AFRICAN INTEGRATION AND INTER-REGIONALISM: THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

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ABSTRACT

Since the end of the Cold War, the notion of regionalism in Africa has undergone, and is still undergoing, a process of transformation that includes reassessing its role, capabilities and design. However, the slow pace of continent-wide integration resulted in the creation of a new framework to address Africa's challenges. As the building blocks of regional integration, the Regional Economic Communities will need to contribute significantly to deepening regionalism. The geographical proximity with Europe has also played an important role in the integration of Africa. It has influenced (by virtue of imitation and also through specific inter-regional policies, mainly concerning development) institution-building, trade and other issues of common interest and concern. This article explores the drivers of regional integration as a form of multilateralism in Africa amid the strengths and weaknesses of African Regional Economic Communities.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, the notion of regionalism in Africa has been undergoing a process of transformation that includes reassessing the role, capabilities and design of regionalism in this part of the world. However, the slow pace of continent-wide integration has resulted in the creation of a new framework for addressing Africa's challenges. This new framework is encapsulated in the *Abuja Treaty*, which makes provision for an African Economic Community (AEC) by 2030 and lays out six stages that must be followed to achieve this goal. As the building blocks of the AEC, African Regional Economic Communities (RECs) will need to contribute significantly to deepening regional integration. The original five RECs are different in shape and capability, but they all have one thing in common: they regard regions as politico-economic and, increasingly, as societal communities.

Africa's geographical proximity with Europe has also played an important role in the integration of Africa as a continent. African leaders sought to imitate the experience of the European Union (EU), because these leaders were interested in promoting greater stability and cooperation at a regional level, through specific inter-regional policies, mainly concerning development, institution-building, trade and other issues of common interest and concern.

This article explores the drivers of regional integration as a form of multilateralism in Africa in the context of the strengths and weaknesses of African RECs. The article is structured in two parts. The first part provides an overview of the conceptual and historical evolution of regional integration in Europe and Africa. The second looks more specifically at RECs as important pillars in the process of regionalisation in Africa and as key actors in the multilateral interaction between Africa and Europe. In its conclusion, the article attempts to answer the following question: is there a tendency on the part of the African Union (AU) and the EU to move from a bilateral AU-EU relationship towards an inter-regional and multilateral Africa-Europe partnership?

2. REGIONALISM, REGIONALISATION AND COOPERATION

Since the end of the Cold War, the debate on regional integration has become central to the study of contemporary regionalism, especially of its conceptualisation and forms. At present, the notion of 'new' regionalism includes the restructuring of borders, areas and territories, and it has also stressed the importance of societal phenomena and bottom-up dynamics, thereby broadening the development of peace and conflict studies and emerging as a vital element of integration studies. According to Deutsch (in Hentz 2003: 12), "integration is more of an assembling than of a growth from one stage to another". Therefore, the success of the new security cooperation depends on the way in which states formulate, integrate and coordinate their common policies.

After 1989, widespread acceptance that the dominant role of states in the regionalisation process was hampering integration in Europe led to a re-conceptualisation of regional formation. Since the end of the Cold War, progress has been made in dimensions such as economic integration, democratisation and institutionalisation. Thus, over time, regionalism acquired a broader nature and scope to include various sectors of society, well beyond the initial limited focus on institutions.

The European Community was transformed in 1993 — by the adoption of the *Maastricht Treaty* — into a pluralistic union of state and non-state actors, namely the EU. The treaty included new cross-border initiatives, the free movement of people and a new egalitarian decision-making structure. Grant and Soderbaum (2003: 6) refer to this 'new' regionalism in Europe as a model composed of two specific processes. The first is the formal regionalism of state actors which focuses on 'regionalism from the top', and the second is the informal regionalism of non-state actors which focuses on 'regionalism from below'. Others, such as Bøås and Shaw (1999: 905), have also highlighted that "the outcome of these processes is highly unpredictable, and most often there is more to these issues than meets the eye".

Four characteristics of 'new' regionalism as a project distinguish it from 'old' regionalism. The first characteristic is its openness, as opposed to the more state-centric approach in 'old' regionalism.

'New' regionalism embodies new regional arrangements among states that seek to liberalise markets worldwide and increase cross-border trade at a regional level.

The second characteristic of 'new' regionalism is its intersectoral dimension, as opposed to the overwhelmingly economic dimension of 'old' regionalism. 'New' regionalism has stimulated a complex approach which includes other levels of engagement within regions, namely at the political, social, cultural, environmental and military levels.

The third characteristic of 'new' regionalism is the relevance of bottom-up phenomena (albeit at a nascent stage) as opposed to the primarily top-down approach of the past. 'New' regionalism offers a regionally centred model of institutions where governments, interest groups and individuals from different backgrounds can engage in common institutions, present proposals and also liaise directly with policy-makers. Examples of such common institutions are Greenpeace and Amnesty International, which advocate for environmental awareness, conflict resolution and human rights at the local, national, regional and global levels, and the EU Committee of Regions (EUCoR), which provides a platform for local and regional representatives and municipalities to voice their views on EU laws and regulations (Telò, 2001: 11).

The fourth characteristic of 'new' regionalism is its emphasis on supranational (neo-functional) agents in the project, as opposed to the dominant state-centric actors of 'old' regionalism. This view is congruent with the trend, advocated by European leaders, to override the sovereignty of states, or at least part of sovereignty in the name of supranational integration.

Regionalisation refers to a process of structural or organisational mechanisms that promotes different levels of engagement within a particular region through regional dialogue, cooperation, integration and ownership. The process does not have to occur within an institutionalised framework, because the process consists of *ad hoc* or formal bilateral and multilateral meetings and agreements. However, what is necessary for the process to start is a willingness by states to make concessions, however small, that attract the attention of other states. Thus the main function of regional dialogue, which is mainly a starting tool for regionalisation, is establishing important contacts and meetings between states. Rosamond (2000:

80) argues that the aim of regionalisation "is to contribute to an embryonic 'sociology of inter-regional exchange' which takes us beyond conventionally rationalistic interest-driven accounts". A successful regional dialogue, often only at state level, is followed by a declaration, statement, communiqué and possibly a 'road map' for future regional cooperation between states.

Regional cooperation refers to the deepening of inter-state relations through economic and technical cooperation. According to Chhibber (2004: 5), regional cooperation has a functionalist agenda similar to that suggested by Mitrany (1968). Chhibber (2004: 6) argues that regional cooperation "does not necessarily aim at political or economic integration, but rather at the effective functioning of an intergovernmental association with specific purposes". For developing countries, regional cooperation is linked to statism, which refers to the leading role of the state in "bringing about economic and social development" (Holsti, 1995: 98) through a number of collective actions, including customs and monetary unions, cross-border trade and macro-economic planning. Two examples of successful regional cooperation initiatives are the *North American Free Trade Agreement* (NAFTA) and the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Once the regional cooperation has come to economic fruition and eliminated economic disparities, regional integration can be addressed to foster more 'regionness'. Hence, regional integration refers to increased interactions between and the interdependence of different social structures. It also refers to a socio-political mechanism that allows states (with the assistance of non-state actors) to harmonise policies on human rights, democratic principles and civil liberties. This mechanism promotes peace and stability in a region and defends the cultural, historical and political homogeneity of states (Keet, 1999: 21; Smith, 1993: 5; Vaÿrynen, 2003: 37).

Finally, regional ownership, a concept that has received little attention from scholars thus far, is considered the ultimate goal of regionalisation. It may clash with inter-regionalism, especially when the relationship between regions is profoundly asymmetrical, as is the case between Europe and Africa. Regional ownership refers to a capacity-building process whereby states in the region take full responsibility for common processes, while donor (external) countries limit their involvement in the internal affairs of a developing region.

Regional ownership can be achieved through the so-called process of 'transformation and streamlining' of associations or collective agreements into fully operational regional institutions owned solely by the regional members (RCC, 2008).

Due to their flexible institutional structures, systems of incentives and level of consolidation, the three concepts of regionalism, regionalisation and cooperation are useful in drawing comparisons and highlighting commonalities and differences between the European and African regional processes. At the same time, because of their focus on interdependence and post-Westphalian dynamics, these phenomena largely overlap with multilateral processes, gradually eroding national sovereignty or leading to integrated forms of policy making.

3. INTER-REGIONAL INTERACTION BE-TWEEN THE EU AND THE AFRICAN RECS

For the last 20 years, regionalism in Africa has also been discussed in the context of multilateral trends such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals, alongside the creation of regional entities such as the AU and the RECs. Perhaps surprisingly, African regionalism has received little scholarly attention. As with European regionalism, African regionalism is characterised by two main approaches, namely the functionalist (Monrovia group) and the federalist (Casablanca group) approaches. These two approaches give interesting accounts on the positive attitudes of states towards regional integration and the methods to be used towards this goal. The rise of this new rivalry between groups in the history of African regionalism necessitates some clarification.

The Casablanca group, represented by Kwane Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, endorsed a belief that institutional integration or supranational institutions can promote peace through intensive economic and societal cooperation, and subsequently eliminate conflict between states. The group's agenda, as Nkrumah put it, is that "Africa must unite". Nkrumah also advanced the notion of 'totality', which refers to total defence, total freedom and total union. Thus in-

tegration is advanced through a three-step process: firstly, common values and norms among states are established; secondly, the regional integration plan is set out and a regional institution is created; thirdly, a common government with politico-military and economic decision-making powers is established. This plan, although it has been defended vigorously by many states at the Constitutive Assembly of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, was eventually rejected (Khapoya,1994: 87).

The Monrovia group, which included former French dependencies, advocated a functional cooperation spill-over across sectors. They proposed a step-by-step approach in which regionalism was merely a transitional stage. They favoured a "*status quo ante*" in Africa. Under this principle, states in Africa were to respect the borders inherited from former Western powers and their territorial integrity. This approach also emphasised a new interdependence between Africa and Europe, due mainly to cultural ties and geographical proximity, which would have put pressure on African states to integrate the continent further. In this light, the functionalist plan of successive stages was adopted as the best road to economic and political integration, thus basing African regionalism on political and economic linkages, rather than on common cultural, historical and language experience (Khapoya, 1994: 288).

The Cold War era was dominated by structural and ideological bipolarity, but it also witnessed a process of decolonisation in Africa. According to Buzan and Wæver (2003:19), this decolonisation was vital for the establishment of a new regional 'security area' in Africa. However, given the post-independence challenges in Africa (including various territorial disputes, the problem of landmines, the difficulties in sustaining armed forces, and the slow and opaque decision-making of the OAU), few states in Western, Central and Southern Africa believed a single security community or constellation was the solution.

As a result, sub-regional organisations were established. The emergence of the Economic Community of West African States — ECOWAS (established in 1975), the East African Community — EAC (established in 1967, disbanded in 1977 and revived in 2000) and the Southern African Development Coordination Conference — SADCC (established in 1980 and replaced by the Southern African Development Community [SADC] in 1992) in Western, Central and Southern Africa respectively were the first African sub-regional

schemes not to concentrate their efforts on the politico-economic linkages with countries and regions outside the continent. Instead, they attempted to create new distinctive security communities within their own territory. The leaders of the sub-regional organisations endorsed the liberalist and cosmopolitan belief of Cobden and Bright that institutional integration or supranational institutions can promote peace through intensive economic and societal cooperation between states within the communities. They argued that the use of armed force is virtually unthinkable within the sub-regions, mainly because institutional integration eliminates the degree of distrust/suspicion that may exist amongst groups of people (Heywood, 2007: 113).

This evolution was also incorporated into a global multilateral agenda based on the idea that developing nations which shared similar institutional problems and economies difficulties should strengthen their reciprocal cooperation at all levels to rebalance the power of Western states in world politics. As part of this agenda, in 1986, African countries (as well as other developing nations from Asia and South America) endorsed the new terms of this cooperation in the *Cairo Declaration on Economic Cooperation Among Developing Countries* (ECDC), which launched various collaborative initiatives, amongst others, a harmonisation of national socio-economic policies, confidence building and reconciliation, and a global system of trade preferences among developing countries. Within the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Group of 77 at the UN and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Secretariat, African states achieved cost-effective trade liberalisation and improved cross-border cooperation among developing countries. This, in turn, promoted the diversification of market production and innovative investment in the African sub-regions.

With the end of the Cold War and the deepening economic hardships in Africa, the idea of strengthening relations with its immediate African neighbours became a necessity. The EU has become increasingly aware of the need to differentiate approaches towards its partner states, especially in the developing world. On the one hand, for instance, the EU has recognised the new emerging powers in the international system, such as Brazil, India, China and South Africa, and, on the other hand, it has established structural relations with sub-regional organisations such as SADC and

ECOWAS.

It is also worth mentioning the publication by the African Union Commission entitled "Rationalization of the RECs: revision of the Abuja Treaty and Adoption of the Minimum Integration Programme". This article has formulated a new concept that is similar to the EU's internal step-by-step integration process. The *Minimum Integration Programme* (MIP) covers topics from harmonisation to rationalisation processes between RECs. The MIP's objectives are to help individual RECs to identify their priorities and use the best integration practices throughout the continent. In the end, the MIP issues feasible and achievable objectives to all RECs which are introduced in the four-year *AU Strategic Plan*. Although RECs' progress at different paces towards integration, the MIP ensures synergy between all the communities, so that the advanced RECs like the Southern and the Western African communities do not hamstring the potential of the other less fortunate RECs, such as the Eastern and Central African communities. As in the EU, the MIP has introduced monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to follow up on the progress of each REC. In this way, firstly, the challenges and constraints regarding the implementation of the *Abuja Treaty* and RECs can be pinpointed long before these problems can actually affect continental integration; and secondly, the MIP outlines the most important priorities to be pursued at a sub-regional level and their expected results (African Union Commission, 2010: 1-3).

3.1   The current status of the RECs

As mentioned earlier, the *Abuja Treaty's* objective was to establish an economic community. The basic strategy is genuine trade creation and trade diversity within African countries. The treaty includes new cross-border initiatives and promotes the free movement of people. The African economic community follows a trade-led integration model with four steps, namely, the establishment of free trade by 2008, of custom union by 2010, of single economic space or common market by 2015 and of a monetary and economic union by 2030. The last two steps require the establishment of centralised authorities such as an African Central Bank to guide the five original RECs into a single continental economic community.

At this stage, all 14 RECs, including ECOWAS, the Common

Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD), SADC, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC), are developing at their own pace. The majority of these RECs have begun thinking outside the box and are creating not only trade-related economic gains, but also societal incentives. However, the mainstream model adopted by them all is the same. For example, SADC and the EAC have emerged as a security constellation of the newly independent states in their respective sub-regions. Others, like COMESA, emerged as a result of a preferential trade agreement based on the pioneering work of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) during the 1960s. Overall, the RECs present a new regional institutional framework which is open to all interested parties. All of them acquired their own distinctive institutional mechanisms for politico-societal and economic management and have thereby become actors in their own right. Regionalism is obviously the rule-based system all the RECs are using. The integration arrangements between countries in Africa are clear manifestations of the willingness of African states to take full responsibility for the continent's situation.

Apart from being African regional projects, the RECs offer a comparative advantage relative to multilateral organisations such as the EU and the UN. The purpose of the RECs spread beyond the manifested borders to include cooperation with other RECs and international agencies at a multilateral level. As already mentioned, the actor capacity of the RECs in the region is usually stronger than the actor capacity of the multilateral agencies. There are three reasons for this: first, the RECs are familiar with the cultural background of their sub-region; second, the RECs' leaders enjoy consolidated and longstanding relations both at personal and institutional levels; third, the RECs are directly affected by economic or political crises in the sub-regions.

This is partly why the development of sub-regional military cooperation in Africa is also defined by the framework of the AU, of which the five original RECs are members. The AU fulfils the obligation of Chapter VIII (on regional arrangements) of the *UN Charter* and is committed to playing a greater role in pursuing the continent's goals. Consequently, in accordance with Article 13 of the *Protocol on*

a Peace and Security Council (PSC), the AU launched the African Standby Force (ASF). The ASF has one principal and five standby brigades, namely the Northern, Central, Eastern, Western and Southern African Brigades. The brigades were officially launched by African leaders in 2007 and are expected to be fully operational by 2010 (Gamba, 2008: 59). In order to preserve the regional security architecture of the continent, the decision to deploy troops will be taken by the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) and the UN Security Council in consultation with the parties concerned, including sub-regional organisations. The capacity of the African armed forces is further strengthened by hybrid AU/UN peacekeeping forces. The co-deployment of armed contingents by the UN and AU will prevent a 'stand-alone' African situation and reduce the financial burden of such deployment on African states. At a sub-regional level, the Brigades will draw on the personnel and financial contributions of all the member states. Unlike previous peacekeeping missions, the PSC has the legal jurisdiction to intervene, for example, by deploying the Brigades in terms of Article 13 of the PSC of the AU inside a member state to address genocide or human rights violations (Brey-tenbach, 2008: 254; Franke, 2009: 173).

Significant advances have also been made to address the causes of economic crises in Africa. The RECs introduced various macroeconomic convergences which aim to align tariffs, inflation and exchange rates. The quest for monetary integration has also been influenced by the success story of the EU, with its monetary system leading to the adoption of the Euro in 1999. At the same time, though, the EU experience holds at least three important lessons for the African leaders. First, the preparation for full monetary integration takes a long time. Second, functional intra-regional trade is likely to be a prerequisite. Third, economic giants such as South Africa might need to become net payers of economic alignment policies aimed at strengthening the hitherto weaker economies of the region. Thus far, all the RECs have established macroeconomic surveillance to meas-ure the monetary stability and development of member states. A good example is ECOWAS, which is close to establishing a common currency zone. SADC and the EAC also have plans to do so in the near future. However, African economies have not yet diversified their production levels, and there are significant constraints on the competitiveness of African goods in the global market. Vickers (2007:

5) summarises the African economic situation as follows: "Africa's share of global exports dropped sharply from 4,1 per cent to 1,6 per cent between 1980 and 2000 and its share of imports fell from 3,2 per cent to 1,3 per cent over the same period and the continent continues to produce a paltry 1 per cent of the world's manufactured exports".

Cooperation with the EU is successful to varying degrees. The 2007 Lisbon Summit, which brought together the EU and African leaders, offered a new partnership of 'equals', at least on paper. The *1st Joint Roadmaps* for the implementation of the *Joint Africa-EU Strategy* was launched at the 12th Africa-EU Ministerial Troika in Luxemburg. It includes seven areas of partnerships endorsed by Joint Expert Groups. These groups are composed of ministers from member states, the AU and EU Commissioners, and representatives of the Secretariat of the Council of the EU and the African Commission. The role of the EU in the consolidation of the RECs is crucial. The EU remains the most important development partner of Africa's regional integration through the implementation of the *Economic Partnership Agreements* (EPAs) with different African countries and the implementation of a *Free Trade Agreement* with North African states. In addition, the EU targets for Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) contribution are ambitious: the Commission has delivered 1,7 billion euros of additional funds to the continent and has vowed to increase the ODA to reach 0,7 per cent by 2015, as enshrined in the *Millennium Development Goals*. The adoption of the EPAs will contribute significantly to deepening regional integration, but it is likely that these agreements will need revision if they are meant to sustain bottom-up enduring integration at the sub-regional level (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2010: 32).

While the rest of the world is in recession, Africa's economy has picked up. Although progress varies from state to state, Africa's economic growth was at around 2,5 per cent in 2010. Experts say that Africa's extreme poverty is declining, though not as quickly as was hoped. It is also reported that more and more countries in Africa are benefiting from monetary and fiscal reforms. Most African countries now have small budget deficits and effective tax and audit systems (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2010: 35).

3.2   Some key weaknesses of the RECs

The sharp increase of actors involved in the African regionalisation process and its relations with the EU and other multilateral actors has become a problem. As is shown in the *Figure 1*, the number of RECs has almost tripled in the last decade. Simultaneous and overlapping memberships add an additional layer of complexity to the process, resulting in neighbouring states having different tariff barriers due to their membership of different RECs. For example, out of the 15 member states of SADC, eight are also members of COMESA, five are members of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), two are members of the Indian Ocean Commission, one is a member of the EAC, and one is a member of the Economic Community of the Countries of the Great Lakes (ECCGL).

Moreover, disunity within SADC has fractured the regional grouping. For instance, several SADC members have decided to negotiate separate EPAs with the EU. The two SADC EPA negotiating groupings consist of Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland (BNLS) on the one hand and Mozambique, Angola and Tanzania on the other. Other members of SADC, namely Malawi, Mauritius, Madagascar, Zambia and Zimbabwe, have joined the COMESA EPA negotiating grouping. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a member of both SADC and COMESA, has decided to join the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) EPA negotiating grouping. This reality, coupled with the refusal of the sub-regional 'powerhouse' South Africa to join and participate as an observer in the SADC EPA grouping, has made it more difficult for the sub-region to introduce common tariffs and trade policies with the EU. This has added to the sense of institutional malaise within SADC and has also undermined its relations with the European counterpart (Agbeyegbe, 2008: 156; Curran *et al*, 2008: 546).

Overlapping memberships also come at a cost. States are unable to contribute equally and to meet their financial obligations to the groupings they belong to. So far, the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and CEMAC have received full contributions from all their members. Others, like ECOWAS and ECCAS, have put in place a community levy in order to generate their own resources and lessen their dependence on external donors. Another problem is the access to

Figure 1: Institutional Complexity: The Overlapping Memberships of African RECs
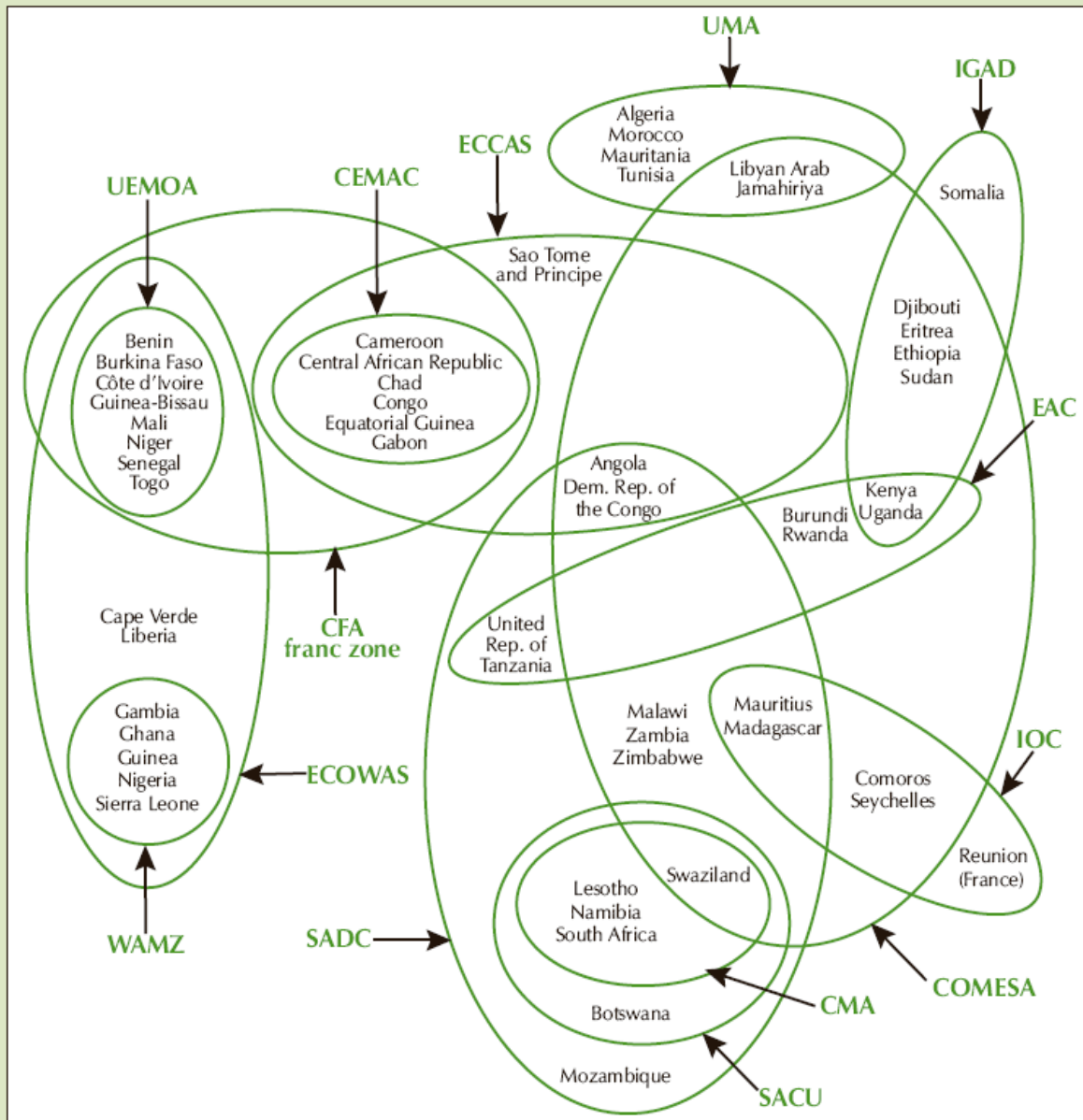
Source: UN Commission on Africa (2010)

community funds by member states. Few RECs have adopted clear mechanisms to transform community project goals into national programmes. Lack of coordination among members is often cited by REC officials as one their stumbling blocks. Each REC makes efforts to coordinate its actions with those of other RECs, but there are simply no structured mechanisms to integrate and institutionalise this relationship.

The RECs also face major constraints in respect of human resources. The majority of RECs do not have sufficient trained administrators to prepare, implement and manage projects. Given the lack of experienced and trained administrators in the fields of trade, public-private partnerships, environmental and societal security, training provided by outside experts will be crucial for the quality of the regional integration in Africa. Corruption among administrators is also cited as a problem by donor partners such as the EU. Indications of fraud and corruption are abundant in the public domain of many African states. In the light of the above assessment, the question arises whether or not funding should be monitored by external auditors. Clearly, the staffing constraints are linked with RECs' inability to project budgets to deal sufficiently with technical skills shortages. This in turn is linked with the inability of members to meet their multiple membership obligations in more than two or three RECs (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2010: 25).
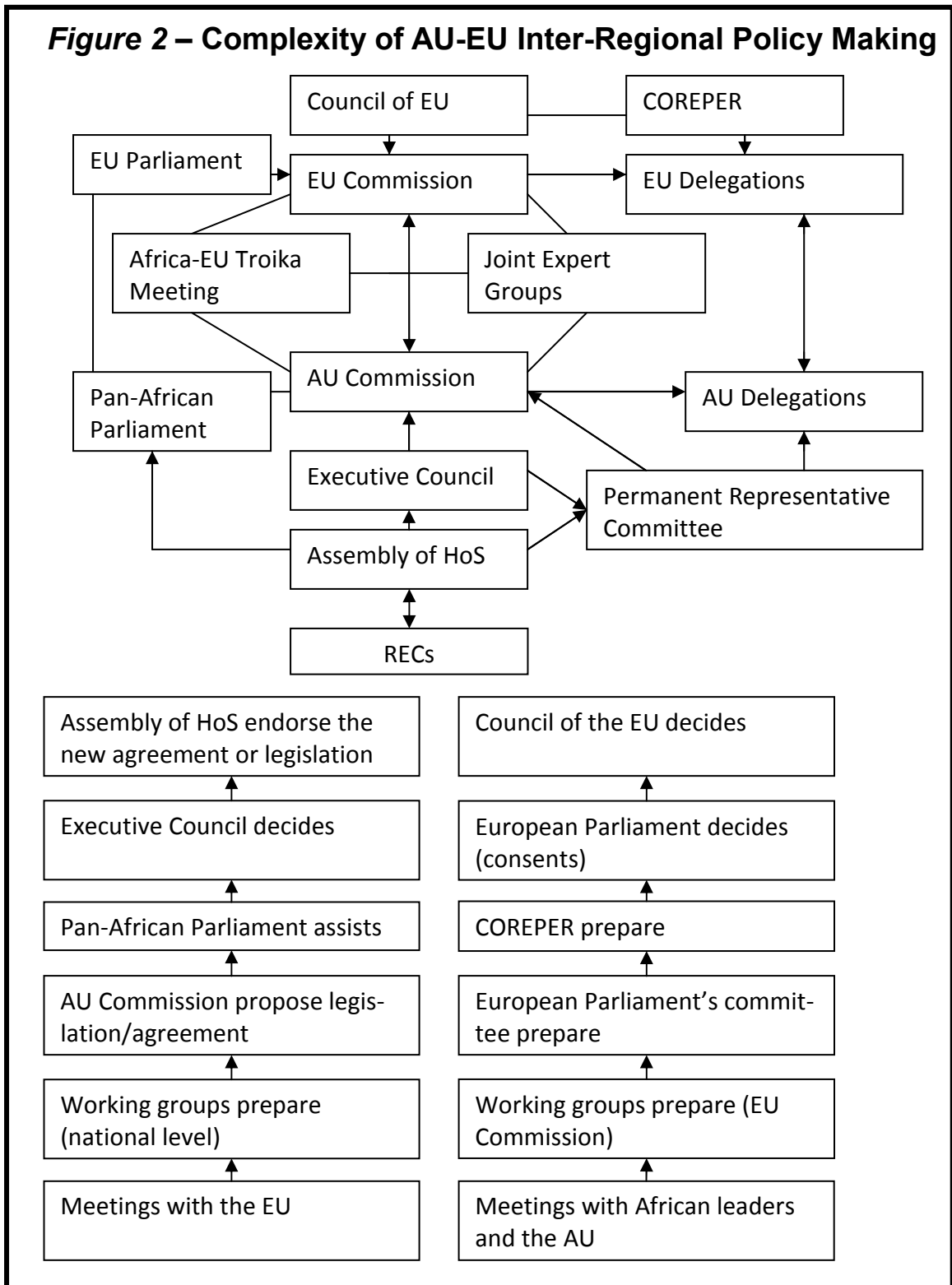
Free movement of people, right of residence and establishment is another major problem that may constrain regional integration in Africa. Moreover, obstacles such as the high unemployment in the case of SADC is causing an irregular flow of migrant workers; there is a plummeting of financial investments due to the current international financial turmoil; and there is a lack of synchronised decision-making in the economic sector (for example, African banks do not have a common approach to interest and exchange rates). These all hinder the SADC goal of developing "policies aimed at the progressive elimination of obstacles to free movement of capital and labour, goods and services and of the people of the region generally among member states" (Hentz, 2009: 206). Attention should also be paid to the political impetus of leaders to centralise rather than to decentralise micro-regional projects. The *UN Commission for Africa Report* (2005:285) argues that "forcing poor countries to liberalise through trade agreements is the wrong approach to achieving growth

and poverty reduction in Africa and elsewhere". This argument is further articulated by Hausmann, Rodrik and Velasco (2006), who state that "[t]he principle to be followed is simple: go for the reforms that alleviate the most constraints and, hence, produce the biggest bang for the reform buck and rather than use a spray-gun approach in the hope that we will somehow hit the target, focus on the bottlenecks directly".

Overall decision-making processes are also weak. Policy-making is slow, *ad hoc* and opaque, and sometimes controversial. The SADC intervention in Lesotho (1998) and the Zimbabwean-led intervention in the DRC (1998) never received the support of the UN Security Council, thereby limiting their multilateral character (Hwang 2005: 169). Moreover, the AU and SADC have remained reluctant to act on the Zimbabwean crisis amid the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the country, notwithstanding the multilateral pressure exerted by the UN, the EU and other major global players. The stalemate between SADC member states regarding the dispute between Namibia and Botswana over territorial claims involving the Kesikili/Sedudu island on the Chobe River has significantly eroded the ability of the organisation to resolve issues amongst its members (Hwang 2005:159). The AU relies on RECs that are also weakly organised, according to Robert Collins, an Africa expert and professor of history at the University of California. According to him, "[n]one of these states can really produce very much", and "they look at the bureaucracy and they are less likely to give" (in Hanson 2009). The RECs also regularly need to update draft resolutions under discussion by negotiating teams. Often, the RECs only post documents that are finalised and approved on their websites, when it is too late for non-governmental organisations (NGO) or third parties to provide any feedback.

The EU's integration process of 'cloning' from one organisation to another has added considerable confusion to the overall interpretation of the RECs and the AU (*Figure 2*). At the structural level, there is almost no area that has not been successfully 'cloned' to the AU. However, when one looks at the decision-making level, the conclusion is invariably negative. The AU's legislative arm, the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), remains a silent witness with no legislative or supervisory role whatsoever. Furthermore, PAP's members are not elected, unlike the members of the European Parliament, but are appointed by the ruling national governments. By contrast, the European Par-

Figure 2 – Complexity of AU-EU Inter-Regional Policy Making

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┌──────────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
│   Council of EU  │────────│   COREPER    │
└────────┬─────────┘        └──────┬───────┘
┌──────────────┐  ↓                │
│ EU Parliament│─→┌──────────────┐ │  ┌──────────────────┐
└──────┬───────┘  │ EU Commission│─┼─→│  EU Delegations  │
       │          └──────┬───────┘ │  └──────────────────┘
       │  ┌────────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐    ↕
       │  │ Africa-EU Troika│   │ Joint Expert │
       │  │    Meeting      │───│    Groups    │
       │  └────────┬────────┘   └──────┬───────┘
       │  ┌──────────────────┐         │  ┌──────────────────┐
       │  │  AU Commission   │←────────┴─→│  AU Delegations  │
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┌──────────────┐ │  ┌──────────────────┐          ↕
│ Pan-African  │ │  │Executive Council │  ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Parliament   │ │  └──────┬───────────┘  │ Permanent Representative  │
└──────┬───────┘ │  ┌──────────────────┐→ │ Committee                 │
       │←───────────│  Assembly of HoS │  └──────────────────────────┘
                    └──────┬───────────┘
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                    │      RECs        │
                    └──────────────────┘
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Assembly of HoS endorse the new agreement or legislation	Council of the EU decides
↑	↑
Executive Council decides	European Parliament decides (consents)
↑	↑
Pan-African Parliament assists	COREPER prepare
↑	↑
AU Commission propose legislation/agreement	European Parliament's committee prepare
↑	↑
Working groups prepare (national level)	Working groups prepare (EU Commission)
↑	↑
Meetings with the EU	Meetings with African leaders and the AU

liament needs to give its consent to any decisions, except of security issues, made by the Council of the EU. Also, the members of PAP are detached for a long period (three to four years) from their constituencies or party structures, whereas the European Parliament's members are forced to serve one third of the mandate in their national constituencies. The RECs' and AU's Secretariats remain seriously underfunded, which compromises their effectiveness to provide policy and strategic assistance to national member states. This, in turn, makes it extremely difficult for the RECs and the AU members to find economic data and information on the situation of their region and of the continent which they could use during trade negotiations with the EU. In summary, the Executive Council remains the only decision-making body which prepares the agenda, and the Assembly of Head of States formally approves it.

Moreover, intra-RECs' exports and imports remain limited (*Figure 3*). This in turn marginalises the potential African market and the purchasing power of the RECs. The latest data show that the amount of African goods exported to the rest of the world outnumbers the intra-trade between RECs by almost 50 per cent; however, it is encouraging to see that "the growth in intra-African trade outpaced the growth in Africa's trade with the rest of the world by about 10 percent" (UN Economic Commission for Africa, 2010: 81). It is also encouraging to note that ECOWAS and SADC perceive intra-trade as an instrument that effectively promotes economic growth and reduces poverty.

RECs do not prioritise according to their immediate needs, but rather focus on the continental AU priorities. According to the AU Commission, RECs' main priorities are trade, energy and transport, which are considered top AU goals. Their lowest priorities are unfortunately health, conflict prevention, the promotion of democratic institutions and water, which are considered national goals. Thus, the harmonisation and rationalisation of domains among the RECs is missing. The RECs should adapt to their specific environments with projects which they must introduce with appropriate funding and human capacity. In this context, the role of the AU is to coordinate relations among the RECs, but also to support their own regional initiatives that are designed to address the specific needs of the RECs. Thus, the coordinating role of the AU must be strengthened (AU Commission, 2010: 15).

Figure 3 – Trade Flows (Exports) of the RECs (2010)

Legend: ■ Africa ▨ Asia ▨ EU & USA □ Rest of the World
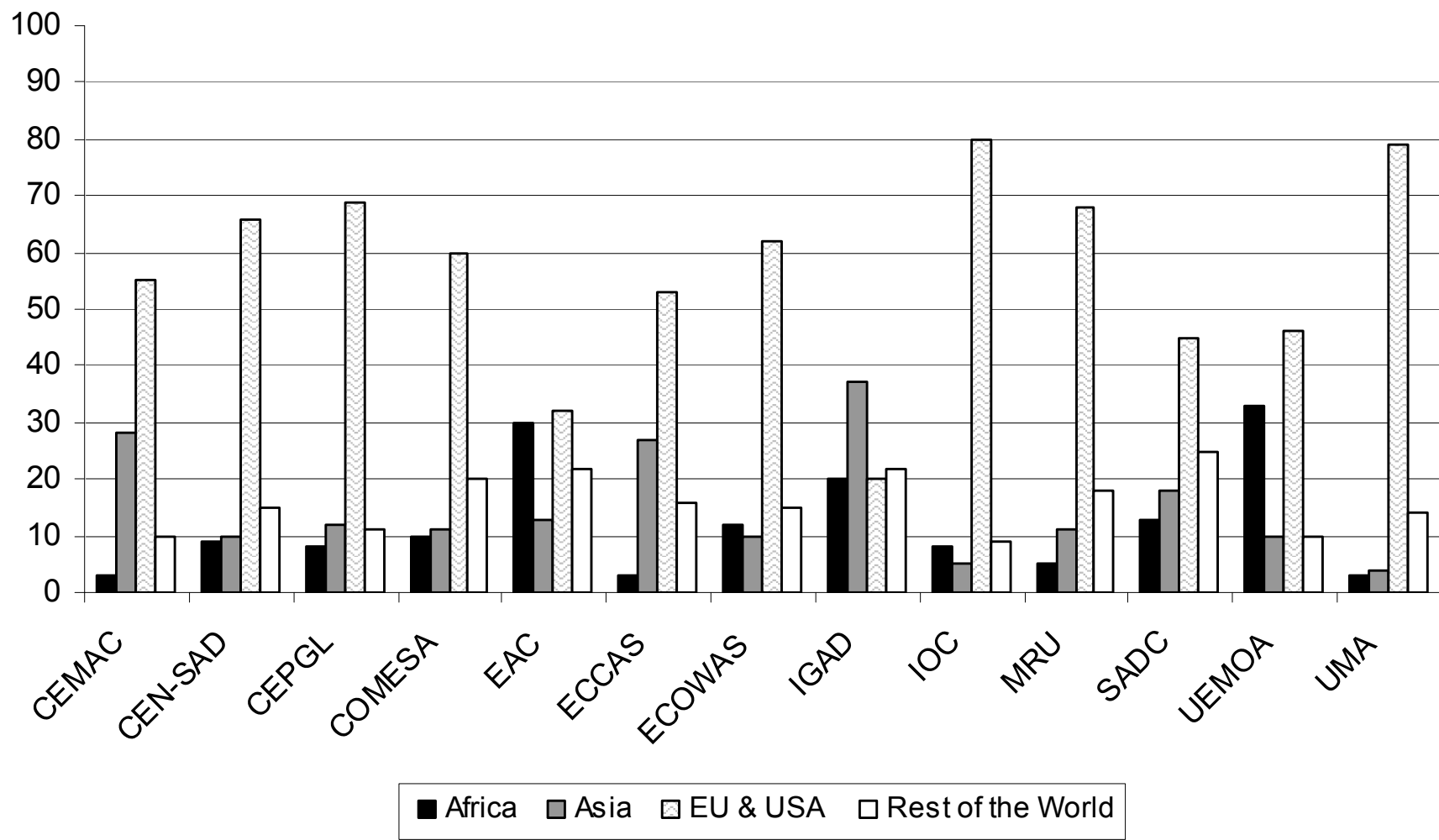
4. CONCLUSION: A GENERAL ASSESS-MENT AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the last decade, the EU's and Africa's agendas have become closely connected. However, the regionalisation paths adopted by Europeans and Africans differ immensely. The European regional integration aims to govern relations within the region. Although its process has not been smooth and its journey has been beset with conflicts and problems, the EU has nevertheless been able to consolidate an institutional structure and promote tangible reforms. By contrast, the African regional integration has been developed as a stepping stone towards multilateral relations with the rest of the world, as well as to improve its own status in the global system through the use of trade and the RECs.

The *Abuja Treaty* aims to establish a continental economic community through harmonisation and progressive integration. This Treaty, unlike the *Nice Treaty* and the *Lisbon Treaty* of the EU, was not designed to handle and govern political issues and relations. It rather encourages states to abandon any political rivalries or issues (or sometimes ignore them) and to take measures to align their economies with one another. However, to achieve the goals of the *Abuja Treaty*, the RECs must embrace rationalisation. The overlapping memberships and other constraints mentioned earlier undermine the efforts of states to reach the goal of a continental regional economic community and the integration into the global economic system.

In the last couple of years, the EU has been struggling to strike a balance between, on the one hand, multilateralism of equals and, on the other, bilateral preferences and asymmetrical relations with African partners. The EU has proposed a strategic partnership as an important block in the overall EU-Africa relations. However, the EU has also been tempted to negotiate bilateral preferential agreements with selected partners such as South Africa (the *Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement* — TDCA) and Northern African states (the *Barcelona Process and Neighbourhood Policy*). The adoption of the *Joint Africa-EU Strategy* in Lisbon in 2007 opened a new chapter in the relations of the two regions. This multifunctional strategic approach is based on the belief that "development policies

and strategies cannot be imposed from the outside" and insists that partners must find African solutions to African problems. The EU and African states agree on the ideals of regionalism, but they differ in their practical implementation. From its side, the EU emphasises the issue of accountability. The EU argues that it is the sole responsibility of African RECs to create a suitable environment and mobilise funding to support projects. By contrast, the RECs emphasise aid delivery mechanisms as the *modus operandi* of regionalisation as a process. African leaders argue that aid should be directed to government coffers and assist service sectors. This approach will improve the image of governments to investors and help governments to assume greater responsibility over the projects.

The conditions set by the facilitating states often outweigh the objectives and neutrality of the project. This is particularly evident with the RECs, where projects are often selected by the facilitating states, which have not sufficiently researched the importance of the project or its impact on local communities. In respect of the regionalism project, there is a need of a follow-up process and a sense of continuity, meaning that a potential project has to be recognised as a stepping stone for a subsequent project.

Regional integration is an important component of Africa's development and is also used as a stepping-stone towards more global or multilateral relations, but, in itself, it cannot solve developmental challenges. Current constraints to trade facilitation, government procurement and investment, services and competition could derail the process. Many states in Africa still do not have organic economies, but rather have artificial economies that were created by socialists or colonialists in the 1950s. Discontinuity between the strategic and the operational levels also needs to be addressed in each REC. Building on this argument, the RECs embrace the idea of a distinctive regional identity through economic interdependence. However, while each REC has established sound institutional structures, the capacity of each member state to address the issue of economic interdependence often diverges from and hinders the aims and objectives of the AU and the RECs.

Pressure for multilateral cooperation has undoubtedly intensified the debate on the future of the RECs. Inter-regionalism as a form of multilateralism has ensured that states' multilateral trade and security commitments to the EU are kept. The role of the RECs' insti-

tutional framework is therefore crucial. The capacity building of the RECs is good for the overall EU-Africa partnership. However, the main question is whether Africa can honour these multilateral commitments. These trade and security commitments are pivotal features of multilateralism and they shape the very concept of African regionalism and regionalisation. Hence, in this increasingly multipolar world order, Africa's regional structures need to play a more active role *vis-à-vis* the EU. But the EU must also remember that multilateralism is a two-way street. The EPAs are an opportunity for the EU to demonstrate its widening regional credentials in Africa. It is very important that the EPAs are not regarded as the incorporation of only two actors, namely the EU and the RECs. The region-to-region multilateral cooperation between the EU and the RECs is a means to affect the intra-regional developments in Africa and Europe. Finally, to answer the question asked by Caroline Bouchard and John Peterson "Can inter-regionalism be a means to the end of extending and deepening of multilateralism?". Yes, the multilateral cooperation between the EU and the RECs does offer a means of dealing collectively with issues of common concern and balancing the geostrategic interests in rapidly changing regions.

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