

CONFERENCE report

The EU-ACP relations
after 2020: towards
a new partnership?

 **LUISS** SCHOOL
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On 19th June 2017, LUISS School of Government, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, organized a Seminar on “The EU-ACP relations after 2020: towards a new partnership?”. The invited speakers were: Dr. C. Fasone (LUISS School of Government), Prof. M. Carbone (University of Glasgow), Prof. L. Fioramonti (University of Pretoria), Prof. G. Migani (CETHIS), and Prof. E.A. Diouf (University of Dakar).

BACKGROUND

The relationship between the European Union (EU) with 79 countries from Africa the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) is currently regulated by the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement. This agreement was signed on 23 June 2000 in Cotonou, Benin (hence, in the following, “Cotonou Agreement”). Its aim is the establishment of comprehensive partnerships with three pillars: development cooperation, political cooperation and economic and trade cooperation. However, it also takes into account new challenges such as climate change, food security, regional integration, state fragility and aid effectiveness.

With the aim to boost the spread of fundamental values such as regionalization, equality of partners, dialogue and global participation, the EU-ACP agreement has been signed for a 20-year period (2000-2020).

In the wake of the EU Global Strategy, the EU-ACP relationship needs to be renewed towards a more strategic and proactive cooperation between the Cotonou Agreement’s partners. The next three years are crucial to strengthening this trade agreement by taking into greater consideration the different regional realities and future challenges. This conference took stock of further tailor-made strategies that need to be implemented.

THE ROLE OF THE EU

The EU needs a new mandate from Member States (MSs) in order to negotiate the post-Cotonou agreement with the ACP countries. The EU appreciates what the agreement has achieved in the field of trade. As far as democratic principles, protection of democracy and rule of law are concerned, it considers that there is still room for improvement.

There is increasing evidence that the ACP countries do not form a unitary group. Since the African, Caribbean and Pacific area face different problems and priorities, the new agreement needs to take this into account. For example, while the African countries have difficulties on peace and security, the main concern of the Pacific countries is sustainable development and ocean governance. The post-Cotonou agreement should bear this in mind.

The EU wants to find a balance between preserving the acquis of the Cotonou agreement and addressing the ACP countries in a way that respects their peculiarities. Up to now, the EU development fund – which is outside the EU budget – mainly funded the ACP relationship. According to Dr. Fasone, there should be an attempt to put the EU development fund into the EU budget.

Moreover, there is the issue of how to translate the agreement into institutional reality. The EU first wants to look at the content of the negotiations and then define the institutions accordingly.

Professor Carbone argues that some European MSs question the very existence of the relationship between the EU and the ACP. According to them, the ACP is a geographical entity that exists only in relation to the EU. A group of High Level Facilitators for the outreach activities on Post-Cotonou Agreement, composed of Emma Bonino, Pascal Lamy and Louis Michel, has been created.

European MSs have quite different positions on the post-Cotonou agreement. Nordic MSs think that the ACP partnership is not viable any more. Agenda 2030 should focus on a new partnership with a universalistic approach that cuts across different regions. Not only

some regions – the ACP countries – should be considered. Nordic MSs consider the ACP a partnership in which only issues of development are relevant.

Germany's approach is different: it focuses on the ACP by considering investments on infrastructure and energy in Africa. The aim is to cut the divisions between different African regions.

The EC argues that focusing on single pillars (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) could endanger the Cotonou acquis. While the EC takes for granted that the ACP countries will not question the acquis if the approach continues to be on the whole group of the three regions, many elements would need to be renegotiated. A major focus on Africa, particularly within the African Union, could undermine the main principle of ACP.

THE EU AND THE ITALIAN COMMITMENT

“The Minister of Foreign Affairs intends to establish a comprehensive dialogue with all the stakeholders in order to foster privileged relationships with its partners. The EU-ACP agreement has to be preserved and deepened in the following years”: with this statement the Counsellor, A. Petrangeli, opened the LUISS conference with an aim to shed light on the further steps that must be taken in the future. “We need to modernize, and take into account new needs from an educative and development perspective in order to continue to share the same values and pursue all together the fundamental principles of the Cotonou Agreement. Before the expiration of 2020, Italy intends to be a pivotal and relevant partner to take the challenge for the renewal of the agreement’s strategy”, Petrangeli affirmed.

Italy wants to preserve the *acquis* of the agreement and to stress its regional dimension. Especially on small and medium enterprises (SMEs), Italy has a lot of experience that it could use. Moreover, what can be observed is that migration is addressed more and more following a holistic approach. Since migration is seen as a resource, it should be approached with all instruments at our disposal. The Italian Foreign Ministry stressed the need for building inclusive and resilient economies in Africa, so that opportunities are created for local people to stay in their country of origin. Last but not least, Italy could give a great contribution in the field of culture and education. Professor Carbone, a member of the negotiating task force on the Cotonou agreement, affirms the plausibility of reaching a new, effective agreement. However, structural problems are still unsolved: on the one hand, Brussels needs to reinforce its role as a ‘one-voice partner’, avoiding the misunderstanding of a meaningless partner ‘à la carte’. On the other hand, the EU has to urge a new methodology for the signatures of these partnerships in order to transform its relationship into a pivotal strategic one. A development perspective

has to be adopted, and ad hoc economic programs need to be sought.

“A Marshall Plan for Africa is the pivot turning point to renew our European commitment”, Carbone affirmed. “It might be desirable for a division of three core agreements to boost the partner’s regionalization and re-launch the EU aid effectiveness with tailor-made programs”, he concluded.

THE AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Several African countries stress the importance of how language is used in the legal documents. A certain use of language prevents a discussion on the same level between the EU and the African countries. Especially on migration, African countries perceive themselves not to be on an equal footing with the EU. The EU just calls for Africa to stop illegal migration. It lacks a comprehensive approach to migration problems and security issues. Because of this, African countries still perceive their relationship with the EU to be asymmetric, to the disadvantage of them.

Following Professor Fioramonti, African countries also argue that their different economic systems should be taken into further consideration. Contrary to what the EU sometimes states, they do not see free trade as the only solution to the problems of the African economies. The focus should be on fair trade more than on free trade. In brief, a different approach to development and prosperity in the African countries is needed. However, some EU officials also argue that the key message that some African leaders gave to the EU is the need for investments and opportunities to trade.

DISCUSSION POINTS

There were several discussion points raised during the conference.

- Are the three original pillars of the Cotonou Agreement – developmental cooperation, political cooperation and economic and trade cooperation – still the most important and urgent issues to address?
- It has been widely recognized that the ACP countries do not form a unitary group. How should the EU differentiate between them?
- How is it possible to find a balance between preserving the *acquis* of the Cotonou Agreement and differentiating within the regions of the ACP area?
- How to overcome different positions of EU MSs on the EU-ACP partnership?
- What role can the EU-ACP partnership play within the EU Global Strategy?
- What role is the African Union going to play in the renewed EU-ACP partnership?
- How can ACP countries combine economic growth and development with the protection of the environment?
- How can ACP countries be better integrated into the world economy?
- Which stakeholders will be included in the negotiations of the EU-ACP relations?
- What role can Italy play in the renewal of the EU-ACP relations?

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