AFRICA

African countries and the EU cooperate mainly through the Cotonou Agreement and the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. The Cotonou Agreement was concluded in 2000 between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states and is structured in three pillars reflecting the political, economic and development dimensions of the partnership. The Cotonou Agreement was due to expire at the end of 2020 but it has been extended, most recently until June 2023, as the signature of a new agreement, negotiated to modernise and upgrade the partnership has been blocked in Council by one EU Member State. The Joint Africa-EU Strategy has been implemented through multiannual roadmaps and action plans adopted at each Africa-EU summit. At the last EU-African Union summit held in February 2022 in Brussels, EU and African leaders agreed on a joint vision for a renewed partnership based on solidarity, security, peace, sustainable development and shared prosperity. The EU is Africa’s biggest donor of development assistance, which is provided through the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe.

LEGAL BASIS

— Articles 217 and 218 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU);
— The Cotonou Partnership Agreement between the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states and the European Community and its Member States (Cotonou Agreement);

THE COTONOU AGREEMENT

Relations between the EU and sub-Saharan Africa are currently underpinned in particular by the Cotonou Agreement, which sets out the basis for relations between the EU and the 79 countries forming the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS).

The Cotonou Agreement was signed in 2000 and was due to expire in 2020 but has now been extended until June 2023. The goal of the Cotonou Agreement is to eradicate poverty and to integrate the ACP countries into the world economy. The agreement
is structured in three pillars (political, development, economic and trade cooperation) and is implemented by joint ACP-EU institutions, including a Council of Ministers, a Committee of Ambassadors and a Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

The negotiations on the post-Cotonou agreement between the EU and the OACPS were concluded in December 2020, but signature of the new agreement is still pending. The current Cotonou Partnership Agreement is expected to remain in force until the provisional application of the post-Cotonou agreement. The new agreement sets out strategic priority areas for cooperation, including: human rights, democracy and governance; peace and security; human and social development; environmental sustainability and climate change; inclusive sustainable economic growth and development; and migration and mobility. The post-Cotonou agreement also stresses the relevance of cooperation in international forums, and of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Cooperation is structured in three regional protocols reflecting the different priorities of the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions. The EU-Africa Protocol will become the key legal framework for relations between the EU and sub-Saharan Africa. The protocol will also assign a greater role to dialogue and cooperation with the African Union (AU). The regional priority areas encompass inclusive and sustainable economic growth; human and social development; the environment and natural resources; peace and security; the rule of law, justice, democracy and governance; human rights and gender equality; and migration and mobility.

An OACPS-EU Council of Ministers and four Parliamentary Assemblies comprising an umbrella OACPS-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and three Regional Parliamentary Assemblies (EU-Africa, EU-Caribbean and EU-Pacific) will underpin the structure of the agreement (see the briefing by the European Parliamentary Research Service entitled ‘After Cotonou: towards a new agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific states’).

**THE JOINT AFRICA-EU STRATEGY**

The Joint Africa-EU Strategy was adopted by European and African leaders at the second EU-Africa summit (in Lisbon in 2007) and defines the political vision for the Africa-EU partnership. Its goals are:

— To move beyond donor-recipient cooperation, opening Africa-EU relations to issues of joint political concern;
— To expand cooperation by addressing global common challenges such as migration, climate change, peace and security and to reinforce cooperation in international forums;
— To support Africa’s aspirations to encourage trans-regional and continental responses to these important challenges;
— To work towards a people-centred partnership, ensuring better participation of African and European citizens.

The strategy is implemented through multiannual action plans.
Ahead of the most recent (sixth) EU-AU summit, the Commission and the European External Action Service issued the communication ‘Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa’. It proposes enhanced cooperation revolving around five pillars: the green transition and energy access; the digital transformation; sustainable growth and jobs; peace and governance; and migration and mobility. On 25 March 2021, Parliament adopted a ‘resolution’ on a new EU-Africa Strategy – a partnership for sustainable and inclusive development. Parliament’s resolution echoes and reinforces parts of the proposal, such as sustainable and inclusive growth, while calling for increased focus on others, such as human development, social inclusion, human rights, the empowerment of women and young people, and resilient agriculture. On migration, the resolution considers that the success of the partnership will depend on significant improvements in mobility opportunities and calls for legal migration channels to be further developed.

At the sixth EU–AU summit (Brussels, 17-18 February 2022) EU and AU Heads of State agreed on a joint vision for a renewed partnership ‘promoting our common priorities, shared values, international law, and preserving together our interests and common public goods. This includes inter alia: the security and prosperity of our citizens, the protection of human rights for all, gender equality and women’s empowerment in all spheres of life, respect for democratic principles, good governance and the rule of law, actions to preserve the climate, environment and biodiversity, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, the fight against inequalities, support for children’s rights, and the inclusion of women, young people and the most disadvantaged’. At the summit, an Africa-Europe Investment Package of EUR 150 billion was agreed on with the aim of promoting diversified, sustainable and resilient economies.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

The EU remains Africa’s biggest donor.

As a result of the negotiations on the new 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework (see separate fact sheet 1.4.3 ‘Multiannual financial framework’), development cooperation is covered by the comprehensive ‘Global Europe’ financial instrument, fully incorporated into the EU budget.

Global Europe brings together 10 separate instruments and funds from the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework, as well as the European Development Fund. It has an overall budget of EUR 79.5 billion and is made up of three main components: geographical, thematic and rapid response. The largest share, reserved for the geographical component, is worth EUR 60.4 billion and almost half of it is earmarked for Africa.

A number of African countries situated in the north of Africa, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel and Lake Chad regions also benefit from the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, set up in 2015. Since this fund was launched, the total amount of funding made available for the three regional ‘windows’ has increased and now amounts to almost EUR 5 billion.
TRADE RELATIONS

The Cotonou Agreement allows the EU and ACP countries to negotiate development-oriented free trade agreements called Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). Trade between the EU and African countries – together with regional and continental economic integration – is considered a fundamental element to promote sustainable development in Africa. In addition, unilateral schemes allow preferential market access to the EU for most sub-Saharan countries (see separate fact sheet 5.2.3 ‘Trade regimes applicable to developing countries’). The principal instruments promoting trade between the EU and African regions are the World Trade Organization-compatible EPAs. However, the negotiation of these agreements, which started in 2002, has proven more difficult than expected and has been met with considerable resistance from some African Governments. Therefore several EPAs, which were meant to cover entire African regions, are only being provisionally applied with countries willing to do so, such as Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Cameroon (for more information, see the European Parliamentary Research Service briefing entitled ‘EU economic partnership agreements with ACP countries’).

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The conclusion of the ‘post-Cotonou’ agreement requires the consent of Parliament (Article 218 TFEU). Parliament’s consent is also required for the EPAs concluded with African countries. In addition, Parliament has actively contributed to shaping the new Global Europe financial instrument and is closely involved in its implementation.

Parliament has several standing interparliamentary delegations for relations with African countries and institutions. The principal body in which Parliament cooperates on such matters is the ACP–EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, composed of Members of the European Parliament and Members of Parliament from the ACP states, which plays a fundamental role in strengthening parliamentary relations between the EU and its ACP partners under Article 14 of the Cotonou Agreement.

Parliament has also developed forms of parliamentary cooperation with the AU through its Delegation for Relations with the Pan-African Parliament, established in 2009. Parliamentary summits typically accompany the intergovernmental ones, with parliamentary summits issuing a joint declaration directly to the heads of state or government at the beginning of each intergovernmental summit.

The EU also has privileged parliamentary relations with South Africa, which were strengthened in 2007 by the EU-South Africa Strategic Partnership - the EU’s only bilateral strategic partnership with an African country.

Christian Meseth
04/2023