
Africa, the ACP and Europe: the Lessons of 25 Years

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My concern, under this umbrella of a title, is to look at the often neglected political sub-text of a complex economic and financial relationship and trace its evolution. All too frequently it becomes further submerged in what has been called a 'rich diet' of the technical details of the accord. To be fair, the 1997 Green Paper is fully aware of this political background: 'What we make of the post-Lomé world is essentially a political choice', says Professor Pinheiro, the current Commissioner, in his Foreword (European Commission, 1997).

It is this political sub-text which, in the years in which I have been trying to make sense of it all, has sustained my preoccupation with the subject matter of the Lomé Convention, and with what may replace it. A declared interest comes from the years 1973–82 I spent in Brussels in the Information Directorate-General of the Commission, working in a unit attached to Development (DGVIII). This meant that I followed the two years of negotiations that led to the first Lomé Convention in 1975 (Whiteman, 1975), and again the year or more of negotiations of Lomé 2 in 1978–9. I was present at the signing of Lomé 1 and 2, and (as a journalist) Lomé 3 in 1984. In all my years as a 'spin doctor' of the Commission I lived and breathed what we used to call the 'life' of the Lomé Convention: taking journalists on visits to projects, following the piecing together of indicative programmes, attending interminable joint committees, lecturing from Helsing to Huddersfield on the virtues of Europe's putative development policy.

Now, in the last fifteen years since I have returned to *West Africa* magazine, I have been on the outside looking in again, viewing from without what I once knew from within. A Japanese student once commented to me that the Commission appeared to be surrounded by a 'deep mist': I had felt like replying 'you should see it from the inside'. But as a historical experience it was fascinatingly instructive, and if I seem to go on about the past in a 'consultation' that is looking at the present and the future, it is because this particular past is relevant. There is nowadays little collective memory of

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Brussels in the 1970s and early 1980s, and surprisingly little literature on the politics of it.

I have chosen the twenty-five year span advisedly, because 1972 was the year of the signing of Britain's Treaty of Accession to what was then the European Economic Community. For Africa this was the moment which started the process which led to the signing of the Lomé Convention in February 1975.

We have come a long way since then, with many changes both in Europe and in Africa. When you look at the vast panoply of relations, accords, treaties that the European Union has with virtually every country in the world, including what are still called 'developing countries', it is hard to recall that the Treaty of Rome 40 years ago included the kernel of a development policy almost by accident.

I say 'almost', because in fact in 1956 France was obliged to threaten to refuse to sign the Treaty of Rome unless a provision was made to accommodate its relations with a number of African territories, then still colonies. This was the origin of Article 38 of the Treaty, providing for the 'associated states', eighteen of which (fourteen of them ex-French and seventeen 'francophone') later came together in the 1963 Yaoundé Convention. This was a narrowly based accord, very much in the French and Belgian interest, making the Dutch and Germans unhappy because they were more naturally focused on English-speaking Africa. After considerable pressure they later secured limited trade accords with Nigeria and East Africa.

I recently came across an unusual reference to this period in Omar Bongo's *Confidences d'un Africain*, an extended interview in the form of a book published in 1994 in which the veteran Gabonese President recalls how he asked General de Gaulle why he was so reticent ('mais pourquoi, mon General?') about the entry of Britain into the EEC. Bongo says the General replied, 'It is because of you others, the francophone Africans. For you in this affair of the European Community, everything happens *pro rata* because of demography, so when you see the giants, Nigeria, Tanzania, Kenya beside Gabon, one must be vigilant.' Bongo's comment was: 'Voilà. It was his style of government. Always watching over the Francophone African countries' (Bongo, 1994: 90). Even with de Gaulle's capacity for insincerity when it suited him in the interest of France, this recollection is still revealing.

It was the imagination of de Gaulle's successor, Georges Pompidou (who changed tack on British entry), and of Edward Heath, at the time of the accession negotiations, that permitted the Community to take a hold of itself and make a historic plunge, in the context of enlargement, into the beginning of a development policy, although the various provisions of the Accession Treaty relating to the Commonwealth may not necessarily have made this clear at the time. For Britain it was simply a tidying up process, a clearing of the decks. Nonetheless it became a transformation, and a key factor lay in Africa, where there was an initiative to extend the relationship with Europe to every sub-

Saharan country. It even received the endorsement of the Organisation of African Unity, even though the North African countries voluntarily preferred to negotiate their own agreements with the Community. Countries outside the Commonwealth like Sudan, and those which had no or negligible colonial experience like Liberia and Ethiopia, were also included.

The attachment to Africa of the Caribbean and Pacific groups (formed because of the challenge of the changed situation arising from British entry) also irrevocably changed the historical pattern when in 1973 it was decided to establish the ACP group. Notably this did not include all developing countries. The European Community was not ready for such a radical move, even if Britain was reproached for not doing enough for the Asian Commonwealth countries which were left to negotiate their own accords as best they might.

But the creation of the ACP did move the frame away from dangerous lingering notions of Eur-Africa (a dubious idea with connotations of master-servant relations, that had been taken up by both Hitler's Germany and the Vichy regime in France). And it opened the door for the Community to move on to a wider international stage. In September 1973 therefore negotiations were begun between the EC of the time and around 45 ACP countries. It took a marathon eighteen months of often turbulent negotiations before the multi-dimensional trade and aid package, which was signed in Lomé on 28 February 1975, was evolved.

In retrospect, it is fair to say that it felt like a brave new world at the time. It was happening in the stirring context of the early 1970s, the period of the oil price shock when the West thought that it was being held to ransom. It was the period of commodity politics, when producer power was the rage and when anyone with a raw material to sell fondly thought they were on to a winner. In fact, it did not last beyond 1979, but at the time there were fears of a permanent global power shift.

Its various unusual features — the contractual nature of the relationship which gave a feeling of security; the partnership which supposed equality of partners; the institutional superstructure of joint committees and councils, even a joint assembly; the overt linking of trade with aid and the abandonment of reciprocity; the scheme for stabilising export earnings; the industrial co-operation chapter (much touted in those days even if there is now more realism about a rush to industrialisation) — were all selling points which seemed to insert Lomé into what used to be called, in the contemporary buzz-phrase, the New International Economic Order (something which to some extent is actually in process of happening in the 1990s, but not as conceived at the time).

Equally important was the way in which, even as Lomé was being negotiated, the EC began to talk for the first time of a development policy. This did not feature in the Lomé treaty. It was the Maastricht Treaty on European Union in 1992 which finally gave it official treaty status, although Councils of Development Ministers began meeting from 1973 onwards. It was Claude

Cheysson (the first Commissioner for Development, described by some as ‘Pompidou’s gift to the British’) who put forward in 1974 what was called ‘the Fresco’ — a picture of a global policy with a variety of component parts, beginning with the agreement which became Lomé, and which anticipated a worldwide network of agreements and instruments. These have now been built up to embrace Asia, Latin America, North Africa and the Middle East into a substantial worldwide framework (even including Eastern Europe), involving over half of the total EU resources devoted to development.

The idea was easy to promote, because it had both contemporary relevance and intellectual validity. It was also relatively easy to answer its critics who were at that time many — Atlanticists or Marxists, or both; especially as there was a genuine recognition among ACP leaders of the power of collective bargaining, seen classically in the Lomé 1 negotiations where better terms were extracted thanks to the ACP demonstration of unity. Despite the members’ considerable diversity, this unity stretched right across the group, providing collective backing for a whole array of individual interests. The weight of Africa gave substance to the ACP, but the human resources of the Caribbean were often crucial and the introduction of the Pacific gave both a global span and the involvement of a further slice of the disfavoured and neglected. It was what the former President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, has called ‘the trade union of the poor’.

The prime of the Lomé idea is worth recalling now, as in the years that followed the concept has been whittled down. If the criticisms that it attracted in the early period have become dulled, that is rather a reflection of its decline, and of the fact that it is taken less seriously, to the point that some have even tried to consign it to the dustbin of history, in spite of real and often unacknowledged achievements on the aid side. Mistakes have undoubtedly been made, and one hopes that lessons have been learned, even as fashions in development theory have also changed.

The negotiations of 1979, 1984, 1989, and, more recently, the mid-term negotiations of 1995 seemed gradually to become less and less sparky and more sullen. This was in part because of an increasing disillusionment that the Lomé Convention in itself was ever going to change anything very much, and a growing feeling that the ‘treaty between equal partners’, which we had all proclaimed, was too hypocritical for comfort. Above all, the decline took place against a background of worsening economic conditions in Africa, the motor of the ACP group.

The 1980s, with their mounting debt, depressed commodity prices, the ravages of recession, and the cruelties of a world economy in thrall to Reagan/Thatcher-style monetarism (seen in the way economic reform, even though it may have been needed, was brutally applied), have been called

Africa's 'lost decade'.¹ The African continent was seen by some as a 'basket case', accentuated by phenomena like drought and famine, which were brought home more vividly than before by developments in instant communication in 'the global village'.

In the circumstances, the Lomé Convention, especially the financial provisions which provided its sinews, appeared more and more desirable; it was a case of any port in a storm. This meant that the negotiating position of the ACP as a group was weakened and much more came to be digested without protest, as the partnership became increasingly 'asymmetrical' and appeared to be simply a question of 'collective clientelism' (Ravenhill, 1985). Policy dialogues, conditionalities, structural adjustment, progressively brought into the Lomé arrangements, all seemed to undermine the notional equality enshrined in the Lomé contract, and Claude Cheysson's erstwhile favourite pitch to the ACP on the subject of the European Development Fund ('it's your money') disappeared totally from the language of Lomé.

The negotiating muscle which had been displayed convincingly in Lomé 1 seemed slowly to wither; although in 1979 the ACP were still prepared to use the threat of non-signature as a tactic, it was the last time. Ironically, even as it withered, the Convention grew in size with each renegotiation, becoming more and more a bureaucrat's dream and increasingly cumbersome to implement. And 'Lomé fatigue' led to the acceptance in 1990 of a ten-year convention. There were even those in 1990 who spoke of having a convention of 'indefinite duration', an argument I do not detect as having been revived.

This 'fatigue' in fact covered all aid to Africa apart from humanitarian aid, which in the 1990s waxed apace to the point that it became a separate unit administered by a different commissioner. The 'development portfolio', one of the fattest in the Commission, had already been divided in 1984, and after a temporary revival in 1988 is now split among three directorates-general, with others also involved.

The economic catastrophe of Africa in the 1980s led to international talk of the continent's marginalisation. This was accentuated by the end of the Cold War, which both made it a less important theatre for politically motivated aid and diverted available resources to Eastern Europe, thus putting more pressure on the resources for Lomé, which had an effect on the amount made available for Lomé 4, Part 2. The morose crisis of June 1995 in which it was only French willingness to put up more funds that ensured that the deal for the new EDF went through (again, we come back to Lomé even now being more an interest of France than of any other Member State), was a classic illustration of the way Lomé has slipped down the EU agenda.

1. The expression 'lost decade' to describe the 1980s was coined by Professor Adebayo Adedeji, Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa from 1975 to 1992.

This brings one neatly to the Green Paper, and the consideration of the future of a very particular relationship which now appears in many respects to be in crisis. The Paper is suffused with the desire for a new deal, with much emphasis on the idea of a revival of partnership. The point has to be made and underlined, however, that whatever replaces Lomé depends on the active participation of those conceived of as partners. While 'basket-case' Africa, the Africa of Madame Bonino (no offence intended), may still grace the headlines, there has always been another Africa struggling to make its way, to learn lessons, and to follow whatever advice is needed to survive.

If what we are now being told — that there is still hope for recovery and real development (*The Economist's* recent cover of 'Emergent Africa' is but one of a series of positive messages we are receiving, based especially on revival in Eastern and Southern Africa) — then talk of a new partnership may be possible. The Green Paper, for example, makes much of 'revitalising the ACP-EU partnership by strengthening its political dimension' (p.24). But it then wisely asks 'are partners ready for this and all its consequences?', especially as 'good governance, democratisation and human rights' are at the core of the idea, and many in the ACP may well have their own views on reinforced political conditionalities. This is especially pertinent if the ACP are again to be taken seriously as 'partners', with a revitalised Lomé superstructure. It has to be seen in the light of the reinforced powers slowly accruing to the European Parliament, which would have an increased role in the political aspects of the relationship.

In fact, attempting to read between the lines of the Green Paper (which is actually quite hard to do in such an all-purpose document) I seem rather to detect a trend to what the French call *banalisation* of the EU-ACP special relationship, towards making it less *special*, more *normal*, putting the EU's relations with Africa and with the ACP fully within the context of its worldwide relations with developing countries, in a series of adaptable agreements. There is, for example, the question of the budgetisation of the EDF (the fact of being outside the EU budget made Lomé unique among the accords); the suggested abandonment of non-reciprocity (which back in 1973–5 was almost a condition for many to come into Lomé); the context of tougher rules at the World Trade Organization which press for the ending not just of non-reciprocity but of special preferences. Above all, there is the Green Paper's mooted break-up of the ACP as a group. Both the Caribbean and the Pacific still clearly appreciate the strength of the group. The Africans have yet to pronounce collectively, and while some may secretly favour an Africa-only deal (even given the Eur-African undertones it might contain), it may be hard to secure it. The Green Paper itself writes consistently of the ACP as if the next accord will be with the group. But there is still a serious chance of fragmentation not just geographically but into a diverse patchwork of accords, although there have always been huge diversity and disparities within the ACP group.

Ironically the arrival of South Africa, whose economic weight could give new negotiating muscle to the 'partnership', may encourage the *de facto* development of a flexible coalition of accords under a Lomé umbrella, especially if the idea of a series of Free Trade Areas takes off. While the concept of 'different instruments in different combinations' has always been a part of the Lomé idea and its further expansion cannot be avoided, there will come a point where the Lomé coalition may become too loose to stand together. There is therefore a real and serious test of ACP unity in the months to come.

That unity may also be tested by the idea of a 'political dimension' mentioned above. The Lomé of the 1970s was much valued for its *political neutrality*. I can still hear Claude Cheysson, in his impeccable clipped English, talking of it and all of us repeating it as a mantra to our times. The then European Community was not unduly concerned about the nature of regimes. This was partly because the objective was to remove the relationship from the Cold War context and permit neutral aid to needy regimes that might have adopted, to different extents, Marxist postures. The policy was applied everywhere from Ethiopia to Grenada. Inevitably it also became a fig-leaf for dictators. Did not the then Director-General for Development himself represent the Commission at Emperor Bokassa's coronation in December 1977?

Slowly the EC started to squeeze the ACP on human rights. In some cases (as in the Equatorial Guinea of Macias) aid programmes were impossible to administer. It was probably the atrocities of Amin that led to a campaign spearheaded by Dr David Owen, the then British Foreign Secretary, for suspension of aid to Uganda in 1977 and a first tiny effort to introduce human rights provision into Lomé 2 in the 1978–9 renegotiations. By 1984 it was much more concretely in the preamble, and by 1989 had a full position in the body of the text.

The whole idea of human rights criteria in Lomé was boosted by the end of the Cold War and the rise of universal democracy, especially the democratic movements in Africa of the early 1990s. The EU also played its part, especially through an increasingly active European Parliament, and this is a pressure that will continue. We are now, however, in a phase of more limited expectations for democracy in Africa. While a number of the changes are irreversible, in many cases we have to talk of 'virtual democracy' (in the phrase of Dr Richard Joseph, 1997), in which democrats have to accept half a loaf or less. There is increasing unhappiness among Africans at the tendency of Europeans to lecture them from a position of moral superiority, while their own house (in such matters as immigration policy) is very far from being in order. It all shows how far we are from the Lomé of the 1970s.

Incidentally, if the human rights issue continues to make waves, it seems inappropriate to talk, as some still appear to do, of Lomé 5. If a 'new partnership' with a political dimension means anything, it should be impossible for the assembled EU and ACP to go to the capital of the dictator Eyadema's

pseudo-democracy where riots were put down by a brutal military in 1990–1. Even in 1975 at the signing of the first Convention some of the European representatives found that Eyadema's synchronised self-adulation resembled a Nuremberg rally.

Lastly, at a consultation in London like this one, one should return to the question of the British role referred to at the beginning. I have tried, perhaps from wariness coming from long years at the coal face in Brussels, to avoid French-bashing. Indeed, at a recent conference in Bordeaux I felt moved to query a Danish academic for making it look as if France was not only the mastermind of Lomé but also of DGVIII, clearly a grotesque simplification. But looked at objectively, Lomé came into existence largely because of the French, who wanted a special African connection as an extension of their own sphere of influence. Lomé represented a Franco-British compromise, even if the British still tended to hanker for globalisation. In the 1970s era of the 'Hart-Pronk'² axis, Britain was still ready to adopt a high development profile. Even now, there remains a tension between the 'globalisers' and those who still favour a priority African connection.

With the downgrading of aid in the 1980s there was an increasing loss of interest in Lomé in London, indeed accompanied by an increasing discontent that much of Britain's meagre aid budget was going to Brussels. This trend was fuelled in the 1990s by Eurosceptic fantasies, viewed with alarm, to my knowledge, by most ACP countries as a kind of abdication, especially on the part of those who felt they needed a healthy British influence in Brussels. Many observers found that there were those in the European seats of power who were beginning to discount Britain as a serious factor.

There is now, however, a change of climate that gives Britain a chance to play a fuller role in the European dynamic on the matter of development and the future of the ACP accords over the next two years. It was the dynamic that existed in the 1970s, in the EC, in the ACP, within the Convention itself, which gave the whole thing its originality, and which seems to have suffered the wear and tear of the years. There is a new configuration which involves not just Blair and Mandela, but also Wolfensohn (and new thinking in the Washington institutions) and even (why not?) Kabila.³ Allied to the underlying factor of Europe's post-Maastricht evolution these could lead to a new dynamic which even now, despite trends in other directions, could produce something new and original.

2. Judith Hart and Jan Pronk were development ministers for the UK and the Netherlands respectively at the time of the signing of the Lomé Convention in February 1975.

3. Laurent Kabila came to power in Zaire/Congo in mid-May 1997, after the ending of the thirty-two-year dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko. Although Kabila was an unknown quantity, the fall of Mobutu seemed to presage great changes in Africa.

References

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Twenty-five years ago thousands of children in Africa were paralysed by the virus. The disease is now only found in Afghanistan and Pakistan. There is no cure but the polio vaccine protects children for life. Africa Live: Updates on this and other stories. Nigeria is the last African country to be declared free from wild polio, having accounted for more than half of all global cases less than a decade ago. This was one of the conditions that the Africa Regional Certification Commission set before declaring the continent free from wild polio. Now only the vaccine-derived polio virus remains in Africa with 177 cases being identified this year. This is a rare form of the virus that mutates from the oral polio vaccine and can then spread to under-immunised communities. By 2030 one in five people will be African. Combine the continent's soaring population with technology, improvements in infrastructure, health and education, and Africa could be the next century's economic growth powerhouse. Here are just a few of the surprising facts and figures about Africa and its emerging success story. 54%. Africa will account for more than half (54%) of the 2.4 billion global population growth in coming decades. The United Nations predicts that between 2015 and 2050, Africa will add 1.3 billion people, more than doubling its current population of 1.2 billion. Image: UNIC Europe-Africa relations after Corona Geert Laporte, European Think Tanks Group blog, 6 April 2020. The EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States have governed their relationship since 1975 through a sequence of partnership agreements. The most recent of these is the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, which expires in 2020. ECDPM, with more than 30 years of involvement in ACP-EU relations, helps guide this debate towards realistic and workable scenarios for the future that benefit all parties concerned. This dossier collects our past work on ACP-EU relations as well as our recent analyses of a future partnership. Authors. The team took scans of 25 Britons who did not speak a second language, 25 people who had learned another European language before the age of five and 33 bilinguals who had learned a second language between 10 and 15 years old. The scans revealed the density of the grey matter in the left inferior parietal cortex of the brain was greater in bilinguals than in those without a second language. The effect was particularly noticeable in the "early" bilinguals, the findings published in the journal Nature revealed. The findings were also replicated in a study of 22 native Italian speakers