

African Regional Integration and the Role of the European Union

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I.

African regional integration has had a remarkable new beginning since the formal beginning of the African Union (AU) in 2002. Following the Treaty of Abuja, in force since 2004 and envisaging an African Economic Community in six stages by 2028, and following the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), since 2002 a mandated initiative of the African Union including NEPAD's unique African Peer Review Mechanism for the measuring of good governance, the African Union has become the frame for a new African regionalism. The new beginning in African integration is impressive, promising and creative. It is not only a rhetoric operation but a substantial recognition of the need to redefine the parameters of political, socio-economic and security developments on the African continent.¹

The independence of African nation-states was accompanied and supported by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), founded in 1963. The OAU was driven by an anti-colonial impulse and aimed at protecting the national sovereignty of each African state. To prevent a revision of borders, often drawn artificially during the age of colonialism, was a prime concern of the OAU. Non-intervention into domestic affairs became the main application of the principle of protecting national sovereignty. The OAU failed to link the principle of national sovereignty with the principle of popular sovereignty that is with the principles of human rights, rule of law, democratic accountability and good governance. The economic decline in Africa between the 1970s and 1990s became an almost all-pervasive stereotype that was reinforced by the sad realities of civil wars and failed states, failing regimes and widely spread bad governance. For some, Africa was already considered a lost continent.² Until the turn of the century, Africa's image in the world became blurred by negative stereotypes and widely perceived experiences of frustration and decline. The positive examples of some African success stories did not serve as model for other countries. In fact the positive examples became the sad exceptions to a rule of decline and disaster.

Amidst of the African crisis, a new beginning became inevitable. The term "African Renaissance", introduced by South Africa's President Thabo Mbeki, became the proud

¹ See David Bach, „The Global Politics of Regionalism: Africa“, in: Mary Farrell, et.al.(eds.), Global Politics of Regionalism: Theory and Practice, London: Pluto Press 2005: 171-186.

² See Mir A. Ferdowsi (ed.), Afrika – Ein verlorener Kontinent?, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2004.

expression of a new vision.³ It was echoed by initiatives to better link economic development, social stability and political security with the need to redefine Africa's own responsibility and a stronger popular ownership in the future of the continent. If Africa was to have a better future, its people would need to materially benefit and its leaders ought to take their responsibility seriously. Inevitably, the deficit analysis had to address the issue of governance and hence the structural deficits of weak states and fragmented nations. Africa had to discover the concept of regional integration as a means to give the continental development a new and promising perspective.

When Libya's leader Muammar Gaddafi launched the initiative to replace the Organization of African Unity by the African Union in 1999, he also had in mind his personal ambition and that of his country. But an objective reality evolved, namely the consensual recognition of real regional integration as the frame for a new beginning in Africa's development. This consensus was based on a notion of African unity that was no longer related to an anti- or post-colonial definition of Pan-Africanism. For the century ahead, Pan-Africanism was to be achieved by means of regional integration.

The result was an almost frantic institution-building in the shortest possible period of time, often without clear focus and more often without a solid understanding of the need for deepening integration if region-building was to make sense and eventually become solid. Africa opted for a territorially inclusive way of coming together. Except for Morocco, all African states joined the African Union. The array of seventeen formal structures of the African Union as outlined in the Constitutive Act of the AU is impressive.⁴ Most noticeable are:

- The AU's President's Assembly (Article 7), its supreme body, which meets once a year and takes decisions by consensus or two-third majority on substantial matters and by a simple majority on procedural matters.
- The AU's Executive Council consisting of the Foreign Ministers of the African Union and deciding on regular matters from foreign trade to communications and foreign policy.
- The Pan-African Parliament is located in Midrand, composed of representatives from across the continent and active since 2004.
- The AU Commission is based in Addis Ababa and is composed of ten commissioners (Chairman since 2008: Jean Ping of Gabon). Its secretariat is responsible for co-ordinating the activities and meetings of the African Union.
- The AU Permanent Representatives Committee (Article 3) is composed of nominated permanent representatives of the member state governments. It prepares the work for the Executive Council.

³ Thabo Mbeki, *The African Renaissance, South Africa and the World*, Speech at the United Nations University, Tokyo, April 9, 1998, online at: www.unu.edu/unupress/mbeki.html; for an academic analysis see Fantu Cheru, *African Renaissance: Roadmaps to the Challenge of Globalization*, London/New York: Zed Books, 2002.

⁴ African Union, *The Constitutive Act of the AU*, online at: Africa-union.org/About_AU/AbConstitutive_Act.htm.

- The African Court of Justice has been mandated to primarily rule on human right matters in Africa. Over time, it shall merge with the African Court of Human and Peoples' Rights, currently seated in Arusha, whose first eleven judges were elected on January 22, 2006, by the Executive Council of the AU.
- The AU Peace and Security Council is designed to be responsible for monitoring and intervening in conflicts and is intended to have an AU peacekeeping force at its disposal. The Peace and Security Council was formally launched in Addis Ababa on May 25, 2004 and received initial EU support of €250 million for its peacekeeping facility.
- The AU Economic, Social and Cultural Council serves in an advisory capacity and is composed of representatives from professions and civil society.
- The financial Institutions of the AU include the African Central Bank, the African Monetary Fund and the African Investment Bank.

In sharp contrast with past experiences, Article 30 of the Constitutive Act of the African Union defines the procedure to suspend membership in the AU in clear words: "Governments which shall come to power through unconstitutional means shall not be allowed to participate in the activities of the Union."⁵

In spite of the impressive wording of the Constitutive Act of the African Union and several subsequent documents related to matters of African governance, the normative principles of the factual operations of the African Union remained unclear. Bigger, to this day, is the gap between declared principles and operational procedures on the one hand and means of energetic and coherent implementation of principles and objectives on the other hand. The biggest uncertainty, however, exists in defining the relationship between the objectives of the African Union and the aspiration of manifold regional integration groupings across the African continent. The overlap of membership looks like an image of the solar system – and it echoes a situation of a map that was painted before the discovery of how things shown on the map may work.⁶

The multiplication of regional groupings across Africa has not been a new phenomenon. With the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), they have been streamlined, in a way. Currently, eight regional groupings in Africa have been designated as building-blocks for the development of an African Economic Community (AEC) by 2028: The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU, headquartered in Rabat), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, headquartered in Abuja), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS, headquartered in Libreville), the Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA, headquartered in Lusaka), the Southern African Development Community

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ See African Union Commission (ed.), *Rationalization of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs): Review of the Abuja Treaty and Adoption of Minimum Integration Programme*, Addis Abeba: African Union, 2007: This important and stimulating study provides options for the rationalization of the regional economic communities in Africa. The study tends however to underestimate the need for firm criteria in order to implement policy decisions and it is focused on economic and technical matters, thus neglecting the political and legal issues discussed in this essay. All in all, the assumption that integration can be optimized through mechanistic technical processes must arouse scepticism when taking into account the unpredictable political dependency of any integration progress.

(SADC, headquartered in Gaborone), the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD, headquartered in Djibouti), the Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD, headquartered in Tripoli) and the East African Community (EAC, headquartered in Arusha). So far, none of these regional groupings has been able to fully bridge the gap between aspiration and reality.⁷

But it is fair to recognize that Africa has moved to more shared responsibility and to policies of non-indifference about what is going on across the continent. Two trends have become noticeable since the early 1990s:

- On the regional level, the existing regional integration systems experienced a general overhaul with strong emphasis on economic development and functional deepening, including in the sphere of security and parliamentary representation.
- On the continental level, the goal for African unity became more politicized and institutionalized while being broadened through mechanisms of functional deepening; simultaneously the limits of autonomous claims to national sovereignty as the highest goal of statehood were increasingly recognized and the notion of protecting human rights won ground over the stereotypical claim of non-interference in domestic affairs of individual African countries.

So far, African leaders have not been able to define a coherent sequencing of the work ahead of the eight regional groupings or of their possible eventual merger with the African Union. As much as regional integration in its theoretical nature and its comparative dimension, the role of regional groupings in Africa and the issue of overlapping membership on the African continent is under-researched. This fact also reflects the underdeveloped research potential of Africa. African institutions of regional integration lack human resources, and so does the academic sector across Africa. While the European Union is supported by more than 13,000 civil servants, the African Union counts 700 professionals. Their commitment and competence is beyond doubt. But their figure is simply too limited to cope with the rising expectations in any meaningful way. Human capacity-building remains an integral necessity to enhance the quality and breadth of integration-building in Africa. Africa has an enormous need to increase academic training facilities. Together with African partners in Europe, comprehensive programs in tertiary education and further education programs dealing with matters of regional integration need to be launched.⁸

II.

The most simple question, yet rarely posed in Africa is as follows: why regional integration at all? The prevailing trend among integration actors and integration analysts tends to focus on the technical question of how to make integration work. How integration may work depends on why integration should take place. Although regional integration, by and large, is a

⁷ On the current formal situation of regional economic integration across Africa see ECA, Regional Economic Integration in Africa, in: Philippe de Lombaerde (ed.), Multilateralism, Regionalism and Bilateralism in Trade and Investment: 2006 World Report on Regional Integration, Dordrecht: Springer, 2006: 127-157.

⁸ See Andreas Stamm, „Wissenschaftskooperation: Neue Formen der Zusammenarbeit mit Subsahara-Afrika,“ in: Stephan Klingebiel (ed.), Afrika-Agenda 2007: Ansatzpunkte für den deutschen G8-Vorsitz und die EU-Ratspräsidentschaft, Discussion-Paper 18, Bonn: Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik 2006: 107-112.

constructivist activity, integration is more than a technical operation. The technicalities of regional integration – including the question of how to measure regional integration progress – are relevant. But they still remain tools and should not be confused with the need to clarify the purpose of integration. In order to achieve integration objectives and to strengthen the legitimacy of region-building, clarity about normative preconditions, political objectives and genuine goals of value added ought to be defined and regularly re-calibrated.

The purpose of regional integration in the African context seems to be evident yet this question does not necessarily find coherent answers.⁹ In light of the many failures of African development of the past three to four decades, it sometimes seems as if regional integration may be understood as the panacea to run away from this failed past. The overriding experience however of regional integration is the fact that weak states only produce weak integration. Strong regional integration requires solid, functioning and accountable national structures. Regional integration is no substitute for reforming the nation-state across Africa. Successful regional integration requires a solid preparation of each member state of a regional grouping.

The most comprehensive argument for region-building in Africa is twofold: Region-building is the reaction to the limits of autonomous state activities in generating and distributing public goods. At the same time, region-building provides the means and the potential to enhance the actor-ness of Africa as a whole and of all of its societies and states in the age of globalization. Regional integration is about the pooling of limited resources and the advancement of distributing public goods under the global conditions of the twenty-first century. Peace and security, rule of law and political stability, economic development and social inclusion – the long list of African challenges goes beyond the capacity of individual states. In order to increase the sense of ownership and the degree of inclusivity of citizens in the life of Africa, regional integration provides an additional level of governance and the management of public affairs. Region-building is about building up tools to better generate public goods and objectives for a more sustainable distribution of public goods. But region-building only works if it is law-based and driven by a common legislation.

First and foremost, region-building is trust-driven. Without trust in the honesty, sincerity and objectives of one's partner, no regional grouping can overcome the point of mutual suspicion. Up to a certain point, cooperation is possible even among adversaries. But genuine and deep trust-based region-building requires the mutual recognition of the regime of governance of all partners in a regional grouping. In order to do so, regime symmetry must be minimal at least and should be solid in order to carry region-building efforts beyond the simple point of functional cooperation without deeper commitment. Because of this precondition for strong and real regional integration, it is no surprise that to this day, no African regional grouping, the African Union including, has addressed the issue of a common legislation. Functioning

⁹ For some good academic answers see Keith Gottschalk/Siegmar Schmidt, "The African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development: Strong Institutions for Weak States?", in: *International Politics and Society* 4(2004): 138-158; Lawrence O.C. Agubuzu, *From the OAU to AU: The Challenges of African Unity and Development in the Twenty-First Century*, Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 2004; Economic Commission for Africa (ed.), *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa*, Addis Abeba: Economic Commission for Africa, 2004; David J. Francis, *Uniting Africa: Building Regional Peace and Security Systems*, Ashgate: Aldershot, 2006; Tesfaye Dinka/Walter Kennes, "Africa's Regional Integration Arrangements: History and Challenges", in: *ECDPM Discussion Paper No.74*, Maastricht: European Centre for Development Policy, 2007.

institutions and working tools of integration are important – but eventually they make sense only as a consequence of regional integration commitment. The recognition of the objective of democratic region-building must define the starting point and the ultimate objective of sincere and sustainable regional integration processes.¹⁰

A European experience is telling: Central and South Eastern European countries have always belonged to Europe. But none of them joined the European Union before they had become functioning democracies and accountable pluralistic states based on rule of law and market economy. Africa has opted for territorial inclusivity as initial mode of region-building. The consequences are grave: The process toward deeper integration has become daunting and difficult. This does not mean that deep integration is impossible in a territorially united Africa. But it is only realistic to state that deeper integration will take more time and may eventually not be achieved as long as the plethora of different political systems across the continent prevails. The commitment of resources, the readiness to share decision-making and, eventually, the willingness to pass a mandate for action into the hand of actors other than one's national government requires trust which, in political terms, requires regime symmetry among partner countries. Luxembourg or Malta may be small European countries. But nobody in the European Union would question the legitimacy of, let's say, an EU Commissioner from one of these countries. His or her career has been based on the democratic system that prevails at home. His or her European mandate is embedded in the trust of all the other partners in the democratic legitimacy of his or her country of origin. Eventually, deep integration will require the readiness for common legislation and it will require the recognition of a common destiny. This universal insight holds also true for Africa and defines the current limits of the African Union.

The issue of deep integration is not a one-way-street. The further regional integration advances, the more does it affect policy areas beyond the original scope of operation. The more it advances, the more likely it will affect the parameters of the domestic system of the constituent parts of a regional grouping. Integration strikes back: It impacts the political, economic, social, and most likely also the cultural and constitutional spheres of the member states of a regional grouping. The impact goes beyond the sphere of political and public actors and will eventually reach the daily life of citizens. Therefore, integration must go hand in hand with an increase in ownership in a regional grouping. Regional citizenship is the logical consequence and regional citizen's claim rights are, eventually, the inevitable consequence of an advanced regional grouping. African regional integration will discover these inevitable implications of the path that has been redesigned with the creation of the African Union.

It may well be that eventually it will not be the African Union but the most advanced and deep sub-regional groupings – the building blocs of an African Economic Community – that may become African equivalents of the European Union. The African Union may continue to serve the prime objective of promoting African unity as a matter of identity and the external

¹⁰ See Peter P. Waller, „Demokratische Renaissance in Afrika?“, in: Internationale Politik, 8 (1999): 49–54, online at: www.internationalepolitik.de/archiv/jahrgang1999/download; Sven Grimm, „Europäische Demokratieförderung in den 1990er Jahren,“ in: Sven Grimm, Die Afrikapolitik der Europäischen Union: Europas außenpolitische Rolle in einer randständigen Region, Hamburg: Institut für Afrika-Kunde, 2003: 138-192; Fatoumatta M'boge/ Sam Gbaydee Doe, „Overview of Civil Society in Africa“, in: Fatoumatta M'boge/ Sam Gbaydee Doe, African Commitments to Civil Society Engagement: A Review of Eight NEPAD Countries, Nairobi: African Human Security Initiative, 2004: 13-56.

projection of African claims. But while the African Union may continue to represent the symbolic dimension of African unity, some of the building blocs of sub-regional groupings in Africa may evolve into the strong representatives of deep region-building. It is noteworthy, that those sub-regional groupings in Africa that have become most advanced in their structures, objectives and performances have broadened their agenda and refocused their priorities. They may not have become expressions of deep integration that encompasses regional legislation and the eventual pooling of political destiny. But they have undergone internal transformations and changes in priorities, sequencing and approach that has helped them to become much more comprehensive and all-encompassing compared with their initial ambition. So far, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the South African Development Community (SADC) are the most successful examples of deepened integration among sub-regional groupings on the African continent. They represent the strongest potential to continue on this path with sustained success. Over the course of the following years, they may be followed by the re-born East African Community (EAC). These three building blocs of an African Economic Community are also the most differentiated, advanced and comprehensive regional groupings in today's Africa. They may eventually mature into the African equivalents of the European Union – supranational entities hold together and advanced by a common body of legislature and a multi-level system of governance. In turn, the African Union may develop into a hybrid of the Council of Europe, the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations – a collective security organ defined by the quest for a common identity and its global recognition.

III.

The African Union and the building blocs of the African Economic Community are the products of several crises in African unity and African development. The new strategy of promoting African unity through African regional integration will surely experience crises in integration and, most likely, also new crises of integration. None of this must be disastrous as the European experience suggest. In fact, many crises in integration may become turning points in advancing regional integration. Eventually, regional integration in Africa may be strengthened through the experience of crises. In fact, there is ample evidence to suggest that already by now, the development of the African Union and the main building blocs across the African continent have gone through genuine cycles of crisis and renewal, challenge and response.

More than on any other continent, regional integration in Africa is linked to the development strategy of the continent. With the normative myth of African unity as represented by the Organization of African Unity, also many of the assumptions of the African development strategy and, more importantly, of the Africa-specific development tools have been reconsidered. Several insights must be formulated even if they touch taboos or vested interests in Africa and among the friends of Africa elsewhere.

- Aid-based development has not worked. Since the early 1960s, the African continent has received more than 1,000 billion \$ of public development aid. This amount equals the transfer of public resources from West Germany to East Germany in the first decade after German unification of 1990. Almost a generation later, in East Germany

only pockets of sustainable development can maintain competitiveness in the globalized world. Since the opening of China under Deng Tsiao Ping in the late 1970s, the People's Republic of China has received approximately the same amount – 1000 billion \$ - through an external resource transfer. Unlike in Africa and in Germany, the resource transfer in the Chinese case was not one of public aid. It was a resource transfer of private investment which has triggered remarkable and sustainable economic growth – the key to make a country wealthy. The results have turned China from a basket case into a vibrant and new center of economic gravity with double digit growth rates for more than a decade, now rising to become an economic world power.

- Yet, the Chinese development model may not serve as a comprehensive model for Africa. Africa does not share with the countries of Northeast Asia the strong economic nationalism that, at least up to a point, benefits from competition among the countries in the region. There is no African equivalent of the combination of China, Japan, Korea and the Southeast Asian tiger countries, at least not to this moment. Africa is different from Northeast Asian societies as far as the tradition and heritage of formal education and the pursuit of systemic thinking are concerned. Historically, Africa's traditions of education, by and large, were oral. Africa's intuitive, often naturalistic approach to life stands in contrast to the scripture-based sharp discipline and structure of form, function, authority, hierarchy and norms in Northeast Asia. The entrepreneurial spirit that is often associated with the societies of Northeast Asia is not an African tradition.
- The most recent Chinese “discovery” of Africa provides new insights into the development potential of Africa and the problems of African development.¹¹ China's assertive investment strategy serves the purpose of the rising Chinese economy. It also serves the African countries that can offer energy sources and raw materials which the Chinese need. It improves their infrastructure and thus provides an important frame for future development activities. It does, however, not serve those African countries that are not on the Chinese radar screen. Applying modes of mutually reinforcing self-interest can be a successful strategy if applied to Africa's development. For Europe this means to go beyond development, aid, guilt and self-interest-driven strategies. For Europe, the lesson of the new Chinese presence in Africa is simply: Get ready to recognize Africa as a partner and equal. Get ready to conceptualize strategies and projects of mutually reinforcing self-interest. It is here that the European (and especially German) tradition of “Ordnungspolitik” (order policy) may come in as a more sophisticated and sustainable development model than the Chinese rush for quick and rather one-dimensional results.
- It is remarkable that Africa has begun to discover one essential precondition and consequence of the rise of China and the subsequent rise of India: to tap on the potential of the African diaspora. Most private investment in China was contributed by

¹¹ See Denis M. Tull, *Die Afrikapolitik der Volksrepublik China*, SWP-Studie, Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2005; Thomas Fues/Sven Grimm/Denise Leufer, „China's Africa Policy: Opportunity and Challenge for European Development Cooperation,” Briefing Paper 4, Bonn: Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, 2006, online at: www.die-gdi.de/die-homepage.nsf; Barry V. Sautman, “Friends and Interests: China's Distinctive Links with Africa,” Working Paper 12, Hongkong: Center on China's Transnational Relations 2005/2006, online at: www.cctr.ust.hk/articles/pdf/WorkingPaper12.pdf.

overseas Chinese. In the meantime, the more than twenty million overseas Indians have understood the mechanism and effect. They have discovered the investment potential in India. They realized that the reversion of brain drain must not be to their detriment. In fact, aside capital, they bring experience and inspiration. Africa is well-advised to enhance the role of the African diaspora and turn the issue of brain drain into a matter of brain circulation. This would include a structured policy of (possibly temporary) migration to Europe and North America, but also a structured transfer of technical skills from Europe and North America to Africa.

- Most important, an updated development concept for Africa needs to include the wretched and poor of Africa as a source of opportunity. Poverty eradication is the goal, as stated in the United Nations Millenium Declaration and many fine statements by the African Union, regional groupings in Africa and many donor countries. But poverty eradication is no purpose in itself. It is aimed at empowering the individual in his or her human dignity through a better growth of his or her talent and potential. At the moment, all too often poverty is still considered a burden or an excuse in Africa. If Africa were to learn from the Chinese and, increasingly, the Indian experience Africa would define poverty and poor people as an opportunity. Poor people are an opportunity to invest in their better future and hence into a better future of the whole continent. The future of Africa cannot be based on different strategies as the future of any other modern society: education, urbanization, possessive individualism and the broadening of the market as an inclusive order of freedom. To make such a sociological development work, the political sector needs to provide the frame but cannot generate the content.
- In the course of Western modernization rule of law has preceded democracy, sometimes even modern statehood. It cannot be different in Africa. Reliable rule of law is the key to advance domestic stability and regional integration. Accountable participation in the name of democracy will follow suit. Democracy cannot generate social inclusion by itself. It requires a legal frame that protects the weak and predicts life for the strong. Without the primacy of rule of law good governance remains rhetoric. With reliable rule of law in strong states the primacy of regional law can become a logical continuation rather than a limit of individual state action. There is no cultural obstacle or limit to the application of this insight. The application of this law of reliable and sustainable modernization may take time. There is no reason why eventually it cannot work with the same result in Africa as it has done in Europe or North America. The main reason does not lie in anthropological, cultural and religious factors. The main reason lies in the structure of societal developments under the condition of the homogenizing yet incomplete and fragile modern state. Only rule of law is an objective and sustainable glue that holds a state together, makes it strong and ready to open for cooperation and eventual integration with neighbours and partners. Therefore, also regional integration needs to be law-based and empowered with a legislative component gradually shaping a community law.

IV.

The European Union is promoting regional integration in Africa and elsewhere. During past years, its focus in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific was related to the negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreements. Since 2002, the EU enticed its ACP partners to engage in these negotiations. The EU claimed that the negotiations would strengthen regional integration in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. By replacing preferential trade agreements (that have been in place through subsequent Yaoundé Conventions, Lomé Agreements and the Cotonou Agreement of 2000) by free trade mechanisms, the EU would comply with WTO provisions. At the same time, the EU claimed, relations with Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific regions would be put on the basis of equality and a true partnership.

By 2008, interim agreements had been reached with several sub-regions and individual countries or contingent groupings of countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. More than anybody else, EU officials had become doubtful of the multiply potential of Economic Partnership Agreements. The EU was looking for a new rationale in its relations with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.¹²

The beginning of these relations dates back to the initial Treaties of Rome founding the European Economic Community in 1957. The Treaties of Rome granted a five-year trial period for the commercial and financial association of French, Belgian and Dutch overseas territories. Article 131 and Article 136 created a *de facto* free trade area between the European Economic Communities and its associated areas. The most visible immediate effect was the availability of new European outlets for African tropical fruits. More long term was the effect of the Development Fund established by the Treaties of Rome to improve the infrastructure in the southern hemisphere. This was the beginning of a European development policy. In 1963, the relationship between the European Economic Communities and eighteen associated states in Africa plus Madagascar was renewed through the Yaoundé Convention, named after the capital of Cameroon where the agreement was signed. It provided commercial advantages and financial aid to Africa. In force since July 1, 1964, its successor – the Yaoundé II Convention – followed in 1969. The quest for a new beginning between the now European Community and many of its former colonies was increasingly linked to the struggle for a new world economic order. In responding to the continuous demands from the Southern hemisphere, the European Community offered a comprehensive scheme of partnership and preferential cooperation for Europe's most desperate former colonies.

¹² For further details see Mir A. Ferdowsi (ed.), *Vom Enthusiasmus zur Ernüchterung? Die Entwicklungspolitik der Europäischen Union*, Munich: Forschungsstelle Dritte Welt, 1999; "Strategy for Africa: An EU Regional Political Partnership for Peace, Security and Development in the Horn of Africa," in: European Commission (ed.), *Compendium on Development Cooperation Strategies*, Brussels: European Commission, Directorate General for Development, October 2007: 7-23; "European Union Strategy for Africa: Conclusions by the Heads of State and Government Meeting in the European Council, Brussels, December 15-16, 2005," in: European Commission (ed.), *Compendium on Development Cooperation Strategies*, Brussels: European Commission, Directorate General for Development, October 2006: 61-182; Sven Grimm/Nina Kielwein, "Die Afrikastrategie der Europäischen Union – Kohärenz gegenüber einem vielschichtigen Kontinent im Wandel," in: *Analysen und Stellungnahmen*, Bonn: Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, 9(2005); Peter Molt, "Zur Afrikastrategie der Europäischen Union," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 48(2007): 33-38; Gisela Müller-Brandeck-Bouquet/Siegmar Schmidt/Corina Schuhkraft/Ulrike Kessler/Philipp Gieg (eds.), *Die Afrikapolitik der Europäischen Union: Neue Ansätze und Perspektiven*, Opladen: Budrich, 2007.

In 1975, the European Community and 46 countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific signed the Lomé Convention. Further Lomé Conventions followed at an interval of five years. Lomé IV, signed in 1990, included 77 countries. Unlike the Lomé Conventions I to III, the last Lomé Agreement lasted for ten years and included a mid-term review. It covered 638 million people in the Southern hemisphere. The Lomé Conventions entailed innovations and improvements in North-South-relations:

- On principle trade was conducted on a non-reciprocal basis. The EC partner states – called ACP states (ACP stands for Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) were exempted from the GATT multi-fiber agreement, which placed restrictions on textile exports from developing countries to industrial markets. When GATT was replaced by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1993, this principle came under increasing pressure by countries and regions not participating in this non-reciprocal trade privilege.
- In a spirit of partnership and cooperation, the European Community unilaterally exempted certain ACP- products from customs levies and import taxes.
- The most innovative component of the Lomé Convention was the stabilization mechanism for raw materials: A fund was created by the EC to provide for stabilizing capital for raw materials from the partner countries if the price for their raw materials falls below a certain threshold or in case of an excessively bad harvest. This STABEX-system constituted a resource transfer to the ACP budgets.

On June 23, 2000, a new long-term approach in the relationship between the European Union and its ACP partners, including Africa, began: The Cotonou Agreement was signed between the EU and 15 Caribbean, 14 Pacific and all 48 sub-Saharan countries. Africa provides 95 percent of the total ACP population and gets 80 percent of all support funds defined by the Cotonou Agreement. This agreement replaced the Lomé IV Convention and is intended to last for twenty years. Its main features are the following:

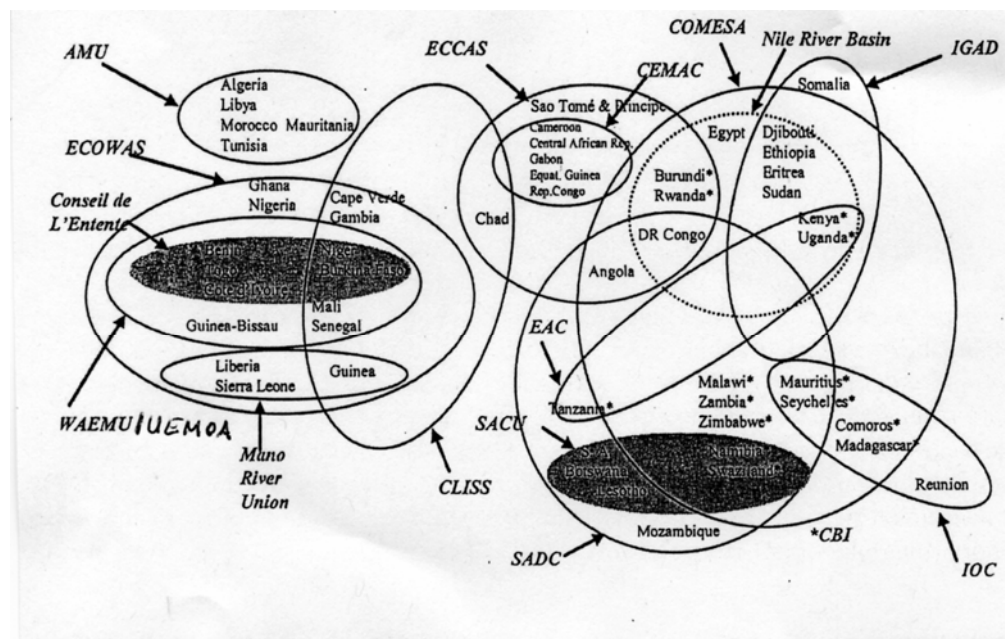
- The Cotonou Agreement emphasizes political dialogue with a strengthened inclusion of civil society.
- In terms of economic cooperation, it replaced preferential relations with the principle of reciprocity as requested by the WTO but potentially to the disadvantage of several EU-partner countries in Africa; until 2008, new regional Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) with each of the ACP regions were to be negotiated.
- The ACP countries are no longer exempted from the WTO multi-fiber agreements with their restrictions on textile exports from developing countries to industrialized markets. This is extremely relevant for some African countries: 58 percent of total exports from Lesotho and 39 percent of total exports from Mozambique are in textiles.
- Several preferential elements of the Lomé Convention favored agricultural activities in countries producing beef (Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe), sugar (Tanzania, Mauritius, Malawi, Swaziland) and the economies of the land-locked African countries. They have been discontinued by the Cotonou Convention.¹³

¹³ For further details see Françoise Moreau, "The Cotonou Agreement – New Orientations", in: The Courier 9(2000): 6-10; Siegmund Schmidt, "Aktuelle Aspekte der EU-Entwicklungspolitik: Aufbruch

The main reason for the fundamental shift from preferential trade arrangements to the principle of reciprocity was the ruling of the WTO Dispute Settlement body according to which the provisions of the Lomé Convention were unfair by giving preference to banana exporters in the Caribbean and in other countries with special relations to Europe. The Cotonou Agreement stipulates the principle of reciprocity in free trade. To comply with its logic, the Cotonou Agreement divided the ACP countries into different regional groupings. The subsequent negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreements left it to the African countries to decide under which configuration they wished to negotiate with the EU. Since 2002, the EU negotiated Economic Partnership Agreements with the following groupings in Africa:

1. West Africa: all ECOWAS member states plus Mauritania;
2. Central Africa: all CEMAC member states plus São Tomé and Príncipe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.
3. Eastern and Southern Africa: all COMESA member states except Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Libya and Swaziland.
4. SADC minus: all SACU member states including South Africa as an observer, plus Angola, Mozambique and Tanzania.

Chart I: African Regional Organizations



Source: United Nations Economic Commission for Africa: Assessing Regional Integration in Africa Addis Abeba 2004, p. 84.

Table I: Memberships of African Regional Groupings Compared to Memberships of Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) Negotiating Groupings (2008)

regional groupings	COMESA	SADC	ESA EPA	SADC EPA	ECOWAS	UEMOA	ECOWAS EPA	CEMAC	CEMAC EPA
Angola	x	x		x					
Botswana		x		x					
Burundi	x		x						
Comores	x		x						
Dem. Rep. of the Congo	x	x							x
Djibouti	x		x						
Egypt	x								
Eritrea	x		x						
Ethiopia	x		x						
Kenya	x		x						
Lesotho	until 1997	x		x					
Libya	x								
Madagascar	x	x	x						
Malawi	x	x	x						
Mauritius	x	x	x						
Mozambique	until 1997	x		x					
Namibia	until 2004	x		x					
Rwanda	x		x						
Seychelles	x	x	x						
South Africa		x		x					
Sudan	x		x						
Swaziland	x	x		x					
Tanzania	until 2000	x		x					
Uganda	x		x						
Zambia	x	x	x						
Zimbabwe	x	x	x						
Benin					x	x	x		
Burkina Faso					x	x	x		
Cape Verde					x		x		
Cote d'Ivoire					x	x	x		
Gambia					x		x		
Ghana					x		x		
Guinea					x		x		
Guinea-Bissau					x	x	x		
Liberia					x		x		
Mali					x	x	x		
Niger					x	x	x		
Nigeria					x		x		
Sao Tome and Principe							x		
Senegal					x	x	x		
Sierra Leone					x		x		
Togo					x	x	x		
Cameroon								x	x
Central African Republic								x	x
Chad								x	x
Equatorial Guinea								x	x
Gabon								x	x
Republic of Congo								x	x

Source: ZEI, Stefan Busse

By 2008, only some interim agreements with contingent groups of partners and individual member states were finalized. The EPA negotiations had turned out to be difficult, if not stuck in an impasse. The European Union and its African partners are now obliged to take stock and conceptualize a new beginning. Time has come to put European-African relations into a historical context, to study them in a comparative regional way and to re-define them by a new and comprehensive political strategy. In the course of the past decade or so, the European Union had initiated bi-regional association agreements with MERCOSUR, and eventually also with the Andean Community of Nations (CAN) and the System of Central American Integration (SICA). None of these negotiations has come to fruition by 2008. The negotiation with MERCOSUR had even been suspended for several years. But, the overall idea of bi-regional association agreements reflects a new strategic vision and orientation. The aim is to achieve a comprehensive political and economic scheme of association that contributes to stabilizing global developments, supports regional integration as it (really) stands in Latin America and projects the global role of the European Union. If it were successful, bi-regional association agreements would constitute a new global reality and an additional dimension of global governance. Bi-regional association agreements could become a strong answer to the challenge of globalization and an element in managing the opportunities of globalization. Bi-regional association agreements could be the appropriate element of moving from a post-colonial relationship to a mature relationship among equals in the age of globalization.

As far as Europe's relationship with the former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific is concerned, such a relationship is yet to grow. In light of the ambivalent experiences with negotiating Economic Partnership Agreements, the EU should reconsider its strategy toward Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

1. The preferential trade relationship with Africa and subsequently also with the Caribbean and the Pacific region has accompanied European integration from its very beginning. Since the initial commitment of the Treaties of Rome in 1957, the European relationship with former or current colonies and overseas territories of some of the EEC (later EC and EU) member states was based initially on a late colonial and later on a post-colonial relationship. It moved from dependency to cooperation, from colonial dominance to guilt and development aid. It continued to cover special vested interests of some former European colonial powers in some of their former colonies (and continuously existing overseas territories). The European Union as a whole has grown as this relationship has matured. Economic Partnership Agreement's (EPA's) were meant to be a modernizing continuation of this policy of five decades. However, they were too narrow, one-dimensional in their economic orientation and almost anti-political. They never had the potential to be a comprehensive strategy for re-designing Europe's relationship with Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.
2. The negotiations of Economic Partnership Agreements were inherently contradictory as far as the main normative objective of the European Union is concerned: promoting regional integration in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. While the EU was claiming to promote regional integration, it did not recognize the existing regional groupings as its integral and comprehensive negotiation partner. Instead of negotiating in the Caribbean with CARICOM, the EU "invented" CARIFORUM to include Cuba and the Dominican Republic. Both these countries are not considered to be helpful engines of Caribbean regional integration by CARICOM to which they do not belong.

Instead of negotiating with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIC), which has established itself in recent years as the nucleus of pan-Pacific regional integration, the EU preferred a different approach of negotiation vis-à-vis Australia and New Zealand on the one hand (both of which are PIF member states), the Melanesian group of PIF countries, Papua New Guinea in particular, on the other hand, while not pursuing a comprehensive negotiation strategy with the PIF as a whole. In Africa, the situation was likewise incoherent. The EU was negotiating with four idiosyncratic groupings and not comprehensively with any of the existing regional groupings. But in order to support regional integration in Africa, the EU needs to recognize regional groupings as they exist, no matter their substance, no matter how complex and difficult the relationship therefore may be and no matter how comprehensive the EU approach ought to be to accommodate the interests and conditions of all the respective regional partners. Everything else would always remain, at best, be a lukewarm support of region-building.

3. The European Union needs to develop a comprehensive political strategy for its future relationship with the regional groupings in Africa, in the Caribbean and in the Pacific region. Together, they may well pursue the goal of reciprocal free trade as one tool but they should never elevate reciprocal free trade to be the ultimate and comprehensive goal of a bi-regional relationship. The regional groupings in Africa, in the Caribbean and in the Pacific have matured. They still may be weak, contradictory and insufficient. Yet, as they exist they are expressions of a genuine and independent expression of region-building. They have become political processes and ought to be supported as such. They have to be taken seriously by the European Union as a political and economic expression of the genuine interest of the respective people, societies and states. The European Union can define criteria for the management of bi-regional relationships. These criteria ought to be defined by normative principles inherent in the European integration project, including the promotion of human rights, rule of law, democracy, good governance and market economy. But only a political approach culminating in coherent, comprehensive and multi-dimensional bi-regional association agreements with the existing regional groupings in Africa, in the Caribbean and in the Pacific region can serve as the basis of a new, mature and equal relationship between the European Union and large parts of a world that have outgrown post-colonialism.

Table II: State of Negotiations on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), (May 2008)

Eastern and Southern Africa
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The LDCs Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Malawi, Sudan and Zambia export under the EBA initiative since 1/1/2008. - An ESA-EU framework agreement and an EAC-EU framework agreement have been signed as interim agreements. These are expected to lead to two full EPAs by the end of 2008 and by July 2009 respectively.
Southern Africa
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland, Mozambique (23/11/2007) and Namibia (12/12/2007) signed interim agreements, while Angola is still negotiating. - South Africa continues exporting to the EU under the TDCA. - SADC-EPA states plan on applying a full EPA by the end of December
Central Africa
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cameroon and the EU have initiated an interim agreement on 17/12/2007. - An interim agreement with Gabon may be concluded in 2008. - The third non-LDC Republic of the Congo has shown little interest in the negotiations. - The LDCs Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and São Tomé and Príncipe export under the EBA initiative since 1/1/2008.
West Africa
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The non-LDCs Ivory Coast and Ghana signed interim agreements with the EU. - The remaining non-LDCs, Nigeria and Cape Verde, export under the standard GSP and under the EBA initiative since 1/1/2008. - The LDCs Benin, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo export under the EBA initiative since 1/1/2008. - According to ECOWAS, the conclusion of a full EPA is not to be expected before mid of 2009.
Pacific Region
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Papua New Guinea and Fiji have initiated an interim agreement with the EU on 23/11/2007. - The non-LDCs Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Marshall Islands and Tonga export to the EU under the GSP regime since 1/1/2008. - The LDCs East Timor, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu export under the EBA initiative since 1/1/2008. - A full regional EPA is expected to be concluded by the end of 2008.
Caribbean Region
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Initiated a full EPA with the EU. The formal ministerial signature of the Caribbean-EU EPA is scheduled for June 2008.
<p>EBA: “Everything But Arms” GSP: “Generalized System of Preferences” LCD: “Least Developed Country” TDCA: Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement</p>
Source: ZEI, Stefan Busse

V.

In order for the European Union to take African regional integration seriously, Africa has to break what Nigeria’s former President Olusegun Obasanjo has called the “over-dependency-under-performance syndrome.”¹⁴ In concrete terms, this requires a tangible re-calibration of development strategies aimed at moving from aid-driven development to aid-framed and –

¹⁴ Cit. In Timothy Muriti (ed.), „Institutionalizing Pan-Africanism: Transforming African Union Values and Principles into Policy and Practice“, IIS Paper 143, Thswane (Pretoria): Institute for Security Studies, 2007: 13.

supported private initiative as key to sustainable development. As far as the daunting problem of overlapping membership in different and often idiosyncratic regional groupings is concerned, Africa has to move from efforts to understand the chaotic world of overlapping memberships in regional groupings to an analytical frame that is trying to make sense of region-building in Africa through the prism of concentric circles: Applying the concept of subsidiarity and implying the need for a clear ordering of competences, priorities and potentialities, Africa has to redesign its region-building map along the notion of concentric circles:

First circle: African states ought to be considered the prime basis for any integration scheme on the continent. They need to strengthen their ability to provide public goods, protect non-negotiable normative principles (especially human rights, rule of law, market economy and good governance) and contribute to the development of supranational levels of governance in Africa. Only strong and capable states can be good partners in integration and engines for region-building.

Second circle: The regional groupings in Africa need to be considered the second layer in the construction of regional integration in Africa. They need to move ahead to become multi-dimensional structures of governance, vertically covering a broad array of public domains and horizontally re-connecting with the states and societies that are constitutive parts of each regional grouping. Eventually African regional groupings will have to move from the economic agenda to the agenda of peace and governance. They will also need to create some form of supranational authority and a gradually growing common legislation, monitored and, if necessary, advanced by the work of an independent regional judiciary.

Third circle: On the continental level, the African Union serves as facilitator and engine for the advancement of regional groupings. The African Union coordinates regional activities and should intent to harmonize objectives, instruments and policy formulations. It may remain the embodiment of the quest for African unity. This quest ought to be understood as an expression of a common identity and a shared political culture, supported by efforts of collective security and continent-wide implementation of standards of human rights and governance. But in the end, most probably the African Union will play more the role of a hybrid of Council of Europe, the OSCE and United Nations. Africa's "European Union's" will rest with some of the continents regional groupings.

Fourth circle: Africa might consider an extension of the scope and radius of its continent-wide coordination organs by reaching out to a cooperative structure that includes the most important strategic partners of Africa. Such a cooperative association with the EU, the US, China, Russia and the Arab League could serve as an externalized collective development and security platform aimed at stabilizing the genuine African efforts in peace-building and post-conflict management, but also supporting those aspects of global governance in which African issues and global issues are inextricably linked.

Africa has entered a new stage of region-building. The concept to achieve the African Economic Community by 2028 has been achieved at different levels in different regions of Africa. New components have been introduced into the agenda of African regional integration with the need for post-conflict management, the importance to move from petrified pluralism to dynamic pluralism, from static to real rule of law and from formal to deep integration including a legislative component. The core issues at this moment in time are trust, based on

symmetric regime structures, and implementation based on clearly defined goals, criteria and time-tables. Only some of the many African regional groupings can be expected to achieve the necessary success on this path. For the time being, most likely ECOWAS, SADC and the EAC are the prime candidates for success. They are multi-dimensional, have gone through the experience of crisis and renewal, are political in nature, and promising in potential and seriousness of their leading actors.

Other regional groupings will probably play supportive roles, either functional or sector-specific, in the context of the overarching leadership of the strongest of the African regional groupings. The African Union will need to distinguish between strong and weak regional groupings according to the normative principles of trust and democracy, rule of law and good governance, potential and capacity to project multi-dimensional interests and agendas. At the core of deep integration stands the recognition of the primacy of some sort of supranational political authority, usually backed by a supranational legal authority. Only with these mechanisms in place can economic authority grow. Like democratic accountability and supranational rule of law, economic credibility as a precondition for a genuine African Economic Community which is both sustained and successful.

At this point in time, the question for Africa is not whether maximalist or gradualist concepts of region-building prevail. A smart approach would combine maximalist objectives with gradualist approaches and processes. Gradualist federalism can be a smart and successful way to combine idealism with realism, vision with rational management of daily affairs and contingent obstacles. Such an approach will help to generate a unique and respected form of multi-level governance in Africa.¹⁵ Concentric circles of overlapping policy issues are a better perspective for Africa than the solar system-like and almost unrelated circles of formalistic memberships. A strategy of concentric circles for African region-building requires a clear ordering of political competencies between the different levels of governance.¹⁶ Such a strategy could break the circle of pretension and rhetoric integration that is still strongly represented in African region-building.

¹⁵ See Admore Mupoki Kambudzi, „Portrayal of a Possible Path to a Single Government for Africa“, in: Timothy Murithi (ed.), *Towards a Union Government for Africa: Challenges and Responses*, Pretoria/Thswane: Institute for Security Studies, 2008:13-27. Kambudzi's paper is the most stimulating and thoughtful contribution of a remarkable book. The book echoes the 2007 debate among AU Heads of State and Government about the potential for a unified African government. While in the end, the majority of Africa's political leaders opted for a gradual path toward continent-wide integration, their debate – and the subsequent echo to it in political circles and among academics in Africa – has advanced the quality and depth of the African discourse on regional integration considerably. Kambudzi, Secretary to the AU Peace and Security Council, must be lauded for advancing the debate and focussing it in a way that combines realism with idealism. His paper is a lasting milestone in the intellectual reflection about African region-building. It will serve as a landmark for the future debate on region-building in Africa. On the Grand Debate among the AU leaders see Delphine Lecouture, „Reflections on the 2007 Grand Debate on a Union Government for Africa“, in: Timothy Murithi (ed.), *Towards a Union Government for Africa*, op.cit.: 45-59.

¹⁶ For an initial proposal of how to order competencies in an African multi-level governance system see Irungu Houghton, „Identifying the Domains of Competence and the Possible Impact of the Establishment of a Union Government on the Sovereignty of States,“ in: Timothy Murithi (ed.), *Towards a Union Government for Africa: Challenges and Opportunities*, op.cit.:79-89.

VI.

The major question for African region-building is of a strategic nature: How to achieve result-oriented deep integration? How to do things better, more effective and with sustainable effects? How to define the potential of integration from its opportunities instead of being scared or worried about its limits? On paper, the declaratory frame around the actors of African region-building is impressive. The new momentum for regional integration in Africa is a fine opportunity that should not be missed. But it needs strategic focus, honest re-assessment of priorities and links between the existing structures and – most importantly – an optimal use of limited resources in order to achieve visible and lasting early results.

African states, African regional groupings and the African Union need to conceptualize their common future toward a functioning multi-level governance system in Africa on the basis of three components:

- A clear strategy linked to manageable priorities.
- A clear time frame linked to realistic procedures of work.
- A clear definition of binding criteria.

The third aspect is probably the most important one to advance African regional integration. Strategies, priorities, even time-tables and verbal commitments are cheap currency and in fact they are a rhetoric currency widely available in Africa (as elsewhere). But the need to define clear and binding criteria for the implementation of visions, programs and projects is key to move from rhetoric to real integration. There is enormous need for defining criteria and binding mechanisms in African region-building. African leaders and European partners of Africa should consider it a prime obligation to work on binding criteria for the implementation of noble goals and reasonable objectives. Aiming for the African Economic Community, establishing African peacekeeping brigades, continuing the interesting African Peer Review Mechanism on compliance with principles of good governance, making the institutions more effective, strengthening the role of the African Parliament and moving toward direct election of regional parliaments, advancing the role of regional and continental judiciary in matters of human rights but eventually in all matters of constitutional relevance with a recognition of the primacy of supranational judiciary – these are impressive, fine and welcome objectives. These objectives reflect a new reality in Africa, a new sense of commitment, ownership and responsibility. A lot of credit must go to those leaders and experts, civil servants and consultants who have re-engineered the quest for African unity into the direction of functional and working regional integration. But now it is time to deliver. And deliverance requires criteria and a certain degree of conditionality.

In order to move ahead, African actors in regional integration need to identify obstacles to integration if they want to better understand why certain things may not work, take longer to be implemented or require different techniques in order to succeed. They also need to identify possible federators and those mechanisms and actors that can bring the cause of integration forward. Africa needs more stakeholders that appreciate the potential of regional integration of streamlined competencies among the horizontal and vertical actors involved in integration or affected by its consequences.

Africa's regional integration efforts will have to move ahead in the direction of common legislative commitments with clear implementation procedures. It must be avoided that such a trend would be perceived as a zero-sum-game between African states and African regional groupings. A win-win-perception can be achieved only if regional integration can generate authentic value added for all participating actors and constituent parts. Therefore, the guiding question accompanying any integration project must be: What can a regional grouping – or Africa as a whole – do better than any of its member states? To think from the potential of regional integration is the only pro-active strategy to avoid being trapped by considerations about the limits, problems, obstacles and backlashes of integration.

As this tends to be an abstract thought, it is essential for the African Union and for the regional groupings across Africa to define spheres of potential value added through regional integration with binding character. It would be misleading to assume that this can only be a “good weather operation”. In fact, the overall European experience with integration suggests otherwise: European integration projects were mostly achieved because of a combination of three different and potentially contradicting factors:

- The insight of the limits of national actor capacity and the inner strength to recognize that regional solutions will be better.
- The recognition that a joint will requires compromises which are not always based on a speedy “return on investment” but need to be understood as a long term commitment of all partners.
- The understanding that different interests can be coupled through mutual trust in the overall usefulness of a project in spite of existing differences in motivation and objectives.

The experience of the Franco-German tandem as engine of European integration provides ample examples for this theory. When integration began in Europe, France wanted to project its political strength onto the European level while (West) Germany was looking for moral rehabilitation after the disastrous destruction triggered by the German totalitarian regime under Hitler. Eventually, the six founding states of the European Economic Community came together in 1957 defining functional and sector-specific economic integration as their first joint strategic goal on a long political path. When the common European currency was initiated, France wanted speedy access to the then strong German mark while (united) Germany was interested in Europeanizing its monetary policy, including the establishment of a politically independent Central Bank. Eventually, all EU partners agreed with the Maastricht Treaty of 1991 which combined a firm schedule toward full monetary union with concrete and enforceable criteria to make the monetary union an economic success beyond the interventionist ambitions of changing political majorities. When the French President launched the idea of a Mediterranean Union, he wanted the other EU partners, Germany in particular, to share his vision while Germany - and other non-Mediterranean European governments - was initially highly sceptical. Eventually, they did not want to be left out and leave the idea to become a unilateral French-project: in March 2008, all EU member states and institutions agreed to form a Union for the Mediterranean.

These are but three examples from different decades underlining the need to identify diverging interests in order to pool their potential for the common good. African regional

integration strategists would be well advised to study this European experience carefully in order to move from idealism to realism in the pursuit of their own region-building agenda: Existing commonalities do not necessarily trigger joint projects. Although this can happen, it is not certain. Political will and sustained regional, supranational structures remain essential.

Africa has ample room to identify win-win-constellations originating in deep and real region-building. Infrastructure measures and basic need provisions, optimizing human resources and migration potential, generating employment and sustainable growth, prioritizing education and closing the digital divide, preserving the human habitat and providing work conditions in line with human dignity – these are but a few of the basic challenges that should be reconsidered as opportunities for Africa. The wisdom of African leaders will find the right answers and turn strategy into reality. Important is one of the European experiences: Africa needs working, efficient and uncompromising institutions, but it should not fall into the trap to take institution-building for region-building. Regional integration is a matter of real issues and concrete results in joint projects. Regional integration is not done by emulating any sort of institutions that one might conceive. Regional integration happens through institutions and policies that work.

VII.

Currently, African region-building efforts are going through a formative period comparable to the period Europe went through between the mid-1940s and the mid-1950s. After World War II, the need for a new beginning was inevitable in Europe. State-relations and relations among European societies had to be based on a new rationale. They had to be framed by an organizing idea that would ensure peace and stability, affluence and freedom for generations to come. Europe's Western democracies opted for functional economic integration as a tool to advance peace and to promote eventual political union. There is no law of nature that requires to begin with the same tool and to follow the same or a similar path. One fundamental lesson may be learned from the European integration experience: The formative idea that can carry the rationale for regional integration for decades must be of a political and strategic nature, encompassing many aspects of public life and influencing several social and political dimensions. The rationale for European integration was the idea of reconciliation based on a gradually emerging common rule of law. The rationale for African integration could be the formative idea of continental stability through socio-economic progress based on a gradually emerging regionalized common rule of law. The limits of past state-centered policies need to be transformed by the opportunities of integration-oriented policies. African regional integration is going through its own formative years. They must be result-driven and open to the world in order to link Africa with the age of globalization. A remarkable new beginning has emerged in African region-building. Now, the phase of deliverance has started. This is a new, sometimes daunting and often difficult chapter. But it is a chapter with a perspective: To re-define the place of African people, societies and states in dignity and respect amidst all the other players in the age of globalization. For Europe, this opens the responsibility to engage in a new and future-oriented partnership with its neighbouring continent that truly deserves the name and will stand the test of time.

Remarks:

Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.

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