



# **BROADENING THE DEBATE ON EU–AFRICA RELATIONS**

Edited by  
Frank Mattheis and John Kotsopoulos



# Broadening the Debate on EU–Africa Relations

*Broadening the Debate on EU–Africa Relations* is designed to expand the scope of our understanding of the multi-layered relationship between the European Union (EU) and African political actors in order to shape both the academic and policy level discourses.

The focus on chapters highlighting an African perspective offers an opportunity to redress an imbalance in scholarship, and also represents an effort to reinvigorate the EU–Africa discourse. The contributors scrutinise hitherto underexplored areas, from agricultural cooperation to sanctions to scientific collaboration, as new insights linger in the less visible margins of the relationship. Jointly, they push in the same direction, to broaden the debate on how subjects are approached in a field of study that has one-sidedly focused on the effect of deliberate actions of the EU. To that end, three dimensions represent the common thread of the book: how to recalibrate African and European perspectives, how to proceed on an assumption of mutual influence rather than unidirectionality and how to highlight the intertwined nature of the different drivers of the relationship.

Recalibrating African and European perspectives by focusing on elements of reciprocity within the broad array of interregional interactions, *Broadening the Debate on EU–Africa Relations* will be of great interest to scholars of African Studies, African IR and the EU.

The chapters were originally published as a special issue of the *South African Journal of International Affairs*.

**Frank Mattheis** is a researcher at the Institut d'études européennes, Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium, and the Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, University of Pretoria, South Africa. He holds a PhD in Global Studies and specialises in comparative regionalism and interregionalism.

**John Kotsopoulos** is an Associate Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, University of Pretoria, South Africa. He holds a PhD in International Relations (University of Kent, UK) with focus on asymmetrical negotiations between the EU and Africa.



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Maurizio Carbone

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Jo-Ansie van Wyk

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*Exploring 'brain circulation' as a concept to mitigate brain drain in Africa and improve EU–Africa cooperation in the field of science and technology*

Amr Radwan and Mahmoud Sakr

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*Characterising partnership for research and innovation in Sub-Saharan Africa: Lessons from the case of the Africa–EU ProIntensAfrica Initiative*

John Ouma-Mugabe, Petronella Chaminuka and Ana M P Melo

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*The European Union and security sector reform: South Sudan and the challenge of ownership*

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**Chapter 8**

*Interregionalism and police cooperation against cross-border crime in East Africa: Challenges and prospects*

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# Contributors

**Tasnim Abderrahim** was recently a Visiting Fellow with the Middle East and North Africa programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations. She previously worked as a Junior Policy Officer at the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) in Maastricht, the Netherlands, and as a Research Assistant with the Centre des Etudes Méditerranéennes et Internationales (CEMI) in Tunis, Tunisia.

**Faten Aggad-Clerx** is an Africa analyst covering African development issues. She is currently the Program Manager for Africa at the European Centre for Development Policy Management. Previously she worked as a business associate at the Maendeleo Group, an advisory firm based in Cape Town, South Africa. Faten is Algerian and has formerly worked for several think-tanks and as a consultant for the United Nations system.

**Philomena Apiko**, a Ugandan national, is a Policy Officer in the African Institutions Programme. She holds a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) and Master of Laws (LLM) in Human Rights Law, from the University of Cape Town, South Africa. She also has a Master of International Law and Economics from the World Trade Institute in Bern, Switzerland. She specialises in African Union institutions and regional integration processes.

**Maurizio Carbone** is a Professor of International Relations and Development and Jean Monnet Professor of European Union (EU) External Policies at the University of Glasgow, UK. He has published extensively on the EU's external policies, particularly foreign aid and other development-related policies, EU–Africa relations and the EU–ACP partnership.

**Petronella Chaminuka** is the Principal Economist in the Agricultural Research Council Unit in Pretoria, South Africa, and was involved as a researcher in the ProIntensAfrica project. She specialises in agricultural and development issues.

**Arnold H Kammel** has been the Director of the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES) since 2015. He studied Law and Political Science in Graz, Vienna and Alcalá de Henares (Madrid), and holds a Doctor of Law degree from the University of Graz, Austria. In 2004 Arnold Kammel became a Research Fellow at the AIES. From 2007 to 2014, he served as the Secretary General of the AIES. His research interests include European integration (focusing on EU foreign, security and defence policy) in general, as well as EU crisis management in Africa in particular.

**John Kotsopoulos** is an Associate Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, University of Pretoria, South Africa. He holds a PhD in International Relations (University of Kent, UK) with focus on asymmetrical negotiations between the EU and Africa.

**Jacob Lisakafu** is a Lecturer on international relations at the Open University of Tanzania, and the Associate Director of postgraduate studies. He holds a PhD from the Graduate Centre of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Leipzig, Germany. His research interests include peace, security and regionalism in Africa, as well as current dynamics of international relations and cooperation and mechanisms of ensuring global security.

**Frank Mattheis** is a researcher at the Institut d'études européennes, Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium, and the Centre for the Study of Governance Innovation, University of Pretoria, South Africa. He holds a PhD in Global Studies and specialises in comparative regionalism and interregionalism.

**Ana M P Melo** is the Executive Director of the Portuguese Infrastructure of Biological Data – BioData pt., based in Lisbon. She was involved as a researcher in the ProIntensAfrica project.

**Luckystar Miyandazi** is a Policy Officer in the African Institutions Programme, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM). Before joining ECDPM, she worked as the Tax Power Campaign Africa Coordinator at Action Aid International, where she led the development, coordination and delivery of pan-African campaign actions, events and mobilisation activities within 15 African countries. She holds a master's degree (Distinction) from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore – ASERI in Milan, Italy. She has also a Master of Science in Taxation student at the University of Oxford, UK.

**John Ouma-Mugabe** is a Professor of science and innovation policy at the Graduate School of Technology Management at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. He has published on science and technology policy in Africa, biotechnology and environmental policy, and institutional arrangements for environmental sustainability. His current research focuses on the political economy of science, technology and innovation policy-making in Africa.

**Amr Radwan** is the Head of Research and Innovation Management Department at the Egyptian Academy of Scientific Research & Technology (ASRT). Amr has a number of published papers and reports in the area of innovation systems, research governance, science policy and technology development, and co-authored several regional strategies for science and technology. He has served as a consultant with many international agencies, researcher at several institutions and R&D coordinator at Unipharma pharmaceutical corp., where he also founded its process innovation unit.

**Mahmoud Sakr** is currently the President of the Academy of Scientific Research and Technology/Ministry of scientific research in Egypt. Previously, he was the Head of Genetic Engineering & Biotechnology Division at the national research centre in Egypt and the Executive Director of Science, Technology and Development Fund in Egypt. He is a member of several strategic committees at national and international bodies, and steering boards of number of Egyptian research institutions, and has managed national and multinational competitive projects.

**Jo-Ansie van Wyk** is a Professor of international relations at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa. Her research interests include South African foreign policy, diplomacy and international relations, nuclear diplomacy and political leadership.



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# A contextualisation of EU–Africa relations: Trends and drivers from a reciprocal perspective

John Kotsopoulos  and Frank Mattheis 

## ABSTRACT

This article provides a contextualisation for the study of relations between the European Union and Africa. We identify seven major trends and drivers that have characterised the literature surrounding the relationship: colonial legacy, meanings of partnership, asymmetry, market liberalisation, politicisation, regional actorness and the changing global order. In the literature, these elements tend to be examined separately or in unidirectional perspectives. This article argues, however, that each element invariably influences both sides, although not necessarily in the same manner or to the same effect. In addition, most elements are intertwined and influence each other. These entanglements become visible when examining all seven elements as part of one context. This article suggests that proceeding on an assumption of mutual influence and highlighting the intertwined nature of the different elements constitutes a framework that serves this special issue's efforts to recalibrate African and European perspectives in the scholarship.

## Introduction

On 6 March 1957, Kwame Nkrumah declared the establishment of the Republic of Ghana, accelerating the decolonisation process of Sub-Saharan Africa. Less than three weeks later, on March 25, the foundational framework of what is now the European Union (EU) – the Treaty of Rome – was signed. The first shoots of African political independence and of European integration were not only decisive events that helped chart the future trajectories of the two continents. They were also intrinsically linked from the start and, despite seemingly divergent paths – African independence and European interdependence – provided the foundation for an entangled relationship between the two continents. The Treaty of Rome linked France and Belgium's colonies to the then European Economic Community (EEC) by extending preferential terms of trade with all of the EEC member states. The treaty also created a development fund for African countries. This trade and aid model, framed under a developmental umbrella, served as the framework for relations between the EU and Africa into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

However, despite some forward-thinking efforts to improve the terms of trade – most prominently with the 'non-reciprocal' trade clause and export earning guarantees of the

Lomé Convention – the relationship failed to break the long-standing power asymmetry between the two ‘partners’. The donor–client dynamic and perpetual dependency elicited criticisms from all sides. To many, the relationship between Europe (including the EU) and Africa was a neo-colonial and exploitative one. To others, failure was attributed to poor African governance, unable to take advantage of the preferential terms Europe offered.

This inherent tension has been reflected in the body of academic literature on relations between Africa and the ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) on one side and the EU on the other. Some of the best-known works address these problematic dimensions of the relationship, including development and dependency, asymmetrical trade arrangements and the exercise of power.<sup>1</sup>

Notable, however, is the persistence of asymmetry in EU–Africa relations even at the level of scholarship. There is a relative underrepresentation of studies from Africa. Some works by African scholars about EU–Africa relations have come from individuals based outside the continent, such as Babarinde<sup>2</sup> and Mangala.<sup>3</sup> Some recent books on the subject have come from Africa, including works by Oloruntoba, and Adebajo and White-man.<sup>4</sup> Still, the number of journal articles concerning Africa by Africa-based scholars is actually diminishing relative to articles from scholars based outside the continent.<sup>5</sup>

This underrepresentation of African perspectives reinforces the challenge that ‘rarely is the Global South seen as a source of theory and explanation for world historical events’.<sup>6</sup> Providing space for varying interpretations of a changing global order seems obvious – but it is not always evident in the literature even in instances where a conscious effort has been made to address under-representation.<sup>7</sup> Challenging Eurocentric assumptions of universalism<sup>8</sup> and the preponderance of Western understandings of social science in Africa<sup>9</sup> can lead to a richer dialogue between North and South. Similarly, ‘de-linking’ scholarship on EU–Africa relations from any one dominant perspective can circumvent this risk of provincialism.

This special issue of the *South African Journal of International Affairs* has been conceived as an opportunity to broaden the scope of our understanding of the relationship and ultimately shape some of the academic and policy level discourse. Following a scenario-building exercise and two author workshops in 2017 in Pretoria, the articles in this issue offer an opportunity to redress the imbalance in scholarship discussed above, and also represent an effort to reinvigorate the EU–Africa discourse. Scholars scrutinise hitherto under-explored areas, as new insights often linger in the less visible margins of the relationship.

Three of the featured articles in this special issue offer analysis on the broader dynamics of the relationship. Maurizio Carbone examines the current post-Cotonou discussions, tracing not only the territorial clashes between the ACP and African Union as each has sought jurisdiction to lead negotiations with the EU, but also areas where the parties have come together in order to best leverage African interests. Luckystar Miyandazi, Philomena Apiko, Tasnim Abderrahim and Faten Aggad-Clerx assess the contrasting understandings of common challenges facing the two partners, including the perception that solutions to issues such as migration are Europe-driven and seldom Africa-owned. Their paper provides insight into how a redefinition of the basis for cooperation between the EU and Africa could lead to better mutual understanding. Finally, Jo-Ansie Van Wyk looks at the triennial EU–Africa summits and argues that the EU’s pragmatic approach to tolerating the presence of leaders against whom it has imposed punitive measures undermines the efficacy of the EU’s overall sanctions agenda.

Another two articles explore the realm of scientific research, gauging the different ways in which the asymmetry of the relationship can affect specific issue areas. John Ouma-Mugabe, Petronella Chaminuka and Ana M P Melo delve into partnerships for enhancing agricultural transformation in Africa. By tracing the complex process of creating a governance mechanism for a multi-institutional association, they reveal a host of systemic issues that continue to complicate aspirations of equality between EU and African partners.

In a related contribution, Amr Radwan and Mahmoud Sakr address the question of how to optimise scientific collaboration between European and African scholars using a ‘brain circulation’ model. The authors address the challenge of harnessing the expertise of the African diaspora as well as avoiding the perpetual problem of brain drain to Europe. The article provides an insightful example on how a Euro-African issue that is usually framed as unidirectional can be understood in a reciprocal perspective.

Finally, the special issue is rounded out by two articles that contribute in novel ways to one of the historically key areas of focus in the relationship: security. Arnold Kammel takes a critical look at the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy in South Sudan. His work reveals the shortcomings of the EU’s ‘comprehensive approach’ to security sector reform and the extent of local ownership in the EUAVSEC mission. Jacob Lisafaku addresses the growing problem of cross border crime in East Africa, underlining the need for the East African Community and the EU to better integrate their policing support. This, he argues, is an opportunity to strengthen the interregional relationship between the two parties.

In order to provide cohesion to the thematic range of these papers, this introduction to the special issue of the *South African Journal of International Affairs* provides a contextualisation of EU–Africa relations by bridging the gap between two perspectives that, although complementary, are often studied in isolation. The first perspective is concerned with actors that induce or guide action between the two partners: the drivers of the relationship. The second perspective looks at a general direction or pattern in the relationship, which is often historically contingent and structurally rooted: the trends of the relationship.<sup>10</sup> In order to bridge the gap, variables from both perspectives are assembled from an examination of key scholarship concerning the relationship over its 60-year history. This relationship rests on two main pillars. The first pillar is the entanglement between the ACP Group of States and the European Communities, which stems from the Treaty of Rome and is now guided by the Cotonou Agreement. Although the ACP excludes North Africa and includes former colonies outside of Africa, it constituted a central avenue for engagement between the two regions. The second pillar is the EU–Africa partnership under the framework of the Joint Africa–EU Strategy (JAES).

What started as a quasi-colonial endeavour between the embryonic European project and a cluster of francophone African countries in a narrow range of issue areas has become a comprehensive and multilayered partnerships between the European Union and the African continent. In between, the relationship went from a fleeting moment of parity in the nascent days of the New International Economic Order of the 1970s to a largely dependent, donor–client ‘associationism’<sup>11</sup> in subsequent decades.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century ushered in a new era for the relationship, spurred by an economically rejuvenated and politically more self-confident African continent, but also by an evolving EU. This period also marked the development of a dedicated political relationship outside of the ACP structures in the form of the EU–Africa partnership. This dimension of EU–Africa

relations deepened and broadened the scope of cooperation between the two sides. Still, there have been notable instances of disagreement and divergent interpretations of events, as evidenced in negotiations towards the economic partnership agreements (EPAs) between the EU and various regions of Africa. International controversies, such as the NATO-sponsored intervention in Libya in 2011, have also led to instances of distrust between Africans and Europeans.

In the remainder of the article, we aim to combine the relevant but fragmented literature streams on EU–Africa relations in order to provide a contextual framework for this special issue. The following subsections present trends and drivers and combine endogenous as well as exogenous variables to provide the context in which the other articles of this issue need to be situated. The elements consist of colonial legacy, partnership, asymmetry, market liberalisation, politicisation, regional actorness and the changing global order. While these seven elements can also be applied to Africa’s position in international relations at large, we suggest that interactions with the EU are of an exceptional density on all levels.

### Colonial legacy

It would be impossible to ignore the heavy weight of centuries of what has been an often deeply problematic history between Europe and Africa when assessing EU–Africa relations. Europe as a continent has a special and ‘peculiar’ relationship with Africa.<sup>12</sup> The colonial legacy still affects the relationship between the two parties in that ‘it contributes to building expectations of compensation (through aid) and recording disappointments when those expectations are not met’.<sup>13</sup> In addition, 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, for most Sub-Saharan African countries, the EU remains the main trading partner and it absorbs around 85% of Africa’s agricultural exports and 75% of Sub-Saharan Africa’s overall trade.<sup>14</sup> Taylor points out that the colonisation process resulted in Africa’s economies being oriented more towards the needs of European capital than the requirements of the local population, and so set up a pattern of dependency that is very difficult to break and leads to what Daniel Bach has coined ‘integration through hysteresis’.<sup>15</sup> For instance, the CFA Franc currency unions in West and Central Africa, respectively, have proven resilient to decolonisation and remain backstopped by the French Treasury, as African elites have used the monetary link with the EU to invest in property and other assets abroad. European languages still dominate official discourse and education in many African countries.

Of course, no relationship is static. Several junctures over time reveal both the entrenchment of neo-colonial relations and fleeting challenges to the resilience of the colonial legacy.

For instance, the 1957 Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community set the first blueprint for the EEC’s relations with what were, at that time, still its colonies.<sup>16</sup> Enzo Grilli’s analysis explicitly points to a neo-colonial arrangement:<sup>17</sup>

[T]he fundamentals of French colonial theory and many elements of its practices, which had been inserted into the Treaty of Rome, survived and took on a life of their own in this new framework... This linkage was subsequently updated and even partially reshaped, but never altered in a fundamental way even when the countries and territories of Africa became independent states.