

What future for EU-ACP relations after 2020?

The Partnership Agreement between the EU and the ACP Group (Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries established in 1975)—the largest and most sophisticated existing North-South partnership—dates back to 1975. The successive Lomé Conventions (1975–2000) and the Cotonou Agreement (2000–2020) have provided the legal basis for this partnership, which currently comprises 78 ACP countries and 28 EU member states. Combining political dialogue with cooperation on trade and development finance, the agreement is based on shared principles and values and co-management through joint institutions.

The Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) signed in 2000 will expire in 2020 at the end of the current EU multi-annual financial framework (MFF 2014-2020) and the changing global context, as well as institutional, political and socio-economic developments in both the EU and the ACP, raises many questions on the best ways to maintain and promote an effective and close cooperation between the EU and the three regional groupings after 2020.

On both EU and ACP sides internal reflections on the post-Cotonou era have started in the last years but no open debate involving non-governmental actors of the CPA has been organised so far. The CONCORD Cotonou working group organised a [seminar with ACP civil society partners in June 2013](#) to exchange views on changing realities within respective contexts.

In 2013, ECDPM and DIE published a discussion paper based on a **comprehensive review¹ of ideas and perceptions** on the future of the CPA on both sides. It provides a good overview of the current and future challenges in the EU-ACP relations. According to the findings, the predominant feeling among European actors is that neither the CPA nor, possibly, the ACP group itself would continue to exist in their current format after 2020. Regarding future options for EU-ACP relations, in general, on the EU side, *a shift from the ACP-EU framework towards individual regional partnerships is envisaged as a natural and likely way forward.*

The directorate general for External Policies of the **European Parliament also published a study² in 2013 where 3 options are envisaged:** 1) *a dissolution of the joint partnership and its replacement with regional arrangements;* 2) *the development of an overarching ACP–EU partnership that coexists with strengthened Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and* 3) *the emergence of a more dynamic and cohesive ACP group, which may establish global partnerships beyond the EU.*

The third scenario is subject to in-depth reflection by an [Eminent Persons Group³](#) established by the ACP group to prepare key recommendations for revamping the ACP Group to be more effective in delivering results to its populations. This report to be discussed at the ACP Summit of November 2014 will also include recommendations on how to move forward after the CPA comes to an end. It comes in due time before the new Commissioner on Development and International Cooperation, **Neven Mimica, launches a broad consultation of all stakeholders on the future of the EU-ACP relations** as announced during his hearing in front of the Development Committee of the European Parliament.

According to the CPA, a third review of the agreement should take place in 2015. However, due to the slow ratification of the second review of 2010 and considering the interest of both parties in entering into the post-Cotonou debate, there is little prospect that this review process will take place.

A partnership under pressure

The EU-ACP relations are under pressure for multiple reasons. In the EU itself, perspectives on the partnership with the ACP as a group are quite mixed. The different enlargement rounds have fundamentally changed the **EU's collective attitude towards the ACP Group** as a 'post-colonial' concept. EU members and especially the new ones increasingly question why more financial resources are not spent in the wider neighbourhood of the EU rather than in the 'South'.

There is a **multiplication of dialogue processes and high level political initiatives** between the EU and third countries that cross-cut the EU-ACP dialogue (Africa-EU Joint Strategy, EU-Latin America, EU-Pacific, sub-regional trade negotiations...).

With the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) now tackling trade issues in Africa, and the African Union slowly establishing itself as a key interlocutor in peace and security and continent-to-continent relations of a more political nature, the ACP Group is confronted with new actors on its turf (see ECDPM & DIE study).

¹ Towards renewal or oblivion? Prospects for post–2020 cooperation between the European Union and the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group, May 2013.

Available at http://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/DP_9.2013.pdf

² Available at http://www.epg.acp.int/fileadmin/user_upload/EP_Policy_Briefing_ACPEU_Relations_After_2020_EN.pdf

³ See the Eminent Persons group website at <http://www.epg.acp.int/>

The **renewed EU interest for a strengthened cooperation with Africa** is greatly influenced by the increased competition for African natural resources and market and there is a widespread sense within the EU and its member states that the donor-recipient development cooperation rationale of the CPA is no longer the best way to support the win-win model of economic growth they pursue.

In addition, **controversies have given rise to increasing frustration and mistrust** between the ACP and the EU, such as the slow and difficult negotiating process around the economic partnership agreements (EPAs) or the International Criminal Court warrant of arrest for the Sudanese President Al-Bashir. Moreover, the dialogue between the two parties on the question of migration, visas and readmission has never been easy and conclusive.

The **lack of reference to the ACP Group in the Lisbon Treaty** and the less prominent place of the ACP in the internal DEVCO and EEAS institutional framework are also signs that the EU is losing its interest in the ACP as a group. In the ACP group itself, there is little current appreciation for its value beyond being a means of securing EU development assistance through the European Development Fund (EDF). So far, the ACP Group has made only tentative progress in formalising relations with other global players and a radical change in EU-ACP relations would inevitably impact on the future of the Group.

The **ACP-EU partnership seems to have lost considerable influence in terms of its political relevance**. The political dialogue that is an important pillar of the CPA is viewed on ACP side as one-sided in the way the EU promotes the values of the CPA and chooses when and where to intervene. Substantive issues in the areas of peace and security and the fight against terrorism and organised crime are largely dealt with outside the ACP-EU framework. Many EU ministers no longer take the time and trouble to attend the annual Joint ACP-EU Ministerial Council meetings. These signs of European “disengagement” seem to be aggravated by an increasing lack of high-level ACP interest in their own group. Moreover, the participation of civil society and other non-governmental stakeholders in the dialogue, a binding provision of the CPA, is far from meeting the expectations.

Nevertheless, **EDF funding is generally welcome and viewed as an effective and predictable development instrument** although many are disappointed that cooperation remains so government-oriented with limited involvement of the other actors of the partnership (civil society, private sector, local authorities, regional bodies,..). Serious discontent emerged on ACP side at the beginning of the 11th EDF discussion when the EU made the proposal to close bilateral cooperation with Upper Middle Income Countries of the ACP group (as part of its new **country differentiation approach**). In respect of the provisions of the CPA, it was finally decided to maintain cooperation with all ACP countries but with a new EDF distribution key favouring poorest countries and with a more growth, trade and private sector oriented cooperation in MICs. It is expected that EU bilateral cooperation and presence in the Caribbean and Pacific countries will be particularly affected by this new approach, increasing even more the differentiation between the 3 regions of the ACP group. On the ACP side many respondents of the ECDPM & DIE study *viewed differentiation as the wrong signal to send to ACP countries that have been performing well and a policy that could undermine ACP cohesion*.

CONCORD views and recommendations

It is of utmost importance for EU and ACP signatories of the CPA to

- **Ensure an effective and full implementation** of the last 6 years of the CPA and 11th EDF while ensuring a smooth transition to the post 2020 cooperation agreements and arrangements that will be agreed upon. In that view **a fair and open debate and consultation process between the EU and the ACP**, taking into consideration the objectives and interest of both sides, should be launched so that realistic options can be developed while preserving the spirit of the CPA.
- Alongside the joint reflection and negotiation process it will be essential to **make a proper assessment** of the different pillars of the CPA and to identify the **positive aspects of the CPA that need to be maintained and reflected in any future arrangement/agreement**. We think in particular of:
 - o The comprehensiveness (political dialogue, cooperation and trade) and the regional coverage (beyond bilateral cooperation) of the CPA
 - o The importance given to human development and human rights, peace and security
 - o The core principles and essential elements of the agreement and the importance of the political dialogue
 - o The inclusion in the agreement of a mechanism, including possibility of suspension, to address violations of its essential elements (including human rights)
 - o The partnership approach, the joint institutions and co-management of cooperation
 - o The multi-stakeholder approach and the fact that participation of civil society is part of the agreement not only at cooperation but also at political dialogue level
 - o A well-resourced multi-annual and predictable financial instrument (EDF) and the fact that it is jointly programmed and managed
- **The Joint Parliamentary Assembly and all actors of the CPA, including civil society, should be part of** the reflection and negotiation process on the future of EU-ACP relations and inclusive mechanisms of discussion and consultation with all stakeholders should be put in place in that view on both sides and at the EU-ACP level.

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