

**The end or the beginning of a new relationship:
the EU and the ACP group**

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As we face the future we are conscious that a Europe that builds Community by bringing economic disasters to developing countries sacrifices values that are themselves essential to the strength and permanence of that Community – eroding those concepts of care and concern and of responsibility for the future of our planet which lie at its very heart. [...]

Ambassador to the EEC, Lawrence E ‘Bonnie’ Mann (Dyett 1998, p.45) 1973.

We are fully conscious and firmly convinced that at this historic juncture in the existence of our unique intergovernmental and tri-continental organisation, the demands for fundamental renewal and transformation are no longer mere options but unavoidable imperatives for strategic change.

Sipopo Declaration. 7th Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government. Sipopo, Equatorial Guinea. 2012.

Introduction¹

The ACP Group is the Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, which is historically associated with the European Union and is now almost sixty years old. Covering three continents, the ACP Group originally evolved from the Associated African and Malagasy States (AAMS) established under the Yaoundé Convention, a pioneer agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC) signed in 1963. It is currently comprised of 79 members, with South Sudan expected to enter as the 80th

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member. The ACP Group spans three continents, six regions and covers 48 countries in Africa, 16 countries in the Caribbean and 15 countries in the Pacific, with a total population of 980 million people.

Over half of the members of the ACP Group are categorized as LDCs by the UN. Only 9 LDCs are not part of the ACP. In addition the ACP includes 15 landlocked countries and 28 small island states; countries which are facing specific challenges. The Group is therefore the largest group of vulnerable countries. Moreover the ACP Group is also the largest multilateral group after the G77, which has 132 countries, and the United Nations, with a membership of 193 countries. The ACP group and the EU together form the largest group in UN, and comprise a majority.

The formation of the ACP group followed the wave of independence of former European colonies during the 1950s and 60s, and in parallel to the construction of the European Economic Community. The members of the ACP enjoy a special relationship with the EU. The ACP – EU Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) provides the legal base for the relationship in its current form. It covers cooperation in the area of trade, development cooperation, peace-keeping and political dialogue.

The ACP Group has been progressively recognized as an intergovernmental organization under international law. It has the observer status in the UN (since 1981). It is also recognized by international and regional bodies: UN Habitat, WTO, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), United Nations' Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Agence Internationale de la Francophonie and the Commonwealth Secretariat. The ACP Group has technical agreements with the World Customs Organization (WCO), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the World Bank.

Total ACP trade accounted for €550 billion in 2010. Its total exports in 2010 had a value of €258.9 billion, and imports had a value of €291.1 billion (Eurostat 2011). The ACP attracts increasing amounts of foreign direct investment (FDI), increasingly from South Africa, Brazil, China, India and Gulf states. In the aftermath of the economic recession Portugal is receiving financial assistance from Mozambique and Angola, and Portuguese professionals are leaving to find employment in Angola (Nossiter, 2011).

The CPA expires in 2020 after a 20-year period. The CPA stipulates that the ACP and the EU must enter into negotiations 18 months before the expiration of the agreement. It is inescapable that at this point the partners of the CPA will have to engage with each other (Nickel, 2012: 6). The world has changed profoundly since the CPA was established and will continue to do so before the agreement ends in 2020. At this point attention is being drawn to the emergence of the BRICS and the enlargement of the EU, developments which have changed the landscape. There is therefore consensus that the ACP – EU relationship will have to undergo a serious revision and re-examination. Some wonder if it will be discontinued altogether.

This paper examines how these questions are being addressed by the institutions and what notions underpin them. I will compare the narratives presented so as to identify if and what common denominators might be emerging between the ACP and the EU on their common future, if any. I will finally present my observations on what I feel are the key questions to consider in a frank and open examination of the future potential of the ACP – EU special relationship.

Breaking up of the ACP?

While the special relationship with the ACP countries was part of the protocols in earlier EU Treaties, in the Lisbon Treaty all references to it were removed, provisions that had been in place since the Treaty of Maastricht was adopted in 1992. These references in the Treaties had created a specific basis for the ACP – EU relationship. Moreover, the ‘Declaration on the European Development Fund’ (EDF), part of the Treaty of the EU under the Final Act since the Maastricht Treaty, was removed as well (Koeb, 2009).

The removal of references to the ACP and the EDF in the Lisbon Treaty alarmed the ACP Group. Observers concluded that the special relationship was no longer valued by the EU. The administrative architecture in the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Commission no longer recognised a central place for the ACP (Nickel, 2012, Laporte, 2012). In addition observers have mentioned that in current

euro-speak the term ‘ACP’ is systematically avoided by European Commission officials, giving rise to thought that there has been an agenda shift away from the ACP. The new white paper on Development Cooperation, presented by the European Commission in “An Agenda for Change” (2011a) did not mention the ACP. At the same time it gave increased emphasis to engaging with regional structures based on regional partnerships. European Commission proposals to differentiate eligibility of aid between countries is also met with suspicion. Would this be another way of dividing the ACP? It would lead to the diminishing of interest of the Caribbean countries, if they were no longer eligible to funding under the European Development Fund (EDF), the financial package by which the EU provides support for development in ACP countries. These were all seen as signs on the wall, announcing the end of the ACP – EU special relation.

The relationship between the ACP and the EU has gone through rough times in the last decade. The negotiations on the European Partnership Agreements (EPAs) have created serious divides between some of the ACP regions and the EU. In West Africa and in Southern Africa especially a common approach to the regional trade agreements is lacking. The ACP has accused the EU of inflexibility and reproaches the EU of imposing a blanket approach without giving any attention to the specific and different realities in each of the members of these regions. The EU has argued that the ACP is intransigently avoiding facing up to new realities of liberalisation in a globalised world.

The EPAs are part of a longer debate that begun in 1996 when the Green Paper was launched in preparation for the negotiations that would eventually lead to the CPA. The proposal to split the ACP in different groups as a basis for trade negotiations was part of the proposals. Viewed as an EU strategy to diminish the joint bargaining power of the ACP, regionalisation was rejected and the ACP remained as a joint umbrella under which the EPAs were negotiated (Van Reisen, 1999). Within the context of current challenges in the EPA negotiations, the solidarity among the ACP has become stronger in terms of providing a common position towards the negotiations (See for instance the Sipopo Declaration, 2012). The failure of progress in the EPA negotiations has unified the ACP Group. Yet at another level, these negotiations have already created a regionalisation of the ACP.

The regionalisation of the ACP does not necessarily impede the functionality of the ACP Group as a whole. However, the stronger identity of the ACP regions does point to the question of the added value of the ACP Group, over and above the regions, and its relation to the EU. Even though the European Commission has not taken any explicit official position in the negotiations, there is a strong sense that its leadership seems to favour the scenario of regional ACP structures, with the EPA regions (or Regional Economic Communities (RECs)) as the main basis for a continued relationship. This is the case despite the remarkably little progress has been made on the EPAs, whilst only one region has realised a full EPA Agreement. One could speculate that the continued lack of progress and the inflexibility of the European negotiating position on the negotiation mandate, might indicate that even a future relationship based on RECs is no longer desired or seen as a realistic way forward.

In this description of the situation, it is relevant to note that the European Commission is essentially concerned with the future relations of the EU with the ACP and the form this may take. The EU discourse on the ACP Group is centred around the question of the future of the special relationship it has with the EU, and this guides the operational questions focusing on the structure of the relationship between the two groups. The question of “the future” concerns the future of the ACP – EU relationship and therefore the issue it frames is in terms of a cost-benefit analysis of the relationship: what can the ACP bring to the EU in return for what its costs are.

In doing so the European Commission places the ACP exclusively within the historical context of its special and unique relationship with the EU. It has not engaged with the possibility that the ACP might have an identity additional to the relationship it has with the EU. In this construction of the discourse the ACP is understood and constructed as essentially dependent on its relationship with the EU, and the EU is put in a position that it can give life or death to the ACP.

The position of the ACP Group

The position of the ACP Group departs from a fundamentally different angle, in which it is moving away from seeing itself as dependent upon the relation with the EU. In 2010 the ACP established an Ad-Hoc Committee that was concerned with the “Future of the ACP group”. The title of this Committee is not just semantic but political. In the same spirit, the Sipopo Declaration that was adopted by the ACP Summit in December 2012, is entitled: “The Future of the ACP Group in a Changing World: Challenges and Opportunities”. Rather than discussing the future of the *ACP – EU* relationship, the Declaration discusses the future of the *ACP Group*. It discusses the future of the ACP Group both within the context of its relationship with the EU and on the basis of its own existence as a Group, independent from the EU.

The basis for the idea that the future of the ACP can be interrogated independently from its relationship with the EU lies in the Georgetown Agreement, which established the ACP Group in 1975. The Georgetown Agreement recognised “the importance of solidarity and unity in cooperation among the ACP States”, in the desire to enhance “the political identity of the *ACP Group* to enable them to act and speak with a single voice in all international fora and organizations” and to “establish the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States to achieve common objectives so as to contribute towards the realization of a new, fairer and more equitable world order...” (*Preamble to the Georgetown Agreement, as amended in 2003*).

The Georgetown Agreement reflects the remarkable merging of a coalition between former French colonies and former British colonies during the negotiations of the British entry in the European Economic Community. At that time the agenda of the European side was to keep these two former colonial groups of countries separate. It was the former colonies that decided that solidarity and joint positioning could bring better collective results. The Europeans, being squeezed in the oil crisis of the 1970s and in need of access to raw materials, accepted the demand by the former colonies for one policy towards the group in its entirety (Van Reisen, 2009). The Georgetown Agreement strongly reflects the notion of the ACP as a group established in and of itself, even if the original agreement does recognize a strong relationship with Europe.

The evolution of the Georgetown Agreement through its subsequent amendments shows a progression from the ACP's original dependence on the European Union to self-awareness and the formulation of specific objectives for the group's development. The Georgetown Agreement, as amended in 2003, lists a range of objectives that pertain to the development of the ACP as an independent group. Next to more general objectives these include more specific areas of work, especially sustainable development and climate change, trade and peace and conflict mechanisms:

- to consolidate, strengthen and maintain peace and stability as a precondition for improving the well-being of ACP peoples in a democratic and free environment;
- to promote policies, especially in the areas of the environment and the rational management of natural resources, in pursuit of sustainable development;
- to promote and reinforce intra-ACP regional integration so as to enable ACP States to increase their competitiveness and to meet the challenges of globalization;
- to strengthen the political identity of the ACP Group to enable it to act as a coherent political force in international bodies and to ensure that due regard is accorded its specific interests;
- to promote and reinforce political dialogue within the ACP Group so as to consolidate ACP unity and solidarity;
- to contribute to strengthening regional mechanisms for the prevention, management and peaceful settlement of conflicts and by pursuing and developing cooperation between ACP States and third States.

The 2003 amendments to the Georgetown Agreement further strengthen the values of the group, referencing respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law in the preamble. Finally the 2003 amendments to the Georgetown Agreement included the aspiration to “establish contacts and relations with other States and groups of States”. The Group has indeed diversified relations. In 2012 a Memorandum of Understanding of Cooperation with Brazil was signed. This signaled the interest of the ACP Group to open up to cooperation with new partners, and the interest of Brazil to make use of the structures that the ACP provides for cooperation. Meetings at Heads of State level have further steered the programme for a strong intergovernmental base of the ACP Group, with meetings held in Libreville, Gabon, November 1997, Santo

Domingo, The Dominican Republic, November 1999, Nadi, Fiji, June 2002, Maputo, Mozambique, June 2004, Khartoum, Sudan, December 2006 and Equatorial Guinea in December 2012.

The title of the Sipopo Declaration of the last Summit (“The Future of the ACP Group in a Changing World: Challenges and Opportunities”) is a clear reference to the idea that the ACP Group has to define its own future. By deduction it follows that the future relationship with the EU only follows from the definition of the own identity of the ACP. The Declaration is primarily concerned with the development of the Group as the principle basis of a future for the Group: “Convinced that the strength, unity and solidarity among our states will sustain the future of our Group in a changing world of challenges and opportunities, and determined to create the necessary conditions to make our Group an influential player in economic governance and global policy.” (§ C) The direction of the discussion on the future is not the EU but is economic governance and global policy.

Only in one part does the Sipopo Declaration strongly refer to the EU; this part is concerned with the EPAs. A joint and common approach in relation to the challenges that the ACP face is presented, in response to the EU’s strategy in the trade negotiations so far. The language here is not language of a Group that is begging for a relationship with the EU. It is a critical expression of the lack of progress in negotiations on EPAs: “We therefore regret that after 10 years of negotiations, the process has not yielded the desired results.” (§ 35) The disappointment and defiance expressed in the Declaration is a clear articulation of the difficult negotiations on EPAs. These have been a defining factor of the relationship in the last 15 years, throwing its shadow forward to frame the expectations of the post 2020 framework.

The Sipopo Declaration elaborates three substantive areas around economic governance and global policy: (i) International Trade; (ii) Sustainable Development, Climate Change, Food Security and Social Development and (iii) Energy and Sustainable Development in ACP States. In these areas the Declaration sets out a framework for a common political approach to address issues of common concern. In addition there is strong emphasis to promote South – South and triangular cooperation as an alternative to the traditional North – South development architecture.

Overall the Declaration is a strong statement to define the future of ACP on the basis of the identity of the ACP as one Group: “On the basis of the Georgetown Agreement, we resolutely reaffirm our determination to stay united as a Group grounded in the values of peace and solidarity, unified action and the identity that characterize us.” (§ 65) On the basis of this identity, understood as a self construct and not imposed, the Declaration continues to set out the future of the ACP – EU relation: “We are committed to continuing and sustaining the relevance and effectiveness of our Group by deepening and enhancing the ACP – EU relationship as a unique North – South Development Cooperation model, while developing diversified South – South and other partnerships, with an aim to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development in our States.” (§ 65)

Whether or not this path will succeed is still to be seen; yet the question of the future is framed as one in which the ACP itself will decide on the way forward. Therefore the central question is the development of the future identity of the ACP Group in a newly emerging global context. The relationship with the EU is here a subquestion, even if it is an important one, one that emerges in the frame of the history of the ACP and of the special relationship that the ACP Group enjoys with the EU and values.

The European Parliament

The European Parliament has not yet expressed itself on the issue of the Future of the ACP – EU relation. A policy briefing (February 2013) gives an indication of the initial framing of the question. In addition, analysis of the position on the replenishment of the EDF and on the budgetisation of the EDF provides interesting insight in the position of the European Parliament vis à vis the ACP. The Presidents of the ACP – EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly have expressed themselves on the discussion on the future configuration of the ACP – EU relations, which will be examined in the next section.

The current position of the European Parliament is most straightforwardly expressed in its position of replenishment of the EDF. If the European Parliament was inclined to weaken or even seek the end of the special relationship between the ACP and the EU, the most simple way to make this known would be through the budgetary powers it has. Indeed it is the funding of the support to the ACP Group that has remained outside the European Budget, which has in a material sense underpinned the special position of the ACP Group.

It has long been a desire of the European Parliament (since the construction of the ACP Group as such in the 1970s) to bring the EDF into the European Budget. This would bring the programme of the EU with the ACP into the general policy and budgetary framework and more importantly, it would give the European Parliament greater mechanisms of oversight. However, in the first decade of the Millennium the position of the European Parliament changed in favour of maintaining the EDF as a separate entity. The reason for this was the growing concern that the European Commission was aiming to remove the boundaries of the budgets for development cooperation so as to have more flexibility to fund its external programme. A chronic underfunding by Member States of the EU's foreign policy agenda coupled with an increase in expectations for the EU to present itself as a Global Player on the world scene were contributing factors to the pressure felt by the European Commission. This motivated the proposal to budgetize the EDF, but the European Parliament rejected the idea that the problem of the underfunding of the EU's foreign affairs agenda should be resolved by drawing on resources for development. The EDF remained a separate fund, supporting the ACP.

A second reason for the change of position of the European Parliament in 2006 on budgetization was a response to the pressure of the Council to reduce the budget of the European Union. The separate fund of the EDF provides an important additional budgetary source and the European Parliament feared that overall budgetary means would be further reduced by the Council if the EDF was incorporated in the main budget. The proposal of the European Commission to budgetize the EDF in the Financial Perspectives 2007 - 2013 was therefore rejected by the European Parliament in 2006.

The result is that the specificity of the ACP – EU relation to date is still supported by the financial arrangements which provide a separate basis for it. In the negotiations for a new financial framework (2014 – 2020) the European Commission intends to budgetize the EDF (European Commission, 2011b) in 2020. The European Parliament will only agree if there is reasonable guarantee that this will not reduce funding for development cooperation (European Parliament 2013). This is consistent with the European Parliament position that has demanded a meaningful endowment of the EDF throughout its history.

In the provisions for the 11th EDF the European Commission has provided that parliamentary scrutiny between the two main development instruments (EDF and DCI) are the same. This will allow the European Parliament to scrutinise the EDF in equal measure to other development partnerships. The urgency of the previous democratic deficit of the EDF has now been resolved (European Parliament 2013).

In addition to the above the European Parliament continues to have a strong interest in some of the structures set up under the ACP – EU cooperation, among which the ACP – EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA). This provides a mechanism to promote parliamentary democracy in the ACP countries and to engage at a political level with the ACP members of parliament (addressed further below).

The narrative of the European Parliament has had a strong focus on both the financing of the ACP – EU cooperation and the scrutiny of the EDF and presents a strong focus on aid cooperation between the two groups. It strongly presents the ACP – EU relationship in a donor setting that defines the EU as a donor and the ACP as recipient. A view on the own potential of the ACP remains invisible in the current emphasis on aid cooperation as the defining element of the relationship.

The Policy Briefing by the European Parliament Policy Department (2013) remains within the discourse on the future of the *ACP – EU* relationship (which is the title of brief). Nevertheless this Brief does recognise the distinct dynamics in the two groups. The policy brief also recognises that the ACP Group is ahead in the debate on the future of the ACP – EU Partnership. Departing from a perception that ‘Business as Usual’ is not an option for the post 2020 framework, the following options are presented:

1. Disappearance of the common ACP – EU framework and its replacement with separate regional agreements
2. Overarching ACP – EU framework and strengthened regional structures
3. A Revamped ACP Group, beyond an EU partnership (2013)

The rationale provided for these options give acknowledgement of the ACP Group itself as one of the defining actors in the consideration of future options. It notes that the Sipopo Declaration strongly rejects a break-up of the ACP Group, associated with option 1. It further observes that if the ambitious goal of a more dynamic and cohesive ACP Group was achieved, an aim the Sipopo Declaration aspires to, it could “significantly shape” the partnership after 2020 (2013: 9). The Policy Brief notes further that if the ACP Group would succeed in creating a basis to present itself in an equal relationship to other intergovernmental groupings, it would challenge the EU “to make itself an attractive partner.” (2013: 10)

While the Policy Brief remains within the discourse of the ACP – EU relationship, it recognises the distinct contribution of the two different groups in defining the relationship and potential alternative options. It also recognises the ACP as an independent Group with aspirations that are not defined by its relationship with the EU and go beyond the original historic relationship built with the EU.

The ACP – EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly

The Presidents of the ACP – EU JPA expressed themselves in 2012 in a Declaration entitled “Beyond the Cotonou Partnership Agreement”: “The Co-Presidents warn of the loss of parliamentary activity and of the executive control of national parliaments should the Cotonou Agreement not be duly replaced after 2020. In this sense, they recall the key role the ACP – EU JPA plays in strengthening political dialogue between the parliamentarians of both regions and in the legitimization of the scrutiny powers of the ACP states.”

The ACP – EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly presents in its discourse a bridge between the European Commission’s emphasis on the future of the ACP – EU relation and the ACP’s starting point with the future of the ACP. It states: “Co-Presidents of the ACP – EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly welcome the current discussions at ACP and EU levels, on the future configuration of the ACP – EU relations after 2020 and stress the important roles that parliaments play in this context. The Co-presidents underline the importance of the issues discussed and call for a thorough debate to better define the respective interests of both the ACP and the EU, in order to continue and to intensify their partnership beyond 2020.” (ACP – EU JPA, 2012. Emphasis added, MvR). This narrative maintains a strong focus on the ACP – EU relationship, whilst recognising the respective (and hence potentially different) interests of the two Groups in it.

The recognition that the two Groups have distinct interests (alongside common interests) is emphasised by the recognition provided in the statement to the potential of the ACP Group. It states: “The ACP group forms a solid block that should explore its collective strengths in order to play a meaningful role in view of the global challenges and the new opportunities opened by the emerging economies.” (ACP-EU JPA 2012) The Co-Presidents elaborate this statement by presenting the potential of the ACP Group to impact on global processes, and stressing the role it can play as an independent actor: “In this regard, the Co-Presidents recall that a strengthened ACP Group would be a capable interlocutor with whom the EU and other partners could cooperate efficiently in pursuing objectives of mutual interest. The follow-up of the Rio+20 Conference, the post-2015 development agenda or the finalisation of the Doha Development Round present such opportunities.” (ACP – EU JPA2012)

Discussion of scenarios for the post 2020 configuration

Comparing the narratives of the different actors of the debate on the post 2020 relationship between the ACP and the EU, it is evident that the definition of the problem varies in fundamental ways. The differences in the framing of the issue lead to different

assessments of the challenges and opportunities. With the Adoption of the Sipopo Declaration the reality of the ACP Group defining its own future is a reality. It is also clear that a number of issues can be identified on the basis of this. These are discussed here below.

1. Decreasing interest and increasing relevance

Laporte (2012) observes a “decreasing interest in the ACP group”, an observation related to a mix of different issues. He mentions the Eastwards interest of the newest EU Member States.. However, one could argue that the history of EU accession has shown that the interest of Member States to play a bridge to certain regions balances out over time (van Reisen, 2009).

A more complex issue raised by Laporte is the issue of competition between intergovernmental groups and whether the ACP Group carries added value in a comparative perspective to other groups. Laporte is quick to conclude that the EU is interested in reinforcing relations with the AU and that this might be more efficient. The problem with this position is that it takes no note of how the ACP views this. Moreover, one could argue that the long-term interests of the EU might be better served in a multitude of intergovernmental arrangements. I will elaborate these arguments here.

In 2011 I presented an analysis of the deficits in global governance and especially the absence of representation of the poorest countries. The poorest countries are systematically marginalised in the context of the G20, the UN Security Council, the World Bank and the IMF. If development would be served by global governance structures that include the interests of the poorest countries, one can argue that the absence of the poorest countries from global governance is in fact a development problem.

Representation of the poorest countries in Global Governance requires arrangements that are different from regional arrangements. Even the EU itself is represented in multiple ways in all of these fora. Within the context of the UN, the G20 and the Financial Institutions it would be helpful if a multi-continental intergovernmental Group

was available to defend the interest of the poorest countries. The three-continental ACP Group can do just that.

Historically homogeneousness is rarely achieved in international relations. Being the history of men and women international relations are always a reflection of history and social processes that are not defined by one single logic. One can argue that the ACP is well placed to represent the poorest countries. Being the largest group of poor countries and diverse, it is actually in a position to carry some weight in the international arena.

Is this just a matter for the ACP? It can be construed as solely an ACP Group interest. But it can equally be thought of as a shared interest with the EU. After all, the EU still cares about its values of good governance, inclusiveness and human rights. As quoted by the Ambassador of Guyana in 1975 in the beginning of this paper, the European Union can only hold on to these values, if it is able and willing to defend these internally and externally. This is a matter of principle, but it is also a matter of practicality. In several recent global negotiations the EU was sidelined because it did not have a strong enough coalition of partners and it failed to use the likeminded potential it had with the ACP. This is the case in climate change negotiations, in negotiations on financial control and economic policies and in the poverty agenda. The ACP Group as a Group that has a meaningful political contribution in global governance can therefore be seen as a potential key interest of the EU.

2. The role of the ACP Group in new global configurations

The African Union is the regional grouping most thought of as ‘replacing’ the ACP group. Indeed in many funding and political arrangements the EU has made it clear that it prefers to deal with the AU. Laporte (2012: 3) argues that the AU or regional organisations such as ECOWAS “appear to have gained more legitimacy and credibility in dealing with continental and regional political and security issues.” While the AU (and regional bodies) are obviously relevant and of interest to represent the African region (or other regions), I would argue that the relevance of the AU (or other regional bodies) does not imply the irrelevance of the ACP group.

As I have argued above, a regional representation is not set up to do the a representation of a Group of poorest countries. In addition it would be an illusion to think that Global Governance would be a purely interregional affair in the near future. Even the European Union has not been able to replace the European permanent members in the Security Council, demonstrating that an interregional governance system is not (yet) realistic. A representation of a like-minded group that is not regional therefore has much more legitimacy and practical meaning.

Globalization requires increasingly real participation and negotiation in various circles of like-minded group in order to successfully advocate interests of countries or regional grouping. Lein et al (2013) argue that there is a “general perception” that the ACP and the EU have little cooperation in this regard. Cooperation around global governance issues is indeed a new endeavor and the institutions on both sides need to be mandated to engage in this regard. Despite it being early days in terms of political cooperation, there has been considerable progress. In 2011 the ACP engaged in the following areas of global governance::

- Partnering with the EU in the UNGA to realize EU representation (following from Lisbon Treaty)
- Showing presence and gave voice to development issues pertaining to climate change in Durban COP 17 conference
- Collaborated with various partners on South – South cooperation, in preparation of the Busan conference on aid effectiveness
- Participation in the LDC conference in Turkey
- Negotiation of collective position vis a vis the EU proposal on trade

In 2012 the ACP engaged actively in the UN Conference on Sustainable Development and the ACP and the EU presented a common statement. Cooperation on South – South cooperation has also remained an area of ongoing engagement. The ACP is strongly advocating for a robust Arms Trade Treaty, which is relevant and urgent.

Laporte (2012: 5) finds the feasibility of a scenario of a greater role of the ACP in global governance “questionable” given “potential duplication”, referring specifically to the G77. However various resource people and ambassadors who have served in the UN in NY argued in private conversations that in the current global changes the ACP

does actually have relevance. They point to the changing nature of the G77 that is a wide grouping including countries like China, India and Brazil. The ACP Group, as part of the G77, provides a very useful forum for agreeing issues that are common to the smaller economies in the G77. Moreover the possibility of consensus building between the ACP Group and the EU by aligning the diplomatic circles of the ACP in NY and in Brussels where they have a strong presence, presents a very good opportunity for coalition building with the EU on UN related matters. The working structures and history of the ACP in working together is a strong asset in this regard and allows for mobilization in capitals and in regions, all of which could be useful to strengthen global governance. Unlike the G77 which relies on the capacities of the government structures of the current chair, and the UN secretariat, the ACP's capacities are underpinned by its permanent secretariat in Brussels that not only provides ongoing capacity for the workings of the Group, but also an institutional memory.

The ACP Group has also different comparative advantages to regional groupings. Compared to the AU, the ACP group appears as an operationally strong body, with clear structures. It is well connected to Finance and Planning Ministries. It has built capacities in planning, finance and programme management. Moreover, thanks to the EPA negotiation perhaps, the ACP Group has solid experience in organising itself in global negotiations, and it has created an ability to confront powerful blocks such as the EU and the WTO. The ACP has history, an identity and a track record in political strategy development. This should not generate fear in the EU. It should generate pride as it speaks to the achievement of the alliance it has built with the ACP Group. The EU should celebrate the independent potential of the ACP Group as the fruit of the 60-year old partnership and as a success of a development relation that has leaped into the future.

3. Challenges for the EU as a Global Player

Exploring the issue of an effective engagement in global governance through simplification (and hence abandoning the special relationship with the ACP) need to be set in a realistic understanding of global processes of negotiation and access.

The EU might in the short run think to benefit from a more simplified configuration and set of relations. But is this likely to give it more benefits? If the relationship with the ACP group of countries is regionalised, would this not diminish the current potential of the ACP to be a bridge in global governance issues to both Latin America and to Asia? A regional focus would largely leave the influence of Europe limited to Africa, whilst both the US and China will not fail to compete with it over influence in Africa. The EU should therefore seriously reflect on its strategic interests and whether or not the ACP group as a whole are a fundamental part of a net of relations that will allow the EU to retain its relevance as a Global Player.

Arguments pointing to ‘duplication’ in international relations negate the reality that global governance is composed of concentric circles and that different groupings add different forms of accountability and mobilise interest negotiation in different ways. The priority for the improvement of Global Governance is not to develop a system that is perfect in its efficiency, but requires different channels for interest representation. At this juncture, the big challenge in Global Governance is not a point of ‘efficiency’ or ‘duplication’. The problem is the lack of representation of the poorest countries and their systematic marginalisation in global negotiations. The EU can do something about this by creating space for the ACP Group to ensure international fora and negotiations are opened up to the Group so that their interests can be voiced.

The negotiations in the Rio + 20 Conference are a good illustration of the value of an approach of different negotiation circles. Within the preparations in the ACP different problems of different subgroups emerged and were negotiated. For instance the priorities of the small island states facing high sea levels, and Sahel countries suffering from desertification. The ACP provided an excellent forum to prepare common positioning of these very varied interests (all faced within the context of development). This provided the basis for a joint position with the EU. For the EU it added relevance and urgency to its position and strengthened its bargaining power being supported by the large ACP grouping.

The role of the ACP in political dialogue has also increased in recent years within its own group in relation to sensitive political situations. In the complex political developments in Madagascar, Togo, Senegal and Mali the ACP played a constructive

role. The ACP has built strength as a group to engage both internally and with third parties, especially the EU, in such processes. The EU can benefit from this capacity of the ACP and its engagement with the ACP group can give it access. The direct interference that is reminiscent of colonial practices is more and more ineffective and therefore alternative channels of communication, messaging and positioning need to be fostered.

The assets contained within the special relation that the EU has with the ACP should not be underestimated. While the Chinese finance the AU Head Quarters and so much more in Africa, the EU is sending out messages that it has reservations on a continued partnership with its key ACP partners. If the EU is really prepared to give up the one Group with which it has a historic relation, a joint past and shares a common set of values, it raises questions of its own ambitions. Is the EU truly fit to be a Global Player? Some EU Member States are ready to take over this role, be it in the context of the Francophony or the Commonwealth – though none of these will have a chance to compete at the global level within the new challenges that present themselves.

It is therefore imperative to seriously examine the risks of scenarios in which the special relationship of the EU and the ACP Group is discontinued. In those examinations there needs to be a greater recognition of the potential negative consequences of bringing the sixty year relationship to an end. The ACP and the EU have on both sides invested so much already to build this alliance. It therefore may hold important assets to the future of both.

Conclusions: Nurturing partnership

There still remains some obsession with the historic roots of the ACP – EU, which can lead to distorted conclusions. Lein et al. (2013: 1) list as a reason to “do away” with the ACP – EU partnership the “[d]ecreasing relevance of ex-colonial ties”. I would argue that the ACP – EU relationship never was ‘rooted’ in colonisation, but quite the contrary; it provided an alternative set of relations for the EU with the newly independent nations. The creation of the ACP group itself, bringing all the former

colonies together in one, was a complete break with the colonial practices. The Georgetown Agreement was negotiated by the ACP countries (and in disregard of the master plan of the Europeans) in 1975 to break with the yoke of colonial ties. It is imperative that the EU accepts and understands the ability of the ACP to map out its own future.

The narratives on the post 2020 configuration that are overly focussed on the ACP – EU relationship without consideration of the aspirations of the ACP Group as an independent player are, one could argue, outdated and rooted in the past. This is also the case for narratives that are exclusively focused on aid, shaping the discussion on the post 2020 arrangements within a hierarchical donor – recipient relation, which is based on the top-down model of the colonial times. The Sipo Declaration must therefore be taken seriously and provides an essential point of departure for reflections on the future.

The EU itself must carefully examine its own interests and how it wants to secure these. Competition over natural resources, raw materials, energy, land, food, water and labour will increase and global governance will be crucial to foster arrangements to create access to these. Matching economic challenges, competition over markets coupled with the threats posed by climate change need to be managed in a multilateral framework. Security, peace and migration questions require international cooperation. The EU will be faced with ageing and labour market shortages. The EU will need allies it can trust. The short-term savings of “doing away” with a partnership the EU has built over 60 years could come at a great cost.

But partnerships do not come for free. They need attention, nurturing and sharing. They improve when common values are celebrated. They must certainly be fed by mutual respect. They need the memory of a joint past and dreams of future aspirations. They need investment of political time and dialogue. They need to be sustained.

Annex 1: EDF

Table 1: EDF in million € (current prices)

	Rome Treaty	Yaoundé I	Yaoundé II	Lomé I	Lomé II	Lomé III	Lomé IV	Lomé IV bis	CPA	CPA	CPA
	1957	1963-1969	1969-75	1975	1979	1984	1990-1995	1995-2000	2003-2008	2008-2013	2014-2020
	EDF 1	EDF2	EDF3	EDF4	EDF5	EDF6	EDF7	EDF8	EDF9	EDF 10	EDF 11*
Year	1957	1963	1969	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2006	2011
EDF	569	730	887	3,053	4,207	7,882	11,583	13,151	14,300	22,000	34,275*
# ACP Countries		18	18	46	58	65	68	70	77	77	79
# EU Countries		6	6	9	9	10	12	15	15	25	27
EDF/per capita current prices	10.5	9.7	10.5	12.3	13.5	17.9	21.9	21.3	20.7		10.6*

**This is the negotiation offer which has not yet been agreed to date (compiled MvR).*

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