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## **EU and Africa: A Few Contentious Points on Security Policies**

### **Introduction**

Regional organizations have been the pillars of the EU-Africa relations for more than two decades. This time allows reflecting on the successes and weaknesses of this priority, though there is a strong consensus that any assessment should be positive, first of all because there is no alternative to this policy.

The main debates nowadays focus on which regional organizations within the continent to promote first, what agenda to push forward, which tools to build as to implement more efficiently and then what the consistency of this policy is, when considered with larger lens. Yet, this important but slightly technocratic discussion often is more complex for two reasons.

On the one hand, EU policies towards Africa are not always what they are stated. Member States, competing agendas, relations with other international organizations, European public opinions move or reframe them in ways that more than often may appear debatable or unclear seen from Africa.

On the other, African regional organizations have very diverse origins and, to a large extent, dealing with one does not help dealing with another. The history of each regional organization and the behaviour over time of the former colonial powers is not the only problem. From the independence onward, new regional settings were set up and some African countries are nowadays part of different organizations that do not always share the same priorities and agendas. The European commitment to deal with all African regional organizations is also tempered by other considerations: ECOWAS gathers more western sympathy than CEN-SAD...

### **A Reassessment of the Africa Policy after 1990**

Since the independences, the European states tried their best to promote regional organizations as economic actors. Typically ECOWAS was seen as a way to encourage regional economic policies which would have positive impacts at national level. In order to carry out economic reforms, the strategy was to start top down more than bottom up, i.e. from regional to national levels more than the opposite. This strategy was rooted in a very negative understanding of the African state as a channel to provide opportunities for rent seekers and coercing the market.

In the early 1990s, this policy was largely left out without actually assessing its success or failure. Suddenly, the debate went on the new regionalism boosted by the

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transformation of the European Community into a European Union. The debate also shifted to security issues after the failures of peace keeping operations in Somalia and Rwanda: the genocide in the latter country was just another proof that military cooperation on a merely bilateral basis was increasingly costly and that Western contingents were not willing to intervene within a normal peace keeping operation anymore.

In a more nuanced manner, this shift could also be understood as an indirect consequence of the reforms affecting the European armies at the end of the Cold War. The reduction of national defence budgets, the end of military competition in Africa, the need also to adapt to new crises (e.g. in the Balkans) convinced former colonial powers that Africa was not worth investing again time, resources and people. Actually the Western ODA to Africa drastically decreased until 2002.

### **A New Doctrine?**

The failure of multilateral interventions certainly played a role in the way new military cooperation policies were designed. The French for instance put emphasis on stabilisation operations with RECAMP (Renforcement des capacités de maintien de la paix). Compared to the US led program ACRI, the French integrated a more civilian-military dimension that today after Afghanistan and Iraq is also acknowledged by the US army.

Yet, the justification of a new doctrine could not rely only on Western military capabilities. It has also to involve African governments; willingly or not, they had to endorse the new situation and find their own advantages in it. Western powers made a concerted effort in public diplomacy to convince everybody that a number of peace keeping operations under regional or continental umbrella had been great successes that could be used as models to frame a new policy that would provide African solutions to African problems.

For instance, ECOMOG in Liberia and Sierra Leone became described as a near to successful operation while its legality was contested from the very beginning by many “Francophones” leaders and its effectiveness even more after the dubious election of Charles Taylor in 1997 as Liberia’s President. As always, the French added their specific touch. The MISAB (Mission de surveillance des accords de Bangui) became a paradigm of the “new spirit” by which African troops were in the forefront of any African peace settlement.

African institutions, under heavy suggestions, endorsed this policy, some because they genuinely thought that they should become collective security actors, others simply because funding was available and this policy offered a way to gain again some leverage on western policies towards the continent.

Yet, many crises were dismissed by African regional or continental bodies, which should have already been a motive of great concern. Even more problematic, this policy provided some ambiguous support to African interventionism. Certainly, the best example was the SADC security organ endorsing an intervention in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 1998 while South Africa was boycotting the meeting. A recent example is the Ethiopian intervention in Somalia with the dubious endorsement of IGAD.

Those facts could and should have provoked an intense political debate between European and African state institutions and Civil Society Organisations. As often, the opposite happened. As disagreements would have surfaced, it was decided to look the following point on the agenda: debates are necessary as far they can conclude by an agreement...

### **The Resilience of Western Interventionism**

Old habits die hard. Whenever Western national or European interests were at stake, old style interventions were still possible with only lip-service paid to African would-be security actors. Those interventions – it should be highlighted – were not always for the mere interests of individual western states but could encompass global issues.

UK intervened in Sierra Leone in different manners. First in 1997, it did so by supporting (or closing its eyes on) private security firms with debatable practices and records. When British troops were sent in early 2000 to avoid a new UN disaster (with hundred of peacekeepers near to become hostages), Tony Blair did not take time to call President Obasanjo and consult with ECOWAS. He did it and then convinced his African colleagues that they actually agreed on this operation.

The same line of argument could be used for France acting in Central African Republic and using the regional forces (FOMUC) as a smokescreen for its own military deeds. More concerning than the unilateral operation in Sierra Leone was the political context of such intervention. Actually, the main target was not violent thugs trying to overthrow a legally elected president Bozizé but Chadian rebels trying to use north-eastern Central African Republic to enter Chad. While François Bozizé had formally accepted national dialogue with its opponents, Idriss Déby was adamant to find a military solution.

Even EU interventions as the Ituri's were not so clearly endorsed by its African counterparts. Many African leaders thought that the crisis in Ituri was overplayed by the UN for its own stake and did not want to hear about such a military intervention. For the European Union (especially the French who played the leading role), it was necessary to save the UN mission in DRC from a major setback after the Iraq crisis. For African leaders, again Africa was the playing ground of a French-US rivalry that had little to do with long term African interests...

### **A Number of Potential Pitfalls**

Even though no one has articulated an alternative policy, one should be aware of the potential shortcomings of such a new security policy. It would be easy to illustrate the following points with crises, events or incidents that took place over the last two or three years.

First, whatever the rhetoric is, conflict prevention is no more a focus and this is troublesome especially at a time the new resolution on “the responsibility to protect” mentions prevention as a first step, while most leaders and public opinions in the West think that military intervention is the solution. The destruction of N'djamena in February 2008 was the outcome of a crisis foreseen for two years. Yet, the European Union just has preferred to endorse the very debatable commitment to Idriss Déby by Paris. Another policy – that was not the support to the rebels – was possible but never really discussed and put on the agenda by Germany and UK, two states that have interests either in Darfur or Chad.

Second, this policy rewards the African military and put them at the core of any efforts to tackle crises. Yet, the impact of such policy on African troops that may have been involved in politics or dream to be is not assessed. In a number of incidents, especially in West Africa (Ivory Coast in 1999 and Guinea Bissau in 1998), African contingents supposed to restore peace and order actually became the very destabilizing element. Only these extreme situations are mentioned here to illustrate the point but one may believe that the problem occurs even in case the Army is genuinely republican.

Third, willingly or not, this policy intends to create regional hegemons that could themselves become points of contradiction. For instance, the European Union is betting on South Africa for obvious reasons. Doing so, it downplays the rivalries between Pretoria and other African capitals and the fact that South Africa might use this international leverage for other debatable purposes. For instance, nobody questioned the surprising South African attitude toward Khartoum in the Darfur crisis. South Africa is a democratic country. Uganda or Ethiopia have a more debatable democratic record: yet, they appear as reactive actors as far as the EU is concerned...

Fourth, regional organizations often may be part of the conflicts more than the solution. Most armed crises in Africa are nowadays regional in certain ways. How to deal with organizations that behave irresponsibly (they are not the only ones in the world) without freezing a policy that looks so consensual. For instance, in the very different situations of Ivory Coast and Somalia, one may strongly argue that the respective regional organisation behaved at some points in a very negative manner that put the lives of dozens of thousands people at risk.

### **Conclusion**

As said in the introduction, there is no alternative to this policy. What is becoming increasingly important is tuning.

It is clear that short term and long term interests have to be spelled out and in specific moments one may have to accept to contradict either one or the other.

A true partnership is not only based on commonalities; it is also based on the acknowledgement of differences. Therefore, it would be precious to have frank discussions on previous crises which showed completely diverse understandings and not only on the planning of the next ones....