

DISCUSSION PAPER No. 304

EU-Africa trade relations and the EPA process: RATIFICATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES FOR CAMEROON, CÔTE D'IVOIRE AND GHANA

By San Bilal

September 2021

It is high time for the remaining member states of the European Union (EU,) who have not yet done so, to ratify the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). The first ones have already been concluded with some African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries in 2007. This is the case, for instance, for the interim EPAs with respectively Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, which are considered in this paper.

These free trade agreements have generated controversial discussions for years and may not be perfect. But they have not only maintained, but also secured and improved the preferential access of these countries to the EU, vital for some of their major exports. The EPAs have not led to the feared negative impacts that some had predicted. Their potential benefits, however, are highly dependent on the way they are used and the reform dynamics and support measures that accompany their effective implementation.

The EU, with the EPAs and beyond, intends to stimulate local and regional economic transformation pathways by stimulating domestic production and promoting value addition for local, regional, and international value chains, in particular with the EU. In doing so, increasing attention is given to sustainability, inclusive and gender dimensions, as is the case for sustainable forestry and cocoa initiatives in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Development assistance, in the form of not only traditional aid, such as technical assistance, but also blended finance and guarantees, as well as policy dialogues, multi-stakeholder engagement and improvement of the investment climate, are key pillars of the EU support. Such a comprehensive approach is critical, not only for the implementation of the EPAs, but especially to accompany African own reform and transformation processes. This includes the African Continental Free Trade Area and other regional integration dynamics, as well as the response to the COVID-19 crisis, with the aim to build back better, greener and in a more sustainable, inclusive and gender-sensitive way.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Acronyms	iii
1. The EPA process.....	1
2. Single country EPAs in regional contexts	4
2.1. West Africa: Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana	4
2.2. Central Africa: Cameroon	6
3. The development dimensions of the interim EPAs.....	8
4. Reform dynamics and development support.....	9
5. Sustainability initiatives: from timber to cocoa	12
5.1. Sustainable forestry	12
5.2. Sustainable cocoa initiative	12
6. Value chain development and industrialisation.....	13
7. EU-Africa trade and investment partnership for building back better, greener and in a more inclusive way.....	14
8. To ratify or not to ratify.....	16
References.....	18

List of Figures

Figure 1: Some key milestones on the EPA process.....	3
Figure 2: EU institutions and member states AfT to EPA regions (2017 constant \$/cap)	10
Figure 3: EU institutions and member states support to ECOWAS by EPA status (2017 constant \$/cap)	10
Figure 4: EU institutions and member states support to Africa by EPA status (2017 constant \$/cap)	11

List of Tables

Table 1: Summary of Côte d'Ivoire's liberalisation schedule for main products	5
Table 2: Summary of Ghana's liberalisation schedule for main products	6
Table 3: Summary of Cameroon's liberalisation schedule for main products	7

Acknowledgements

This study benefits from specific funding by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Directorate-general Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid. The author would also like to thank the people consulted for this study, and in particular Antonio Gambini, as well as Inna Perova for the editing and layout. The views are the author's only and do not represent those of any institution. Comments on the paper can be made to San Bilal (sb@ecdpm.org).

Acronyms

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AfT	Aid for trade
AU	African Union
C&TF	Customs and trade facilitation
CEEAC	Communauté économique des États de l'Afrique Centrale
CEMAC	Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale
CET	Common external tariff
DFQF	Duty-free and quota-free
EAC	East Africa Community
EBA	Everything-But-Arms
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EDC	Economic and development cooperation
EDF	European Development Fund
EFSD	European Fund for Sustainable Development
EIP	External Investment Plan
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
ESA	Eastern and Southern Africa
EU	European Union
FLEGT	Forest law enforcement, governance and trade
FTA	Free trade agreement
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GDP	Gross domestic product
GSP	General system of preferences
LDC	Least-developed country
MAR	Market Access Regulation
PAMFOR	Forest Governance Improvement Programme
ROO	Rules of origin
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SB4A	Sustainable Business for Africa
SHIRA	Sustainable Healthcare Industry for Resilience in Africa
SPS	Sanitary and phytosanitary
TBT	Technical barriers to trade
TSD	Trade and sustainable development
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
VPA	Voluntary partnership agreements
WTO	World Trade Organization

1. The EPA process

The Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the European Union (EU) and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states have been a long saga, which has attracted over the last two-decades a lot of attention and some controversy. While EPAs have been ratified by most of the ACP countries that have concluded them, this is not yet the case for all the EU member states. This paper considers the case of the three interim EPAs concluded respectively with Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, and the merit of ratifying them in the context of the current EU trade, investment and sustainable development relations with Africa.

The EPAs were meant to be reciprocal free trade agreements (FTAs) between the EU and regional groupings of the ACP states, with several objectives.

The first, most pragmatic objective, was to ensure the compatibility of the EU preferential trade regime for the ACP countries with the multilateral trade rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The establishment of the WTO in 1995 was accompanied by a mechanism – the Dispute Settlement Mechanism – that allowed for the effective enforcement of the rules of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). This meant that the unilateral EU trade preferences granted only to the ACP countries, known since the mid-1970s as the Lomé preferences (since granted under the successive EU-ACP Lomé Conventions I to IVbis), had to be replaced.

To comply with the GATT/WTO rules, the EU could provide either unilateral trade preferences to all developing countries, with possible differentiation based on objective development criteria, or provide reciprocal trade preferences in the context of free trade agreements which cover essentially all trade between the parties. The EU trade regime to the ACP, in particular for bananas, had been challenged under the GATT since 1991 (de Melo 2021). Before the 1995-WTO though, GATT rulings were not binding. The EU was granted in 1996 a first 5-year WTO waiver (i.e. temporary exemption) to get time to adapt its trade regime towards the ACP. 1996 is also the year the EU published its Green Paper outlining the alternative options for its new trade regimes towards the ACP. This led to the negotiations and conclusion in 2000 of the new EU-ACP Partnership Agreement, – the Cotonou Agreement – which foresaw the negotiations of FTAs – the famous EPAs – between the EU and self-determined ACP regional groupings, to be concluded by the end of 2007. The EU obtained in 2001 a second WTO waiver to extend its Lomé-type of preferences to the ACP until the end of 2007, so as to allow time to properly negotiate EPAs without any trade disruption for the ACP during that period.

In parallel, also in 2001, the EU introduced its 'Everything-But-Arms' (EBA) initiative, a special regime under the EU general system of preferences (GSP) granting duty-free and quota-free (DFQF) market access to the EU for all products except arms from least-developed countries (LDCs). In 2005, the EU introduced a new 'sustainable and good governance' incentive regime of its GSP, the 'GSP+', granting better preferences to countries based on the respect of core international environmental, labour and social conventions.

The second objective, key in the EU rationale for the EPAs, was to promote the development of ACP countries. EPAs were meant to help the diversification of their economies, build on and promote their regional integration processes, help structure their domestic market by addressing a broad range of regulatory issues beyond simple tariff liberalisation, strengthen their capacity and facilitate their integration into the world economy. The EU also insisted on the gradual and strongly asymmetric liberalisation process of the EPAs, considering the level of development and capacity of the countries involved. Moreover, the EPAs were enshrined in the Cotonou Agreement, which included a strong development dimension, notably with the European Development Fund (EDF). The EU and its member

states also collectively agreed to accompany the preparation and implementation of the EPAs. EPAs were therefore presented as first and foremost development tools.

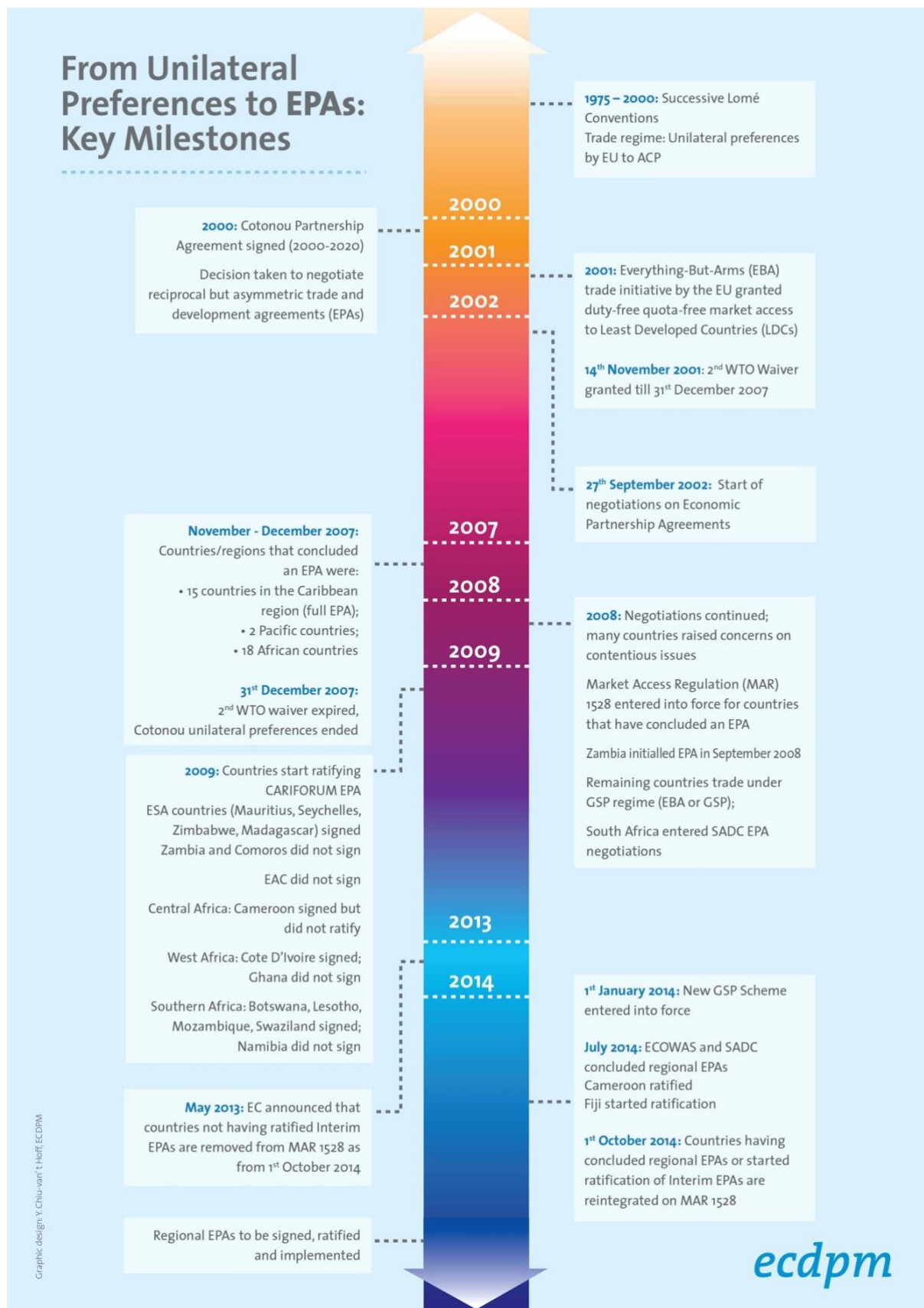
In practice, the negotiations of the EPAs have proved much more complicated and controversial than expected. Many, including among the ACP countries and civil society organisations, feared that the opening of ACP economies to EU products in an FTA would expose them to an excessive competition from the EU, with the risk of undermining local production and development efforts. They complained about the lack of level playing field. They also insisted that regional markets and rules had to be set first, by concerned ACP countries, before engaging with the EU. Moreover, the overlapping of regional groupings, with ACP countries in particular in Africa, belonging to an average of three regional groupings, for historic, political and economic reasons, was not necessarily conducive to negotiating on a regional basis with the EU. Let regional integration take place first, and then only would ACP countries be able to effectively engage with the EU, otherwise the EPAs would undermine, not build on and foster regional integration. Besides, the EU was also accused of bypassing the WTO, and pushing under the EPAs issues that were rejected at the WTO – such as the ‘Singapore issues’ (trade and investment, trade and competition policy, transparency in government procurement, and trade facilitation). Finally, many ACP countries, and in particular in West Africa, asked for additional development assistance to accompany the EPAs – additional to the EDF – and in line with the additional costs required to address the necessary adjustment to the EPAs and be able to effectively take advantage of the new trading arrangement.

The process and outcome of the EPA negotiations has been somewhat mixed and complex (see Figure 1). By the end of 2007, negotiators reached a final agreement, along the lines initially envisaged for a comprehensive EPA, only in the Caribbean region. Negotiations were also concluded with an additional 20 other ACP countries, but on a narrower set of issues, centred mainly around market access issues, in the form of ‘interim EPAs’. They were considered ‘interim’ or ‘stepping stone’ agreements because the ambition was to negotiate regional EPAs. But by the end of 2007, a regional consensus could not be reached. So, each ACP country had to decide whether it preferred to conclude an EPA bilaterally with the EU, to get full market access to the EU under the EPA offer and rules (including rules of origins), or whether it was fine to revert to the EU GSP also available to all ACP countries (except Gabon), by 1 January 2008. Many LDCs, which benefit from DFQF market access under the EBA scheme of the EU GSP regime, did not mind not concluding an EPA with the EU. But other countries, in particular non-LDCs, did prefer to conclude an EPA to maintain the preferential access to the EU for some of their products not covered by the GSP. This has been the case for Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana, which in particular did not want to lose their preferential access to the EU market for bananas mainly (as well as other products such as processed cocoa and preserved tuna).

The agreements were asymmetric, with ACP countries liberalising at least 80% of their trade with the EU over a 15-year period, while the EU offered DFQF market access to EPA products as of 1 January 2008. As the (interim) EPAs concluded by the end of 2007 still had to be signed and ratified (a potentially lengthy process), the EU adopted the Market Access Regulation (MAR 1528/2007) to grant this DFQF access to countries that had concluded an EPA.

With a view to achieve more comprehensive EPAs on a regional basis, the EU continued negotiations with the interested regional groupings. To give a new impetus to negotiations which seemed to be dragging on, the EU decided in May 2013, with the EU Regulation 527/2013, that countries which had concluded an interim EPA in 2007 but would have failed to take the necessary steps to ratify it by 1 October 2014 would be no longer DFQF under MAR 1528/2007, and would thus have to fall back to the GSP regime. As a result, regional EPAs were successfully concluded with West Africa on 30 June 2014, with Southern Africa on 14 July 2014, and with the East Africa Community (EAC) on 16 October 2014.

Figure 1: Some key milestones on the EPA process



However, the successful conclusion of the negotiations only means that the negotiators from all parties agreed and initialed the agreement, and does not necessarily mean then the signing and ratification of the agreement.

Out of the three regions, only the South African Development Community (SADC) EPA Group managed to be signed by all parties, on 10 June 2016, and provisionally applied since 10 October 2016. Angola asked in 2020 to accede to the SADC EPA, a process currently ongoing.

In EAC, while all EU member states have signed the EPA, only Kenya and Rwanda signed it on 1 September 2016, and only Kenya ratified it on 21 September 2016. The EAC EPA could therefore not be implemented. But Kenya, having signed and ratified it, has been allowed by the EU to benefit from DFQF market access. In June 2021, the EU and Kenya “agreed to engage towards implementing bilaterally the EPA”, on modalities to be determined (European Commission 2021).

In West Africa, the regional EPA was signed in December 2014 by all parties except Gambia and Mauritania – which signed on 9 August 2018 and 21 September 2018, respectively – and Nigeria, which remains the last of 16 West Africa countries not to have signed the agreement, de facto preventing the adoption of the regional EPA. This is the reason why Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana have gone forward with their respective bilateral EPA, as discussed below.

In Central Africa, only Cameroon signed (on 15 January 2009) and ratified (in July 2014) the regional EPA, as explained below.

Finally, in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA), five countries, Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and Zimbabwe – referred to as ESA-5 – have signed and ratified the regional EPA. Mauritius, Seychelles, Zimbabwe and Madagascar signed it in 2009, and the ESA EPA has been provisionally applied since 14 May 2012. In 2017, these four countries indicated to the EU their interest to engage in a more comprehensive EPA. Following the ratification and provisional application of the EPA by Comoros in February 2019, the negotiations on the deepening of the ESA-5 EPA started in October 2019. The issues under negotiations include a wide range of issues, such as agriculture, technical barriers to trade (TBT), customs and trade facilitation (C&TF), sanitary and phytosanitary issues (SPS) and rules of origin (ROO), as well as new issues such as trade in services, investment liberalisation and digital trade, capital movements, payments and transfers and temporary safeguard measures, government procurement, intellectual property rights, a trade and sustainable development (TSD) chapter, consultative bodies for civil society and parliaments, and economic and development cooperation (EDC).

2. Single country EPAs in regional contexts

Some EPAs have been de facto concluded with individual countries, while they were meant to be concluded at the regional level. This is the case for the interim EPA with Côte d’Ivoire, the interim EPA with Ghana, and the Central Africa EPA with Cameroon only.

2.1. West Africa: Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana

Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana were strongly in favour of concluding a regional EPA, as part of the configuration of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) plus Mauritania. This was not necessarily the case for all of their regional partners though. By the last quarter of 2007, it became clear that the ECOWAS grouping was not ready to conclude an EPA. Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana therefore opted to conclude an interim EPA each, based on the negotiations conducted so far at the regional level, and stopping short of the initial ambitions of the EPA. Under these ‘interim’ agreements, also referred to as ‘stepping stone’ agreements towards a regional EPA, they agreed to

liberalise 80% of their respective trade with the EU, over a 15-year period. In counterpart, the EU fully opened its market to Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana products as of 1 January 2008 under the MAR 1528/2007. Côte d'Ivoire signed the EPA on 26 November 2008, while Ghana delayed the signature of its interim EPA.

The negotiations continued at a regional level towards the conclusion of an EU-West Africa EPA. This process of negotiations with the EU was conducted in parallel to the integration process in West Africa, and in particular the regional negotiations on the establishment of the ECOWAS common external tariff (CET). The synergies between the two processes were obvious, as it was necessary to define the ECOWAS CET to be the basis for a regional liberalisation schedule towards the EU. The tariff bands of the CET, agreed in January 2014, served as the basis for the tariff phase down under the EPA, paving the way to the conclusions of the EU-West Africa EPA negotiations on 30 June 2014 (Ramdoo and Bilal 2016). Since then, 15 West African countries have signed the West Africa EPA, but one, Nigeria, has not yet accepted to do so, de facto blocking the adoption of the West Africa EPA.

While it would be preferable to move ahead with a regional EPA, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana had no choice but to proceed with their interim EPA.

Côte d'Ivoire ratified its interim EPA on 12 August 2016, which entered into provisional application on 3 September 2016. It was approved by the European Parliament on 25 March 2009, and has already ratified by all EU member states except Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.

Since 2019, Côte d'Ivoire is progressively liberalising 80% of its imports from the EU, to be completed by 2029. Following an updated liberalisation schedule,¹ summarised for main products in Table 1, the first phase of liberalisation, in 2019, included the opening to vaccines (human and veterinary medicine), printed books, laboratory reagents, some chemicals (diammonium phosphate, contraceptive preparations), newspaper, electrical equipment (e.g. motors). In practice, since the signing of the interim EPA, Côte d'Ivoire had de facto a 10-year standstill before initiating any liberalisation process, and will have another 10 years to complete it, amounting de facto to a 20-year transition period, while excluding 20% of its imports from the EU. Products excluded from liberalisation include agricultural goods, such as most fruits and vegetables, onions and shallots, frozen edible bovine offal, edible offal of swine, malt, as well as wine, clothing, cotton, cement, cosmetic goods, plastics and cardboards.

Table 1: Summary of Côte d'Ivoire's liberalisation schedule for main products

Côte d'Ivoire's timetable for cutting tariffs on selected EU exports (by export volume in 2019)				
HS Code	Product	EU Exports in 2019 €m	Current tariff	Full liberalisation
300490	Medicines consisting of mixed or unmixed products for therapeutic or prophylactic purposes	107.4	0%	2024
100199	Wheat and meslin	100.6	5%	2024
190190	Malt extract for food preparation	50.5	5%	2029
870120	Road tractors for semi-trailers	28.3	5%	2021
300220	Vaccines for human medicine	27.9	0%	2019
330290	Mixtures of odoriferous substances and mixtures	25.6	10%	2029
480421	Unbleached sack kraft paper	20.8	5%	2021
740811	Wire of refined copper	20.5	5%	2026
843149	Parts of machinery of heading 8426, 8429 and 8430	20.5	5%	2024
230990	Preparations of a kind used in animal feeding	19.3	5%	2024

Source: [European Commission 2020a](#).

¹ https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2020/january/tradoc_158598.pdf

Ghana interim EPA was signed on 28 July 2016, and ratified by Ghana on 3 August 2016. It entered into provisional application on 15 December 2016. It was approved by the European Parliament on 1 December 2016 and has so far been ratified only by Croatia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania and Luxembourg.

Following an adjustment of its liberalisation schedule in 2019,² Ghana will liberalise only 78% of its imports from the EU by 2029. Table 2 highlights some of the main products to be liberalised. Ghana officially started the implementation of its liberalisation schedule in 2020, which only included products at ‘zero tariffs’, and in 2021, following technical adjustments related to rules of origin, codes and systems, effectively started opening up its market with the second phase of liberalisation.³ Products such as agricultural goods, including fruits and vegetables, are mostly excluded for liberalisation, and so are frozen poultry, frozen beef, frozen mackerel, frozen tuna, sugar, edible offal, food preparations, margarine, animal feed, non-alcoholic beverages, worn clothing, ceramics and cement.

Table 2: Summary of Ghana’s liberalisation schedule for main products

Ghana’s timetable for cutting tariffs on selected EU export EU (by export volume in 2019)					
HS Code	Product	EU Exports in 2019 in €m	Current tariff	Start of liberalisation	Full liberalisation
271012	Light oils and preparations	184.3	10%	2026	2029
300490	Medicines	69.7	0%	2020	2020
271019	Medium oils and preparations	57.2	10%	2026	2029
490700	Unused postage, revenue or similar stamps	40	0%	2020	2020
843143	Parts for boring or sinking machinery	34.3	5%	2021	2021
300220	Vaccines for human medicine	36.7	0%	2020	2020
190190	Malt extract; food preparations of flour, groats, meal, starch or malt extract	32.3	5%	2024	2024
870120	Road tractors for semi-trailers	25.8	5%	2024	2024
842230	Machinery for filling, closing, sealing or labelling bottles, cans, boxes, bags or other containers	24.1	5%	2021	2021
843149	Parts of machinery of heading 8426, 8429 and 8430	21.9	5%	2021	2021
040210	Milk and cream in solid form	20	10%	2026	2029
330210	Mixtures of odoriferous substances and mixtures including alcoholic solutions	19.2	10%	2026	2029

Source: [European Commission 2020b](#)

The bilateral interim EPAs of Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana are sub-optimal compared to the West Africa EPA concluded at the regional level. But the interim EPAs were adjusted in 2019, in terms of updating their respective liberalisation schedules, but also to reflect more flexible the rules of origins agreed upon in the West Africa.

2.2. Central Africa: Cameroon

The situation in Central Africa initially resembles the one in West Africa. The region negotiated as a regional group, but made slow progress. This was due to the weak capacity of the regional grouping, and most of all the lack of interest from most countries from Central Africa. Ultimately, only Cameroon was interested in an EPA, because it needed it to continue exporting its bananas to the EU after 2007 without facing new trade barriers. Unlike West Africa, in Central Africa the EPA concluded remained a regional one, somewhat artificially. So, instead of concluding

² https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2020/january/tradoc_158599.pdf

³ <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=2281>

a bilateral interim EPA with the EU, as Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana did in West Africa, Cameroon agreed on the regional Central Africa EPA, concluded on 17 December 2007 and signed on 15 January 2009. But it has been the only country in the region to do so. The EU tried to actively engage with the region in order to reach a truly regional agreement. But these efforts have been in vain, and since 2012, not much effective engagement has been taking place at the regional level. The Central Africa EPA is open to all eight countries of the region, but is in effect until now only a Cameroon-EU EPA, as the other seven countries are not showing any interest. Cameroon ratified the EU-Central Africa EPA on 22 July 2014, which started to be provisionally applied on 4 August 2014. The European Parliament approved the agreement on 13 June 2013, and all EU member states have already ratified it, except for Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovenia.

Cameroon started implementing the EPA in 2016, gradually opening its market to 80% of EU imports by 2029, according to its liberalisation schedule,⁴ summarised in Table 3 for its main products. Cameroon started by removing tariffs on products for which it had a low level of protection, and that are not produced locally, such as industrial and agricultural inputs, machines, chemicals, vehicles and spare parts, computers, paper and consumer products. Products deemed sensitive by Cameroon have been excluded from liberalisation, such as milk products, flour, most meat products, certain vegetables, wines and spirits, malt, wood and wood products, used clothes and textiles and paintings.

Table 3: Summary of Cameroon's liberalisation schedule for main products

Cameroon's timetable for cutting tariffs on imports from the EU to zero (for selected products)					
HS code	Product	Export value in 2019 in €m	Base rate (at start of liberalisation)	Starting date of liberalisation	End of liberalisation (tariffs at zero)
300490	medicines of mixed or unmixed products for therapeutic or prophylactic purposes	62.3	5%	2016	2019
100199	wheat and meslin	51.2	10%	2020	2029
271019	medium oils and preparations, of petroleum or bituminous minerals	43.3	10%	2020	2029
252310	cement clinkers	31.8	10%	2017	2023
870323	motor cars and other motor vehicles for transport of persons	29.1	30%	2020	2029
330210	mixtures of odorous substances and mixtures, incl. alcoholic solutions	23.9	10%	2017	2023
870422	motor vehicles for transporting goods	14.7	20%	2017	2023
190110	food preparations for infant use, put up for retail sale, of flour, groats, meal, starch or malt extract	12	5%	2020	2029
851762	machines for the reception, conversion and transmission or regeneration of voice, images or other data	11.8	10%	2020	2029
730890	structures and parts of structures, of iron or steel	11.8	20%	2020	2029

Source: [European Commission 2020c](#)

The European Parliament gave its consent in June 2013. In July 2014, the Parliament of Cameroon approved the ratification of the Agreement and on 4 August 2014, the agreement entered into provisional application. Tariff liberalisation started in 2016 and entered in its 4th phase in 2019.

⁴ https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2020/february/tradoc_158637.pdf

3. The development dimensions of the interim EPAs

The (interim) EPAs do not have a specific trade and sustainable development (TSD) chapter, contrary to the current practice nowadays for EU FTAs. This is because they are still based on an older generation of the EU FTAs, concluded at the end of 2007, while a TSD chapter was first introduced with the EU-South Korea FTA in 2011. However, the interim EPAs are based on and refer to the principles of the Cotonou Agreements, which include the respect of human rights, democratic and sustainability principles. These principles are therefore of direct application to the interim EPAs (Bilal and Ramdoo 2016). Perhaps more importantly, the whole of the EPA is considered as a development agreement.

The main objectives of the (interim) EPAs with Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana has been to prevent any trade disruption with the EU following the end of the Lomé-type of preferences under the Cotonou Agreement by 2008. As these three countries are non-LDCs, they did not have the option of falling back to the DFQF market access provided by EBA under the EU GSP. As the standard GSP offers less preferential access to the EU market, concluded an interim EPA with the EU was critical for these countries. This is particularly the case for preserving free access to the EU for bananas and processed cocoa products, as well as other fresh and transformed agricultural products.

In this respect, it is important to note that the stability and durability of preferences is a key element of the benefit from trade preferences, and that uncertainty can have significant adverse trade effects, and thus negative development impact (Borchert and Di Ubaldo 2020). The interim EPAs offer that predictability and stability. Unlike the EU GSP or the EU Market Access Regulation, which are unilateral trade regimes dependent only on the good will and decision of the EU, the interim EPAs are reciprocal agreements, binding both parties, in a lasting and predictable manner.

In the case of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, these could be replaced by the EU-West Africa EPA should Nigeria also agree to sign and ratify it. But this West Africa EPA is already known, and would ensure the continuity with the two interim EPAs in the region. Stability of the reciprocal market access would be preserved.

Concerns have also rightly been raised about the negative implications of the interim EPAs on the regional integration processes in Central and West Africa (Bilal and Stevens eds. 2009; Ramdoo and Bilal 2016).

For the custom union of West Africa and of Central Africa to be completed, EPAs should be regional as well. That is, West Africa should in principle adopt the same trade policy toward the EU, and open up its CET uniformly across the whole ECOWAS member states. This is exactly what the EU-West Africa EPA liberalisation schedule does in phases, based on the ECOWAS CET, while allowing for a list of products to be excluded from liberalisation, amounting to 25% of its imports from the EU. With the two interim EPAs, this is not the case. Similarly, Cameroon being the only country in the Central Africa region to gradually dismantle its trade protection towards EU imports, a Central Africa CET cannot be implemented without the other countries of Central Africa also joining the Central Africa EPA.

In practice, though, the situation is slightly different. ECOWAS is a custom union, but the implementation of its common external tariff (CET) "is still at the embryonic stage" (AU 2020, p.50). In Central Africa, the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (Communauté Économique et Monétaire de l'Afrique Centrale – CEMAC) is formally also a custom union, but its CET is not effectively implemented. Moreover, the harmonisation process towards a single Economic Community in the Central Africa region with a common CET between the CEMAC and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS; Communauté économique des États de l'Afrique centrale - CEEAC), which is a larger formal free trade area, is still pending.

An interesting study recently tackled this issue from an empirical perspective (AETS 2019). Focusing on West Africa, it considered the impact of the Côte d'Ivoire interim EPA and the Ghana interim EPA on regional trade, and in particular whether Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana could become open doors for EU imports, and in particular EU inputs to industrial processes, which could then be exported to the other countries of the region. It concludes that ECOWAS rules of origin would prevent the transit of EU imports via Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana to the rest of the region. It also estimates that less than 1% of exports to the region from Côte d'Ivoire and less than 0.5% from Ghana, incorporate EU inputs to be liberalised under the interim EPAs. This suggests that while the interim EPAs could in principle affect trade and distort competition within the regional market, in practice the scope for such occurrence is very small.

In this respect, it is interesting to note the contrast between some *ex ante* studies on the potential impact of the EPAs, and the actual evaluations. The EPAs have generated a lot of fears, leading to a very active 'Stop EPA' campaign (Bertholot 2018). Concerns were raised about many issues, including the unbalance of the negotiations and unequal nature of the partnership, the lack of local capacity to compete with EU imports which could wipe out local production and prevent the emergence of new industry, the potential loss of much needed fiscal revenues due to the tariff dismantlement towards the EU, the lack of proper regulatory framework at the national and regional level, the sequencing and scope of the EPA process which could derail regional integration and industrialisation processes, the poverty impact, etc. (Bilal and Stevens eds. 2009; Chimanikire 2019; Makhan 2009; South Centre 2012). On the other hand, the EU has been emphasising how the EPAs could lead to a real transformation of the ACP economies, fostering business and investment opportunities for domestic and foreign actors, more and better jobs, leading to the diversification of their economies, their sustainable development, and their integration in the global economy, through a privileged partnership with the EU (European Commission 2016, 2020; Zamfir 2018).

In practice, many of these fears do not seem to materialise; nor did many of the ambitious expected benefits. Recent empirical studies have offered a much more sober assessment, mainly due to the gradual implementations of the EPAs over a long period. The impacts are overall small, positive or negative, depending on the countries and configurations.⁵ These findings are overall confirmed by the *ex post* evaluations of the EPAs, in the Caribbean (Plaisier et al. 2021) and in the East and Southern Africa (LSE 2021). In both cases, the actual impact of the EPA seems to have been extremely limited, both in terms of trade flows and development.

4. Reform dynamics and development support

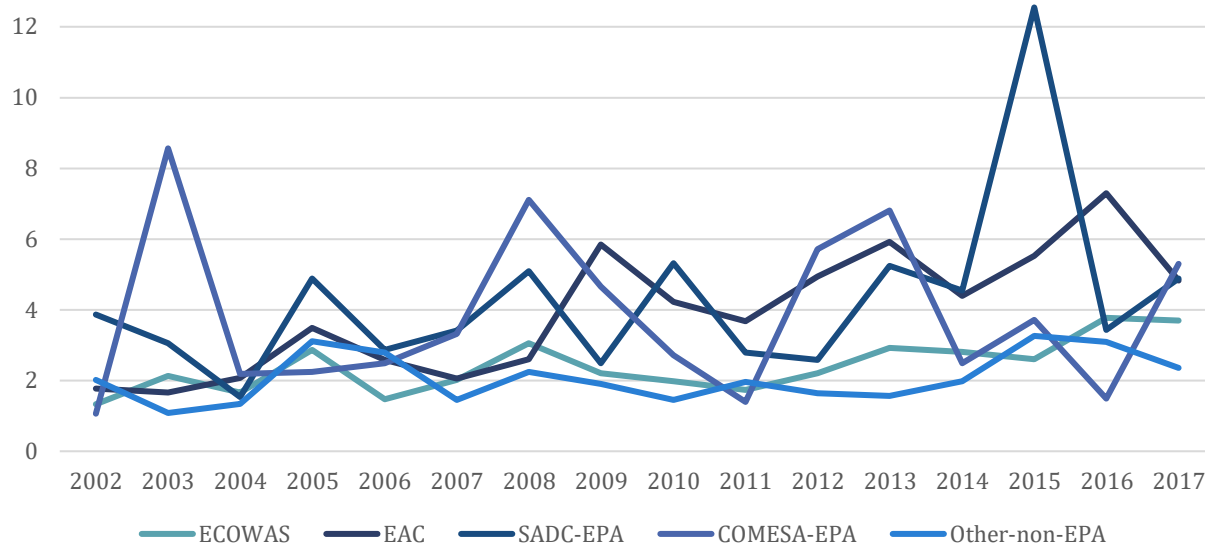
It is also very important to stress that the EPAs cannot be considered in isolation, and are part of a broader context, in terms of domestic, regional and international policies and evolutions, as well as in terms of development support. EPAs were aimed to support the transformation and development of ACP countries. But EPAs, like any other FTAs, cannot change a country. They can at best help accompany some local and international transformation processes. So, countries that have initiated more profound domestic reforms and have actively engaged in trade and investment, have tended to use more effectively their EPA. This is the case for instance of Mauritius in Africa and the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean.

The EU has sought to actively provide development support to the EPAs, and more broadly to the sustainable economic development of ACP countries, including Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. The EU is the main international provider of aid for trade (Aft), and has provided significant aid to these three countries in the context of the EPAs. Beyond the formal commitments to provide €6.5 billion for the EPA Development Support – a framework which attracted a lot of political attention but had extremely limited effectiveness – the EU has provided

⁵ See for instance Bouët et al. (2016), Grummiller et al. (2018), Stender et al. (2020), Tröster et al. (2020), World Bank (2015), and a summary of some studies commissioned by the European Commission in Zamfir (2018).

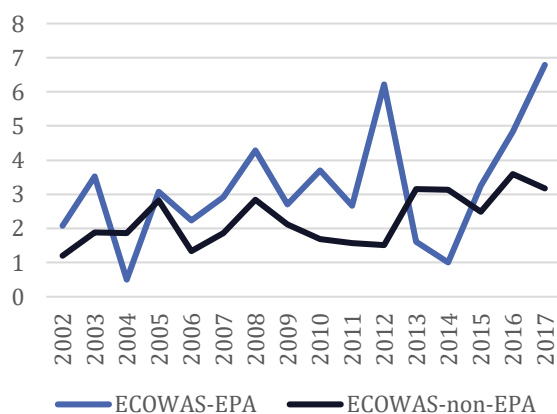
relatively more development assistance to EPA countries than non-EPA ones, as illustrated by Figures 2, 3 and 4 (Lui and Bilal 2019).

Figure 2: EU institutions and member states AfT to EPA regions (2017 constant \$/cap)



Source: Compiled from OECD CRS (Lui and Bilal 2019)

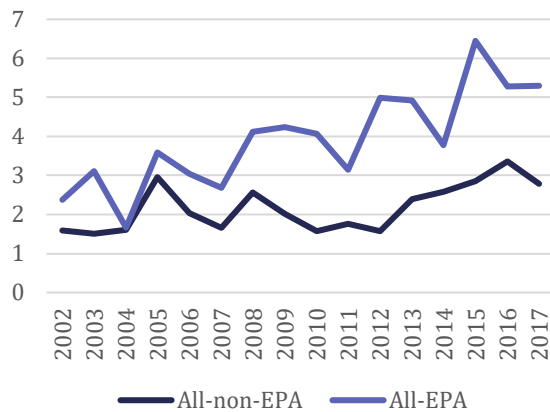
Figure 3: EU institutions and member states support to ECOWAS by EPA status (2017 constant \$/cap)



Note: ECOWAS-EPA comprises Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, whereas ECOWAS-non-EPA covers all other countries

Source: Compiled from OECD CRS (Lui and Bilal 2019)

Figure 4: EU institutions and member states support to Africa by EPA status (2017 constant \$/cap)



Source: Compiled from OECD CRS (Lui and Bilal 2019)

There is also evidence that EPA countries have received more EU development support targeted at sustainable development objectives (Holmes et al. 2020). The EU has also put increasing attention in its AfT over time to trade and investment linkages in the EPAs, as well as private sector development (Quak 2018). Examples of relevant development programmes for EPAs include budget support, instrumental to improve the governance of domestic resources and taxation and improve the investment climate, dedicated EPA support (the EPA Implementation Strategy in Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire, the EPA Accompanying Measures Strategy in Ghana), trade facilitation, competition and infrastructure investment programmes (often set up at a regional level), investment and trade promotion, agricultural and social support.

With the establishment of the External Investment Plan (EIP) in 2017, the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD), the EU has strengthened its capacity to use blended finance and guarantees to more effectively leverage private finance (the first pillar of the EIP), while enhancing its anchorage to policy dialogue and an improvement of the investment climate (pillar 3 of the EIP), putting the necessary technical assistance to achieve these objectives (pillar 2 of the EIP). Beyond the EU institutional framework of the EIP, it is also the philosophy behind this new approach that matters most. It builds on the European Commission endeavours to assign 'A Stronger Role of the Private Sector in Achieving Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in Developing Countries', in the name of its [2014 Communication](#). It relates to the increasing efforts to foster domestic production capacity, enhance value chain development, stimulating sustainable investments, improving the business and regulatory environment, and connecting better private sector actors, and in particular SMEs, at the local and regional level, as well as with the European business. It is in this spirit that the EU has set up Sustainable Business for Africa (SB4A) platform, to help better harness private sector forces to development objectives. The promotion of more and better-quality jobs, in a greener and more sustainable manner, has come to the top of the agenda of the EU with Africa. In this broader context, EPAs are just one of the mechanisms through which this sustainable and inclusive transformation can be pursued. Examples of such synergies include the EU-Côte d'Ivoire and the EU-Ghana Business Forums organised by the EU, and the extension to Cameroon of the activities of European initiatives to connect innovative SMEs such as the Enterprise Europe Network, for instance (Seters and Bilal 2020). In this more comprehensive approach, trade is just one of the tools for the promotion of development objectives, and EPAs are only one of the channels to articulate in a more coherent manner a partnership approach with the EU support.

5. Sustainability initiatives: from timber to cocoa

The EPAs have also served as a general framework for the EU to support more ambitious sectoral initiatives towards greater sustainability initiatives.

5.1. Sustainable forestry

The Central Africa EPA contains a specific chapter on forestry governance and trade in timber and forest products, with a view to improve the sustainable management of forests and prevent the trade of illegal logging. The agreement makes explicit reference to the European Union's action plan on forest law enforcement, governance and trade (FLEGT). Following the adoption in 2010 of the EU Timber Regulations (EU Regulation No 995/2010), EU operators are required to perform due diligence checks to ensure the legal sourcing of their timber products. One way to meet this requirement is through the FLEGT licensing scheme for timber under the 2005 FLEGT-Regulation (EC Regulation No 2173/2005). To facilitate this process, the EU has also entered into bilateral voluntary partnership agreements (VPA) with interested partner countries. This is the case for Cameroon and Ghana, with which a VPA was signed in 2011 and 2010, respectively.

In this context, the EU has been accompanying and supporting forest governance reforms in Cameroon and Ghana (Woolfrey 2021). This includes capacity building programmes, as well as multi-stakeholder engagement, including with the private sector, to combat illegal logging and set in place effective traceability mechanisms. In Cameroon, the EU has provided €10 million for the Forest Governance Improvement Programme (PAMFOR), €15.5 million for the Programme to support the preservation of biodiversity and fragile ecosystems in Central Africa (ECOFAC 6) to support two national park sustainable management and conduct anti-poaching activities, as well as an additional €5 million for the Central Africa World Heritage Forest Initiative for the management of forests at a national park in Cameroon. In Ghana, the EU support for the FLEGT initiative has taken various forms, including significant technical assistance and capacity building for public, private and civil society actors, facilitation of dialogue, and analytical support (Woolfrey 2021). Besides the direct support, it is also the political involvement of the EU and partnership dimension that matters, since reforming the governance of forestry and increasing the transparency of the timber sector is a highly sensitive and complex issue.

5.2. Sustainable cocoa initiative

The sustainable cocoa initiative, launched by the EU with Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana in September 2020, is a critical new initiative in several ways.

First, it is a sector that matters. Côte d'Ivoire is the first world producer of cocoa (accounting for 15% of its GDP), Ghana the second (9% of its GDP), and Cameroon the fifth (1 to 2% of its GDP), the three of them accounting for 62% of the world production. The EU is the first world importer of cocoa, accounting for 60% of world imports, with the Netherlands as the first importer of cocoa, Belgium the first transformer, and Germany the first consumer. Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and the EU are thus key actors in the cocoa market, and their partnership does matter. The cocoa sector is also one with many smallholder farmers, most of whom are living below the poverty line. It is also a sector where child labour is common, affecting a total of 1.5 million children in Côte d'Ivoire (790000) and Ghana (770000) – while less common in Cameroon. Cocoa production is also the source of environmental degradation, notably deforestation (with 60% of the forests lost in Côte d'Ivoire and 16% in Ghana from 1990 to 2020). Environmental, social and labour sustainability are at stake.

Second, it is a collective initiative, bringing the European Commission and EU member states, together with Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. The approach taken results from multi-stakeholder consultations and dialogues, initiated in 2019, involving state officials, international organisations, civil society, farmers and private sector.

Third, it builds in local initiatives and dynamics. The initiative was triggered by a minimum global price initiative by Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana in the mid-2019, setting up a living income differential to ensure a decent income for local farmers. Large international food companies also lobbied the EU to promote some voluntary partnership towards ensuring the sustainability of the cocoa production and value chain, and its traceability.

Fourth, the initiative capitalises on the EU approach towards sustainable development. The EU seeks to foster the development of sustainable and inclusive value chains for quality jobs. It does so by engaging with local private sector (in particular SMEs and smallholder farmers) and European and international business, promoting due diligence measures on a voluntary basis as well as through binding commitments (as in the forthcoming due diligence legislation later this year). The EU also seeks to leverage its political influence through policy dialogue, development cooperation (the EU has set aside a €25 million budget for this initiative) and economic power. The EPAs are in this respect a conducive framework for EU sustainable trade, investment and development aspirations. But they are only part of the toolbox. Influencing domestic legislation and processes towards 'sustainable cocoa' standards and practices is also part of the arsenal. Non-mandatory guidelines, voluntary partnership agreements (à la FLEGT) and binding due diligence requirements can all be envisaged as well.

6. Value chain development and industrialisation

The 'sustainable cocoa' initiative is also an example of how the EU can help promote sustainable production and value chain development.

The purpose is not only to grow raw commodity in a more sustainable manner. While desirable, this would not be sufficient for a sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Commodity dependence has been one of the main development challenges for poorer countries (UNCTAD 2019). Production capacity development, product diversification and value addition are essential for jobs enhancing economic transformation and industrialisation processes. Cocoa processing is an illustrative example in this respect.

Cocoa transformation is generally associated to chocolate manufacturing. But cocoa processing also includes grinding and the production of intermediary products, such as cocoa powder and butter (also used in cosmetics), and cocoa liquors. Processed cocoa is a capital-intensive activity requiring mainly high skills (Abbadi et al. 2019). Investment and training are thus essential elements of a cocoa upgrading policy.

Grinding, despite adding only limited value, has been the industrial policy more actively pursued in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Chocolate manufacturing adds greater value, but it is largely dominated by companies in consumer markets in the US and Europe. Nonetheless, opportunities exist to develop niche markets for exports towards Europe. Yet, the larger potential probably rests in the growing local and regional chocolate market in West Africa (Grumiller et al. 2018). Local processing of cocoa beans can also be the source of inclusive and gender-led approaches, in particular with rural women initiatives (Ben Said 2018).

Active policies can effectively promote cocoa transformation, at the regional, national and local level. For instance, the government of Côte d'Ivoire has provided tax incentives in an attempt to foster industrialisation, in particular for agri-processing, including to attract investment in cocoa processing (Oxford Business Group 2020). The local

authorities of the Nawa region have also adopted a pro-active cocoa industrial policy, which includes chocolate manufacturing, as well as an innovative project - the “Nawa Bio Energy” - using cocoa pod for the production of bio energy, for soap and fertiliser (Coulibaly 2021; Moyouzame 2021). Capacity building, hard and soft infrastructure developments, policy and regulatory reforms, trade and investment facilitations, and multi-stakeholder engagements are all necessary steps to unleash the sustainable economic transformation potential of agri-processing, as in the cocoa sector. International and regional support, as the one provided by the African Development Bank for the cocoa sector, are also instrumental for catalysing industrial reforms and investments (AfDB 2017; BCEAO 2018).

The EU, with the EPAs and beyond, also intends to stimulate such transformation, stimulating domestic production and promoting value addition for local, regional, and international value chains, notably with the EU. EPAs secure an only marginally improved access to the EU market for most signatory countries, compared to the Lomé/Cotonou-type of preferences. Yet, they offer the potential to develop new value chains, with the EU, but also regionally, via the ‘regional preference’ clauses in the EPA, which foresees that partner countries in the EPA should grant each other preferences at least equivalent to those they grant to the EU. However, it is mainly through their indirect effects, by stimulating domestic and foreign investments, by facilitating trade and by promoting domestic reforms, that EPAs can have a greater impact on value chain development (Woolfrey and Bilal 2017). In particular, EPA implementation measures and support can actively contribute to promote productive capacity in processing and value addition in promising sectors.

In this respect, it is worth highlighting the ‘jobs and growth compacts’ approach adopted by the EU. Based on the country own strategies and development plans, the EU identifies key sectors or value chains with high potential for quality-job creation and inclusive growth, in a sustainable and gender manner. The EU targets these value chains, with a view to help addressing regulatory and business climate bottlenecks, promote policy dialogues through public-private partnership and multi-stakeholder engagement, and provide the needed aid-for-trade and investment support needed, as appropriate. The EU support is meant to promote domestic and regional value chains, as well as their integration into European and global value chains, as a key dimension of economic transformation and inclusive prosperity (World Bank 2020). Trade and investment opportunities, as those provided under the EPAs, as well as regional integration processes, can further contribute to this objective (Woolfrey and Bilal 2017).

7. EU-Africa trade and investment partnership for building back better, greener and in a more inclusive way

This process takes place in a rapidly evolving context: the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and resulting crisis, international geo-political tensions, and an increasing inequality gap between richer and poorer countries and people. The call for support and solidarity with developing countries has never been greater, with the imperative to build back better, greener, in a more inclusive and gender sensitive manner, leaving no one behind. The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the vulnerability of some global value chains, as well as the resilience of others. It has also highlighted the call for greater self-reliance on strategic supply, the desire to pursue greater strategic autonomy, and the temptation to reshoring and favour local supply chains.

The grossly asymmetric to vaccines and health care has also encouraged some more pro-active initiatives to promote vaccines and pharmaceutical manufacturing in Africa. This is the case for instance with the Sustainable Healthcare Industry for Resilience in Africa (SHIRA), an initiative announced by the EU at the end of May. It aims to establish a financing platform to enable political and development finance partners to coordinate and strengthen health security and resilience in Africa. Combined with support to strengthen the systemic weaknesses of the health systems in Africa, this initiative is a good example of industrialisation endeavours based on a partnership public-

private, EU-Africa, investments and grants, trade and technology transfers, skills development and innovation, for more inclusive development outcomes leaving no one behind. To be successful, conducive regulatory frameworks must be in place, at the domestic level, but also between Europe and Africa. The Team Europe approach and EU-Africa partnership can act as key facilitator, beyond the EPAs and specific trade arrangements.

The health example, obviously triggered by the pandemic, is just one of the sectors where such cooperative approaches for economic transformation towards inclusive and sustainable objectives. Climate mitigation, adaption and resilience, in line with the EU Green Deal, and digitalisation, are among the other key priorities of the EU in the context of its partnership with Africa.

From the African perspective, the priority is to ensure its capacity to address the health, as well as the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. Resources' mobilisation, at international and domestic levels, is a priority, notably in view of the very limited fiscal space of most African countries. Addressing the sustainability of their debt is of the utmost priority, including some international initiatives for debt rebalancing and restructuring, for instance in the context of the G20.

The pandemic has also given further impetus to the need to build regional markets in Africa, fostering intra-Africa trade, investment and value chains, for greater economic autonomy of the continent. The major pan-African economic development is the entry into force of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) on 30 May 2019 and the official start of trading on 1 January 2021. The AfCFTA is commonly heralded as the largest FTA in the world, with the aim to include all 54 African countries. Given the sheer complexity of the task, the effective implementation of such an agreement would be no little achievement. However, the AfCFTA is much more than a free trade agreement. Africa has well understood that trade is just a tool, not an end in itself. The AfCFTA is first and foremost a political commitment, to foster productive capacity at the domestic level, promote cross-border industrialisation, create jobs and improve the livelihood of all, leaving no one behind.

Not surprisingly, the EU is fully behind this ambition. For one, the AfCFTA and the EPA ambitions are similar, in the way they aim to use economic and regulatory tools to foster inclusive and sustainable economic transformation and employment at a regional level. This is not to say that they may no longer be possible contradictions and trade-offs between the AfCFTA and the EPAs. But by aligning some of their tools and core objectives, there is ample opportunities for complementarity and synergies, so that the EPA and AfCFTA implementations can be pursued jointly.

Africa is rapidly evolving, becoming more assertive and better coordinated at the continental level, including with the highest political backup, by the African Heads of State, for their trade agenda for the continental development. This is an integral part of the African transformational pathway, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the AU Agenda 2063.

The EU, notably with its trade policy, is also rapidly evolving, as outlined in the European Commission Communication on the [Trade Policy Review](#) published on 18 February 2021 (European Commission 2021). The EU has identified key priorities for its trade policy, which include:

- reviving multilateral approaches and reforming the WTO,
- supporting the green transition and promoting responsible and sustainable value chains,
- supporting the digital transition and trade in services,
- strengthening the EU regulatory impact,
- strengthening the EU's focus on implementation and enforcement of trade agreements, and ensure a level playing field, and
- strengthening the EU's partnerships with neighbouring, enlargement countries and Africa.

The EU is also becoming more assertive, in pursuing its principles, values and interests, including through its trade policy, which should be better enforced - the EU nominated in July 2020 a Chief Trade Enforcement Officer - and pursue stronger sustainability and due diligence commitments. The effective monitoring, implementation and enforcement of the Trade and Sustainable Development chapters of EU FTAs will also be strengthened, and the scope of commitments, institutional setups, and possible sanctions for non-compliance will also be considered.

In particular, the EU seeks through its trade and trade-related policies to more effectively leverage its economic power, the attractiveness of its open market and its active international engagement to better promote its strategic interests, in geo-political and economic terms, as well as its values, principles and norms. This means promoting multilateralism and a rules-based international order, the promotion and protection of human rights, core labour and social rights, gender equality, as well as the fight against climate change and the preservation of biodiversity. The Paris Agreement will become an essential element in future trade and investment agreements concluded by the EU, and the effective implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity will become a priority. The EU will also seek to strengthen the resilience and sustainability of value chains, including in the health sector, with a view to ensure fair and equitable access to critical goods in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and recovery. Cooperation, partnership and constructive engagement are key dimensions of the EU approach, among governments and with the private sector.

Africa is particularly relevant to the EU own interests, stability and prosperity. From a geo-strategic perspective, the EU seeks to promote stability and resilience in its neighbourhood and Africa, helping to address vulnerabilities and promoting an inclusive recovery and sustainable socio-economic, green and digital transformation of Africa. As the main provider of aid for trade, the EU actively seeks to foster trade and investment in Africa, building on African own initiatives and promoting sustainable economic ties and integration between the two continents, including among private sector actors. On the international scene, the EU seeks allies and ways to forge stronger partnerships, not least with Africa. The EU trade relations with Africa are thus not just about economic ties, but also, or perhaps mainly about development, values, sustainability, cultural, political and geo-strategic considerations and objectives.

The EU-Africa partnership could be subject to new political impulse, with the European Commission Communication [Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa](#), and related Council conclusions adopted on 30 June 2020, and the pending EU-Africa Summit, postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2020). A Team Europe-Africa on trade and investment for inclusive and sustainable development could be forged, with a stronger and more institutionalised cooperation between European and African actors, at least at the sectoral level through possible platforms, in particular among public development banks and development finance institutions from the two continents (Bilal 2021; Bilal 2020). The EPAs are just one stepping-stone in this configuration.

8. To ratify or not to ratify

In this overall context, the ratification of the EPAs with Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana should not be assessed only on the specific merits of their respective provisions. The EPAs provide useful opportunities, not least to ensure an open access to the EU market in a structured and comprehensive manner. Yet, they are not perfect: these are old agreements, framed and concluded in the 2000s, which do not meet the higher standards set by the EU in its more recent FTAs. Besides, they are still only bilateral agreements concluded with individual countries, not regional groupings, as intended. So, the question is not whether the EPAs to be ratified are perfect, or as best as can be. They are not. The question is rather whether they can contribute to the broader development ambitions set by the EU and Africa in their partnership. This is surely the case, as time has shown.

But for those in doubts, the question is whether we know better than those that have concluded, ratified and started implemented these agreements. In this respect, we should remember the words of Hanna Tetteh, the then Minister of Foreign Affairs from Ghana, in her letter to the Committee on International Trade of the European Parliament in November 2016, seeking to convince the European Parliament to approve the EU-Ghana interim EPA:

“Ghana's IEPA was unanimously approved by both sides of the house in our Parliament, and no dissenting votes were cast. That gives a clear indication that *as a Parliament and being fully aware of the opportunities and the challenges of implementing this agreement, we were collectively of the view that it was in our best interest to ratify the IEPA* and continue to ensure our duty free, quota free access to the EU market, while we still make the effort to have our Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and ELI EPA signed and ratified by the required number of states so that the substantive regional EPA can come into force.

We believe that when it comes to determining the matter of what is in our best national interest, as the elected representatives of the people of Ghana, the Parliament of the Republic of Ghana has both the legitimacy and the mandate to make that determination, and not any other third party, irrespective of however well-intentioned such a third party may be. [...] *I think it would be inappropriate for anyone to suggest that we do not have the capacity to assess what is in the best interests of our country.*” (Tetteh 2016; *emphasis added*).

References

- Abbadi, S., B. Senadza, M. Lieuw-Kie-Song and H. Abebe (2019), [*Assessing the employment effects of processing cocoa in Ghana*](#), STRENGTHEN Publication Series, International Labour Organization, August.
- AETS (2019), [*Mise en œuvre de l'APE intérimaire en Côte d'Ivoire et au Ghana : étude d'impact sur l'intégration régionale Afrique de l'Ouest*](#), Mai. [*Implementation of the Interim EPA in Ivory Coast and in Ghana: impact study on regional integration in West Africa*](#), May.
- AfDB (2017), [*High hopes for cocoa farmers in Africa, as AfDB plans big for producing countries*](#), African Development Bank, 8 August.
- AU (2020), 2020 [*African Integration Report: The Status of Regional Integration in Africa Advancing Intra-African Trade for Post-Covid Recovery*](#), African Union, December.
- BCEAO (2014), [*Etude monographique sur la filière cacao dans l'UEMOA*](#), Direction Générale de l'économie et de la monnaie, Banque Centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest, juin.
- Ben Said, E. (2018), [*Quand les agricultrices ivoiriennes transforment le cacao en "or"*](#), AA Anadolu Agency, 29 janvier.
- Berthelot, J. (2018), You said free trade? The economic 'Partnership' Agreement European Union - West Africa; Vous avez dit libre échange? L'Accord de "Partenariat" économique Union européenne - Afrique de l'Ouest. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Bilal, S. (2021), [*How European financial institutions can work better together for sustainable and green \(co-\)investment in times of COVID-19*](#), ECDPM Discussion Paper No. 294, March.
- Bilal, S. (2020), [*Collaborative efforts to stimulate sustainable investment for COVID-19 recovery in developing countries*](#), ARI 142/2020, Elcano Royal Institute, December.
- Bilal, S. and I. Ramdoo (2016), [*Sustainability and human rights in EPAs A comparative analysis between the Caribbean and African EPAs*](#), ECDPM Discussion Paper No. 198, September.
- Bilal, S. and C. Stevens eds. (2009), [*The Interim Economic Partnership Agreements between the EU and African States: Contents, challenges and prospects*](#), ECDPM Policy Management Report No.17, ECDPM and ODI, July.
- Borchert, I. and M. Di Ubaldo (2020), [*Go ahead and trade: the effect of uncertainty removal in the EU's GSP scheme*](#), Working Paper, EUI RSCAS, 2020/15, RESPECT working paper.
- Chimanikire, D. (2019), [*EU-Africa and Economic Partnership Agreements \(EPAs\) – Revisited*](#). L'Europe en Formation, 1(1), 51-67.
- Coulibali, E. (2021), [*Développement local : des cabosses de cacao transformées dans la Nawa*](#), 7Info.ci, 29 avril.
- de Melo J. (2021), Bananas, [*Subject of the Longest Transatlantic Dispute in the World Trading System: A Postmortem*](#). Chap. 15 in Hoekman B.M., Zedillo E. (eds), *Trade in the 21st century, back to the past?* Brookings Press, pp. 477-499.
- European Commission (2021), [*Trade Policy Review: An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy*](#), Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2021) 66 final, Brussels, 18 February.
- European Commission (2020a), [*EU-Côte d'Ivoire Economic Partnership Agreement Creating opportunities for EU and African businesses*](#), DG Trade, October.
- European Commission (2020b), *EU-Ghana Economic Partnership Agreement Creating opportunities for EU and African businesses* DG Trade, December.
- European Commission (2020c), *EU-Central Africa (Cameroon) Economic Partnership Agreement Creating opportunities for EU and African businesses*, DG Trade, October.
- European Commission (2020d), [*Economic Partnership Agreements - Putting partnerships into practice: EU trade and investment with African, Caribbean and Pacific states*](#) / Les accords de partenariat économique - Les partenariats

-
- en pratique: Le commerce et les investissements de l'UE avec les pays d'Afrique, des Caraïbes et du Pacifique, 2020 edition, August.
- European Commission (2016), [10 benefits of Economic Partnership Agreements \(EPAs\)](#) / Les 10 avantages des accords de partenariat économique, DG Trade, November.
- European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2020), [Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa](#), Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, JOIN(2020) 4 final, Brussels, 9 March.
- Grumiller, J., H. Grohs, W. Raza, C. Staritz and B. Tröster (2018), [Strategies for sustainable upgrading in global value chains: The Ivorian and Ghanaian cocoa processing sectors](#). ÖFSE Policy Note, No. 24/2018, Austrian Foundation for Development Research (ÖFSE), Vienna.
- Oxford Business Group (2020), [How Côte d'Ivoire's new tax reforms aim to bolster industrialisation](#), 26 February.
- Holmes, P., J. Magntorn Garrett and J. Rollo (2020), [Pulling together or pulling apart: EU trade and development policy](#), VOXEU, CEPR, 15 October.
- LSE (2021), [Sustainability Impact Assessment in Support of Negotiations with Partner Countries in Eastern and Southern Africa in view of Deepening the Existing Interim Economic Partnership Agreement: Ex-post Evaluation](#), SIA in support of negotiations with ESA5 TRADE 2019/D2/D09 for the European Commission, LSE Consulting, May.
- Lui, D. and S. Bilal (2019), [EU soft power in the case of the West Africa EPA Development Programme \(PAPED\)](#), in Apiko, P., S. Bilal, P. Holmes, D. Lui, J. Magntor Garrett and J. Rollo, *Report on the coherence between Europe's trade and development policy*, report by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) and the University of Sussex in the framework of the Horizon2020 project RESPECT - Realizing Europe's Soft Power in External Cooperation and Trade, December, Part II, pp.32-52.
- Makhan, D. (2009), [Linking EU trade and development policies: Lessons from the ACP-EU trade negotiations on Economic Partnership Agreements](#), Studies 50, Bonn: German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE).
- Moyouzame, A. (2021), [L'expérience de l'Ivoirienne Marie-Orlane Asquet dans la production de charbon bio](#), Agence Ecofin, 24 février.
- Plaisier, N., T. Shafique, M. Fuenfzig, D. Luff and S. Snoeijsbos (2021), [Ex-post evaluation of the EPA between the EU and its Member States and the CARIFORUM Member States](#), Final report by Ecorys & Appleton Luff for the European Commission
- Quak, E.-j., 2018, [The EU and its member states' trade support programmes for Economic Partnership Agreements \(EPAs\)](#), K4D helpdesk Reports 341, Institute of Development Studies (IDS), 17 July.
- Ramdoo, I. and S. Bilal (2016), Regional Integration in Africa: The Impact of the Economic Partnership Agreements, in Gutowski A., T. Knedlik, P.N. Osakwe, I. Ramdoo and K. Wohlmuth eds., *Africa's Progress in Regional and Global Economic Integration: Towards Transformative Regional Integration*, African Development Perspectives Yearbook, Vol.8, Lit Verlag, pp. 229-267.
- South Centre (2012), [The EPAs and risks for Africa: Local production and regional trade](#). Analytical Note SC/TDP/AN/EPA/30. June.
- Seters, J. van and S. Bilal (2020), Sustainable EU business and trade: How the Enterprise Europe Network can promote trade beyond Europe, ECDPM Briefing Note No. 115, March.
- Stender, F., A. Berger, C. Brandi and J. Schwab (2020), [The trade effects of the Economic Partnership Agreements between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States: Early empirical insights from panel data](#), DIE Discussion Paper 7/2020, March. Published in [Journal of Common Market Studies](#), June 2021.
- Tetteh, H. (2016), [Letter to the Chairman Bernd Lange and Members of the Committee on International Trade of the European Parliament](#), November.

-
- Tröster, B., R. von Arnim, C. Staritz, W. Raza, J. Grumiller and H. Grohs (2020), [*Delivering on Promises? The Expected Impacts and Implementation Challenges of the Economic Partnership Agreements between the European Union and Africa*](#), Journal of Common Market Studies, 58(2), March, pp. 365-383.
- UNCTAD (2019), [*Promoting value addition and the enhancement of domestic productive capacity through local economic empowerment*](#), Note by the UNCTAD secretariat for the Trade and Development Board Trade and Development Commission Expert Meeting on Promoting Value Addition and Enhancement of Domestic Productive Capacity through Local Economic Empowerment Geneva, 16 October 2019 Item 3 of the provisional agenda, 7 August 2019.
- Woolfrey, S. (2021), Can a trade-focused approach promote more sustainable forest management? An analysis of the EU-Ghana FLEGT Voluntary Partnership Agreement, report written in the framework of the Horizon2020 project RESPECT - Realizing Europe's Soft Power in External Cooperation and Trade. May.
- Woolfrey, S. and S. Bilal (2017), [*The impact of Economic Partnership Agreements on the development of African value chains*](#), ECDPM Discussion Paper No. 213, June.
- World Bank (2020), [*World Development Report 2020: Trading for Development in the Age of Global Value Chains*](#), World Bank.
- Zamfir, I. (2018), [*An overview of the EU-ACP countries' economic partnership agreements. Building a new trade relationship*](#), EPRS Briefing, European Parliamentary Research Service, July.

About ECDPM

The European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) is an independent ‘think and do tank’ working on international cooperation and development policy in Europe and Africa.

Since 1986 our staff members provide research and analysis, advice and practical support to policymakers and practitioners across Europe and Africa – to make policies work for sustainable and inclusive global development.

Our main areas of work include:

- European external affairs
- African institutions
- Security and resilience
- Migration
- Sustainable food systems
- Finance, trade and investment
- Regional integration
- Private sector engagement

For more information please visit www.ecdpm.org

In addition to structural support by ECDPM’s institutional partners: The Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden, this publication benefits from specific funding by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Directorate-general Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid.

ISSN1571-7577

ecdpm

Making policies work

**HEAD OFFICE
SIÈGE**

Onze Lieve Vrouweplein 21
6211 HE Maastricht
The Netherlands *Pays Bas*
Tel +31 (0)43 350 29 00
Fax +31 (0)43 350 29 02

**BRUSSELS OFFICE
BUREAU DE BRUXELLES**

Rue Archimède 5
1000 Brussels *Bruxelles*
Belgium *Belgique*
Tel +32 (0)2 237 43 10
Fax +32 (0)2 237 43 19

info@ecdpm.org
www.ecdpm.org
KvK 41077447