"Symposium on ACP-EU Cooperation" - Dr. Clair Gammage's Response to Prof. Melaku Desta

By:

Clair Gammage

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Thank you for taking the time to offer such valuable comments, Professor Desta. I share your views wholeheartedly. It is the nature of blog posts that one cannot cover everything, but I do indeed see Cotonou as a disruptor of Lomé in the ways you have described. I cover the history of ACP-EU cooperation from Yaoundé to Lomé to Cotonou and the EPA negotiations in my book (published in 2017).

This symposium has been an opportunity to explore how the ACP-EU relationship can progress in the future, especially given the issues surrounding the EPA negotiations, which as you have noted, have been extremely problematic and divisive to the Lomé acquis. There have been many disruptors to the cohesion of the ACP as a single negotiating bloc and, in spite of their many differences and diverging priorities, I nevertheless believe that a coherent and common negotiating position in respect of the post-2020

framework is important for at least two reasons. First, there were key state actors among the African and Caribbean nations that successfully rejected aspects of the agreements that the EU sought to advance agressively. This shows that, even at the macro-level or 'umbrella' level of the new framework, the ACP are more likely to achieve a better deal for their constituencies if they work together (a 'strength in numbers' argument, if you like). Second, and as our contributors point out in their forthcoming posts, just as there are differences among this diverse group so too are there synergies. It goes without saying that the EU exerts considerable influence in respect of its relationship with all developing countries.

The ACP are – as a large bloc – capable of exercising a strong bargaining position if they coordinate their efforts. It should be recalled that the EPA framework disrupted the historical 'one-bloc' negotiating approach of the ACP. I have previously argued that dismantling the 'one-bloc' approach in favour of negotiating with the individual and 'imagined communities' of the EPAs has perpetuated the power asymmetry that exists between the EU and ACP. Of course, it will be interesting to hear more about the ACP negotiating strategy in the post-2020 negotiations from the ACP Secretariat in due course. With respect to your comments on the EU-Africa strategy within the regional negotiations of the post-2020 framework, it has long been my position that the EPAs are symbolic of the EU's utter disregard for African regionalism(s). Elsewhere I have explored the negotiating positions of both sides and I do not seek to restate all aspects of my analysis here. There are, however, a few key aspects of the EPA negotiations that lend support to your points (1)-(4).

The SADC EPA, for example, fell short of the EU's original ambitions and this shows that the African nations will not simply be 'bull-dozed' by an agenda that does not suit their needs. In the EAC and the SADC regions, we have seen geographical indications added to their protocols to protect African products as one of our contributors, Yentyl Williams, discusses in detail. This reinforces that while the relationship is undoubtedly asymmetric, it is not entirely unequal – African nations are seeking to innovate within the confines of those agreements for their own development.

The forthcoming contribution from Yasin Jelle complements point (4). However, and as Yasin notes, there must be genuine political will from African nations to

complete the AfCFTA. At this point, there is no reason to doubt their enthusiasm and commitment to the pan-African project but any weakness among the states will invariably enable the EU to exploit that in its negotiations with Africa. It must be remembered that the continent of Africa is extremely important to the EU's future growth. Africa – perhaps moreso than the Caribbean and Pacific countries – is, therefore, in a stronger position to demand more from the future relationship.

In doing so, I agree that African nations should push for (2) and (3). Moving beyond the arguably false dichotomy between 'North Africa' and 'Sub-Saharan' Africa will require a transformative reconfiguration of Africa-EU relations, but I see this as a positive and progressive one (I'm not sure that the EU will, but perhaps the EU Commissioners in DG Trade can comment on that point!). Any future FTA with the EU must, I believe, ensure that African nations are properly integrated into the global economy and not just into the EU's economy. With the African negotiating position as potentially the strongest it is also in a position to leverage on behalf of the other ACP states. This is why, I think, a 'one-bloc' approach remains critical for framing the future relationship from which the regional strategies can be focused on the needs and priorities of the three regions.

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