# TRANSFORMATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S APPROACH TO AFRICA: TRAJECTORY AND RATIONALE

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## *Abstract*

*The aim of this paper is to trace the trajectory of the European Union's (EU) relations with Africa and to find out the rationale behind the changes of these relations. The EU has been developing stronger cooperation and partnership with African countries. The relations between the former and latter has followed a trajectory shaped by historical factors. The national interest of the EU members and changing dynamics of politics and economics are the drivers of this historical evolution. On the other hand, the research is revealing a particular set of reasons responsible for the changes in the EU's approach to Africa. The article has outlined the legal framework and outcomes of EU-Africa relations. The research paper has analyzed and concluded the trajectory and rationale of the EU's attitude to Africa.*

***Keywords****: European Union, Africa, African Union, China, Security.*

## 1. Introduction

This study has two fundamental aims. One of them is to point out the trajectory of the EU-Africa relations shaped by the historical developments. The other one is to find out the rationale behind the fundamental changes in the EU's approach to Africa. The study is a serious and important attempt to indicate the trajectory which is marked by the historical developments starting from post-colonial times and up to the recent developments. This research paper is also significant in terms of its critical evaluation of the changes of the EU's approach to Africa. It seeks rationale for the fundamental changes of the EU's attitude towards Africa. The author argues that the EU-Africa relations can be traced along the way of a certain trajectory. The article clearly introduces the rationale behind the visible changes of the EU's approach to Africa. The method is qualitative which employed the review of secondary data. The latest research articles have been reviewed and quoted in the area. Realist theory of international relations has been instrumentalized by emphasizing the element of national interest. The manuscript has two main parts. The first part introduces the trajectory of the EU-Africa relations. The second part reveals the rationale behind the outlined changes of the EU's approach to Africa.

## 2. Trajectory of the EU-Africa Relations since 1957

The European Economic Community (EEC) was created in 1957 by six original members. Most of the members are the ex-colonizers of the African continent. The EEC members have special historical perspective towards Africa. The relations have evolved into certain types of relationships i.e. post-colonial, political dialogue and equal partnership and strategic relationship. This part will present the trajectory and all related changes within this context.

### 2.1. Preserving Post-Colonial Connection: Foundation Years of the EEC

In the beginning of the relations, some of the African countries were struggling for independence and, the EEC was in the formation process in late 1950s. Scholars emphasize that European Integration is linked to Europe's desire to pursue national interests in post-colonial and post-independence era. (Hansen and Jonsson, 2014). The character of relations can be explained from the realist perspective which prioritize national interest. Even during the drafting of the Treaty of Rome, some member states, especially France, tried to secure include some clauses to maintain closer relations with Africa. This goal was obviously related to

national interest of some colonial European powers. Economic interests are the main driven factor in the national interest of the European countries.

Initial attempts for closer relations were the series of Yaounde Conventions. They aimed at maintaining the special relationship with the EEC countries and post-independence African countries. Pallotti (2018) argues that Yaounde Conventions have been perceived as functional to the consolidation of a 'neo-colonial' relationship between Africa and the EEC.

> "On the one side, the Yaoundé Conventions helped to strengthen the political influence of the EEC member states on their former Sub-Saharan African colonies. On the other side, the membership of the conventions offered the newly independent African countries both a preferential access to the EEC market and an additional source of foreign aid, and consolidated their relations with the Western bloc within the context of the Cold War." (Pallotti, 2018: 4)

This period indicates that some of the colonial powers in the EEC wanted to fix their relations by trying to compensate their colonial inequalities with non-conditional foreign aid. The Yaoundé Convention of 1963 retained the original focus on economic relations and excluded human rights aspects from development policy and development aid to Africa (Mangala, 2013c: 70). "It must however be stressed that, for their part, former European colonies also insisted on the non-conditionality of development aid, which came to be generally seen as a "right" and a form of compensation for colonial inequities" (Mangala, 2013c: 70). Thus, the EEC's non-conditional foreign aid was a kind of incentive to maintain special relationship with former colonies, even if they experience human rights abuses.

Subsequently, the Lomé Convention in mid-1970s promised more balanced relationship to be established between the EEC and African countries. Pallotti (2018: 4) argues that the EEC promised a more just and more balanced economic order for African countries. "With the Lome Convention, the EEC introduced non-reciprocal trade preferences to the [African, Caribbean and Pacific]ACP countries. One of the aims of the Lome Convention was to compensate the loss of earnings of ACP countries in the EEC market. Especially, the losses stemming from the agricultural trade was considered." (Pallotti, 2018: 4).

Since the EU's perspective, prioritizing economic and trade benefits for Europe, has been criticized, the EU had to add some more moral elements into the formal agreements. Langan (2012: 258) underlines that the Lome III in 1985 included some moral elements indicating poverty issues and a need for solidarity. Langan (2012: 258) argues that, "[m]oral/ethical

norms, in this way, constructed a public image of an egalitarian ACP–EEC partnership on the international stage."

Since the end of the Cold War indicated the start of a new era, the Lome IV Convention brought binding conditionality. According to the Convention, ACP countries would respect human rights and democratic principles. In cases of human rights violations or interruption of democratic principles, the EEC would suspend cooperation with the states concerned. (Pallotti, 2018: 7) However, this conditionality clauses have not been practiced. Mangala (2013c: 71) cites that even though respect for human rights and democracy was considered as a guiding principle of this Convention, their violation could not be sanctioned in practice.

The relations between the EU and sub-Saharan Africa have long been reduced to issues of trade and development cooperation through the Yaounde´ and subsequent Lome´ partnership. (Bagoyoko & Gibert, 2009: 791). However, the agreements could not produce the intended economic growth of African countries. According to European Commission document released in 1996, the Lomé regime was renewed on three separate occasions — in 1981, 1985 and 1989 — but it was believed that the EU failed to provide economic growth and diversification for Africa as outlined in its principal objectives. (Heron & Murray-Evans, 2017: 347)

## 2.2. Political Dialogue and Partnership between Equals: Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA)

The EU-Africa relations were shaped by economic interests of the EU and member states. The EU seemed to provide foreign aid for the development of African countries. During the Cold War, security issues and internal conflicts have been neglected to some extent. The issues of conflict prevention and security have gained importance since the early/mid-1990s (Venturi, 2016: 5). After the second half of the 1990s, Pallotti (2018:12) observes that EU developed a different approach to the problems of conflicts and violence in Africa. The EU promoted a new motto which is 'African solutions to African [security] problems'. The CPA has become an instrument to deal with Africa's problems from a new perspective.

One of the most important novelty in the CPA was the introduction of 'political dialogue' between the EU and the ACP. This political dialogue should 'contribute to peace, security and stability and promote a stable and democratic political environment'. (Bagoyoko & Gibert, 2009: 792) In the same vein, Carbone (2013: 743) argues that the CPA has broadened the earlier

cooperation which has been developed in several agreements. The CPA also added the element of political dialogue to the existing trade and aid pillars. This meant to promote improvement of common interests, while strengthening the partnership between equals. The emphasis on the partnership between equals can be a historical achievement albeit it has been limited in practice.

During this era, in addition to democratic principles, the concept of good governance has been given special emphasis. In terms of economy, private sector-led growth and poverty issues have, also, been addressed. (Pallotti, 2018: 8) In spite of the fact that democratic principles, human rights and good governance are underlined as essential elements of the Agreement, the CPA has also brought a new perspective about corruption. The violations of the above-mentioned principles and serious cases of corruption would bring to the suspension of a state from the CPA agreement (Pallotti, 2018: 9). Unlike Lome Conventions, Mangala (2013c: 73) argues that the CPA introduces a relatively well-developed enforcement mechanism. There are both positive and negative measures in the case of human rights violations. Particularly, in the case of 'negative measures', the CPA rules that sanctions must be of last resort.

## 2.3. Shift to Continental Approach: The Cairo Summit of 2000 and Beyond

The trajectory of the EU-Africa relations has been directed by some geopolitical and economic factors with the turn of the millennium. The rise of the African Union as continental political and security actor is one of the motivators for the EU. The drivers and effects of globalization has also urged the EU to upgrade development-trade nexus. In this context, The EU has decided to adopt some novelties in its relations with Africa. The Cairo Summit of 2000 indicates the EU's willingness to deal with the whole continent together. Since the head of states and governments of both continents have come together first time in the history of EU-Africa relations (Mangala, 2013a: 3-4), this indicates the EU's eagerness to change the character of EU-Africa relations. "The novelty since the turn of the century, however, has been the attempt to pursue a 'common' and continent-wide approach. This attempt to pursue a unitary policy towards the entire Africa, under the slogan 'one Europe, one Africa' was not an easy task" (Carbone, 2011: 205).

In addition to this, the recognition by the EU of Africa's growing strategic importance is part of a broad reconceptualization process which has seen a shift from humanitarianism to a strategic view of Africa (Mangala, 2013a: 4). Mangala (2013a: 3-4) quotes that the 2000 EU-Africa Summit in Cairo was the first attempt to "give a new strategic dimension to the global

partnership between Africa and Europe for the Twenty First Century, in a spirit of equality, respect, alliance and cooperation." However, the framework was timid in terms of elevating the relationship to a strategic level. Mangala emphasizes that, it lacked a credible operational structure.

"The Cairo Declaration highlighted peace and security as prerequisites to socioeconomic development." (Haastrup, 2013: 48) Following the Declaration, the African Peace Facility (APF) was created to address African security issues. The APF is a financial tool for peacekeeping operations of the AU and other African regional organizations. (Pallotti 2018: 3) The EU has strengthened the security cooperation against international terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in 2005. With the 2005 CPA review, security became a very essential and integral part of the EU-Africa cooperation. The review also linked security issues with development and poverty reduction.

Haastrup argues that the EU changed its approach to Africa after 2000s. Since the EU included security item in the agreements, it is the important indicator that the EU will support African aims instead of dictating some items. The inclusion of security has brought a new approach which links security and trade issues (Haastrup, 2013: 47-48).

On the other hand, at the beginnings of 2000s, the EU's development policy has, also, been upgraded. The EU's reforms have made EU's development policy more poverty-oriented (Carbone, 2012: 6). Since the adoption of new agenda in 2005, the EU has made particular efforts to formulate a more comprehensive European policy toward Africa, through synergies between the EU's activities regarding development aid, democracy promotion and peace-building (Stahl, 2011: 152).

## 2.4. New Strategic Level: Joint Africa–EU Strategy (JAES) and Lisbon Process of 2007

JAES Review in 2005 Bamako Summit added new layers to the strategic relations. "The EU and Africa expressed the need to make a qualitative change to their relationship by gradually transforming it into a "more political, more global and more equal" partnership …" (Mangala, 2013b: 19). More critically, Haastrup (2013: 48) argues that "Prior to the adoption of the JAES, EU-Africa cooperation on peace and security was practically nonexistent." This indicates that JAES critically improved the strategic aspects of the relations. On the other hand, Mangala (2013) also asserts that the JAES has led to a greater institutional rapprochement between the

African Union (AU) and the EU. Thus, the JAES has, also, added a further strategic layer to the relations between the EU and the AU.

"The Lisbon Summit has been a watershed moment in the history of Africa-EU relations, a moment that witnessed the emergence—for the first time— of a common strategy to address common challenges and seek new opportunities" (Mangala, 2013b: 20). The EU has reviewed the critics and corrected some of the criticized issues. One of the critics was the incoherence of the EU's policies towards Africa. Thus, "following the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union has embarked on a fundamental re-thinking of its external action, with the aim of enhancing external coherence and impact" (Carbone, 2013: 750).

This framework came into force in December 2007 during the Portuguese presidency of the EU. The JAES provides the EU with the opportunity to mentor Africa into deepened integration as it calls for constant dialogue and engagement. Unlike previous arrangements, the JAES emphasises equality, partnership, and local ownership as the basis of new EU–Africa relations. Potentially it challenges the prioritisation of the EU as a model of self-replication and/or self-justification. (Haastrup, 2013: 793)

## 2.5. Consolidation of Africa's Strategic Importance: The EU and African Relations within the Framework of New Security Threats

New security threats in the form of environmental security, border security (migration) and human security has dominated the agenda in recent years. In addition to security and development connection, migration issues have also become a central issue in the framework of the EU-Africa relations. Since the early 2000s, migration has become a priority issue for the EU (Pallotti, 2018: 16). For example, the 2010 revision of CPA has "strengthened cooperation in regional integration, climate change and the role of national parliaments as actors of cooperation" (Venturi, 2016: 7). In addition to this framework in the CPA, the actualization and operationalization of these agreements are remarkable in the EU-African relations. For instance, the EU Trust Fund for Africa was introduced in 2015. The aim of the Fund was to find out the root causes of migration from African countries to the EU. The Fund also includes rapid financing mechanisms to fight against illegal immigration (Pallotti, 2018:16-17). Another important achievement is that the EU Trust Fund for Africa "combines migration and development issues." (Venturi, 2016: 8) This shows the clear departure from only developmental approach to the relations. This Fund is now tied to the new Migration

Partnership Framework introduced by the EU in June 2016 that fully integrates migration in the European Union's foreign policy and act combining different policy elements like development aid, trade, mobility, energy and security (Venturi, 2016: 8). All these strategic connections has helped to consolidate Africa's strategic importance for the EU members.

## 3. Rationale behind the Fundamental Changes of the EU-African Relations

This study aims to explore why the EU's approach to Africa has changed, fundamentally. The historical review of the relations indicated the points where the EU-Africa engagements have changed, strategically, critically and even fundamentally. There are three main reasons for this change. The first one is the increasing critics to the EU's approach to Africa in terms of the EU's effects on African economic policies and development. The second one is rapidly growing global security threats after 2000s and its implications for the EU and Africa relations. The third one is the emerging of new rivals in Africa to challenge the EU's longstanding role in the Continent. The most important competitor is China. The other rising powers in the continent are India, Brazil, and to some extent Turkey. "Growing interest in multi-vectorism on the African side to decrease their dependency is also an incentive for the rise of rivals in the region to the EU  (Nezihoglu, 2020)".

## 3.1. Critics to the EU's Approach to Africa and Its Effects on Africa's Development and the EU Affairs

The EU's engagement with Africa has long been criticized by many scholars in the context of colonialism and neo-colonialism. However, these critics have, exponentially, increased together with the rise of post-colonial scholarship and literature in various perspectives i.e. economics and human rights.

The critics can be categorized into three areas. The first one is the nature of the economic relations with African countries. The economic relations have been labeled under the unequal and unfair power asymmetries in trade agreements. Langan (2012) also criticizes the EU's EPA's with African countries with an article of "reciprocal trade". Langan (2012: 261-263) presents many empirical evidence that the reciprocal trade clause much benefited to the EU and harmed African countries.

Langan also criticizes these agreements from the aspects of the regressive consequences of liberalization (Langan, 2012: 261). The critics have accused the EU for its deliberate actions to exploit these trade agreements in favor of the EU's national interests. Besides, these

economic relations are structured around the coercive character of the EU. According to critical scholars, the EU coerces the African countries to open their markets to unfair penetration.

Some other scholars indicate the EU's imposition on African countries. These researchers use coercion as one of the practices of the EU. Haastrup (2013) criticizes the EU's approach to Africa (and to the ACP in general). Haastrup argues that the EU used coercion in its relations with African countries. Since the EU clearly benefited from the series of EU-ACP agreements, it shows the EU's coercive legal abilities (Haastrup, 2013: 792). EU's coercion in economic and trade relations have resulted many negative c consequences and produced further criticisms.

As many critics argue the EU imposed economic and political conditionalities over African countries. Mainly, EPA's has been criticized as a coercive instrument of the EU. Carbone (2013) quoted Adedeji (2012) about the critical aspects of the EPAs. According to Adedeji (2012),  EPA's are critical instruments and they "are another example of how Brussels abuses its vast negotiating power and aid budget to isolate and exploit individual African states and coerce them to open their markets to unfair penetration by European farmers and manufacturers" (Adedeji, 2012: 91 quoted in Carbone, 2013: 749). In the same vein, Pallotti (2018: 6) argues that "Lomé IV firmly aligned the EU-ACP cooperation with the neo-liberal development vision of the Washington Consensus." Pallotti (2018) further criticizes that neoliberal reforms have been imposed in the guise of democracy promotion. For instance, the respect for democracy and human rights became a necessary condition for membership of the Lomé Convention.

The second issue on which critics focus is that the EU's aid to African countries. The EU's aid has been undergone several critics from different aspects. The effectiveness of the aid and bureaucratic delays in providing the aids are the two major critics. The EU has developed several agencies and fund for development aid. EDF was the first one which is created in 1958. According to critics, the EPAs are general and vague, and no clear aid commitments can be found in the agreements (Pallotti, 2018: 11). Pallotti, (2018: 7) also argues that increasing proportion of EDF resources was used to support the implementation of neo-liberal economic reforms. This can imply the lack of effectiveness of aid.

The third on of these critics is about the coherence and consistency of the EU's policies towards Africa. Initially, EU policy-making researchers almost agree that DGs in different policy areas

have conflicting interests. Based on this argument, many scholars argue the lack of coherence and consistency in EU's policy development and implementation with regards to Africa's issues. One of the major problems in this area is the predominance of national interests of a single EU member. In that sense, the effectiveness of the EU policies is being increasingly questioned since the observers detected the absence of common policy making and implementation at the EU level. "European policymaking toward African countries remains fragmented. Foreign and security policy, trade, and development policy still constitute separate policy fields with different actors, interests and decision-making structures" (Hackenesch, 2013: 10).

The lack of policy coherence and consistency among different European policies and institutions involved in the EU's external relations with Africa (Stahl, 2011: 158) have produced conflicting policy outcomes for EU's interests. Besides, dominating of EU-policy-making agenda by a single or few EU member states have created obstacles for the implementation of a coherent European approach toward Africa. Especially, it is obvious in the case of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) due to the unanimity decision-making and the dominant role of member states. If the ex-colonial powers of Europe had a stake, they can make it difficult to adopt comprehensive and common African policy of the EU (Stahl, 2011: 159). In terms of consistency, the EU experienced more challenges. Stahl (2011: 158) observes that the EU never applied political conditionality in a consistent manner apart from Zimbabwe due to undemocratic practices of late-President Robert Mugabe. This conditionality was not a rule though.

The fourth on of these critics is about the EU's normative power which has been addressed by many scholars. Many scholars labelled the EU as normative power. However, in the case of the EU-Africa relations, the EU's imposition on norms as a form of conditionality has, also, been attacked by critics. Stahl (2011: 158) summarizes the negative observations regarding to the EU's normative power. Despite the large literature about the normative leadership of the EU, according to critics, the EU is was not an effective normative power in Africa. Besides, the rhetoric of policy statements frequently does not meet the practice on the ground. It, actually, damages the EU's reputation as an allegedly normative power.

## 3.2. Growing Global Security Threats after 2000s

Since the beginnings of the 2000s, global security environment has produced paradigm shifts and new challenges for many Western countries. September 11 Tragedy in the US has given the birth of a new concept of security doctrine, 'the war on terror'. This new security doctrine of the US has also been adopted by other Western countries. The central idea of this doctrine is to fight the networks of terrorists in global scale. The EU has also emphasized the necessity to fight the networks of global terrorists in developing world, including Africa. This new phenomenon has fundamentally changed the EU's approach to its relations with Africa.

The other important security challenge is about human security. Illegal immigration has been affecting many European countries for some decades due to the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and poverty related issues in Pakistan and others. Besides these, long standing conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have also been the sources of illegal immigration to European countries for many years. Moreover, the outbreak of the Arab Springs in most of the MENA countries has deteriorated the existing situation about illegal immigration. The volume of illegal immigrants has exploded, especially, after the crisis in Libya. The EU had to take more serious and profound measures to effectively secure the EU members from the dangers of illegal immigration as well as to curb the number of illegal immigrants.

The EU had to fight to stop or reduce irregular and illegal migration from the African continent. Increasingly, due to contemporary challenges, it is becoming the priority area for European in dealing with Africa. Thus, the EU developed its dialogue with Africa around this strategic goal. (D'Humières, 2018: 2) Africa, as continent, has gained a strategic advantage in terms of providing security to this new challenge.

According to Barigazzi (2017), the EU had to concern more deeply about Africa not only foreign policy perspective but also from the necessities of domestic politics. "The challenges of migration and terrorism, which have fueled a rise in populism in Europe, have brought home to EU leaders that they have a strong interest in fostering stability and prosperity across Africa — or at least in showing voters that they are doing something to address their concerns" (Barigazzi, 2017).

### 3.3. Emerging New Competitors in Africa

Historically, the EU has been considering itself as the leading player in Africa. The EU's historical legacy goes back to the colonial periods. However, globalization and global trade agreements have caused new strategic engagements with African countries and the emerging economic powers of the world. China is the most active of them to conclude commercial agreements and investment contracts with many African countries (Arabaci and Ozden, 2019). China also engages in many African countries by security cooperation, development aid and social responsibility projects. In that sense, China is emerging as a real rival to the EU's traditional place in Africa. Beside China, India and Brazil has also increased their efforts to engage in commercial and investment activities in Africa not only focused on oil sector but also on pharmaceuticals, timber, agriculture etc. Additionally, Turkey's limited success in humanitarian aid and investments in particular countries such as Somalia and Sudan has, also, led to deeper engagement with Africa in the areas of economy, trade as well as security cooperation. Turkey's ambitions in security cooperation with Somalia, Djibouti and now Niger has become evident with closer military engagements or the establishment of Turkish military bases (Ozkan, 2020). In brief, the proliferation of China's and other actors' activities in Africa have resulted the emergence of real competitors to the EU. The EU had to change its traditional aid-and-development-driven-approach, fundamentally.

China challenges the EU in many aspects. Firstly, China' s production and trading power have dominated most of the African countries import markets in many products. China puts competitive pressure over many rival companies' products originated from many EU countries. China's growing and multilayered presence in Africa is probably the main factor challenging the historical and privileged relationship between the European and the African continents in different fields. (Venturi, 2016: 9) Secondly, China presents new mode of engagement in many areas such as infrastructure, finance and investment. According to Hackenesch (2013: 14), China offers alternative approach for the cooperation with Africa and financing important amount of development projects in Africa. These efforts of China produce considerable 'competitive pressure' on the European aid regime. In this context, Hengari (2012) evaluates the EU-China relations based on competition or cooperation in Africa.

How the EU, fundamentally, changing its approach to Africa. The answer is in a more pragmatic way which retains the elements of national interest as indicated in realist theory.

China's influence shifted the EU to a more pragmatic approach to Africa. Stahl (2011: 159) argues that the EU is slowly moving away from a purely development aid-driven interaction and toward a more economically motivated partnership with Africa. Due to the growing Chinese influence in Africa, "the EU is shifting its approach to development aid to a more pragmatic and partnership-based approach" (Venturi, 2016: 13).

## 4. Conclusion

This research paper has summarized the trajectory of the EU-Africa relations. The milestones of the affairs have been indicated by the new clauses in the agreements and new narratives used in official documents regulating the EU's affairs with Africa. Remarkable changes have been indicated for particular time frames. One of the conclusions is that the EU's approach has changed fundamentally due to historical catalysts such as the post-colonial factors, pos-Cold War factors and the new security environment of 2000s. The second part of the research has summed up the rationale behind the changes of the EU's attitude and approach in African affairs. The fundamental changes occurred due to three main factors. The first one was the exponential increase in critics towards the EU's approach to Africa. Especially, the EU's moral economy, coercive diplomacy and deficiencies in aid-development nexus have been criticized. Thus, the EU's normative actorness has also been questioned. Therefore, the EU had to fix its image and tried to regain its normative actorness by addressing to these critics. The other factor was the requirements for updating the EU's approach to Africa due to the growing global security threats after 2000s such as illegal immigration and regional conflicts. The EU had to deal with these issues by establishing a strategic partnership with Africa. The last factor is the emerging new competitors in Africa. China, India, Brazil and, in some areas, Turkey have become more active in African investment, development, aid and security areas. This new phenomenon has forced the EU to upgrade its relations in more pragmatic way. The EU realized that it should also develop a more coherent common strategy for Africa. Basically, the EU does not want to loose its historical and traditional partners to competitors. Apparently, this shows EU's consideration for national interest in relation to African affairs.

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