

DISCUSSION PAPER No. 238

NORTH AFRICA'S DOUBLE PURSUIT - PART I

Looking north and moving south: LITTLE ENTHUSIASM FOR A CONTINENT-TO-CONTINENT APPROACH

NORTH AFRICA

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SUMMARY

In a two-part paper, we look at the role North African states play in Africa-Europe relations, and how political actors on both continents are influencing this role.

In the first part, we focus on the North African perspective. North African countries are seeking to 'move south', meaning towards continental integration, especially for sub-continental market access and political cooperation, but keep on 'looking north' to safeguard their relations with the EU.

In spite of this double pursuit and their geographic location, North African countries show little enthusiasm for developing a comprehensive continent-to-continent approach under the auspices of the AU. This happens despite the historic involvement of some North African states at the inception of the AU as well as the Joint Africa-EU Strategy, and despite recent reassurances from the AU that their privileged relationship with the EU would remain intact.

North African countries show little or no interest in being associated with a renewed deal between African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and the EU either. ACP-EU negotiations are ongoing, and the EU allowed the "involvement or accession" of third states. But for North African states, the ACP-EU framework adds no value. They also fear that a renewed agreement might downgrade their relations with the EU.

In short, the status quo seems a safer bet than a more comprehensive continent-to-continent arrangement, no matter under which diplomatic framework.

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Acronyms

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
ACSRT	African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Agreement
AFRIPOL	African Police Organisation
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
CAP	Common African Position
CEMOC	Comité d'Etat Major opérationnel conjoint
CEN-SAD	The Community of Sahel-Saharan States
COMELEC	Commission on Elections
COMESA	Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EAC	East African Community
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EDP	Excessive Deficit Procedure
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreements
EU	European Union
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GIZ	German Federal Enterprise
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
JAES	Joint Africa-EU Strategy
JLMP	Joint Labour Migration Programme
NA	North Africa
REC	Regional economic community
SADC	Southern African Development Community
TFTA	Tripartite Free Trade Area
TRALAC	Trade Law Centre
UE	Union Européenne
UMA	Union du Maghreb Arabe
UN	United Nations

Introduction

This paper focuses on how North African countries view future Africa-Europe relations in various fields, especially trade, political cooperation and migration. Based on desk research and interviews held between May and October 2018,¹ its aim is to elucidate how North African countries see the evolving framework for Africa-Europe relations. With Egypt chairing the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in 2019, and the current EU-ACP negotiations probably featuring on the agenda of the next session in February 2019, this topic is likely to gain more attention during the course of the year.

Battle of legitimacies between ACP and AU: what place for North Africa?

The question of the form and content of EU-Africa relations became pressing in March 2018 when as the ‘voice of Africa’,² in the Kigali Declaration the AU stated its intention to negotiate a new deal *directly* with the EU - *beyond* the post-colonial ACP-EU framework.³ How this intention evolved in the months following the Kigali Declaration will be explained in Part 2 (forthcoming). In any event, the Kigali Declaration then led to confusion concerning how the post-Cotonou process would fare (at the risk of becoming an empty shell). The forthcoming Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa may bring greater clarity about the AU’s position on the post-Cotonou process, even though several successive high-level meetings in 2018 have failed to do so.

Confusion surrounding the post-Cotonou process further grew when it became clear that the EU was in two minds about which negotiating framework it prefers for dealing with continent-to-continent affairs, the AU or the ACP Group. This was recently exemplified by the EU-AU Joint Communiqué of 21-22 January 2019. “*While acknowledging the engagement of African states and regions in different cooperation frameworks and the need to preserve their interests, specificities, diversities and acquis, ministers confirmed that the AU and EU would continue to work towards enhancing the continent-to-continent partnership, post-2020*”.⁴ Yet, the EU mandate for post-Cotonou negotiations has an exclusive pan-African flavour to it. It seeks to deepen the regional partnership with Africa, and intends to “*build on, reinforce and upgrade the Joint Africa-EU Strategy*” while ensuring “*intensified cooperation*” with the AU and APSA.⁵ It also refers to legal instruments applicable throughout Africa now⁶ or in the future, notably the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

Crucially, especially for North Africa, the future EU-ACP Partnership would be “*open to and welcome the involvement or accession of third countries which subscribe to the same values, contribute to meeting the objectives, and share the same interests*”.⁷ The Explanatory Memorandum to the EU mandate clarifies that “*this is particularly relevant ... to allow strengthening the 'Africa as one' approach, whilst respecting the existing bilateral association agreements with North African countries*”.⁸

¹ Interviews were held with Tunisian, Egyptian and Moroccan diplomats or public officials. Interviews were also held with the EU delegation in Morocco, and with a Belgian diplomat based in North Africa. Other interviews were conducted with analysts and regional observers including officials of the African Union.

² Murithi (2012).

³ See AU (2018b).

⁴ EU-AU (2019) par. 27. Emphasis added.

⁵ Council of the European Union (2018) p. 26.

⁶ African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

⁷ See Council of the European Union (2018) p. 4 & p. 82.

⁸ Explanatory Memorandum EC (2017).

The ACP mandate too, refers to the AfCFTA, and contains ingredients with a pan-African intent⁹ - though continental / regional bodies are primarily seen as ‘beneficiaries’ or implementing agencies (not as political actors or parties). However, the ACP framework for negotiations *itself* could be said to hamper continental integration. The absence of North Africa defines the ACP construct and is one of its most fundamental weaknesses, since many African challenges can only be solved by cross-border cooperation across the continent while, despite the pan-African ‘*cachet*’ in both mandates, the post-Cotonou negotiations cannot be binding on North Africa.

Against this background, this paper analyses the interests of North African countries in continental integration/cooperation and what this means for their ‘appetite’ for a new AU-led deal with the EU. After discussing the concerns per country (1), this paper looks at shared aims between their foreign policies (2), and formulates some concluding observations (3).

⁹ See ACP Group (2018) which, for example, refers to “[t]he strengthening of African continental integration arrangements and their institutions” (par. 9).

1. Concerns per North African Country

A brief assessment of the respective interests in *continental integration or cooperation* (broadly understood, i.e. not only in the economic sphere)¹⁰ is provided per country (Egypt, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia), followed by an assessment of country-specific preferences regarding a *continent-to-continent approach* between the AU and the EU.

1.1. Egypt

Egypt hosted the first Africa-EU Summit in Cairo in 2000. The Cairo Declaration which was then adopted touched upon a range of issues including aid, trade and political cooperation, and prepared the groundwork for the adoption of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) seven years later.¹¹ At the time, Egypt intended to assume a leading role in shaping relations between the two continents. However, at the time of writing, with these relations in limbo (it remains unclear how the JAES, with little operational power could be 'reinforced and upgraded'),¹² Egypt is seeking to strengthen its position by looking both south and north.

Looking south: political momentum, market access, and Nile cooperation

Egypt's relations with sub-Saharan countries and its involvement in regional integration have evolved considerably over the past few years. For the last seven years Egypt has had a Deputy Foreign Minister for African Affairs actively involved with this agenda.¹³ After a one-year suspension (July 2013 - June 2014) from all AU activities following a military coup which deposed President Morsi, President el-Sisi became quite active on the African diplomatic scene. "*While Egyptian-African relations witnessed a decline under Hosni Mubarak, this has started to change with the remarkable development in Egypt's foreign policy towards Africa over the past four years*".¹⁴ With the signing of the Kigali Declaration and the ACFTA in 2018, this trend seems to be continuing. As Egypt is chairing the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in 2019, it has an extra incentive to 'look south' even if in the past it was "*generally one of the less proactive AU member states*".¹⁵ During its chairmanship, Egypt will pursue the AU's ongoing efforts in the area of institutional reform without giving extra impetus to the dossier.¹⁶ Peace and security, notably in the Sahel region, and the economic development of the continent, are two other thematic priorities.

In its quest to find new markets and as a member of COMESA, Egypt considers the establishment of the Tripartite Free Trade Area, combining the markets of COMESA-EAC-SADC, as "*an indispensable step to establish the continental FTA*".¹⁷ Egypt was one of the few countries to sign and ratify this tripartite agreement¹⁸ (and now also

¹⁰ A separate paper to follow, by Lidet Tadesse, entitled *The Roles of North African Countries in Peace and Security in Africa: drivers and implications*, will delve more deeply into the relations between North African countries and sub-Saharan countries in the area of peace and security.

¹¹ AU (2000).

¹² Council of the European Union (2018) p. 26. See also Part 2 (forthcoming).

¹³ Abdel-Halim (2018) p. 37.

¹⁴ Ibid p. 36.

¹⁵ ISS (2018).

¹⁶ Interview with high-level Egyptian diplomat. See also Mucchi (2019).

¹⁷ Arab Republic of Egypt. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2018). See also Abdel-Halim (2018) p. 37.

¹⁸ TRALAC (2018).

promotes the AfCFTA's entry into force).¹⁹ On this basis, Egypt profiles itself as being at “*the crossroad of trade*”, with potential access to free trade areas in the south with a population of almost 600 million people.²⁰ The country organised a high-level forum on trade and investment in December 2018 shortly before it assumed the AU chairmanship.²¹

Lastly, Egypt continues its negotiations with Nile Basin countries (notably on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam) through the Six Party Committee with technical assistance from the Tripartite National Technical Committee, in the hope of facilitating cooperation in the Nile River Basin.²² As Egypt relies on the River Nile to meet 97% of its water needs,²³ this is a top priority which also depends on political cooperation with the south.

In short, the renewed interest in its southern neighbours and Africa in general, following a decline under Hosni Mubarak, can be explained by the current AU chairmanship, the quest for new markets, and continued tensions around the Nile.

Looking north: the expectation of a tailored approach on trade and migration

Most particularly in the field of trade and political cooperation with the EU, and akin to other North African countries, first and foremost, Egypt wants to preserve what it already has. The EU-Egypt [Association Agreement](#), in force since 2004, has resulted in partial alignment with the *acquis communautaire*. In 2013 talks were formally launched about the possibility of a successor to the *Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area* (DCFTA), although negotiations are currently at a standstill.²⁴

Egypt favours a tailored approach to its relations with the EU and one of its concerns is that the EU Commission's proposal of a single financing instrument in the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, for example, could place more emphasis on an all-Africa approach and weaken bilateral relations as a result.²⁵

For similar reasons perhaps, Egypt is likely to oppose a strong role for the AU in the current post-Cotonou negotiations.²⁶ Yet, if the spirit of the EU negotiation mandate in favour of a strengthened regional partnership with Africa is respected, the post-Cotonou framework will concern policies of interest for the entire continent, including Egypt, which, however, is not directly involved in the negotiations.

Egypt also expects a tailored approach from the EU on migration. However, the EU's focus on migration is still perceived to be one-sidedly linked to security concerns,²⁷ and cooperation on repatriation, readmission and disembarkation remains a delicate area.²⁸ The EU is increasingly giving up on the idea of disembarkation or sending refugees back, and is following the approach adopted by Egypt aimed at stopping more migrants from

¹⁹ This requires an ambitious thirty ratifications by the AU Summit in mid-January 2019, even more than the 22 ratifications required for the AfCFTA to enter into force. Interview with former Rwandan Minister for Trade, [Vincent Munyeshyaka](#), Kigali, 2 October 2018.

²⁰ Presentation: 'Egypt is back as the land of opportunities' at the Africa Economic Forum, 11 October 2018, on file, p. 13.

²¹ Abdel-Halim (2018) p. 38.

²² Arab Republic of Egypt. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. N.d. For ECDPM's analysis, see Knaepen and Byiers (2017).

²³ Abdel-Halim (2018) p. 37.

²⁴ Moran (2018) p. 25.

²⁵ See Part 2 (forthcoming) for details.

²⁶ Interview with high-level Egyptian diplomat.

²⁷ EuroMeSCo annual conference, 'Changing Euro-Mediterranean Lenses', Rabat, 11-13 July 2018. Public statements by several North African diplomats including from Egypt and Tunisia. We will return to this point in Part 2 (forthcoming), 4.2.ii.

²⁸ See also below for explanations of these terms. For further reading, see T. Abderrahim (2017).

leaving. Egypt has indeed succeeded in drastically cutting irregular departures from its shores. The EU has announced its intention of strengthening cooperation with Egypt, and promoting it as a model for border management in the region. Egypt would welcome such enhanced cooperation (especially with regard to irregular migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers currently residing in the country). It may then look north to see what concessions the EU could make in this context (apart from the money that was released through the Trust Fund after the talks in late 2018).²⁹

1.2. Morocco

Morocco is increasingly positioning itself as a bridge between Europe and Africa, and emphasises the merits of both regional integration and triangular cooperation as a way to compensate for insufficient North-South cooperation.³⁰ It looks both south and north in an effort to achieve this strategy.

Looking south: acting as a bridge on trade and migration after joining the AU

Morocco's interest in sub-Saharan Africa is by no means new. South-south cooperation is central to Morocco's foreign policy, especially in the fields of political cooperation, trade and security. The Kingdom's readmission to the AU in 2017 brought an end to the country's isolation from the AU for 33 years and offered new prospects for stronger engagement in African affairs at AU level. The Kingdom also fully supports the AU reforms as advanced by President Kagame.³¹

The country's strategy for boosting trade integration in Africa has evolved, broadly speaking, in three stages: first, through the involvement of Moroccan public companies in basic infrastructure projects; second, through the engagement of private companies in the services sector, supported by active economic diplomacy; and finally, through a medium and long-term vision for greater regional integration.

The Kingdom has bolstered its commercial ties, especially with West Africa, since the 2000s.³² Shortly after its readmission to the AU in 2017, Morocco applied for membership of ECOWAS. While ECOWAS initially welcomed the application, Nigeria, as well as civil society and business groups throughout West Africa, have voiced strong opposition, considering Morocco's ambition as a "potentially lethal threat to domestic production".³³ This suggests that the road to closer commercial integration with sub-Saharan Africa, which is at the heart of Morocco's foreign policy, may be a rocky one.³⁴

In the field of security Morocco has tried to boost its contribution to regional cooperation, using both hard and soft power, in an attempt to challenge Algeria's strong position in this sphere. These efforts were backed by active public diplomacy (e.g. annual tours in West Africa), especially since the accession to the throne in 1999 of King Mohammed VI.

²⁹ Egypt explicitly demanded more funds (see: Arab Republic of Egypt. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2018)). Implicitly it will also want the EU to remain silent on its human rights record and was publicly outraged by a recent EP report on this, which was dismissed as false and not credible (see: Egypt Today (2018)).

³⁰ Cf. Jaidi and Martin (2018) p. 21, p. 145: "*le plaidoyer du Maroc en faveur de l'intégration régionale, de la coopération Sud-Sud et du partenariat triangulaire, cherche à remédier aux insuffisances de coopération Nord-Sud*".

³¹ Address by King Mohammed VI to the African Union's 30th Summit. January 2018.

³² Morocco's trade with sub-Saharan Africa grew by 14.7% annually between 1999 and 2014. See Moubarack (2016).

³³ Fabiani (2018).

³⁴ Byiers and Abderrahim (2018).

Looking north: acting as a bridge without seeking an intercontinental partnership

Morocco once contemplated EU membership.³⁵ Instead the Association Agreement³⁶ with Morocco (that entered into force in 2000) established a political dialogue, free movement of goods, liberalisation of services, economic cooperation and cooperation in social and cultural matters. In 2013, negotiations began on finding a successor to the *Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area*, but these have long stalled over legal disputes, notably on the question whether an EU-Morocco fisheries agreement applies to the Western Sahara and its adjacent waters.³⁷

Despite such disputes, Morocco increasingly seeks to act as a bridge between Europe and Africa.³⁸ This objective, especially in the field of trade, is repeatedly emphasised both in official discourse and by civil society.³⁹ Some sub-Saharan countries sometimes see this as a matter for concern.⁴⁰

In the area of migration too, Morocco seeks to play a bridging role, even at a global level, e.g. with the recent signing of the Marrakech Compact.⁴¹ It takes a leading role on migration also within the AU, at a time when this dossier further dominates the European agenda.⁴² The appointment of Morocco as migration coordinator for the AU increases its role as a key African interlocutor, and indeed ‘special partner’⁴³ for European actors.⁴⁴

Despite its bridge-building role in trade and migration, Morocco is not interested in a renewed AU-led continent-to-continent approach, although the Kingdom did show genuine interest in the JAES, especially before it was admitted to the AU. A continent-to-continent approach may be perceived as diminishing Morocco’s relevance on the regional, continental and global scene in the sphere of political cooperation. This helps to explain why Morocco has played a key role in convincing several West African countries to choose the ACP format for Africa-EU relations, rather than a fully-fledged continent-to-continent approach steered by the AU.⁴⁵

³⁵ In the past, Morocco suggested discussing full EU membership (see BBC News (2000)). Today, some voices in Tunisia are calling for the same. Although the EU would never accept this, it shows that Tunisia and Morocco have high ambitions for their relations with the EU, and that some countries, such as Morocco and Tunisia, want more, not less, differentiation.

³⁶ EC (2000).

³⁷ Court of Justice, Case C-266/16.

³⁸ Kingdom of Morocco, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (N.d).

³⁹ EuroMeSCo annual conference, Changing Euro-Mediterranean Lenses, Rabat, 11-13 July 2018. Public statements by Moroccan diplomats. Several chapters of the book by Jaidi and Martin (2018) focus on the role Morocco could play in the future as a bridge between the EU and Africa. Jaidi and Martin (2018) also mentions: “*l’enjeu fondamental du rôle du Maroc dans les relations euro-africaines est de contribuer à la définition d’une stratégie globale et équilibrée de partenariat entre les deux continents permettant d’exploiter les opportunités communes*”.

⁴⁰ Actors in countries such as Nigeria worry that economic integration with Morocco (or other North African countries), either through ECOWAS or the AfCFTA, could lead to European goods entering their domestic markets under preferential regimes intended for regional partners only.

⁴¹ Moroccan diplomacy has always targeted putting African development questions at the centre of the international community’s concerns, specifically, in the United Nations and its dedicated agencies.

⁴² For example, the high-level meetings on migration following the Aquarius episode. Cf. The Visegrad Summit on 21 June, the meeting between President Macron and Chancellor Merkel, and the ‘mini-summit’ (Germany, France, Spain, Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Malta and the Netherlands), all during the week of 21 June 2018.

⁴³ Lahlou (2018) p. 30.

⁴⁴ The Moroccan King presented a preliminary Policy Document defining a Vision for an African Agenda on Migration in January 2018, at the 29th Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government of the African Union. See Kingdom of Morocco, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (N.d.).

⁴⁵ Africa Confidential (2018).

1.3. Algeria

Algeria profiles itself to the south as a reliable partner on security matters in the AU context and intends to diversify its exports with southern neighbours in the field of trade. Towards the north, Algeria has recently claimed to have smoothed things out with the EU.

Looking south: confirming security role despite difficult relations with its neighbours

Based on its historic engagement in pan-African issues, Algeria continues to play a vital role in Africa in the AU institutions. Algeria has traditionally influenced security dossiers in the AU,⁴⁶ despite the swings between active participation and strategic withdrawal (depending on national priorities or leadership decisions).⁴⁷ It has continually held the position of Commissioner for Peace and Security since the creation of this role in 2002⁴⁸ and has also been (bilaterally) active as a security advocate in various other ways.⁴⁹

At the same time, the country adopts a bilateral approach on a host of political and security matters in the local region. It is rather reluctant to deal with groups of states such as the Ryad Coalition (a coalition of Muslim states against terrorism) or the G5 (a coalition to fight terrorism in the Sahel-Saharan region). Committed to its doctrine of no military engagement abroad, Algeria is not part of either group. G5 is seen by Algiers as an ad hoc structure established by France and its European partners.⁵⁰

In the field of trade, like other North African countries, Algeria purports to 'look south' although this will prove to be difficult: the economy mainly depends on the export of fuel, and its southern neighbours are not listed among its 15 main clients and providers in official statistics.⁵¹ On 8 January 2019, the Algerian Minister for trade announced, however, that in 2019 the country would concentrate on exporting other products, including to its southern neighbour Niger.⁵² On 14 January 2019, Algeria signed "*a roadmap to boost economic trade and cooperation with South Africa*".⁵³

Algeria's relations with two of its neighbours are fragile at best. The issue of Western Sahara (and Algeria's unconditional support for the Sahrawi) continues to constitute a major diplomatic dispute, impeding significant

⁴⁶ Algeria's support to the AU resonates well: the AU Commission President Moussa Faki Mahamat visited Algiers in early March 2018. This visit took place before the Kigali Summit in May 2018. It seems the purpose of the visit was to garner Algerian support for the AU's ambitious plan to reform its institutions, which paved the way for the Kigali Declaration during the AU summit of May 2018.

⁴⁷ Nickels (2014).

⁴⁸ This position is currently held by another Algerian diplomat, Ambassador Smail Chergui.

⁴⁹ Algeria also hosts the African Police Organisation (AFRIPOL), as well as the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT). Algeria's long-standing experience with security also stems from its counter-terrorism experience in the 1990s civil war, which enabled the country to emerge at the start of this century as a leading regional actor on counter-terrorism and security.

⁵⁰ The EU is looking to involve Algeria as a leading country in the fight against terrorism in Africa and the Arab region. Algeria considers itself to be the true initiator of efforts to resolve the Sahel crisis with the establishment in 2010 of the CEMOC (*Comite d'Etat Major operationnel conjoint*) initiative in which the chiefs-of-staff of the armed forces of Mali, Niger and Mauritania are gathered under the chairmanship of Algeria which provides financial support, military equipment and training. However, CEMOC has been criticised as a hollow vessel because it failed to operationalise the joint coordinated military efforts that were needed to counter negative forces threatening the sovereignty of states in the Sahel region (such as Mali).

⁵¹ République Algérienne Démocratique & Populaire (2018).

⁵² République Algérienne Démocratique & Populaire (2019).

⁵³ Algeria, South Africa ink roadmap to enhance trade, economic cooperation, see République Algérienne Démocratique & Populaire – Ministère des affaires étrangères (2019).

coordination with Morocco. The UN currently brokers talks on what Morocco considers to be its '*question nationale*'. As long as no mutually agreed solution can be found, this question will also affect coordination on other issues. With Libya, Algeria maintains relations with the government backed by the international community, which is in a weak position as it hardly controls either the capital, Tripoli, or the city where it is based, Tobruk.

In addition to these difficulties with some of its neighbours, Algeria's role and active engagement in the AU are likely to shift to a lower gear until after the forthcoming presidential elections in 2019. The health issues of Algeria's president prevent the country's voice from being heard as it once was in the AU. The political future, generally, is uncertain.⁵⁴ However, Algeria is likely to continue to play a pivotal role in the AU in the long term. As one of the 'big five' top contributing member states⁵⁵ (each contributing approximately \$37million per year to the AU budget), it will remain a heavyweight within the continental organisation.

Looking north: fragile relations with the EU but signs of improvement

Algeria maintains delicate relations with the EU both on trade and on migration but is seen as a strategic and crucial partner to the EU in security dossiers. The EU-Algeria Association Agreement, which entered into force in 2005, is more limited in scope than EU agreements with other North African countries. Algeria considers that agreement to be to its detriment in the context of falling oil prices (drop in barrel prices since 2014). The EU, for its part, has accused Algiers of circumventing the agreement by imposing restrictions and tariff barriers on certain imported products.⁵⁶ Although under evaluation, this agreement still forms the basis for EU-Algeria trade relations.⁵⁷

Algeria has defended the idea of continent-to-continent relations spearheaded by the AU,⁵⁸ especially as a forum to foster political dialogue, provided that the *acquis* of relations with the EU is safeguarded. However, it does not seem interested in influencing the EU-Africa Partnership *under the ACP framework*, despite the wording and pan-African approach of the ACP and EU mandates. It is even less interested in joining the framework, which is not perceived as the right framework to defend continental interests, build a partnership between equals, or even safeguard national interests.

In addition, for Algeria - now also an "*anchor point for migrants from Central and West Africa*"⁵⁹ - the EU overly emphasises migration in the ACP framework.⁶⁰ A continent-to-continent dialogue would limit the ability to discuss migration bilaterally with the EU. Algeria recently tightened up its migration policy and deported thousands of irregular migrants and refugees from Mali and Niger.⁶¹ Some believe that these expulsions were the result of pressure from Europe outsourcing its border control. But Algeria refuses to act as a 'holding centre' or border guard for sub-Saharan emigration to Europe.

⁵⁴ Colombo (2018) p. 26.

⁵⁵ Together with Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt and now Morocco (replacing Libya's position) since its readmission in the AU in 2017

⁵⁶ See, for example: Ouamara (2018).

⁵⁷ APS (2018b).

⁵⁸ "*Algeria is extremely important for Europe because it has always developed an indivisible and united vision of the African continent*" according to APS (2018b), Algeria has made significant contributions to all stages of the AU's institutional reform process since the Kigali Summit in 2016.

⁵⁹ Lahlou (2018) p. 31.

⁶⁰ See Council of the European Union (2018) Title V.

⁶¹ It has been subject to accusations by human rights organisations as a result, as asylum-seekers and people in regular situations were also deported. The Algerian embassy in Mali was even attacked by Malian migrants who wanted to protest the "*inhumane treatment*" they suffered during their return.

Algerian-EU relations received a boost during a visit by the (outgoing) High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, on 11 November 2018. The meeting mainly focused on regional security, the fight against terrorism and the implementation of partnership priorities.⁶² It was an occasion to reaffirm the mutual commitment to ensuring that all trade-related measures are in accordance with the Association Agreement and the mechanisms it envisages for addressing economic problems encountered by either party.⁶³ This further underscores the importance both parties attach to the bilateral approach.

1.4. Tunisia

Recently faced with renewed youth protests about living conditions (i.e. inflation and unemployment), the Tunisian government is looking south for new economic opportunities while safeguarding its strong partnership with the EU.

Looking south: market access and regional integration

Growing economic difficulties since 2011 have forced Tunisia to enter into new partnerships and explore new markets in the south,⁶⁴ thus reviving its long-neglected relations with sub-Saharan countries. Successive changes in government have prevented the development of a coherent strategy in this context. Over the past few years Tunisia has tried to be more consistent in repositioning itself on the continent. Tunisia supports both bilateral and regional cooperation to enhance economic partnerships with sub-Saharan countries.

In the bilateral context, Tunisia's Foreign Minister, Khemaies Jhinaoui, stated in 2016 that opening up to sub-Saharan countries had become a priority for the country.⁶⁵ The government has stepped up its economic diplomacy through an exchange of diplomatic visits with partners south, opening new embassies and establishing commercial delegations. The aim is to explore investment opportunities and to develop deeper partnerships. Tunisia, for example, is working on improving the access of its small and medium enterprises to sub-Saharan Africa.⁶⁶ Maritime routes have also been strengthened.⁶⁷

Although a fairly discrete actor in the AU framework,⁶⁸ at regional level Tunisia has bolstered ties with regional economic communities, not least by obtaining observer status for ECOWAS in 2017, and membership of COMESA during 2018. Tunisia's private sector played a critical role in shaping this new approach towards sub-Saharan countries. It took the lead in organising visits to partner countries and pushing the government to more actively pursue economic diplomacy with the south. The government seeks to build on the Tunisian public and private sector companies' prior engagement in sub-Saharan countries. To tap the further potential of these new partnerships, the government intends to invest more in developing the necessary transport links and enhancing the presence of Tunisian banks on the continent.

⁶² Concluded between the EU and Algeria in March 2017

⁶³ See official press statement APS (2018a).

⁶⁴ For a description of lingering post-revolution difficulties and the argument to "*avoid attempts at wholesale reform and rather focus on small, focused, incremental changes, and promoting 'islands of effectiveness'*", see Byiers (2018) p. 35.

⁶⁵ Tunis 24-7 (2016).

⁶⁶ GIZ (2017).

⁶⁷ Huff Post (2017).

⁶⁸ This is also perhaps reflected in the relative absence of Tunisians in the AU commission and institutions.

Looking north: preserving a privileged position with the EU

Tunisia's partnership with the EU is quite advanced. The EU-Tunisia Association Agreement⁶⁹ entered into force in 1998. Similar in scope to the Association Agreement with Morocco, it established a political dialogue, free movement of goods, liberalisation of services, economic cooperation and cooperation in social and cultural matters. In 2012, in response to the revolution, a 'privileged partnership' was agreed upon between the two parties. In 2015, negotiations were launched for a successor to the *Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA)*. These negotiations (as well as those on visa facilitation and readmission) are ongoing. In 2016 Tunisia became the first Arab country to be fully associated with Horizon 2020, and since 2017 it has also been associated with an EU cultural programme, the Creative Europe programme. Tunisia is the only southern neighbouring country with whom the EU regularly organises tripartite meetings involving civil society.

Tunisia therefore sees no added value in shifting the centre of gravity to a continent-to-continent agreement. Although the DCFTA negotiations are not going smoothly, the prospects of deeper and wider trade cooperation are still there. Tunisia has therefore adopted a 'wait-and-see' approach. In terms of other countries in North Africa, its interest in a continent-to-continent framework depends on the nature and substance of this framework, and how it will benefit EU-Africa relations. Simply suggesting a new single framework for relations with Africa is too vague. The offer needs to be clear and will be considered only if a continent-to-continent framework would create additional benefits in specific areas of cooperation.

⁶⁹ EEAS (2002).

2. Common concerns, diverging interests and little coordination

Although the rationales clearly differ, North African countries share two broad priorities: strengthening ties with sub-Saharan Africa **(2.1)** while safeguarding and bolstering existing relations with the EU **(2.2)**. Because these objectives are shared but pursued for different reasons, there appears to be little internal coordination advanced at the highest political levels in Africa and Europe⁷⁰ on whether or how to support the idea of a renewed continent-to-continent AU-EU partnership **(2.3)**.

2.1. Looking south: intra-continental integration but for different reasons

For all North African countries further integration towards the south within Africa increasingly constitutes a policy priority. This policy shift is driven by four (sometimes interrelated) factors. First, regional cooperation in the Maghreb itself falls well short of its potential. As the Arab Maghreb Union remains largely dysfunctional (and has been described as the “*definitive collapse of the endogenous experiment of regionalism at the sub-regional level*”),⁷¹ Maghreb countries are unable to derive the full benefits of trading with their neighbours at a time when they need to diversify partners and enhance economic growth. Second, the events of the Arab Spring and the current power struggle in Libya, have had a significant impact on the economies of the countries in the region.⁷² Third, security imperatives have further driven the need for greater regional cooperation between North African countries and the Sahel, West Africa and East Africa, where the security threats are also mounting. Fourth, as both Morocco and Algeria have tried to garner support on the Western Sahara dossier, the pursuit of geostrategic interests has also contributed to this policy shift.

These four factors make it more pressing for North African countries to engage with sub-Saharan Africa, especially on (i) trade, (ii) political cooperation, and (iii) migration.

i. Trade: regional integration as a step towards continental integration

North African countries are increasingly looking to the south for commercial opportunities. Their intention is to foster regional integration as a mechanism to open up commercial opportunities on the continent. Hence their interest in regional economic communities (RECs), notably COMESA and ECOWAS. Egypt is already a member of COMESA; Tunisia has now also joined and became its 20th member after signing the Treaty of Accession in July 2018.⁷³ Tunisia obtained observer status for ECOWAS in 2017 while Morocco has formally applied to join this REC⁷⁴ (although this has not been agreed).

Integration in RECs is seen as a step in the evolution towards the ratification and entry into force of the AfCFTA, a customs union and, eventually, a common market. The recent signing of the AfCFTA does not prevent North African countries from pursuing economic integration with sub-Saharan Africa or from honouring their bilateral trade deals with Europe. Commentators see the AfCFTA as a potential “*stepping stone toward industrial*

⁷⁰ See Part 2, forthcoming.

⁷¹ Colombo (2018) p. 27.

⁷² For Tunisia, for instance, losing the Libyan market negatively affected the country's private sector which required the country to look for new markets.

⁷³ See COMESA (2018).

⁷⁴ For an analysis of the motives behind this decision, see Fabiani (2018).

*development and the structural transformation of North African economies*⁷⁵ on the basis of an expected increase of intra-African trade whereby “*North African exporters would grab as much as 20% of this gain*”.⁷⁶ Efforts to establish an African customs union in the future on the basis of an operational AfCFTA will require African states to *harmonise* their regional or continental trade arrangements with third parties. This may form an extra incentive for North African countries to ‘look south’.

ii. Political cooperation: increasingly speaking with one voice

Politically, the ‘*move to the south*’ can be seen from the numerous initiatives in which North African countries also participate to strengthen cooperation *regionally* or *on the continent*. Regional initiatives include the RECs with political powers in which North African countries are increasingly taking part, e.g. ECOWAS. The Nile Basin Initiative is another clear example of increased intra-continental political cooperation.

In the continental context, the preference for a pan-African approach is sometimes apparent in multilateral fora. It is recognised in Africa, however, that without profound institutional reform, political division will continue to impede such an approach.⁷⁷ Although there is already an incentive to speak with one voice in international fora on some dossiers, thus raising the bargaining power of African countries. Besides the proposed AU reforms (e.g. the Kagame Agenda on the continent's global representation), the recent past has shown how “*the AU has emerged as Africa’s pre-eminent platform to participate internationally, promoting unity among African nations in global negotiations*”.⁷⁸ Examples include:

- The A3 initiative, i.e. the role of African members in the UN Security Council, forming the African voice in the UNSC, indicating the resolve to speak as ‘one Africa’;⁷⁹
- Common African Position (CAP) on humanitarian action and migration;⁸⁰ on climate change; and on the Post-2015 Development Agenda;
- The nomination of Louise Mushikiwabo, former Rwandan Minister for Foreign Affairs as Secretary-General of the *Organisation internationale de la francophonie*.

iii. Migration: different approaches to similar challenges

Migration is another domain where North African states “*face a double challenge of the same nature which consists in preserving their respective interests at home and in relation to the countries of sub-Saharan Africa and the European Union*”.⁸¹ A ‘look south’ approach forms an indispensable part of this double pursuit. North Africa remains a region of transit, and increasingly, of destination, for sub-Saharan migrants. Both regular and irregular migration has become a relatively important component of relations between North African countries and their southern neighbours.

⁷⁵ UNECA (2017).

⁷⁶ Id., p. 9.

⁷⁷ Kagame (2017).

⁷⁸ Lala (2018) p. 9.

⁷⁹ In 2018 the A3 comprised Côte d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, and Equatorial Guinea; South Africa will replace Ethiopia in 2019.

⁸⁰ AU (2018c); The AU-ILO-IOM-ECA Joint Programme on Labour Migration Governance for Development and Integration (better known as the Joint Labour Migration Programme, or JLMP) in Africa (see IOM N.d. for more information).

⁸¹ Lahlou (2018)p. 32.

Each North African country pursues its own policies,⁸² besides Libya where none of the competing factions has control over migration. This puts pressure on neighbouring countries, such as Algeria and Tunisia. Morocco, for its part, is increasingly confirming its position as a destination country (alongside its continued status as a transit country), and has undertaken comprehensive reform to deal with the issue. Along with a number of other African countries, North African states have refrained from signing the Free Movement of People Protocol,⁸³ mostly believing that free movement should be approached gradually. The ‘African Passport’ is nevertheless likely to appear on the agenda of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in February 2019.⁸⁴

2.2. Looking north: safeguarding relations with the EU and its members

The more recent ‘move south’ described above complements North Africa’s traditional ties with Europe. North African countries are adamant about safeguarding their existing relations with the EU. The ‘move south’ should not come at the expense of their relations with the EU, and they expect the EU to continue privileging relations with its southern neighbours.

North African countries are therefore counting on the principle of differentiation being upheld (i), have no interest in questioning what is predominantly a bilateral model (ii) or in joining a post-Cotonou framework (iii) and, while not sharing the EU’s priorities on migration, still use the dossier as a bargaining chip with the EU (iv).

i. Upholding the principle of differentiation

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), launched in 2004, provides North African countries with ‘*business class treatment*’. They fear that the ENP could gradually become less relevant in the future should it be fully or partly replaced by a continent-to-continent approach. Currently, the ENP allows for privileged discussion channels on a host of issues. This basis for political collaboration also constitutes the overarching policy framework for commercial exchange with the EU through country-specific Association Agreements.

The ENP was reviewed after the Arab Spring in 2011,⁸⁵ and then again in 2015. The 2015 re-prioritisation was informed by “conflict, rising extremism and terrorism, human rights violations and other challenges to international law, and economic upheaval [which] have resulted in major refugee flows”.⁸⁶ Besides this adjustment of policy objectives,⁸⁷ the ENP now favours change where the North African countries themselves commit to tangible change in any of the domains covered by the ENP.

⁸² Id.

⁸³ Cf. AU (2018a). None of the North African states have signed the Free Movement Protocol.

⁸⁴ [Assogbavi](#) (2019).

⁸⁵ From an EU perspective, the ENP had not constrained the spill over of neighbourhood challenges into the EU.

⁸⁶ EC (2015) p. 2.

⁸⁷ Strengthening security sector and economies for the local population; “*comprehensively address sources of instability across sectors*”; promotion of “*democratic, accountable and good governance*”, and justice reform, where there is a shared commitment to the rule of law, and fundamental rights. Open markets and growth, inclusive economic development and, in particular, youth prospects.

The principle of differentiation⁸⁸ underpinning the ENP allows for this tailored approach. Following an assessment of the country-specific context, notably the political agenda and economic situation, differentiation informs cooperation in a panoply of fields.⁸⁹ With its wide substantive scope, the ENP is perceived to be a more robust framework than the JAES (which focuses on political dialogue and has little operational power) or the ACP framework (which was hollowed out and reduced to the aid theme only).

North African countries are concerned that a wide-ranging continent-to-continent framework could gradually downgrade the principle of differentiation, despite the clear assurances made to North African countries in the AU's March 2018 Kigali Declaration. This concern is current and widely held by all North African states, even those that consider their present bilateral relations to be modest.⁹⁰ The reluctance to reframe bilateral relations is directly informed by a perceived risk of losing preferential treatment.

ii. Political cooperation: no interest in re-examining the bilateral model

All North African states, except Libya, have concluded Association Agreements with the EU.⁹¹ The agreements with Morocco and Tunisia are the broadest. With these countries and Egypt, the EU has initiated negotiations on a successor to the *Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements*. There is no interest in reframing the bilateral model as enshrined in the Association Agreements. The *status quo* is a safer bet than a more comprehensive continent-to-continent arrangement, either in the framework of an 'Africa pillar' under the ACP or any other diplomatic chapeau. This is also the approach and principle underlying the EU stance on North Africa, as all the parties have already spent significant time and resources on negotiating bilateral agreements (especially on trade quotas).

In addition, North African countries have an interest in bilateral frameworks that pursue political cooperation based on mutual interests (security, border control, mobility, investment, trade, etc.). This is less the case in frameworks such as the Cotonou Agreement which are based on more unilateral approaches whereby the EU primarily acts as a donor and normative actor that can suspend aid when the 'shared values' are not respected - an approach, enshrined in art. 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, which has been widely criticised, not least because it has been inconsistently applied.

A single EU-Africa framework will only be considered if it leaves current bilateral relations unaffected (as was actually suggested in the Kigali Declaration) and can bring added value in specific fields (e.g. the strengthening of cooperation on terrorism, migration, security, science and education). Without added value - or if long-term bilateral cooperation risks being compromised - North African countries would rather embrace a multi-level 'portfolio approach' to foreign policy which effectively utilises the full potential of bilateral, regional and continental fora and policy frameworks.

⁸⁸ Differentiation should be understood widely and not how it is restrictively interpreted in the ACP context. (For an analysis of the ACP context, cf. ECDPM (2012).

⁸⁹ Economic development; security reform; justice; human rights and good governance; aid; transport and connectivity, energy security and climate action; migration and mobility.

⁹⁰ For example, Algeria was facing measures from the EU after restricting EU imports but relations returned to normal after Mogherini's last visit to Algeria.

⁹¹ EC (2000); EEAS (2002); EC (1998); EC (N.d.).

iii. No interest in joining or considering a post-Cotonou Agreement

The post-Cotonou framework is not incompatible with the bilateral model of Association Agreements. There is actually one precedent worth mentioning here which combines both. South Africa became a qualified member of the ACP despite its bilateral (Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement), and then regional (through the EPA) relations with the EU.⁹² Being a qualified member means that South Africa is not a party to the trade chapters. However its membership of the ACP Group enables South Africa to maintain close ties with 79 countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific,⁹³ and offers other advantages.⁹⁴

Although combining a post-Cotonou regime with bilateral agreements could be envisaged in theory, North African countries have shown little interest in this option for at least three reasons. First, the acronym 'ACP' itself, triggers aversion: it is too charged, and too much linked to a post-colonial pact in which aid has become central since the trade and political cooperation elements of the Cotonou Agreement have faded away.

Second, the South African example does not answer all questions about the possible institutional position of North African countries in the context of a post-Cotonou regime: observer;⁹⁵ qualified member or full member?⁹⁶ For the EU, "*to ensure a coherent partnership with Africa as a whole, the most appropriate modalities for associating the countries of North Africa to the new agreement should be sought through consultations.... This will be without prejudice to the existing legal, financial and policy frameworks with these countries*".⁹⁷ However, the "*most appropriate modalities*" for associating the North African countries have not been defined, let alone operationalised.

Third, the final nail in the coffin of the ACP construction for North African states is the open-ended nature of Association Agreements, with no expiry date, unlike the post-Cotonou agreement.⁹⁸

⁹² See protocol 22 on the qualified accession of South Africa to Lomé/Cotonou (cf. Commission of the European Communities. 1997).

⁹³ Membership of the ACP, <http://www.southafrica.be/acp/>, consulted on 4 December 2018.

⁹⁴ (i) country-specific budget (outside the EDF); (ii) access to tenders in ACP countries (thus allowing inter-African financing on big projects to be monitored more closely); (iii) institutional representation; (iv) increased regional cooperation.

⁹⁵ The EU Negotiating Mandate (see Council of the European Union (2018)) states: "*The Agreement will include a provision establishing that third parties, which subscribe to the values and principles underpinning the Agreement and which have an added value in fostering the specific objectives and priorities of the Partnership, may be granted a status of observer.*" (EU Council Negotiating Directives, 8. Final provisions, observer status, p. 86).

⁹⁶ The EU Mandate provides for the possible "*involvement or adhesion of other countries*", under specific conditions, and explicitly refers to North African countries". See Council of the European Union (2018) p. 4, p. 82. Explanatory Memorandum, see EC (2017).

⁹⁷ EC (2017).

⁹⁸ Contrary to most bilateral agreements between the EU and North African countries, the post-Cotonou agreement, according to the EU mandate adopted on 22 June 2018, will again be time bound. The Association Agreements between the EU and North African countries, however, do not envisage a sunset clause (of course, they can be replaced by mutual agreement) and negotiations for a DCFTA are ongoing with Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt. This is why they are considered 'first class'.

iv. Leveraging the migration dossier with the EU while favouring the bilateral track

Migration has been a prominent area for cooperation between the EU and North African countries. This cooperation takes place mainly through bilateral dialogues/pacts and through a variety of frameworks including the ENP, the Rabat process and the Khartoum process, for example. The EU emphasis on migration is now also felt in the post-Cotonou negotiations; however, this is met with resistance by the ACP Group.⁹⁹

With the migration emergency and the Global Compact on Migration receiving much media attention in late 2018, the topic has appeared to gain in importance in relations between both sides of the Mediterranean. It has also become a source of tension: the impetus to make it a top priority in North Africa-EU relations comes from the EU which approaches the dossier in four ways.

- *Border management:* North African countries desire stronger cooperation with the EU on border controls. However, the idea of sending EU border guards to North Africa has not been well received.
- *Repatriation:* The EU wants a stronger commitment from North African states (as countries of origin) on the return of their own nationals.
- *Readmission:* The EU wants more cooperation from North African states (as transit countries) on migrants (i.e. mostly sub-Saharan irregular migrants who aim to reach the EU by transiting through North Africa) or stateless persons. There is clear resistance to cooperation on the reception of irregular migrants rejected by the EU.
- *Disembarkation platforms:* North African countries refuse to provide a ‘holding centre’ for hosting irregular migrants on ‘regional disembarkation platforms’. The EU should not expect closer cooperation from North African countries in discussions relating to migrant camps or ‘disembarkation platforms’ in North Africa.

North Africa’s level of readiness to cooperate with the EU is in descending order of the above list. North African countries have a shared interest in border management, and may consider repatriation. But cooperation - especially on readmission and disembarkation platforms - remains problematic. Readmission would open the door to sub-Saharan migrants who transited via their country. North Africa wants to link this issue to negotiations on visa facilitation while the EU wants to keep these two dossiers separate.¹⁰⁰ The EU’s negotiations with Morocco¹⁰¹ and Tunisia¹⁰² therefore have not progressed well.

⁹⁹ Subsequent drafts of the ACP negotiation mandate show how compulsory readmission was underscored in that framework too. This was met with resistance by the ACP side. It seems that the *Global Compact for Migration* concluded at the UN is considered to be the right forum for generating legal principles on migration.

¹⁰⁰ CP2019: “Countries with more advanced cooperation with the EU on migration, like Tunisia and Morocco, would like to have a closer dialogue with the EU on visa facilitation for their own nationals, within the framework of the Mobility Partnership. Negotiations on a double visa facilitation and readmission agreements have started with Morocco and Tunisia few years ago, but little progress has been achieved. The current environment in the EU makes it uncondusive to concluding such visa liberalisation agreements with these countries”. For the EU, visa facilitation can only be used to reward NA countries for fruitful cooperation on readmission. For this cooperation to be successful, voluntary readmission is a non-starter for the EU.

¹⁰¹ The EU has been in negotiations with Morocco on a readmission agreement since 2000 without concrete results. It concluded a Mobility Partnership with Morocco in 2013 to provide a framework for negotiating readmission in parallel with negotiating an agreement on visa facilitation.

¹⁰² In 2014, a Mobility Partnership was signed with Tunisia and negotiations on parallel agreements for visa facilitation and readmission began in 2016.

In short, North African countries are resistant to managing migration on behalf of the EU,¹⁰³ and criticise the EU's lack of policy coherence.¹⁰⁴ They prefer to deal with the EU on the basis of migration sovereignty, i.e. without much coordination between them and rather bilaterally with the EU or member states. The *status quo* on migration is preferred to the EU's approach which is perceived to be one-sided. At the same time, North African countries are not evading the question altogether as they can use it as a leverage with the EU, notably on visa facilitation.¹⁰⁵

Given these dynamics, it is likely that prioritising migration under one specific approach (especially compulsory readmission) in any future EU-AU framework would provide an extra disincentive for North African countries to engage in a coordinated and holistic relationship with Europe.

2.3. Diverging interests and lack of coordination

Despite the broadly shared policy objectives - strengthening ties in the south while safeguarding and bolstering relations in the north - the underlying interests are divergent. The coordination between North African countries therefore remains weak. Each North African country indeed has its own grounds for following a 'double pursuit'.

All North African countries have expressed a common interest in strengthening ties with sub-Saharan countries to the south. While the reasons for this and the level of engagement vary from one country to another. Egypt sees cooperation with its southern neighbours mainly from the perspective of trade integration and Nile cooperation, and also in the light of its AU chairmanship in 2019. Morocco has the most advanced strategy on strengthening ties with the south as well as the resources to implement it. Algeria has taken a few hesitant steps in the field of trade. Tunisia has a new vision on engaging with sub-Saharan countries but a fully-fledged strategy has yet to be put in place.

The depth of cooperation between North African countries and the EU to the north is not homogenous. Interests and levels of cooperation between the EU and NA countries vary, reflected in different forms of association with the EU. For all North African countries though, the EU remains a partner of choice, especially on trade, also compared to new markets on their southern borders or in sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, commercially speaking, North Africa is the least integrated region in the world. Given the turmoil that they have created in other parts of Africa, the aversion to engaging in EPA negotiations is understandable and offer no real incentive to choose that track.

In the diplomatic arena, North African countries are known for their 'excessive bilateralism'.¹⁰⁶ Efforts like the *Union du Maghreb Arabe* (UMA) intended to transcend this, have not been particularly successful. Coordination within the *Union for the Mediterranean* is also limited with the "*high ambitions of the Barcelona Declaration [now] looking like a cathedral in the desert*".¹⁰⁷ The situation in Libya, and continued diplomatic tensions between Morocco and Algeria despite recent UN mediation efforts, also hamper regional integration. These elements do not encourage coordination beyond mere concertation, i.e. the informal exchange of information.

¹⁰³ Lahlou (2018) p. 31.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, Bozonnet (2018).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. including the migration centre which will be created in Rabat.

¹⁰⁶ Colombo (2018) p. 26.

¹⁰⁷ Moran (2018) p. 25.

3. Concluding remarks: the 'wait-and-see' approach

On the question of renewing continent-to-continent relations, North African countries generally seem to be adopting a 'wait-and-see' approach. They are not interested in a radical change of their commercial relations with the EU or their bilateral relations with EU member states on other matters. As a result, North African countries are unlikely to take the lead in negotiating a renewed continent-to-continent partnership as long as there is no clarity concerning its nature, funding and the position of North African countries.

North African reserve surrounding the post-Cotonou negotiations, in particular, is also likely to continue, despite the EU's assurances concerning the possible 'involvement or adhesion' of North African countries. According to some commentators, these countries were even 'wary' of the EU's intentions in this regard.¹⁰⁸ Clearly, North African countries will not be proactive in seeking to engage in this process under the symbolically and historically-charged ACP structure for all frameworks unless it is thoroughly reformed and probably renamed to remove its heavy post-colonial connotations. This is unlikely to happen and also explains why there is little interest in the South African precedent which shows how the ACP-EU framework could be compatible with upholding bilateral relations, possibly to the advantage of the country combining the two regimes.

Against this background, at the time of writing, it is not really surprising that North African countries are fairly reticent about what they would consider to be the 'right' framework for a continent-to-continent partnership, in general, and about the future of ACP-EU relations, in particular. In the meantime, the North African double pursuit: north and south - continues in different contexts and for different reasons. How the AU, the ACP, and their members are reacting to this state affairs is described in a forthcoming paper, Part 2 of the Double Pursuit, which also analyses the EU's two-faced Janus position and Africa's stance, "*caught between the ACP and the AU*".¹⁰⁹ It provides details of how the mixed messages and duplicit practices of the EU and the AU actually strengthen and even aggravate North African countries' unwillingness to engage in developing a fully-fledged continent-to-continent approach.

¹⁰⁸ Carbone (2018).

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

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