



The implications of the Lisbon Treaty for the EU's Relations with Africa

Mzukisi Qobo¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The new JAES partnership under the Lisbon Treaty will change the way the EU does business, both internally and externally. The EU needs to strengthen its relations with the emerging powers and Africa, but this should be complemented by more focused efforts on the part of Africa's leaders to identify and pursue their own best interests, which might include other possible development partners.
- The donor–recipient relationship between Africa and Europe should be challenged to establish a more equitable partnership, but this can happen only if African leaders manage their economies effectively and thus reduce their aid dependence.
- African countries should work hard to diversify their production base and export markets to reduce their trade dependence.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The long-awaited Lisbon Treaty, under which the European Union (EU) will be able to re-assert a dominant position internationally, streamline its internal bureaucratic processes to improve their efficiency, and speak with one voice on foreign policy matters, came into force on 1 December 2009. However, for African analysts the Treaty raises two questions. What will Africa's place be in the EU's new foreign policy? How will the EU's new arrangements under the Treaty cohere with the vision set out in the partnership of the Joint Africa–EU Strategy (JAES)?

It seems likely that although Africa will continue to feature on the EU's foreign policy agenda, it will command less attention. Europe's strategic interests in the continent will probably be limited to stemming security threats in North Africa, buttressing the African Union's (AU) security architecture, and accelerating trading arrangements under the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). The EU's purse strings will be tighter in the future given the internal challenges it faces, the most pressing of which are disagreements over the distribution of its budget and the financial crisis occasioned by sovereign defaults in some member countries.

Africa's policymakers should take a long-term view of the continent's external relations in general, and not focus only on the EU. At the moment Africa is being courted by diverse countries including India, China, Russia and Brazil. The 2010 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) Report emphasises the importance of South–South co-operation to diversify development assistance and improve Africa's opportunities for growth.² The geopolitical shifts in the global economy have opened up a number of possibilities and made it imperative that Africa's leaders should identify where their continent's best interests lie before deciding on a strategy in advance of the JAES review.

In sum, Africa's future depends on its continued development and its successful integration into the world economy. The Lisbon Treaty is likely to

have some beneficial and some deleterious effects on Africa's attempts to fulfil these goals.

INTRODUCTION

The Lisbon Treaty is the culmination of 50 years of European economic and political integration, which has tended to occur in tandem with increased engagement with former African colonies. Relations between Africa and the EU have not always been cordial, and have been strained by the EPA negotiations, which influential countries such as South Africa in the continent view as forceful assertion of the EU's mercantilistic interests above development considerations.

After attending an EU Summit meeting in Feire, Portugal in June 2000, then South African President Mbeki remarked that the EU had no strategic perspective relating to Africa, as it did with other areas of the world.³ However, the political partnership between Africa and the EU was strengthened in 2007 with the inauguration of the JAES, which outlined eight thematic areas of co-operation through which funding to Africa would be channelled. Nevertheless, the relationship remains asymmetrical, and tensions persist on a number of fronts, especially on issues related to the EPAs.

Interaction between the EU and Africa is likely to be more focused, albeit less important, under the Treaty of Lisbon's provisions and the EU's new institutional arrangements. The change should afford the EU an opportunity to review its relations with Africa, and give Africa the chance to negotiate a better and more equitable relationship with the EU.

More significantly, African countries should diversify their economic relations beyond the EU. The recent UNCTAD Report points out that relations between Africa and emerging powers should be welcomed, as they could help to diversify sources of development finance, develop productive capacity and contribute to sustainable growth and poverty reduction in Africa.⁴

This briefing looks at the implications of the Lisbon Treaty and the role of the revamped external relations mechanism for EU's relations with Africa, acknowledging that only time will

tell whether these predictions are accurate. I also reflect on the context within which the EU is working at present: its perception of its place in the changing global political landscape, and the internal challenges to its credibility caused by the financial crisis.

Currently, the EU has two major aims. The first is to put Europe's house in order by striving towards greater internal coherence, which involves simplifying the EU's complex decision-making procedures, and agreeing to a common foreign policy strategy. The second is to assert the importance of the EU in the global system, especially in relation to the United States and Asia's emerging powers. Under the Lisbon Treaty, the EU created two powerful new positions: President of the Council (with the first incumbent Herman Van Rompuy, a former Belgian prime minister) and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (Baroness Catherine Ashton, a British national). The latter presides over the European External Action Service (EEAS), which comprises both the foreign ministry and diplomatic corps elements of the EU. She is responsible for the massive diplomatic infrastructure representing the EU in various world capitals; for development assistance; and for formulating the strategy that guides it. This gives her unprecedented influence over the distribution of aid.

The eight thematic areas of co-operation of the JAES, which governs Africa-EU relations, are peace and security; democratic governance and human rights; trade, regional integration and infrastructure; millennium development goals; energy; climate change; migration, mobility and employment; and science, the information society and sharing satellite space. It is unclear how these will be affected by the new dispensation, although discussions are taking place in Brussels to determine the shape the JAES will take and the extent of the EU's aid commitment to Africa, in preparation for the EU-Africa Summit scheduled for November 2010 in Libya.

The new thinking could entail overhauling the development assistance template or proposing a much more focused engagement with Africa concentrated on the AU than on individual countries. South Africa remains an exception, as it

enjoys an independent strategic partnership with the EU. The EU might also seek to strengthen Africa's peace and security institutions and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives.

THE EU'S FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES UNDER THE LISBON TREATY

The EU is already engaged in establishing institutions like the EEAS, and while its policy on Africa remains undeclared, it is clear that the Western Balkans and countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Iran and those on the Horn of Africa will constitute the first tier of the EU's foreign policy priorities. The EU is likely to focus on four areas: promoting stability in the Balkans; building capacity to intervene in the Middle East and South Asia; improving trans-Atlantic relations; and developing new relationships with emerging powers like Brazil, Russia, India and China. This prediction is borne out by Catherine Ashton's travels abroad during her first six months in office. She began by visiting Washington in January 2010, which signalled the EU's intention to improve its trans-Atlantic relations in the light of concerns that China might replace it as the world power that the US consults on global governance issues. Later she visited Bosnia–Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo; the Middle East (Cairo, Damascus, Beirut, Amman, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Gaza); Moscow; Ukraine; China; and Japan. This is a mixture of countries: some in the immediate neighbourhood of Europe; others with which the EU is seeking to conclude strategic partnerships; and yet others that pose serious security challenges. It is in the last category that the EU is intent on imposing its authority.

The EU is asserting its status as a global power through a drive to conclude strategic partnerships with countries that have international weight. Ideally they should share the EU's normative commitments in areas such as democracy, human rights, and respect for human dignity (as set out in Chapter 1, Article 10a of the Lisbon Treaty). Such partnerships are being (or have been) negotiated with countries as diverse as the US, Brazil, Russia, China, India, South Africa, Japan, Mexico, and one regional organisation, the AU. In

some cases, the countries concerned have political systems divergent from the EU's stated norms. Nonetheless, in a geopolitical world that is fluid and characterised by complex interdependencies, making a decision about which strategic partners to choose will hinge not on shared values but on a mutual understanding of the rules of the political game. The latter will predominate if the interests of a power (whether a regional organisation or a country) are to be mediated effectively.

For the EU the need for strategic relationships is made more urgent by the realisation that Europe no longer occupies centre stage in the international system. Power in the global system is shifting eastward, and this change has drastically affected the self-image of the EU. As Tsoukalis *et al* point out: 'The relative weight of individual European countries, measured in terms of population, income and trade has been steadily declining for more than two decades; it can only go further down in the foreseeable future.'⁵

Regional groupings like the EU that aspire to global prominence will have to maintain their ascendancy by identifying areas of convergence with other key actors, especially emerging powers, and seeking formal co-operation agreements with them.

THE EU'S RELATIONS WITH AFRICA

With the Lisbon Treaty in force, it is probable that EU–Africa relations will change. Much will depend on the EU's internal discussions. The EU might decide to remodel the development assistance template, which will affect trade and development co-operation. At least two other factors are likely to affect the EU's external aid planning. One is the serious internal tensions within the EU concerning the disbursement of its annual €140 billion budget, which provides aid to the poorest member states and the most needy regions within them. The budgetary allocations for the 2014–2020 cycle will inevitably affect the EU's external development assistance undertakings. The other is that the EU's renewed foreign policy activism will be focused not on African but European countries, particularly the Western Balkans.

The EU sees a potential threat in the

accelerated economic engagement between Asian and African countries. Therefore a remodelled EU–Africa relationship will probably focus on a more commercially-oriented approach, particularly through the EPAs. Another improvement will be a far more coherent EU development policy. This is necessary because its involvement in Africa is extremely varied, including technology, agriculture, defence and development aid and the implementation of a range of undertakings like the Cotonou Agreement, the EU–Africa Strategy, the Europe Neighbourhood Policy and various regional programmes, which are managed under different EU divisions and directorates.

In the past, the major weakness in the partnership between the EU and Africa was poor co-ordination of development assistance, which at times resulted in conflicting programmes. This has impeded attempts to chart the impact of the interventions and assess the extent of progress made, which are normally tabled at the annual EU–Africa ministerial meetings.

EUROPE'S CRISIS OF IDENTITY

The EU represents a very diverse group of member countries with sometimes conflicting interests, making it a near-impossible task for it to speak with one voice, especially on foreign policy. The EU membership lacks a common understanding of what it means to be European. Despite its many successes in instilling the values of democracy and human rights among its member states and promote these abroad, offering the lure of economic reform to new and aspiring members, and creating an enviable internal market, the EU cannot boast a unified polity. Each country in Europe retains a strong sense of national identity that hinders the evolution of a common regional fingerprint. The threats to European countries posed by globalisation, the rise of China, and the surge in immigration from Eastern Europe and North Africa add to the general lack of

self-confidence. The recent financial crisis is likely to magnify these fears and strengthen nationalism, and the extent to which the climate of uncertainty will affect Europe's external commitments cannot be underestimated.

The sovereign debt default of Greece in April 2010 threatened to spread like wildfire across the entire zone. Various countries in Europe suffer from large budget deficits, significant public debts and ageing populations, which make them vulnerable to contagion. The crisis in Greece put the financial stability of Spain, Portugal and Italy in doubt, and these countries have imposed austerity measures to prevent a similar collapse, which would have seriously affected the credibility of the euro. The total amount of funding that has been channelled into rescuing the Greek economy by European leaders and the International Monetary Fund is €750 billion.

It is likely that the Eurozone crisis will lead to a further inward contraction of the EU's priorities, to the detriment of its overseas development assistance. The Lisbon Treaty has already committed the EU to a divergent foreign policy focus, and massive expenditure will be necessary to build the new bureaucratic infrastructure, pushing Africa further down the list of priorities.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Dr Mzukisi Qobo is head of the Emerging Powers and Global Challenges programme at SAIIA.
- 2 UNCTAD Report 2010, *South–South Co-operation: Africa and the New Forms of Development Partnership*. Geneva: UNCTAD, 2010, p. 26.
- 3 Thabo Mbeki, 'Africa Day Lecture', Thabo Mbeki Leadership Institute, Tshwane, South Africa, 27 May 2010.
- 4 *Ibid.*
- 5 Tsoukalis L, Cramme O & R Liddle, 'An EU fit for the purpose in the global age: can we rise to the challenge?' Policy Network 2010. www.policy-network.net.

The Emerging Powers and Global Challenges Programme is funded by the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency and the Danish International Development Agency, facilitated through the Danish Embassy in Pretoria. SAIIA gratefully acknowledges this support.

© SAIIA 2010 All rights reserved. Opinions expressed are the responsibility of the individual authors and not of SAIIA.