



Africa-EU Relations and the African Continental Free Trade Area

Redefining the Dynamics of
Power and Economic
Partnership in a Complex
Global Order

Edited by
Leon Mwamba Tshimpaka
Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba

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ISBN 978-3-031-57991-2 ISBN 978-3-031-57992-9 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57992-9>

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Introduction: Redefining the Dynamics of Power and Economic Partnership in Africa–EU Relations Through the African Common Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba and Leon Mwamba Tshimpaka

The current shift in global alliances and interests presents new possibilities and challenges that could define the relationship between the EU and Africa. In particular, the ongoing Russia–Ukraine war poses new dynamics to changes in critical gas and energy supplies that could affect social, political, and economic aspects of life in Europe. While Africa could help to meet some of the critical needs of Europe, its relations with Russia present other complexities that may affect the extent to which it may respond to

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Switzerland AG 2024

L. M. Tshimpaka and S. O. Oloruntoba (eds.), *Africa-EU Relations
and the African Continental Free Trade Area*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57992-9_1

the needs of Europe. Until recently, the EU has been the dominant power with significant leverage on the resources and markets of Africa. Although there is no single approach to how the 27 EU countries relate with Africa, it is important to emphasize that as a bloc, the EU has exerted its normative power to influence political and economic policies in Africa. As Hurt (2010, 2003) argues the EU has used its global influence to promote neoliberal values in Africa.

This projection of power has been achieved through trade agreements and different forms of development assistance. At the national level, European countries such as France, pre-Brexit UK, Germany and to a less extent, Portugal have leveraged on their colonial legacies to exert direct or indirect powers in shaping and reshaping economic and political processes in postcolonial Africa. As Adebajo and Whiteman (2012) argue, France has through its French-Afrique policy continued to relate with its ex-colonies as its appendages both in the expropriation of minerals, government procurement and control over macroeconomic policies. With the incursion of Russia and its private security company, the Wagner group, there are resistance and changes to this pattern of neo-colonial relations. Both Mali and Burkina Faso have chased French soldiers away from their territories (Ibrahim, 2023). Both before and after Brexit, Britain has also maintained strong influence on its former colonies such as Nigeria, Kenya, and Ghana. But these power dynamics are changing with the incursion of new entrants such as China and Russia to Africa. Whether or not Africa will be able to take advantage of these changes in the dynamics of power would depend on the extent to which it can redefine its strategy and strengthen the African Union to meaningfully represent its collective interests (see Oloruntoba, 2023).

This book explores and analyze the evolving dynamics of power and economic partnership between Africa and the European Union (EU) in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It focuses on understanding the redefinition of dynamics of power and the potential impact on economic cooperation between the two continents in the midst of a shifting global order. Since independence, African leaders have recognized the importance of regional integration as a means of pooling resources to address the differences in capacity, resources and boost economies of scale. The establishment of the Organization of African Unity and its successor, the African Union as well as the regional economic communities were geared toward the ideals of continental integration. Although the African Union has been criticized for its limited

capacity to drive the integration agenda in Africa (see Agupusi, 2021), it has successfully managed the negotiations and eventual take-off of the continental free trade area (African Union, 2018). The AfCFTA is the crystallization of the various negotiations that started in 2017 and is part of the processes toward the actualization of the African Economic Community as encapsulated under the Abuja Treaty of 1991.

This book examines the establishment and implementation of the AfCFTA, which is the largest free trade area globally, covering 54 African countries. It explores how this initiative has the potential to reshape Africa–EU relations by promoting intra-African trade, economic integration, and diversification, as well as inter-regional trade. Both continents have potential to serve as global actors in reshaping the global order in ways that can affect how multilateralism foster inclusive development. However, whether this will happen would be a function of how the EU and AU define their interests and relationship. The book further examines how traditional dynamics of power have influenced economic cooperation and explores the potential for a more balanced and mutually beneficial partnership between Africa and Europe.

The book also analyzes the complex global order and its implications for Africa–EU relations. It considers determinant factors such as Brexit, revolution in information communication technology (ICT) migration, climate change, soft power, post-COVID-19 pandemic moment and emerging civil society, and their growing impact on both Africa and EU. The book explores how these factors impact the economic partnership between Africa and EU and the potential for new avenues for mutually beneficial cooperation. The book seeks to provide insights into how the AfCFTA and complex global dynamics can redefine power relations and foster a more equitable and prosperous economic partnership between Africa and the EU. It contributes to policy discussions and academic research on Africa–EU relations, trade, and international cooperation in a rapidly changing world. The overarching question is how the changing configuration of power in Africa affects EU-African relations and how can the AfCFTA contribute to reshaping these relations and fostering more beneficial relationship between the EU and Africa?

European Union and Africa as Global Actors in a Changing Global Order.

With 27 countries, a population of 447.7 million, 14% contribution to global trade, the EU is a major global actor. Its mission is to promote peace, security and prosperity and the interests of European citizens. The

organization also works to 'prevent and resolve conflicts, to foster resilient democracies, to promote human rights and sustainable development, and to bolster a cooperative and rules-based global order' (EC, n.d., p. 1). Largely made up of countries that subscribe to liberal democratic ideals and variants of capitalism, the EU is a major force in the enactment and sustenance of the current liberal international order (Hurt, 2012, 2003). Working in concert with the United States of America, the EU seeks to promote these liberal values in different regions of the world through humanitarian assistance, aid, coercion, inducement, and diplomacy. At the multilateral level, the EU continues to play very important roles through international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (which a citizen of the EU traditionally leads), the World Bank and the United Nations where until the Brexit in 2015, two of its members are permanent member so the security council.

Africa on the other hand is made up of 55 sovereign countries, many of which were former colonies of the European colonial powers. A continent of over 1.465 billion as of mid-2023, Africa's share of global trade is 3%, while that of production is 1.9% (African Development Bank, 2023). Although Africa makes up about one-third of the United Nations, none of the countries is a member of the UN security council. The continent is also home to some of the poorest countries in the world in terms of Gross Domestic Product. From the 1960s, Africa has been committed to the promotion of an international order that is progressive, inclusive, and respective of the diversity of the global community. Working under the banner of Pan-Africanism, many African leaders have expressed support for an international order that is capable of fostering peace, security, and inclusive development (Abrahamsen, 2020). To a significant extent, Africa's capacity to have a stronger voice at the international level has been severely constrained by divisions constructed around national borders and loyalty to former colonial masters. Despite this challenge brought about by such divisions, the leaders were able to negotiate the AfCFTA, which is focused on promoting structural transformation through the diversification of the economy and more intra-African trade.

There are expectations that with the continental agreement, the AU will be able to occupy a better position to negotiate with the EU and other trade partners (Oloruntoba, 2023). However, these expectations may be difficult to realize when placed within the reality of consideration for national interests and the history of economic relations with the EU. In terms of trade and economic agreements, Euro-African relations have

been defined by asymmetry projection of power and pursuit of interests in ways that reflect EU dominance over Africa. From the Yaounde convention through the various Lome conventions to the Cotonou Partnership Agreement and the negotiations of economic partnership agreements, the EU has always set the agenda, dictated the pace of the negotiations and ultimately the eventual outcomes. Although as scholars have argued, African leaders showed resilience and pushed for a better deal during the long period that the EPAs negotiations lasted, eventually, the EU had the final say.

The long years of disunity among Africans and the asymmetrical relationship between the EU and Africa notwithstanding, the AfCFTA could provide an opportunity to reset the relations between the two continents. This will depend on how the parties to the agreement can follow through with the implementation. Although it is too early to measure the success, the various challenges confronting the continent such as insecurity, lack of adequate infrastructure and limited productive economic activities are early signs that the lofty objectives of the continental agreement may not be realized. Going by history of the relationship between the two continents, there is no rational basis to expect that such support would drastically change the pattern of the relations. However, the emergence of new powers in Africa could force the EU to change course by moving beyond its conventional realist approach to relating with Africa by promoting more development-oriented relations. The Global Gateway program of the EU and its other development funding programs provide unique opportunities to reset the current relations in ways that show its genuineness to its avowed commitment to a new regime of beneficial partnership with Africa.

With redefined power relations that recognize the agency of Africa and respect their development priorities, both continents can contribute to reshaping the faltering multilateral order in ways that can help to fostering inclusive development. Despite its challenges, the AU holds huge potentials to partner with the EU to promote a more inclusive rule-based international order. Granted that many African countries have not gained independence when the two international organizations, the IMF and the World Bank were formed, redesigning power relations between the EU and Africa would require that the EU support the reforms of these institutions in ways that can better accommodate the interests of Africans.

The growing incursion being made to Africa by other actors such as China and Russia provide Africans with options and opportunities

to negotiate better trade, investment, aid, and diplomatic deals for themselves. Although these countries may appear to be benign in their approaches because of less baggage from the past, there is no doubt that the maximization of interest is at the root of any inter-state engagements. This realization of this should spur African leaders as well as civil society organizations to move beyond the usual uncritical embrace of these entrants to Africa and set agenda that could help address the development aspirations of the continent. The concerns over less commitment of these countries to liberal style democratic ideals and the increasing evidence that Russia for instance is supporting the new turn in military coups in West Africa (see Ajala, 2023) create new challenges to restructuring the global order to be more inclusive and adaptable to the global changes.

Chapters in this book examine the extent to which the AfCFTA can serve as the springboard for reshaping EU-African relations in the context of the changes in the global order. Contributors adopt various theoretical and methodological approaches to critically interrogate the feasibility of using the continental agreement to reposition Africa in its relations with the EU on the one hand and how both continents acting together can advocate for a multilateral order that is more inclusive, transparent, progressive, and sustainable. The book is divided into two parts. Chapters in the first part examine the geopolitical patterns of relations between the EU and Africa from the past to the present, while chapters in the second part examine the power dimensions of these relations. This part is unique because it interrogates soft power and how the EU has projected it in Africa.

In Chapter two, Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba lays the foundation for a critical reinterpretation of the dynamics of power relations between the EU and Africa in the context of the AfCFTA and the ongoing Russian-Ukraine war. He notes that the current multilateral order under the hegemony of the United States of America is faltering at its seams due to a more assertive engagement with the global south by a resurgent China and Russia. Both in Europe and the US, there are contending forces for and against globalization as evidenced by the resort to nationalistic politics, imposition of barriers against migration, imposition of tariffs against imports (especially under President Donald Trump), and Brexit. The Russian-Ukraine war is framed within this antithesis of territorial protection on one hand and its expansion on the other. The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine constitutes a defining factor in the evolving

shift in geography of power and geopolitics. Both Africa and the EU are at the center of these changes. Riding against the wind of nationalism and beggar thy neighbor policies of the 1930s, Africa has launched the African Continental Free Trade Area as a means of fostering more intra-African trade and increasing the contributions of the continent to the global value chains. As the leading trade partner with Africa, the EU is trying to leverage on its historical and ongoing engagements with Africa to preserve access to markets and ensure continuous flow of raw materials. The overarching questions are how will these changes affect the relations between EU and Africa? Would the changes bring about better deals for Africa or retain the old paternalistic posturing of the EU? How can Africa leverage on the AfCFTA to recalibrate its relations with the EU, especially in the light of new powers that are showing more interests on the continent? The paper concludes that beyond the sentimental attachment with old partners like the EU, Africa needs to carefully develop a strategy that can enhance its capacity to maximizing its interest in its engagement with both old and new partners.

In Chapter three, John Mary Kanyamurwa, Kaddu, and Karemire examine AU–EU relations in the context of the AfCFTA. Employing a political economy approach to qualitatively analyze the AU–EU relations, they argue that the take-off of AfCFTA in 2021 might not quickly bring easy continental trade leap forward mainly due to uneven returns’ distribution dynamics, structural and logistical challenges. They conclude that for AfCFTA to become an effective mechanism for promoting productive AU–EU relations, there is need to ensure that all the parties to the agreement derive benefits both in the short and long run. This is very pertinent in the light of the differences in the industrial capacity of African countries. Large and more endowed countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya, Morocco, and Ethiopia have more potentials to derive trade and investment benefits from the AfCFTA than smaller countries that lack productive capacities. It is in this context that the AU has a role to play in ensuring that losses suffered by smaller countries are mitigated through the various supports. As mentioned above, the AU suffers from internal contradictions as well as limitations that can affect its ability to perform its roles in relations to the successful implementation of the AfCFTA. It is in this context that the EU has an opportunity to support the AU. Given its many years of experience as the foremost regional integration institution, the EU does have experiences that it can share with Africa.

Adebayo Adedokun takes this argument further in Chapter four by making a strong case for the AU to learn from the EU on how the latter has successfully managed its integration processes over the past decades. Adedokun's argument is premised on the huge responsibilities involved in AU's effectively managing the integration. This argument can be complemented by the promises that the EU has made to support the continental integration under the AfCFTA at the political, economic, and financial levels. While it may be easier for African institutions to learn from the EU, the latter is not under any legal obligation to provide any learning opportunities under the agreement. Indeed, the EU's history of favoring bilateral agreements rather than continental or regional agreements should give little or no hope for an EU that could promote a more strengthened AU and the successful implementation of the AfCFTA. For instance, whereas the EU had promised that the negotiations of the Economic Partnership Agreements would be done on regional basis (see EC, 2000), it eventually shifted to bilateral EPAs, which provided more leverage for the deployment of manipulative power, subtle threats, and intimidation (Hurt, 2010). Ultimately, the AU has the responsibility to develop its capacity to perform its roles more effectively. The starting point would be to carry through with the Kagame report which detailed the recommendations on how the continental organization can be strengthened (AU, 2018-Kagame report).

In Chapter five Ambrose Kessy provides an interesting analysis of Brexit and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), using the East Africa as a case study. He argues that given the long history of relationship between Africa and Britain on the one hand and EU and Africa on the other, the Brexit would have implications for EU–Africa relations under the AfCFTA. This is because while African countries are negotiating trade relations with the EU, UK is also negotiating free trade agreements with some of its former colonies, such as Kenya. Kessy argues that prior to the Brexit vote, it was believed that EAC countries would negotiate better terms with the European Commission. With Brexit however, the EAC countries are now faced with the double challenge of negotiating both with the EU and UK. He argues that these scenarios would affect the EAC countries, especially through the loss of market access. He concludes that while there are challenges to be addressed, such as the need to establish new trade agreements and find alternative markets, there are also opportunities to be seized, such as increased trade with other African countries and the potential for new trade agreements with the UK.

In Chapter six, Anna Masłoń-Orazc and Marta Odete F. Da Silva Coelho take another approach to analyzing EU–AU relations. They use the case study of Hackathons as a Support Tool for the AU–EU Partnership. Given the failures of previous EU interventions to foster development through aid, Maslon-Orazc and Da Silva Coelho believe hackathons can be an innovative tool to redirect funding to deliver expected development outcomes. They define hackathons as a method for fostering innovation processes not just within corporations but also within communities. This approach responds to the need to incorporate the voices of Africans in the design of development aid and other forms of international support. It goes against the dominant approach in which top level government officials from the donor and recipient communities meet to discuss what the donors consider to be the priorities of the recipients. They conclude that European and African organizations should consider implementing dynamic and open technologies, such as hackathons, into development agreements to better support SSA nations. This, they believe can be accomplished by recognizing the distinctive aspects of the EU–Africa Post Crisis Journey hackathon that contribute to the long-term success of the 72-hour hackathon’s winning entrepreneurs and the link between the hackathon and the Africa–EU partnership. Apart from the usefulness of this approach to the government, companies can also benefit by using it to foster their corporate social responsibilities.

In chapter seven, Nthabeleng Lekhanya examines Africa–EU digital technology exchange and agribusiness development within the African Continental Free Trade Area, using the Leribe and Thaba-tseka districts in Lesotho as a case study. Through an empirical methodological approach, she analyzes the potentials of agribusiness in Lesotho within the context of the AfCFTA. This contribution is relevant because of the importance of agribusiness to the structural transformation agenda of the AU. The author shows that the use of digital technology is critical to promoting agribusiness which AfCFTA and the EU hope to accelerate through better coordination with existing initiatives to boost agribusiness. Although Lesotho faces serious challenges of providing access to digital technology, this is central to not only boosting agribusiness but also enhancing the capacity of the private sector in Lesotho to take advantage of the AfCFTA to foster socio-economic development. To realize this would require more infrastructural and financial support by the EU and the AU.

Chapters eight to ten focus on an analysis of soft power in EU-African relations. In Chapter eight, Mercy Atieno Odongo asks the question if the

practice of soft power in Africa–EU relations is optimal or one-sided. Her analysis is based on the experiences of history and contemporary realities, which show how the EU uses its aid as a means of projecting soft power in Africa. Given the limited utility of soft power, Odongo recommends the adoption of smart power in the relationship between the EU and Africa. She concludes that there is a pathway in smart power that is anchored on context, target, self-knowledge, broader regional and global context, tools to be employed and knowing when to deploy different forms of power in achieving the intended purpose. Smart power is not only useful to the EU but even more to the AU which is in dire need of a strategy that foregrounds the interests of Africa, while relating with old and new actors that are active on the continent. Oluwaseun Tella takes this argument further by asking if the EU soft power in Africa a model or a placebo is. His contribution examines the impact of the EU's soft power projection on Africa, especially in the areas of democracy promotion, aid diplomacy, and providing an institutional model for African regional organizations. The chapter also highlights the constraints to successful wielding of the EU's soft power in Africa. He concludes that despite its longstanding relations with Africa, the EU's potential to serve as a model is undermined by its neo-colonial image, the new scramble for Africa with the attendant incursion of old and new players on the continent that have presented alternative allies for Africa, and more recently, the failure of the EU's COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy. The negative image of the EU in Africa will also affect the extent to which it can project its power within the context of the AfCFTA. Oluwaseun Tella's argument was put in a more analytical perspective by Victor Fakoya and Bolaji Omitola in their contribution on African- European Trade Cooperation and the promise of African Continental Free Trade Area as Africa's soft power. They argue that the AU can leverage on the AfCFTA to project soft power in relations with the EU in terms of how the resources are exploited and the terms of trading agreements. Whereas the EU has always projected soft power through its various aid policies, this has been done in an asymmetrical manner. They conclude that given that Africa has for long negotiated from the position of weakness, by unleashing the AfCFTA, the AU would most certainly bolster the continent's trade negotiation power rather than maintaining the status quo of weakness. This will depend on how the efforts geared toward the reform of the AU play out both in the short, medium, and long term.

In Chapter eleven Olanrewaju Emupenne and Michelle Small examine climate change adaptation strategies within the context of EU–Africa relations. They found out that there are convergences and divergences in the climate adaptation strategies of the EU and the AU. Some of these differences include the higher rate of greenhouse gas emissions that Europe emits than Africa, AU member states are more environmentally vulnerable to the effects of climate change than the EU due to geographic, topographical, and socio-economic reasons, thus the focus of AU adaptation strategies is on livelihoods, clean water, agriculture and renewables. They also note that while climate change affects both developed and developing countries, developing countries exhibit less adaptive capacity to respond to climate change due to fiscal, institutional, technical, and infrastructure constraints, thus greater collaboration is needed to close this divide. They recommend that despite the differences, a strategic partnership between the AU and the EU is a prime example of the significance of trans-continental collaborative efforts in climate mitigation and adaptation in dealing with the common challenge of climate change. Climate change is also very critical to the AfCFTA’s objective of structural transformation through industrialization. Opportunities exist for the EU to support the AU in ensuring that AfCFTA intentionally promotes green economy in the process of its industrialization. As global actors, the EU and the AU should also promote more global awareness and consensus on addressing the challenges of climate change at the multilateral levels.

In Chapter twelve, Leon Mwamba Tshimpaka argues that it is imperative to include the civil society organizations in the process of redefining power relations between the EU and AU in the context of the AfCFTA. The chapter investigates the extent to which the EU supports the participation of the civil society organizations in the negotiation of the AfCFTA. He finds that even though the EU provides limited support to these organizations to serve as the representatives of the citizens, such support does not go far enough. A more important question is the extent to which the AU provides support for African citizens to participate in its decisions, especially on something so ambitious and significant like the AfCFTA. It is pertinent for the economic and social council of the AU to engage more with African citizens through their civil society organizations as well as the private sector to provide more input in the implementation of the AfCFTA.

In conclusion, this chapter has provided an analysis of the dynamics of power relations between the EU and AU. It has also provided a general

summary of the various contributions. The book is relevant and timely as it will contribute to the discourses on EU–Africa relations, especially in the context of the AfCFTA.

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Euro-African Relations in a Changing Global Order: Shifting Balance Through the Russia–Ukraine War and the African Continental Free Trade Area?

Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba

The relationship between Africa and the European Union has been defined by power asymmetry and unequal benefits and contentions over the past five centuries. Although Africa has derived some benefits in terms of trade and investment, the overall scorecard has been that the relations continued to be framed within a system of accumulation that favours the EU and its member countries (Akopari, 2017). Kotsopoulos and Mattheis (2020) put this contentious relationship in a broader contest by identifying the various strands of scholarship that have underpinned the analysis. The various strands include ‘colonial legacy, meanings of partnership, asymmetry, market liberalisation, politicisation, regional actorness

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L. M. Tshimpaka and S. O. Oloruntoba (eds.), *Africa-EU Relations and the African Continental Free Trade Area*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57992-9_2

and the changing global order' (Kotsopoulos & Mattheis, 2020, p. 1). Oloruntoba (2016) provides a wholistic analysis of the above issues, using the Economic Partnership Agreements as a point of departure. As the relations continue to evolve, there are countervailing events in both Africa and other parts of the world that calls for deep reflections and rethinking of the possibilities and challenges of redefining the configuration of power between the two contiguous continents. Two of these events are the ongoing Russia–Ukraine war and the formation of the African Continental Free Trade Area. These two events are set within the faltering multilateral order.

Over the past decade, the current multilateral order under the hegemony of the United States of America is faltering at its seams due to a more assertive engagement with the global south by a resurgent China and Russia. Both in Europe and the US, there are contending forces for and against globalization as evidenced by the resort to nationalistic politics, imposition of barriers against migration, imposition of tariffs against imports (especially under President Donald Trump), and Brexit. The Russian-Ukraine war is framed within this antithesis of territorial protection on one hand and its expansion on the other. The war between Russia and Ukraine constitutes a defining factor in the evolving shift in geography of power and geopolitics. Both Africa and the EU are at the centre of these changes. Whereas Russia supplies gas to Europe, Ukraine supplies grains to Africa. These present both opportunities and challenges for Africa to reset its relations not only with Europe but other regions of the world, including Russia that is increasingly playing more active roles on the continent. Apart from the opportunity that the war provides for Africa to take advantage of the European market for its gas supplies, the AfCFTA could provide an avenue for African countries to negotiate with Europe as a bloc (Oloruntoba, 2023b).

Riding against the wind of nationalism and beggar thy neighbour policies reminiscent of the 1930s in developed countries (Gilpin, 2001; Spero & Hart, 2010), Africa has launched the African Continental Free Trade Area as a means of fostering more intra-African trade and increasing the contributions of the continent to the global value chains (Leshoele, 2023; Oloruntoba, 2023a). As the leading trade partner with Africa, the EU is trying to leverage on its historical and ongoing engagements with Africa to preserve access to markets and ensure continuous flow of raw materials. The overarching questions are how will these changes affect the relations between EU and Africa? Would the changes bring about better

deals for Africa or retain the old paternalistic posturing of the EU? How can Africa leverage on the AfCFTA to recalibrate its relations with the EU, especially in the light of new powers that are showing more interests on the continent? This chapter argues that beyond the sentimental attachment with old partners like the EU, Africa needs to carefully develop a strategy that can enhance its capacity to maximize its interest in its engagement with both old and new partners. The rest of this chapter proceeds as follows. In the second section, I present an analysis of the ongoing changes in the global cartography of power, the factors influencing the changes and what they mean for Africa. In the third section, I analysed the Russia–Ukraine war and how it may facilitate new forms of relations between EU and Africa. In the fourth section, I put the AfCFTA in analytical context and show how it may provide a framework for a more nuanced engagement with Europe in ways that can reduce the ongoing unequal relations. Some of the challenges that may hamper this are also put in analytical context. Section five concludes with recommendations on how the ongoing shift in global order can provide opportunities for the EU and the AU to contribute to new forms of multilateral order that can foster better and mutually beneficial international cooperation.

THE CHANGING GLOBAL ORDER AND AFRICA’S RELATIONS WITH THE EU

From the premature triumphalism of hyperglobalists and neoliberals like Fukuyama (1992; Friedman, 2005) who screamed that we have reached the end of history, and that the world has become flat, came the echoes of economic nationalism and populist politics over the past one decade. The new turn is informed and shaped by the failure of free market globalization to incorporate the interests and concerns of the middle class especially in developed countries (Cerna et al., 2015). Paradoxically, free market globalization has not significantly improved the living conditions of the poor in developed countries. Despite the avowed reduction of poverty through market-led reforms, inequality continue to grow apace (Stiglitz, 2012). Poverty also fosters conflicts and political destabilization which contribute to mass emigration of young people from the global south to the global north.

Despite the building of border walls rhetorically and in actual practice, the ‘exodus’ in Collier’s term (Collier, 2015) has not stopped. In reaction to this, populist politicians have resorted to nationalist politics

which tends to undermine the international liberal order. Apart from the US which changed its long-term support for the United Nations institutions under President Donald Trump, the commitment to multilateralism suffered serious setback during COVID-19 when, rather than taking a planetary approach to solving a global health problem, countries resorted to border nationalism and protection (Fagbayibo & Owie, 2021; Moyo & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023). The trade war between the US and China throughout the four years of Donald Trump's presidency affected global economy in ways that further weakened the open international trade regime under the World Trade Organization. Instead of working together to reform the global governance of trade and finance to make it more equitable and development-oriented (see Rodrik, 2001), developed and emerging countries resorted to forming new forms of club diplomacy and negotiating new trade and investment agreements among themselves and with countries in the global south. As the US retreated from the multilateral system, China and Russia are leading a pack of emerging countries under the BRICS group of companies made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Apart from making demands for the reform of the global governance of trade and finance, these countries have set up a development bank and continue to invite new members to their fold. Propped up by Russia (which is under heavy sanction from the West), the BRICS countries have been making plans to replace the US dollar as a currency of international trade. They believe the dominance of the dollars put their economies at a disadvantaged position vis a vis the US. Although some have expressed scepticism about the feasibility of such bold move, Sullivan (2023, p. 1) argues that such move could not be outrightly dismissed because 'a BRICS-issued currency will be like a new union of up-and-coming discontents who, on the scale of GDP, now collectively outweigh not only the reigning hegemon, the United States, but the entire G-7 weight class put together'. While it remains to be seen how the countries can work together to actualize this plan, Sullivan further notes that if the BRICS used only the bric for international trade, they would remove an impediment that now thwarts their efforts to escape dollar hegemony. The problem with actualizing the goal relates to the shifting alliances and the primacy of national interests. As the BRICS alliance and membership continues to expand, it makes it even easier for the US to break the ranks by developing closer ties with critical members of the groups. Political parties with different ideologies may also change the direction of the group if they take power. For instance,

until Da Silva took the presidency of Brazil in 2023, former president Jair Messias Bolsonaro shared little affinity and ideology with other BRICS members. But more fundamentally is the argument by Taylor (2014) that the BRICS countries are not interested in making structural changes to the global structure of accumulation but carving a niche for themselves in ways that can better benefit their respective countries. It is in this context that African countries should worry about how the leading members of BRICS are engaging with the continent.

Although China appears to be adopting a different approach from the West in the ways it relates with Africa (see Brautigam, 2009), there have been concerns that the mode of economic engagement of China with Africa is not creating opportunities for structural transformation of the economies (references). From Nigeria to Angola and to South Africa, China, like the West is engaged in mineral extraction, imports of raw materials and export of manufactured products. Russia is also following the same logic of accumulation. The claims by these countries that they never colonized Africa have not led to any dramatic difference in ways that they engage with the continent. The limited membership of African countries in the BRICS could be a testament to how the continent is viewed among its members. Until Egypt and Ethiopia were invited to join the BRICS during their meeting in South Africa in August 2023, South Africa was the only African country out of the 55 countries on the continent. The primacy of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the foundational basis of its existence, at least in the mind of the Goldman Sachs economist Jim O'Neil, who coined the term, and the agenda of the members shows its limitation in bringing about a fundamental change in the global structure of accumulation and the governance of the global economy. As Fioramonti (2013) argues in his book *The Gross Domestic Problem*, despite the importance of the GDP as a measure of economic performance, it is riddled with a lot of contradictions and obscures very important issues such as the environment, social justice, equality and redistribution.

Despite its long-term engagement with Africa, the EU has not fared better in reacting to the wave of populism in its domestic politics. Apart from the Brexit which effectively pulled Britain out of the EU after four decades of its membership, the supranational organization has consistently developed various policies to keep African migrants on the continent through partnership with North African countries (reference). Scholars and non-governmental organizations have also raised concerns about the plight of African migrants in Europe (Moyo, 2023). Although the EU

advocates human rights and rule of law in African countries, citizens of these countries who are trying to escape the harsh economic realities partly brought about by market ideas sponsored by multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are not deemed worthy of those rights. The populist responses to the migration crisis are not limited to Europe. Britain, under former Prime Minister Boris Johnson cut a deal with Paul Kagame, the president of Rwanda to send asylum seekers from Africa back to Rwanda—a step that has been severely criticized for lack of compliance with the international convention on refugees. The deal was not only deemed illegal to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which the UK is a party to, but contravened UK's laws. On November 15, 2023, the Supreme Court of UK ruled that the deal was unlawful (BBC, December 13, 2023; Reuters, November 15, 2023). According to a BBC analysis of this issue, apart from the illegality of this policy, it is also not economically justifiable. Based on an economic impact analysis carried out by the Home Office, the UK government will spend extra 63,000 pounds on each asylum seeker deported to Rwanda beyond what it would cost to keep them in the UK (BBC, December 13, 2023). Despite this setback, the UK government restarted the deal and signed an agreement with the government of Rwanda on December 5, 2023. Given the estimated 3 billion pounds that the UK spends annually to service asylum seekers and refugees, the government does have a cause for concern. However, deporting asylum seekers back to Africa might not be a sustainable solution. Rather, both the UK and the EU should think about the supply side factors that are forcing people to flee to look for better lives in their countries. According to Kohnert (2007) EU's unfair external trade policies as well as policies that supported autocratic regimes are partly responsible for the migration pressures being felt on the continent. From the Yaoundé Convention through the Cotonou Partnership Agreement to the long negotiations of the Economic Partnership Agreements, trade deals between the EU and Africa have largely benefited the former, especially when the structure of trade is brought into analytical perspective. Whereas the EU exports machinery, and manufactured products to Africa, most countries on the continent have exported raw materials, mainly oil and gas as well as mineral resources to the continent (see Olorunтова, 2016). This form of unequal exchange perpetuates underdevelopment and contributes to the forceful emigration of young people from Africa to Europe and the UK.

Both EU and Britain appear to be responding to the regime of trade imbalance and proposing new programs to engage with Africa. For instance, the EU has started the implementation of the Global Gateway international infrastructure plan which it launched in December 2021. The plan was a strategic response to the actions of other actors like China, which has invested over \$800 billion under its Belt and Road Initiative. The Global Gateway plan aims to improve connectivity between Europe and the rest of the world, especially between developing countries and other European Neighbourhood Policy countries (Gili & Lettieri, 2023). Apart from aiming to mobilize up to €300 billion by 2027, the Global Gateway was designed to operate based on the following principles: democratic values and high standards, good governance, and transparency. equal partnerships, green and clean infrastructures, catalysing private sector investments (Gili & Lettieri, 2023). These principles are like the ones that guided previous relationships between the EU and Africa. Scholars like (Hurt, 2003) argue that some of these principles are conditionalities that the EU seeks to tie African countries to their neoliberal agenda. Besides, there is no evidence that the design of the Global Gateway was designed in consultation with African countries. From the design of the EU infrastructure strategy, it is obvious that it was done in response to the increasing power of China in Africa. Designing development intervention programs for a geopolitical reason may not serve the development interests of the recipients.

While the negotiations on the EU-ACP Economic partnership agreements remain inconclusive after about two decades of negotiations, the Samoa agreement was signed between the European Commission and 79 Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific states on November 15, 2023. According to EC (2023), the new Partnership Agreement lays down common principles and covers the following priority areas: human rights, democracy and governance, peace and security, human and social development, inclusive, sustainable economic growth and development, environmental sustainability and climate change migration and mobility. The agreement also has three regional protocols for Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific with a focus on the specific needs of each region (EC, 2023).

Unlike the EPAs negotiations which involved many stakeholders, including civil society organizations and the academia, the Samoa Agreement was reached so suddenly and quickly. Little wonder that some important countries in Africa such as Nigeria, South Africa and Ethiopia