations be realised. Such a position asserts that the main obstacles to real autonomous development were not internal (such as Rostow’s caricature of “traditional” societies, or The Economist’s innate “African culture”), but were rather external in origin and contingently bound up with the historical experiences of the spread of international capitalism (Frank, 1967, 1975). As Hurt (2004) notes, this approach has placed particular emphasis on agreements such as the Lomé Convention and how this sustained Africa’s role as a primary commodity exporter to Europe through the System for the Stabilisation of Export Earnings (STABEX) and the Stabilisation Scheme for Mineral Products (SYSMIN). On the other hand, core-periphery ties were cemented by the failure to permit duty-free access for manufactured products from Africa, preventing industrialization. Whilst this approach is helpful in understanding key characteristics of the global capitalist system and how Africa was (unequally) inserted into the world economy, its structuralism serves to deny Africa of any agency and not least, reduces African elites to the status of willing dupes, something which the evidence of extraversion does not support.

Indeed, whilst ‘development cooperation itself should be seen as encapsulating particular political and economic relationships rather than constituting some kind of ‘apolitical’ or ‘technical’ (Brown, 2000: 368), nor should it be seen as a one-way street of neo-colonial impositions. The dialectical role between political and economic elites on both sides shapes the relationship. Whilst structures are vital to comprehend, the agency of actors within such structure is equally important. Consequently, the role of resources (political and economic) that emanated from the relationship with Europe was invariably utilised by extant elites for their own purposes (primarily regime survival) and often ran counter to the expressed aims of the Europeans when disbursing such material. As Brown (2000: 371) notes, ‘for particular regimes, power lay in the clientelist links and the patronage that occupation of state positions made possible, and access to external resource flows (from both aid and trade) were a major element in this’. Ignoring the extraversion strategies of African elites when discussing EU-SSA ties thus makes little sense.

## **EU-Africa Relations in Historical Perspective**

The EU history with post-colonial Africa is long and has been progressively formalised—and politicised—as relations have unfolded (Lister, 1997; Brown, 2002; Holland, 2002). The Treaty of Rome (1957) first established a formalised relationship with Europe’s colonial territories (including those outside of Africa), with Article 131 of the Treaty stated that ‘the Member States agree to associate with the Community the non-European countries and territories which have special relations with Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.’ It further stated that ‘the purpose of association shall be to promote the economic and social development of the countries and territories and to establish close economic relations between them and the Community as a whole.’ Of note, France made the association of its African colonies with the European Economic Community (EEC) a pre-condition of signing the Rome Treaty becoming a member of the Community. Later, following independence in the 1960s, the first Yaoundé Convention was negotiated with eighteen largely francophone former colonies, the Associated African States and Madagascar (AASM), in 1963, primarily to safeguard French

interests.

The Yaoundé Conventions of 1963 (Yaoundé II in 1969 saw the agreement renewed for another five years) 'provided both aid and trade access to the EU market - although the latter was given only on a reciprocal basis and therefore did not match the 'special treatment' in terms of non-reciprocal trade benefits that developing countries were establishing in the GATT at a global level - and showed that the EU would play a role in the international support that was afforded to the development and stability of the new states. While the move represented something of a "multilateralisation" of post-colonial ties in that the agreements were with the whole EU rather than simply the former colonial power it also reflected French priorities in North-South relations, protecting as it did France's post-imperial ties with Africa'. (Brown, 2000: 372). As Brown infers, the relationship between the EU and SSA has had to negotiate a perpetual tension: that of balancing the wider, multilateral, interests of the EU, with the more immediate (and often more compelling) interests of individual Union members, primarily the ex-colonial powers. This tension has, in fact, continually weakened attempts at constructing a unified EU stance towards Africa.

After the United Kingdom joined the European Community in 1973, a new agreement had to be established in order to accommodate those countries that were members of the Commonwealth. Thus the Lomé Treaty of 1975 was established, maintaining a separate co-operation agreement between then 46 ACP states (Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific) and the EU. The objective of Lomé was 'to promote the economic, cultural and social development of ACP countries' and was founded on three official principles: equality of the partners, sovereignty in decision-making and the security of relations. The Treaty aimed to bolster trade between the EU and ACP states, support the structural adjustment efforts of ACP countries, facilitate access to capital markets and support direct investment, in addition to compensating fluctuations in export earnings (see Brown, 1999; Montana, 2003).

A key article of the Lomé Convention(s) was non-reciprocal trade access, which allowed approximately 90% of ACP exports to enter the EU's markets duty free. Protocols that managed bananas, beef, rum, sugar and veal exports from the ACP states to the EU were added, fixing an annual import quantity and price. Economic developmental assistance from the EU to the ACP states was also central, mediated through the European Development Fund (EDF) and disbursed according to requirements and based on per capita income. In June 2006, the 10th EDF was agreed for the period 2008- 2013, with an overall budget of €23,966 billion (de Bergh 2006: 1). Compensation for fluctuations in export earnings was covered by two commodity insurance schemes: the stabilization of exports (STABEX) of Lomé I, and the system of minerals (SYSMIN), introduced by Lomé II. These insurance schemes were calculated to aid in the alleviation of negative impacts stimulated by shortfalls in export receipts. Industrial and technical cooperation was also a feature of Lomé, with the aim that ACP countries could access EU expertise in aiding the industrialization and development of their economies.

It is absolutely crucial to situate Lomé within its broader global context. With the growth in membership in the United Nations of states of the South, combined with a steady disillusionment with an ever-apparent unequal world, a strategic space opened up for the ex-colonial nations to question the extant global order. This was particularly so as this was an order in which the new states had had no hand in crafting. As the 1970s progressed the South began to push for an agenda that sought to deal primarily with the promotion of trade between the North. This call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) symbolically culminated at the Sixth Special Session of



the United Nations in 1974 where, under the Non-Aligned Movement's then leader (Algeria's Houari Boumedienne), the South deployed NAM and G-77 (a permanent group representing the interests of the South within the United Nations) texts in successfully pushing for a comprehensive normative declaration detailing the aspirations of the South's elites. This in essence reflected responses to real problems experienced by states in the South, particularly as a result of the Bretton Woods system's creation and operation (Laszlo et. al., 1979).

Emboldened by the demonstration of economic power by OPEC during the crisis of 1973-74, Southern elites clamoured for greater development finance, an increase in the percentage of GNP allocated by the North as aid, and development issues to be paced centrally at the IMF and World Bank. Overall, these were the heydays of the South's role in world affairs as active agents and Lomé reflected this. During this period, 'there were fears of a permanent global power shift' within the West (Whiteman, 1998: 31). The sorts of concessions granted by Europe at Lomé reflect this. Arguably, since the ascendancy of neo-liberalism and the subsequent demise of Third Worldism, what we have witnessed regarding EU-SSA relations have been a process whereby the EU has sought to claw back such concessions and the ACP nations have sought to defend them.

The Convention was subsequently renegotiated and signed in 1980 (Lomé II), 1985 (Lomé III), and 1990 (Lomé IV). These saw, progressively, new additions to the Treaty, namely non-reciprocal trade concessions (Lomé I), the "globalization" of EU-ACP cooperation (Lomé II) and economic, social, and cultural rights (Lomé III). Human rights, regionalization, structural adjustment policies, liberal democratization the rule of law were added at Lomé IV, reflecting the hegemony of neo-liberalism as the Cold War ended (Olsen, 2001). A midterm review of Lomé IV was embarked on in 1995 (Crawford, 1996; Parfitt, 1996; Olsen, 2001). The Lomé Conventions expired on February 29, 2000, to be replaced by the Cotonou Agreement.

## **The Cotonou Agreement**

The Cotonou Agreement was signed on June 23, 2000 in the capital of Benin between the then fifteen members of the EU and 77 ACP countries. The Agreement was the result of protracted and controversial discussions between the two sides that had begun in September 1998 (Martenczuk, 2000; Forwood, 2001). The new agreement marked a deep change in the nature and spirit of the relationship, when compared to earlier EU-ACP conventions. Indeed, Cotonou is in many ways a departure from the provisions of Lomé. In fact, Cotonou can be seen to reflect the hegemony of neo-liberal thinking vis-à-vis the link between development and economic policies. The more interventionist nature of Lomé, reflecting the thrust of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) of the 1970s had had to fight a continual rearguard action as successive Lomé agreements emerged, but by the 1990s neo-liberalism had all but extinguished such sentiments (Hurt 2003: 163). The wider ideational and structural context of Cotonou is thus crucial.

It was the EU that commenced proceedings towards a post-Lomé accord with the publication of a Green Paper on the future of EU-ACP relations (see Commission of the European Communities, 1996). Whilst the ACP generally favored a modification of the accord—but no more. The Libreville Declaration, issued by the first Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government in 1997, called on the EU to maintain non-reciprocal trade preferences and market access in a successor agreement and maintain the preferential commodity protocols and arrangements (ACP Heads of State and Government, 1997). In contrast, the EU advanced a wholesale overhaul. Consequently, a compromise was reached, though slanted in favor of EU due to its preponderant economic

muscle. The failure of Lomé to promote broad-based development within the ACP countries, even after a quarter of a century of privileged. Concessions and market access to Europe made many EU actors question the apparent inability of ACP societies to respond favorably to the diverse economic incentives offered by Brussels. Indeed, during the Lomé timeframe, the ACP countries' shares in the EU's market fell from 6.7% in 1976 to 3% in 1998, whilst 60% of the total ACP export concentrated on only 10 products. There was also an appreciable rise in poverty in many ACP countries (NEPRU, 2001: 2).

Dissatisfaction with Lomé then coincided with two developments outside the control of the EU-ACP framework. Firstly, the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1994 had profound implications for Lomé. Fundamentally, the WTO provisions of non-discrimination made many of the preferential provisions of Lomé unsustainable: the non-reciprocal trade regime of Lomé was illegal within WTO rules as it was granted to only and all ACP countries, regardless of their level of economic development. In 1996 the "banana dispute" came before the WTO and the exclusive and preferential trade relationship between the EU and the ACP states fell foul of WTO statutes. Thus the EU proposed free trade agreements, or Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), with individual as well as groups of ACP countries. Brussels' ambition was that such EPAs would substitute for Lomé's non-reciprocal trade preferences.

Secondly, the continuing planned process of EU enlargement, as well as the launching of the Single European Market in 1993 and the inauguration of a single European currency meant that agreements entered into with non-EU sides needed to be renegotiated to reflect such new developments. Indeed, the Cotonou Agreement had to be negotiated within a wider context whereby the EU had emerged as a major global actor in its own right and where concerns about managing its relationships with its ex-colonies was but one part of an ever-expanding portfolio of foreign policy concerns (Bretherton and Vogler, 1999). By the time that Cotonou was negotiated, it could be argued that the EU had moved on from its fixation with its ex-territories that had been so starkly exemplified by the Yaoundé concords. Equally, the ACP countries now had to negotiate in an environment where other parts of the world were clamouring for attention and in competition for the EU's scarce resources. Not least, of course, were the emerging economies of Central and Eastern Europe, many of whom were aspiring members of the EU and certainly desired—and demanded—increased attention (and expenditure) from Brussels.

Cotonou can be described as resting on three pillars: the political dimension, development cooperation and trade cooperation. The overlapping interconnectedness of these three pillars will be described below. Embedded in all national development strategies and within the framework of EU development cooperation with an individual ACP country, the key political activities are linked to the promotion of institutional, political and legal reform processes, as well as capacity building programs for public and private actors and civil society. Secondly, development cooperation ranges from the promotion of the private sector, to regional cooperation, as well as "mainstreaming" gender, the environment, and HIV/AIDS into EU-ACP aid partnerships. The European Development Fund acts as a special funding mechanism, with EU member states negotiating their contributions to it every five years. Thirdly, trade is envisioned as the strongest pillar of the Cotonou Agreement, as it is conceived as the engine of sustainable development. Yet the ability of the EU to promote "sustainable development" in Africa has arguably been constrained by domestic pressures within the EU itself that lead to highly unequal sets of relationships between the EU and SSA, most graphically emblematic with the EU's systems of

subsidies and the Common Agricultural Policy.

## **The Common Agricultural Policy**

‘More than thirty years after the signing of the first Lomé Convention (1975), the ACP still exports primarily raw materials to Europe and provides a ready market for European finished goods. Conventional procedures have not promoted diversification, competitiveness, growth, or poverty reduction in any sustainable manner. Although regional integration has belonged for decades to the declared aims of both the EU’s and the ACP’s own development strategies, it has been applied with little success’ (Kohnert, 2008: 12). This reflects a degree of failure that both the EU and Africa’s elites cannot escape from. Arguably key in explaining some of the factors behind this situation is the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU.

The CAP has its roots in post-war Western Europe, where agriculture had been crippled and food security was problematic. The CAP was initially aimed at encouraging better agricultural productivity as a means of guaranteeing stable supplies of reasonably priced food and also help rebuild Europe’s agricultural sector. The CAP provided subsidies and structures guaranteeing high prices to farmers and provided incentives for them to increase production. The CAP was highly successful in facilitating the EU’s self-sufficiency in food production from the 1980s onwards. However, as part of the processes stimulated by the CAP, permanent surpluses of major farm commodities (the infamous “butter mountains” and “wine lakes”—see Cottrell, 1987) developed. Some of these surpluses were exported, with the aid of export subsidies, which massively distorted world markets, whilst at the same time being expensive to EU taxpayers (see Mackel, Marsh and Revell, 1984).

Due to mounting pressure within the EU, a series of reforms, particularly at the beginning of the 1990s were introduced. Production limits reduced surpluses for instance. Farmers were encouraged to rely more on the market, although they still received direct income aid. A ceiling was also put on the CAP’s budget and in 2003 a further fundamental reform was agreed. Today, the majority of aid to EU farmers is disbursed independently of their levels of production; under the new system (the Single Farm Payment), EU farmers receive direct income payments to keep them in business, but the link to production has been removed.

The EU makes much of these reforms. However, Charles Crawford, the British ambassador to Poland (correctly) described the CAP as ‘The most stupid, immoral state-subsidized policy in human history’, which amounted to little more than ‘a program which uses inefficient transfers of taxpayers money to bloat rich French landowners and so pump up food prices in Europe, thereby creating poverty in Africa, which we then fail to solve through inefficient but expensive aid programs’ (cited in Sunday Times (London), December 11, 2005). In 2007, the EU spent €42 billion on untargeted support to agriculture, and €9.5 billion on targeted payments under the rural development program. All CAP expenses amounted to slightly more than 40% of the EU budget (European Commission (2008).

Within the EU there is deep division regarding the CAP. The British would like to abolish tariffs and all other measures that maintain EU agricultural prices above world market levels. They would also like to stop the direct payments that farmers receive irrespective of their production output. However, Germany, France and other states where the agricultural lobby is strong wish that the

CAP be strengthened, with the French claiming that the CAP is so effective that it should be exported to developing countries. This French claim needs contextualizing; according to one analysis, CAP reform:

[I]s supporting the expansion of exports through enhancing its price competitiveness and shifting patterns of exports away from basic agricultural products to value-added food products. As the process of CAP reform is rolled out to more and more sectors, the cumulative effect on the price competitiveness of EU value-added food products will be greatly enhanced...further fuelling the expansion of EU exports of value-added food products. This is particularly the case for simple value-added food products, where the price of the agricultural raw materials is proportionally far more important to the price of the final product than for more sophisticated value-added food products. Unfortunately, it is precisely these simple value-added food products that have been the starting point for agriculture-based industrial development' (Goodison, 2007: 292).

Consequently, 'The EU approach to agricultural reform thus has serious implications for African food and agricultural production. Indeed, it could well serve to lock African agricultural production into an externally oriented system of production where prices received are either stagnant or declining' (ibid: 295). Critics have equally argued that the replacement of non-reciprocal trade preferences as provided by Lomé by reciprocal trade agreements, known as Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) will likely continue these same trajectories.

### **Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs)**

The EPAs have proven to be highly controversial aspects of the EU's ongoing relationship with SSA. As part of any EPA, the domestic markets of the ACP countries have to be opened up to EU products and all barriers to trade have to be removed—conformity with the WTO is mentioned several times in the Cotonou Agreement. This necessarily introduces high levels of unfair competition into African economies as European producers are granted access to overseas markets whilst benefiting immensely from price competitive exports due to high levels of direct income support from the EU to enhance EU international competitiveness. Just the elimination of unfair cotton subsidies paid by the USA, China, and the EU to their farmers would increase the income of West African cotton producers by US\$250 million per annum. According to Overseas Development Institute (ODI) estimates, EU cotton subsidies alone account for up to 38 percent of annual income losses of cotton farmers in West and Central Africa; their elimination would increase the cotton export earnings of Benin and the Republic of Chad by US\$9 million and 12 million, respectively (Gillson et al., 2004).

Furthermore, Cotonou extends economic relations to include trade in services and other trade related matters e.g. product standards, intellectual property rights. The push to include these in EPAs has been particularly controversial, as the EU has succeeded in inducing concessions on the liberalization of "new generation" areas or "Singapore Issues", such as government procurement, health, services, competition policies and investment. Including such "Singapore Issues" is not required for an EPA to be compliant with WTO strictures, but it is considered central by the EU in its interpretation of the reciprocity principles of the Cotonou Agreement. However, such non-tariff liberalization threatens to reify, if not extend, the domination of ACP economies by EU corporations. Besides, any liberalization of such "new generation" issues will be mostly unidirectional in the EU's favor.

Equally problematic is the most-favored nation (MFN) clause. The MFN decree automatically confers any trade benefits under future agreements with other countries onto the EU as long as it concerns a country that contributes 1.5 percent or more to the global economy. The practicalities of this is that any ACP country that signed a trade deal with developing economies such as Brazil, China or India would have to extend exactly the same terms to the whole of the EU. Given the rise of interest by such countries in Africa, the MFN seems designed to prevent such emerging economies from establishing trade pacts with African nations without the EU benefiting. Once they are signed, EPAs will be separate trading arrangements either with regional economic blocs (the EU's preference) or bilaterally.

The advent of EPAs has generated widespread opposition within European circles. Of note, the British Department of Trade and Industry and the Department for International Development issued a joint position paper that critiqued the EU's promotion of reciprocity within EPAs, arguing that EPA negotiations should not be exploited as a means to forcibly open up the markets of the ACP countries, pointing out that 'ACP regional groups have maximum flexibility over their own market opening', with over twenty years time for market opening (cited in Goodison, 2005: 296). In turn, the EU's Trade Commissioner, Peter Mandelson, himself British, rejected this 'major and unwelcome shift' in London's stance to EPAs and criticized the influence of campaigning NGOs and celebrities, asserting that Britain's position 'could well make progress with EPA negotiations more difficult by reinforcing the views of the more skeptical ACP states and raising the prospect of alternatives that are, in reality, impractical' (The Guardian (London), May 19, 2005). Such "impractical" demands have been spearheaded by a variety of European civil society organizations such as the STOP-EPA campaign.

In the context of the continuing crisis in the WTO's negotiations on further trade rounds, the EU's project to promote reciprocity as a key element of its EPAs is a main target of the organizations, with claims that they are neo-colonial in nature and nakedly in the interest of EU-based multinational corporations. Raffer (2001) in fact has asserted that 'Free Trade Areas (FTAs) must...be expected to reflect mainly if not solely European interests – to soften the pressures of globalisation on Europe, as the Commission formulated, giving European exporters an advantage over other industrialised countries. This does not suggest development considerations as the main reason'. The STOP-EPA organisation has stated that 'The EU has narrowed down the Cotonou objectives of poverty eradication and sustainable development to a self-serving trade and investment liberalisation agenda. EPAs will increase the domination and concentration of European firms, goods and services' ([www.stopepa.org](http://www.stopepa.org)).

Meanwhile, Oxfam's position is that 'The European Commission clearly wants to use EPAs as a tool to open markets and further its own interests. This is not good. EPAs in their current form would be detrimental to development. They are free trade agreements by any other name and are currently designed to get the most for Europe without the necessary consideration of the negative effects on weaker developing country partners. (The Guardian, (London) May 19, 2005). Even the European Parliament has joined in the criticisms, noting in 2007 that it was 'very concerned that too rapid a reciprocal trade liberalization between the EU and the ACP could have a negative impact on vulnerable ACP economies' and that 'liberalizing trade between unequal partners as a tool for development has historically proven to be ineffective and even counterproductive' (European Parliament, 2006: 1).

From the African side, 'There are increasing anxieties on the part of the African partners about the

outcome of the EPA negotiations. During the EU-Africa Summit in Lisbon in December 2007, African statesmen such as Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade and South Africa's Thabo Mbeki made it clear that they considered the EU proposals for EPAs a dead letter which had to be renegotiated by extending the deadline' (Kohnert, 2008: 13). 'In addition, the AU Commission president Alpha Oumar Konaré insisted on Africa's right to protect its infant industries. He accused the EU of playing the old divide-and-rule game in Africa by luring more advanced economies such as Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire, and Ghana...into signing stop-gap interim bilateral agreements (IEPAs)' (ibid.).

The controversial nature of the EPAs might be seen as part and parcel of a continuing trend to both "open up" ACP markets for the EU's corporate interests as well as an attempt to reconfigure the Global South to accord with the accumulation strategies of capitalist interests. Since 'capitalism encompasses the entire globe, its architects require a universal vision, a picture of a globally conceived society, to join classes in different countries...[in order] to institutionalise global capital accumulation by setting general rules of behaviour and disseminating a developmentalist ideology to facilitate the process' (Mittelman and Pasha, 1997: 51). The political aspect of EU-SSA relations seems to fit with such analysis.

### **Politics, Conditionalities and EU-SSA Ties**

Conditionalities have always existed in EU-SSA relations; the first condition is to join up to any Convention promoted by the EU. As Crawford (2001: 2) notes, 'development aid has always been political...with implicit conditionality'. Initially however, the first Lomé Convention at least claimed that the respect of state sovereignty and the self-determination of partners were paramount. Yet as the EU's policies towards Africa have developed, they have become steadily more politicised (Carbone, 2007). Since around the mid-1980s, explicit references to political norms favored by the Union began to be included in pacts. Carl (1999: 116) states that it was the ACP countries who actually initiated this process by asking that a reference to the respect of human rights as a common "belief" be inserted into Lomé III in 1985 as a means of shaming the Netherlands and the United Kingdom for their economic and political ties to apartheid South Africa (Carl, 1999: 116). Due to British and Dutch objections, human rights were reduced to the annex of the text.

As the Cold War ended and as the "wave of democratization" swept over the developing world, the tables were turned and the EU adopted a proactive stance in advocating political matters as perquisites for the EU-ACP relationship (Olsen, 1997). Human rights, liberal democracy and the rule of law were all clauses inserted into the text of Lomé IV Convention and the revised Lomé IV Convention of 1995 actually saw these norms elevated to the status of "essential" as to what the EU-ACP countries were striving to arrive at as part of the Convention. The Cotonou Agreement pushed this further by developing a framework whereby punishment for misdemeanours, in the form of aid suspension for gross abuses of human rights, was introduced.

In contrast to Lomé, Cotonou also established an apparatus for the reduction of aid through possible modifications of Country Strategy Papers (Santiso, 2003). Cotonou also made aid and resource redistribution possible, with mechanism to reward compliant countries, and limit or deny unspent funds to poor performers. This sent 'the message that it is possible to re-allocate the second tranche to other countries that do perform well and take more account of EU priorities' (Crawford, 1996: 509). This followed a broader pattern whereby 'the introduction of explicit

political conditions to aid was additional to the prevailing economic conditionality that had dominated aid policy in the 1980s, with multilateral lending and much bilateral aid dependent on the adoption of International Monetary Fund/World Bank-led structural adjustment programs' (Crawford, 2001: 2).

In this sense, political conditionalities have become part of the EU's development cooperation regime and this fits with the progressive efforts by all major Western donors to use aid as a tool to advance particular understandings of "good governance" (see Abrahamsen, 2000). 'The 1990s witnessed a dramatic increase in interest among western liberal democracies and international organizations in promoting democracy, human rights and good governance as the global gold standards for states' (Burnell, 2006: 3). A remarkable consensus was achieved on both the ends and the means that were declared in the policy statements of donors in the immediate post-cold war period. Indeed, all inter-governmental organisations, as well as OECD states and other donor agencies, more or less accept as commonsense the self-evident virtuosity and truth of the liberal project. This hegemony is reinforced and amplified by the fact that liberalism is the foundation upon which the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) operate.

Such a normative agenda is equally dominant within the EU, with a broad consensus on what is "good" economic policy linked to what constitutes the fundamentals of any governance structures. All of this fosters an intellectual climate at the EU's policy level in which the basic assumptions of liberalism go unproblematised: 'Untrammelled international competition, the celebration of the market, of wealth and self, anti-communism and anti-unionism; all these are no longer propagated as "revolutionary" in the sense of challenging a prevailing consensus of a different content, but they are now part of normal every day discourse; self-evident, near impossible to contradict or even doubt' (Overbook and van der Pijl in Overbeek, 1993: 2). 'We are given to understand that the laws of the market will inevitably embrace the whole world, so there is really no point in fighting them' (Wood, 2006: 15). The EU's relationships with the ACP countries fit such a portrayal (Wood, 2006).

This is important, as on the EU's part, 'In addition to the general goal of forging good relations with (potential) political and economic partners across the globe, the Union also wishes to use its place in international relations as a vehicle for advocating some of the values it considers important. Among these values are democracy, social welfare, human rights and liberalism' (Arts/Dickinson: 1). It should be noted that the EU does not generally make an explicit distinction between the promotion of human rights and the promotion of liberal democracy; they are assumed to be one and the same thing. Indeed, 'the promotion of democracy and human rights has become an increasingly central feature of EU external relations policy over the past 15 years, including in Africa. It is a prominent characteristic both of the EU's development co-operation policy and of its foreign policy more generally' (Crawford, 2004: 3).

Hurt (2004) notes the EU's policy approaches to achieve its objectives vis-à-vis liberal democracy and "good governance" were twofold: firstly, provide positive support for specific aid projects and programmes aimed at strengthening respect for human rights and liberal democratic practices and institutions. Secondly, as noted, introduce sanctions when there are perceived breaches of human rights, a lack of democracy/democratisation, or serious state corruption (Portela, 2009). This fits with the notion that the key element of conditionality is 'the use of pressure, by the donor, in terms of threatening to terminate aid, or actually terminating or reducing it, if conditions are not met by the recipient' (Stokke, 1995: 11).

An EU Council of Ministers meeting in 1991 established much of the framework for the implementation of such measures. The adoption of the resolution of the Council of Ministers on "Human Rights, Democracy and Development" in November 1991, 'was, and remains, the pivotal policy statement' as it "made promotion of human rights and democracy both an objective and a condition of development co-operation' (Crawford 2000: 92). and as the 1990s progressed, various African regimes fell foul of the EU. Aid was suspended to The Gambia in 1994 following the military coup that deposed President Dawda Jawara, to Liberia in 1998 in objection to President Charles Taylor's support for the Sierra Leonean Revolutionary United Front, and to Togo in 1998 in protest against sham presidential elections. Reflecting the power disparities between the EU and its erstwhile ACP "partners", the ACP-EU Joint Assembly was not conferred with when political questions were deployed as a means to trigger and justify the suspension of aid. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the Maastricht Treaty on the European Union made the promotion of liberal democracy and human rights a key objectives of the newly created second pillar, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). In other words, from Brussels' perspective, liberal conceptions of democracy and human rights were non-negotiable. In fact, since May 1995, human rights and democracy clauses have been inserted into all EU-ACP agreements and allow for the use of conditionality mechanisms.

Criticism of the EU's use of conditionalities to promote reforms centre on the suspicion that the EU utilises political reform as a means to economic liberalization, and political conditionality and democracy promotion as means of promoting dominant relationships. Yet according to Uvin (1993: 68) 'conditionality can be said to have been effectively exercised only if a recipient country undertakes a policy change that would not have undertaken by itself, that is, without the pressure made to bear upon it by the donor'. Following on from this, a number of constraints on the effectiveness of conditionalities can be outlined (Olsen, 1998). Firstly, in comparison to other sources of revenues, such as trade and foreign investment, aid is largely insignificant in most countries, reducing the power to delay aid suspension as a viable political instrument. Secondly, there is no clear definition of what constitutes the priorities for aid and other considerations are often deemed more important, such as economic or geopolitical objectives.

Thirdly, most of the EU's ex-colonial powers have their client states and "pets" and work hard at defending these from predation by other EU member states and/or punishment from the EU as a whole. A somewhat cynical "gentlemen's agreement" is in fact in operation, which shields miscreants. Ethiopia and Zaire, for instance, 'enjoyed continued EC financial support [and] have been prominent recipients of EC aid even though their human rights records are clearly abysmal' (Nwobike 2005: 1395). Generally, those African elites who have the temerity to challenge the ex-colonial power or who have no active patrons within the EU are the most vulnerable to sanctions. Witness the cases of Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan and Zimbabwe's relations with the EU. It is rare that this tacit agreement is breached, although France did just that in 2003 when President Robert Mugabe was invited to the Franco-African Summit, provoking apoplexy in London.



## Conclusions

As a means of furthering EU interests, the European Council adopted in December 2005 a new Strategy for Africa. This was the first EU concept paper with a continental focus and aimed to provide an integrated framework for EU-Africa relations. The plan of the Strategy for Africa is that the various foreign, security, trade and development policies will be coordinated under this new framework. This is in part a response to the long-standing criticism that the EU's "actorness" is limited by its divergent members' various—and often contesting—interests and the concomitant overlapping and duplication of policies (see Manners and Whitman, 2001). The Strategy emphasizes the notion of "partnership" with Africa and explicitly links its emergence to the new institutional dynamics within Africa such as the establishment of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the African Union (AU). However, the disjuncture between the EU's self-perceived role and that of others' views on the organization is again highlighted by the very concept of "partnership". Though a fashionable term amongst all main development agencies and IFIs, the possibility of genuine equality in the relationship has long been in doubt, reducing the term "partnership" to mere rhetorical status (see Hurt 2003; Raffer 2001).

In fact, the notion of "partnership" is undermined by other conceptions of the EU as being a mercantilist actor in global trade (Wolf 1995: 335-6). Here, the EU is seen as primarily an economic power that utilises its commercial muscle to force open foreign markets whilst maintaining a (relatively) closed domestic market. Critics point to the EU's agricultural sector and the CAP as examples of the latter; the EPAs as examples of the former. From this perspective, it could be argued that the concessions granted at Lomé were historical anomalies that sprang from a specific temporal conjuncture i.e. the rise of Third Worldism and the NIEO moment. The preferential market access that was granted to the ACP countries on the basis of non-reciprocity is, in this view, under a process of correction with the planned rolling out of the EPAs. Here, the EU's deft deployment of the WTO's prescriptions as being both fixed and also beyond the control of the EU (despite the fact that the EU, collectively, is a weighty component of the WTO) is a useful alibi for Brussels. Critics argue that this attempt to shift the blame to the WTO is actually a premeditated effort by the EU to clear itself of any blame for policy decisions that are in fact its own (Hurt 2003: 174).

Intriguingly though, such negative observations of the EU as a hypocritical protectionist power are not coupled with a wider negative assessment of its role in the broader international system. Indeed, the EU's role in promoting multilateralism and its ostensible willingness to promote a new multipolar global order goes down well in most African capitals, particularly within the context of recent American foreign policy. Criticism of the EU's role in international trade issues is often mitigated by other evaluations of the EU. And of course, the importance of the EU as a "model" for regional integration is something that has considerable purchase across the continent and which the EU has been active in promoting via technical assistance to various regional economic communities in Africa.

Yet it remains that 'the EU is often described as an inconsistent actor which, while reiterating the importance of the fight against poverty and the quest for sustainable development in its public statements, continues to perpetuate poverty in the so-called developing world through unfair practices and double standards in some of the most sensitive sectors for developing economies' (Fioramonti and Poletti, 2008: 168) Having said that, as Effeh (2008: 88) reminds us, 'by overemphasizing the issue of protectionism in Western markets, commentators on Africa often

ignore one of the region's defining problems: its lack of basic infrastructural and institutional capacity... In a sense, it could be argued that the region's inability to create the necessary institutions and infrastructure is a direct function of resource constraints. Yet, this would ignore the fact that in many cases, resources are either stolen by the ruling elite, or diverted into inappropriate projects, while public institutions are constantly undermined by what media commentators sometimes describe as "bad politics".

To summarize the evolution of the EU's relations with SSA remain dominated by notions of partnerships via development cooperation and inconsistencies regarding economic dealings that often exert powerfully negative images of the EU as a collective unit that gives with one hand but that takes back with the other. Handicapped by the divergent interests of its various members, the question remains whether the EU can move from individual action to a genuinely common set of policies towards SSA (Vorrath, 2005). Indeed, the standard of EU policy coherence has been the subject of controversial debates within the EU, particularly with regard to Brussels' ability to speak with a unified voice in international affairs (see Carbone, 2009). 'Despite being institutionalized in the Treaty of Maastricht, policy coherence for development... which implies taking into account the needs and interest of developing countries in non-aid policies, failed to make headway in the EU, remaining the unheeded concern of some NGOs and a small group of member states' (Carbone, 2008). In fact, policy coherence in the developmental realms has been dubbed 'a "mission impossible" for whoever attempts it due to the interplay of various issues and interests, the different commitment to international development of the member states, and the EU's institutional framework' (ibid.).

Certainly, movement on policies is excruciatingly slow whilst the EU as an institution is notorious for its bureaucratic inertia (Olsen, 2005). Paradoxically, it is probably in SSA where the EU has the greatest potential space to manoeuvre and overcome its failure to develop as a truly coherent global political actor (see Söderbaum and Stålgren, 2009). However, Brussels has historically not been able to achieve this, despite the colonial inheritance and the long-standing ties between key EU members and much of the continent. Currently, the hegemony of neoliberalism within the EU serves the broad interests of outwardly-orientated fractions of the EU's ruling elites and navigating the tensions that this creates in any consistent set of development policies remains a key challenge to the EU-SSA relationship, particularly when these same actors practice *de facto* mercantilism in certain areas of policy whilst proclaiming their commitment to liberalisation. Such hypocrisy invites scorn and resentment within Africa. Of course, with the steady emergence of new actors in Africa's international relations, such as China and India, time may be running out for the EU to fashion a more unambiguous Africa policy.

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