AFRICA

EU-Africa relations are governed by the Cotonou Agreement and the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, including the political, economic and development dimensions of the partnership. The Cotonou Agreement is due to expire at the end of 2021. The negotiations on a ‘post-Cotonou’ agreement have concluded, but its signature is still pending. The Joint Africa-EU strategy has been implemented through multiannual roadmaps and action plans adopted at each Africa-EU Summit. At the last African Union-EU Summit held in 2017 in Abidjan, EU and African leaders defined their joint priorities for 2017 and beyond. The next EU Summit is expected to be held in 2022. Leaders will consider the EU’s vision for the EU-Africa partnership, as expressed in the joint communication from the European Commission and European External Action Service from 2020 entitled ‘Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa’, setting out a new common strategy. Africa and the EU are working together to promote peace, security, democracy, human rights, migration, strengthening economic cooperation, tackling climate change and promoting sustainable development. EU development cooperation in Africa, managed through the European Development Fund and other development instruments until 2020, currently relies on the new 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 governed by the Cotonou Agreement, which sets out the basis for relations between the EU and 78 countries in the ACP group. South Sudan is not a signatory to the agreement.

EU-ACP relations date back to the Lomé Conventions I-IV (1975-2000) laying down development cooperation and trade provisions, which allowed 99.5% of products from
ACP countries free access to the European market. Lomé was succeeded by the Cotonou Agreement, signed in 2000, initially due to expire in 2020 and then extended until the end of 2021. The goal of the Cotonou Agreement is to eradicate poverty and to integrate the ACP countries fully into the world economy. Based on mutual commitment and shared responsibility, it emphasises political dialogue, human rights, democracy and good governance. The Agreement 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 Organisation of the ACP States (OACPS) began in 2018 and have concluded, but signature of the agreement is still pending. The current Cotonou Partnership Agreement is expected to remain in force until the post-Cotonou Agreement kicks in. 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, the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Cooperation is structured in regional protocols reflecting the different priorities of the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions. The EU-Africa Protocol is the legal framework for relations between the EU and sub-Saharan Africa. The protocol assigns a greater role to dialogue with the African Union. 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 ACP-EU Council of Ministers and four Parliamentary Assemblies comprising an umbrella ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and three Regional Parliamentary Assemblies (EU-Africa, EU-Caribbean and EU-Pacific) will underpin the structure (see the briefing by the European Parliament’s Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research entitled ‘After Cotonou: towards a new agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific States’).

THE JOINT AFRICA-EU STRATEGY (JAES)

The Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) 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 fifth EU-African Union (AU) summit took place in Côte d’Ivoire in November 2017, focusing on ‘Investing in Youth’. This is a key issue for both partners, as 60% of the African population is aged under 25. At the summit, EU and African leaders adopted a joint declaration on the common priorities for an EU-African partnership in four areas: (i) economic opportunities for youth; (ii) peace and security; (iii) mobility and migration; and (iv) cooperation and governance. They also condemned the inhuman treatment of migrants and refugees in Libya, adopting a joint statement on the issue.

The sixth AU-EU Summit was scheduled to take place in 2020 but was postponed. It is currently expected to be held in the first half of 2022. The summit will define a new comprehensive common strategy that will replace and upgrade the existing Joint Africa-EU Strategy.

Ahead of the next (sixth) AU-EU Summit, the European 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, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on a new EU-Africa Strategy – a partnership for sustainable and inclusive development. Parliament’s resolution reinforces and completes some parts of the proposal, such as sustainable and inclusive growth, while calling for a reinforced focus on others, such as human development, social inclusion, human rights, the empowerment of women and young people, and resilient, mostly small-scale, 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 developed.

The EU’s ongoing interinstitutional negotiations will lead to an EU proposal to be presented at the summit, while the African Union is currently in the process of issuing its own proposal. The EU and AU positions will be considered at the AU-EU Summit with a view to developing a common AU-EU strategy.

DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

The EU remains Africa’s biggest donor. Development cooperation is channelled through different financial instruments. Until very recently, the most important of these was the European Development Fund (EDF), which was based on the Cotonou Agreement and was not part of the common EU budget (see separate fact sheet 5.3.1 ‘A general survey of development policy’). The 11th EDF (2014-2020) had a budget of EUR 29.1 billion: EUR 24.3 billion for national and regional cooperation programmes, EUR 3.6 billion for intra-ACP cooperation, and EUR 1.1 billion for the ACP Investment Facility, run by the European Investment Bank.

As a result of the negotiations on the new EU multiannual financial framework (MFF) 2021-2027 (see separate fact sheet 1.4.3 ‘Multiannual Financial Framework’),
development cooperation will be 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 MFF, as well as the EDF. 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, EUR 29.1 billion, is earmarked for sub-Saharan 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 recently created EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, set up in 2015. Since the 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, of which EUR 4.4 billion comes from the EDF.

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 trade arrangements EPAs. However, the negotiation of these agreements, which started in 2002, proved more difficult than expected. As a result, for the moment only the EU-South Africa Development Community (SADC) EPA has been provisionally applied, since October 2016.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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

Parliament has various 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 representatives of the ACP states, which plays a fundamental role in strengthening 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 African Union through its Delegation for Relations with the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), established in 2009. The last EP-PAP interparliamentary meeting took place in November 2020 in Brussels. It replaced the EP-PAP parliamentary summit that was put
off due to the postponement of the AU-EU intergovernmental summit. Parliamentary summits often 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 topics of the autumn 2020 interparliamentary meeting were:

— Assessment of the AU-EU partnership and the compatibility of the new partnership proposals with the achievements of the existing Joint Africa-EU Strategy;
— Migration, displacement and asylum cooperation and youth mobility in Africa;
— Peace and security, in particular the roadmap towards the AU flagship initiative ‘Silencing the guns by 2020’;
— Mechanism to achieve gender parity in all spheres of life through the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.

The EU also has close bilateral 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. The last interparliamentary meeting took place in October-November 2018 in Cape Town (South Africa).

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