

**BRIEFING NOTE No. 140**

## **What does the AfCFTA mean for an EU-Africa trade agreement?**

**POLITICAL ECONOMY DYNAMICS OF REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN AFRICA**

**PEDRO**

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The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aims to promote intra-African trade, but it will also affect Africa's external trade relations. The EU, Africa's foremost trade partner, views the AfCFTA as a step towards its long-term ambition of a continent-to-continent free trade agreement (FTA). But does this ambition make sense from an African point of view?

Realising this ambition would require major changes on the African side. African states would need to establish a continental customs union, to align their trade interests towards the EU and to provide a mandate to the African Union, or another continental body, to represent them in trade negotiations. However, various political economy dynamics are likely to thwart these changes. African states' ambivalence towards deeper integration will complicate efforts to establish a continental customs union. The different pressures and incentives they face will make it hard for them to align their trade interests vis-a-vis the EU and their desire to preserve sovereignty means they will be reluctant to give the AU a mandate to represent them in trade negotiations.

Proponents of a continent-to-continent FTA should therefore focus their efforts on supporting the implementation of the AfCFTA and related African integration processes and on improving existing trade arrangements between the EU and Africa. Such efforts could help pave the way for a future continent-to-continent FTA. At the same time policymakers on both sides should not let a preoccupation with a continent-to-continent FTA divert attention away from other avenues to foster constructive EU-Africa collaboration on trade.

## The AfCFTA as a step towards a continent-to-continent free trade agreement between Africa and the EU

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is primarily a project to promote *intra*-African trade, but it also seeks to further the African Union's Agenda 2063 aspirations to enhance the competitiveness of African economies and strengthen "Africa's place in global trade".<sup>1</sup> The implementation of the AfCFTA will have implications not only for African consumers, firms and governments, but also for Africa's trade and investment relations with external partners. Recognising this, the European Union (EU), Africa's foremost trade partner and a committed supporter of the AfCFTA, has set out its vision of the AfCFTA as a step towards the "long-term objective of a continent-to-continent free trade area between Africa and the EU".<sup>2</sup>

While the degree to which this objective is shared on the African side is not totally clear, there are signs of at least some traction in Africa for such an objective. Certain African trade experts and officials recognise the "strong case for a continent-to-continent approach" that builds on AfCFTA integration and simplifies the mess of existing trade arrangements between the two continents.<sup>3</sup> Others argue that Africa would benefit from a united approach to trade negotiations with Europe and other partners.<sup>4</sup> Addressing the goal of a continent-to-continent trade agreement, the Deputy Chairperson of the African Union (AU) Commission recently proposed joint collaboration to develop modalities for continent-to-continent cooperation on trade, indicating that such collaboration would be "fully aligned" with efforts to implement the AfCFTA and deepen economic integration in Africa<sup>5</sup>. It is therefore worth exploring if and how the establishment of the AfCFTA might alter the political economy dynamics around Africa's external trade relations with the EU (and other partners), and how, if at all, the AfCFTA might create the conditions for African countries to one day be ready to conclude trade agreements with the EU and other partners as a united bloc.

## Changes are needed to pave the way for a continent-to-continent FTA

With a formal mandate to represent its member states in external trade relations (and significant experience doing so), the EU is already in a position to negotiate trade agreements with third parties, including other regional or continental blocs. On the African side, however, three major shifts would need to take place before African states would be able to effectively and efficiently negotiate a continent-to-continent free trade agreement (FTA) with the EU as a bloc.

First, African states would need to establish an African customs union with a common external tariff (CET). Negotiating an FTA with a third party as a bloc is theoretically possible without having a CET,<sup>6</sup> but this would be very difficult given the sheer number of African states involved and their different offensive and defensive trade-related interests. Second, all African states would need to share the ambition to negotiate and conclude a reciprocal FTA with the EU as a bloc. Without this shared ambition, any attempts at negotiation would likely be doomed. Third, the AU (or another body) would need to be given the formal mandate to represent this African bloc in trade negotiations with the EU. Again, it may be theoretically possible for African states to negotiate as a bloc without being represented by a single body representing a common African position, but this would be hugely complex in practice given the number of African states involved and their various interests. How realistic is it to expect these shifts to take place, even in the long-term? What impact is the AfCFTA having, or will it have, on the likelihood that these shifts materialise? And what are the implications for proponents of a continent-to-continent FTA? These are the questions explored here.

## What are the prospects for an African customs union?

The AfCFTA Agreement states that the AfCFTA aims to "lay the foundation for the establishment of a Continental Customs Union at a later stage".<sup>7</sup> In doing

so, it reaffirms the long-stated ambition of African states to establish an Africa-wide customs union as a step towards an African Common Market and African Economic Community. The 1991 ('Abuja') Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community foresaw this being achieved by having each of Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) establish a customs union with a CET, then removing customs duties on trade between the RECs, before harmonising the respective REC CETs and adopting a continental CET.<sup>8</sup>

The AfCFTA Agreement does not provide such an explicit formula for achieving a continental customs union, but like the Abuja Treaty, it seeks to build on integration at the REC level.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, of the eight RECs recognised by the AU, only four have established functioning FTAs, and only the East African Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have established customs unions.<sup>10</sup> Uneven progress on implementation of REC customs unions across Africa suggests that not all African states are willing or able to pursue this 'deeper' form of integration. The recent experiences of the EAC and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) with regard to their customs unions illustrate this point.

The EAC launched its customs union in 2005 and established its CET in 2010. In theory the region is a pioneer among Africa's RECs in terms of having a relatively well established customs union. In practice, however, the functioning of its customs union is beset by challenges that undermine EAC integration. Political tensions between EAC member states have spilled over into trade disputes, border closures and even denial of airspace access in recent years.<sup>11</sup> Various non-tariff barriers have also been introduced to protect local industries from regional competition.<sup>12</sup> In addition, EAC member states are increasingly applying tariffs that deviate from the EAC CET, generally to provide greater protection to their local industries.<sup>13</sup> As a result the EAC CET is becoming "less 'common'" and the EAC risks "developing 'backwards' from a customs union into... a free trade area".<sup>14</sup>

In SADC, years of debate around the establishment of a customs union have revealed little desire for deeper market integration among member states.<sup>15</sup> Keen to

further domestic industrial policy objectives, South Africa and Zimbabwe lobbied successfully for SADC to focus on 'consolidation' of the SADC Free Trade Area (FTA) and on regional industrial cooperation, rather than on the establishment of a SADC customs union. SADC activities and rhetoric increasingly reflected this shift in focus, but, until recently, establishing a customs union remained on the SADC integration agenda. However, SADC's recently adopted Vision 2030 and Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-30 - effectively SADC's integration agenda - make no mention of a customs union as a strategic priority, indicating the lack of political traction for a SADC customs union.<sup>16</sup>

These examples illustrate that at least some African states are reluctant to fully harmonise their tariff schedules in practice, even when they have agreed to do so in principle. This is not surprising given the fact that different African states use trade policy very differently. Some African states (Mauritius is one example) maintain a relatively open trade policy, while many others (South Africa comes to mind) use trade policy as a tool of industrial policy, making use of tariffs and other trade policy instruments to protect local industries, which are often highly vulnerable to external competition.

The reasons for protectionist tendencies in trade policymaking in Africa vary from country to country, but generally relate at least partly to the influence and lobbying of powerful local actors, be they politically-connected industrialists and business associations, or vocal labour unions (Woolfrey, Apiko and Pharatlhathe 2019). For many African governments wishing to stay in power, the interests and influence of these domestic actors weigh larger than considerations about the coherence and effective functioning of regional trade agreements. As long as domestic interests continue to generate very different, and/or very protectionist, approaches to trade policymaking across Africa, it will remain a huge challenge to establish an African customs union with a continental CET.

The establishment of the AfCFTA does little to change these interests significantly, at least in the short term. Over time, however, the AfCFTA is expected to stimulate economic and industrial development across

Africa, and the growth of new industries, including services and e-commerce industries. If successful, these developments could generate a rebalancing of domestic interests affecting trade policymaking on the continent, possibly contributing to a greater alignment of interests for more open trade policy (at least towards the rest of Africa) and for deeper integration at the continental level, thereby paving the way for the establishment of a continental customs union and CET.

### Do African states want to negotiate with the EU as a bloc?

Negotiating trade agreements with third parties as a bloc is normal practice for countries that have established a customs union. For example, in the AfCFTA negotiations, SACU member states made a common tariff offer (based on the SACU CET) to other AfCFTA state parties. In such cases, negotiating as a bloc ensures that the 'common' nature of the CET is preserved. Conversely, if one member of a customs union agrees to liberalise tariffs vis-a-vis a third party, and other members do not, discrepancies will likely emerge in that customs union's CET. In Africa, however, member states of customs unions have demonstrated a tendency to 'break ranks' with their fellow members over external trade relations, including over trade relations with the EU.

This has occurred in the case of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). In West Africa, Nigeria refuses to sign the West African EPA, preventing its ratification. Fearing loss of access to the EU market, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana are now applying 'stepping stone' EPAs with the EU. As a result, different ECOWAS member states offer the EU different access to their markets, undermining the 'common' element of the ECOWAS CET.

Similarly, in East Africa, Kenya is moving forward with implementing the EAC EPA, even though other EAC members have not yet signed the agreement and do not appear willing to do so. The EAC Summit recently pronounced that those EAC members that want to implement the EPA can go ahead and do so "under the principle of variable geometry",<sup>17</sup> but if Kenya implements the agreement and other EAC members do

not, the EAC's CET will be undermined. Complicating matters further, Kenya has also signed a bilateral EPA with the United Kingdom,<sup>18</sup> and has entered into negotiations with the United States for a bilateral trade deal.<sup>19</sup>

These examples illustrate the different (offensive and defensive) interests African states have in trade (and broader) relations with the EU. These interests are shaped, at least partly, by the prevailing trade arrangements between the two continents. Africa's many least developed countries (LDCs), have little incentive to conclude EPAs since they already benefit from full access to the EU market under the EU's Everything But Arms (EBA) preferential trade arrangement. By contrast, Africa's middle-income developing countries like Ghana and Kenya stood to lose valuable preferential access to the EU market in the absence of a concluded EPA. Then there are North African countries like Egypt and Morocco, who have concluded bilateral Association Agreements with the EU that govern their trade relations. They are apparently wary of a continent-to-continent approach to EU-Africa relations, preferring to maintain the status quo in terms of their differentiated commercial relations with the EU.<sup>20</sup>

Following the signing of the AfCFTA, an expectation emerged that the AfCFTA could pave the way for African states to engage external trade partners as a bloc, an approach long seen as a way to give Africa more clout in trade negotiations.<sup>21</sup> At the AU Summit in Nouakchott in July 2018, African states even committed to "engage external partners as one block [sic] speaking with one voice".<sup>22</sup> Following that decision, however, a number of African countries concluded trade deals with the United Kingdom following its exit from the EU, Mauritius concluded an FTA with China and Kenya entered into trade negotiations with the United States.<sup>23</sup> In 2019, African states moderated their previous commitment to refrain from entering into bilateral negotiations with third parties, agreeing instead to "inform the [AU] Assembly with assurance that those efforts will not undermine the African Union vision of creating one African market".<sup>24</sup>

Evidently, the AfCFTA has not significantly changed the way African states approach external trade relations, at

least not yet. African countries face different incentives for concluding (or not) trade deals with the EU and other external partners, and these considerations continue to outweigh the perceived benefits of negotiating as a bloc. It is unrealistic to expect these incentives to converge significantly in the short term as a result of the AfCFTA. However, over the longer term, various factors could alter these interests, some linked to the AfCFTA, some not. For instance, economic and industrial development, and the development of domestic trade capacity could alter the balance of domestic interests in some African countries, creating more demand for bilateral trade deals. Graduation from LDC status and the consequent loss of access to the EU market under EBA, could also encourage some reluctant African countries to seek a reciprocal trade agreement with the EU. If such developments create sufficient incentives among African states, a continent-to-continent FTA with the EU becomes a more realistic ambition.

### Could the AU represent Africa in trade negotiations with the EU?

African states have reaffirmed the importance for Africa of “speaking with one voice” to promote the continent’s interests on the global stage.<sup>25</sup> In theory, negotiating as a bloc could help African states get better trade deals vis-a-vis third parties such as the EU.<sup>26</sup> In practice, the large number of African states, and the diversity of trade interests among them, means that negotiating as a bloc would likely only be feasible if African states were willing and able to be represented in such negotiations by a single entity. But no institution has a mandate to represent African states in this way. The AfCFTA Agreement does not establish any supranational institutions, nor does it grant treaty-making power to the AfCFTA Secretariat<sup>27</sup> or to the AU.<sup>28</sup> In short, the AfCFTA does not create a body to negotiate trade agreements on behalf of African states.

The AU, specifically the AU Commission, is arguably the most likely candidate to play such a role in the future, but it would need to be given the mandate by African states to play this role.<sup>29</sup> What does recent evidence suggest about the likelihood of this happening? As highlighted above, many African states ignored the AU

Assembly’s call to refrain from negotiating bilateral trade agreements, leading to a backtracking by the Assembly on this commitment. The AU Commission has also been somewhat sidelined on the AfCFTA, in favour of the AfCFTA Secretariat.

The fact that the African Group of countries at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) pushed for the AU to be granted observer status at the WTO provides some optimism for an AU role as Africa’s voice on international trade.<sup>30</sup> As one well placed observer noted, however, there is little appetite among African countries for the AU to actually represent them in WTO negotiations.<sup>31</sup> This is because the AU doesn’t have the technical expertise to play such a role effectively and because many African countries are better equipped to pursue their own interests at the WTO, which are not always aligned with other African countries anyway. Moreover, the African Group already provides a platform for African members of the WTO to forge common positions where it is in their interests to do so.

Perhaps more tellingly, the recently concluded negotiations for a ‘post-Cotonou’ agreement between the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries and the EU represents a notable missed opportunity for African states to demonstrate their commitment to being represented by the AU. In 2018, AU member states agreed that Africa’s relations with the EU should be governed by “a single framework for cooperation from Union to Union/continent to continent, independently of the ACP-EU framework”.<sup>32</sup> This decision was orchestrated by the AU Commission and its Chair at the time, Mousa Faki Mahamat, then AU Chair, Paul Kagame, and a “vocal minority of AU states, notably Rwanda, South Africa and Zimbabwe”.<sup>33</sup> But it was contested by most West African states and several in East and Central Africa.<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, the AU position failed to gather full acceptance among African states and an ACP negotiating mandate was adopted with the compromise of a two-track approach whereby ACP-EU and AU-EU partnerships would co-exist.<sup>35</sup> As a result the AU did not participate in the negotiations for the post-Cotonou agreement between the EU and ACP countries.

These examples demonstrate reticence on the part of African countries to give the AU a stronger mandate to

represent them in external negotiations. This reticence is also reflected in the inter-governmental and member-state driven nature of regional integration processes in Africa, which have tended to avoid supranational elements. The establishment of the AfCFTA does not immediately alter this reticence, but if the continental bodies established to support AfCFTA implementation are strengthened to play their roles effectively, and if the AfCFTA delivers positive impacts, this may help soften African countries' stance towards at least some elements of supranationality, and may pave the way for a stronger mandate for the AU in terms of representing Africa in external trade negotiations.

## What does all this mean for proponents of a continent-to-continent FTA between Africa and the EU?

While some African trade experts champion the idea that "Africa's collective interest lies in its ability to engage with the rest of the world speaking in one continental voice",<sup>36</sup> the interests of African countries are insufficiently aligned for a continent-to-continent FTA with the EU, at least in the short term. Wary of losing domestic policy space, African governments have not fully committed to deeper integration at the regional level, complicating efforts to establish a continental customs union. Facing different pressures and incentives, African governments demonstrate different appetites for reciprocal bilateral trade agreements with external partners like the EU. Furthermore, treasuring their sovereignty, African governments appear unwilling to transfer negotiating powers to the AU, an important precondition for effective continent-to-continent trade negotiations.<sup>37</sup> The establishment of the AfCFTA has done, and will do, little to directly alter these misaligned interests and incentives, at least in the short term.

## Focus on implementing the AfCFTA first

There are two important implications for those championing a continent-to-continent FTA between Africa and Europe and/or an African voice in trade negotiations. The first is that these are long term goals that will require resolution of tricky questions about what such an agreement would cover, who the individual parties to it would be and who (on the African side) would represent these parties in trade negotiations. Proponents should therefore focus their efforts in the short to medium term on supporting African integration processes, particularly implementation of the AfCFTA and the various national, regional and continental initiatives that will be vital to the AfCFTA's success.<sup>38</sup>

Effective implementation of the AfCFTA and the REC FTAs and customs unions that serve as its building blocks, as well as the multitude of initiatives meant to complement the AfCFTA and promote intra-African trade, can be instrumental in stimulating economic development across Africa, the emergence of new African industries and regional value chains and benefits for Africa's consumers. In turn, these outcomes have the potential to generate new trade interests, and greater demand from Africa's firms and consumers for deeper continental integration, as well as for deeper economic ties with Europe. Furthermore, the process of negotiating and implementing the AfCFTA should improve the capacity of African governments and supporting national, regional and continental institutions to negotiate, implement and administer more complex trade agreements, leaving them better placed to pursue a continent-to-continent FTA with the EU.

For the EU, its member states and other development partners, there are plenty of opportunities to support AfCFTA implementation through targeted aid for trade and other measures.<sup>39</sup> One area in which such support could help facilitate a future continent-to-continent FTA is capacity building for Africa's continental institutions. Those championing a continental vision for Africa's trade relations may want to consider how to support the AU and AfCFTA Secretariat to demonstrate their value to African states in relation to trade agreements, for example by improving the AU's

capacity to play a constructive role in the negotiation and implementation of trade agreements involving AU member states. In this regard the EU could support the AU's bid for observer status at the WTO, and could explore options for involving the AU in EPA negotiations and review processes, provided there is demand for this from African states. Constructive broader political engagement between the EU and AU could also serve to demonstrate to African states the benefits of having the AU act on their behalf.

## Explore ways to improve EU-Africa trade arrangements

The second implication for proponents of a continent-to-continent FTA is that improving existing trade arrangements between the EU and Africa could help pave the way for a future continent-to-continent agreement. The EU and its African counterparts should bring more coherence to the patchwork of existing trade arrangements between the EU and Africa. Where possible, they should make these arrangements more supportive of Africa's economic development and more attractive to Africa's firms and citizens. Beyond potentially facilitating a future continent-to-continent agreement, such efforts would be beneficial in and of themselves.

The EU's Association Agreements with North African countries are "seen as having delivered disappointing results" for the North African countries,<sup>40</sup> while early assessments of the EPAs find that these too have not stimulated significant growth in African exports to Europe.<sup>41</sup> The EPAs have also been criticised for complicating African regional integration processes. With this in mind, the EU and its African partners should seek to revise these trade agreements, addressing their failings, reconciling discrepancies between them and harmonising their provisions where appropriate.<sup>42</sup> They should also prioritise the implementation of - and complementary support for - provisions that support African integration processes, such as provisions on trade facilitation and rules of origin cumulation.

Such efforts would go some way towards establishing a harmonised EU approach to trade relations with Africa, and could lay the groundwork for a more coherent

framework of EU-Africa trade relations, and even, one day a continent-to-continent trade agreement.<sup>43</sup> It could also serve to complement African integration efforts. For example, reforming rules of origin to allow for greater cumulation among African states, including between ACP African states, South Africa and North African states, could support African efforts to establish regional value chains.<sup>44</sup>

The EU's February 2021 trade policy communication suggests that it grasps these implications for better EU-Africa trade relations and aims to take appropriate action. According to the communication, the EU will engage with African partners on "smooth implementation of the AfCFTA" and to "foster economic diversification and inclusive growth" as a way to enhance "trade and investment links" between Europe and Africa.<sup>45</sup> The EU also seeks to enhance "political dialogue and cooperation" with the AU and to explore possibilities for "enhancing links and synergies between different trade arrangements with African countries, for example through more harmonised rules of origin in trade with the EU," and by "widening and deepening" the EPAs. It seems then that the EU is pursuing sensible strategies to build towards its long-term ambition of a continent-to-continent FTA with Africa.

## Do not get hung up on the idea of an FTA

But does this ambition of a continent-to-continent FTA actually make sense from an African point of view? As noted above, efforts to establish a traditional FTA between the EU and Africa will face significant political economy obstacles that are likely to take many years, if not decades, to resolve. FTA negotiations could also get bogged down in disagreements over rules of origin and other tricky issues. Putting too much focus on the goal of an FTA risks diverting attention away from pressing challenges in Europe-Africa trade. It also risks crowding out thinking on more innovative approaches to strengthening EU-Africa trade relations.

Depending on its coverage, a continent-to-continent FTA may generate significant benefits, but such an arrangement is not necessary to take advantage of promising opportunities for EU-Africa collaboration on trade. Given the challenges establishing such an FTA

may entail, the attention of European and African trade policymakers may be better devoted to 'lighter' forms of trade collaboration focusing on issues such as cumulation of rules of origin, ensuring market access for African countries graduating from LDC status, non-tariff barriers to trade, sanitary and phytosanitary standards, trade facilitation, data governance and regulatory reform to support services sector development and trade in services. Ultimately, cooperation in these areas could yield significant benefits even in the absence of a continent-to-continent FTA between the EU and Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> See Art 3(f), Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area; [Agenda 2063](#); AfCFTA Secretary General H.E. Mr. Wamkele Mene: “We must rebalance Africa’s role in global trade”.

<sup>2</sup> [EC President Ursula von der Leyen’s Mission letter to incoming Commissioner for Trade, Phil Hogan, Brussels, 1 December 2019](#). This objective was first noted in the European Commission (EC) Communication on a new Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs in September 2018 ([Communication on a new Africa – Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs: Taking our partnership for investment and jobs to the next level](#) (12/9/2018)) and reiterated in the EC’s Communication on the Trade Policy Review in February 2021, where it is rammed simply as a “continent-to-continent agreement”, possibly signifying a willingness to explore arrangements other than a traditional free trade agreement ([EC communication on the Trade Policy Review - An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy, 18 February 2021](#)).

<sup>3</sup> See Luke & Suominen 2019.

<sup>4</sup> See [Carlos Lopes: Why Africa should revise its trade agreements with the EU](#).

<sup>5</sup> Deputy Chairperson of the AUC, Dr Monique Nsanzabaganwa, speaking at the opening ceremony of the 2nd AU-EU joint ministerial meeting, 26 October 2021

<sup>6</sup> For example, groups of African states, such as the Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) group, have negotiated Economic Partnership Agreements with the EU without being part of a customs union themselves.

<sup>7</sup> Art 3(d) of the [Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area](#).

<sup>8</sup> [Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community](#).

<sup>9</sup> The AfCFTA Agreement explicitly refers to “RECs’ Free Trade Areas (FTAs) as building blocs [sic] for the AfCFTA” (Art 5 of the Agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area).

<sup>10</sup> Complicating this picture, three other African regional blocs - the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC), the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU/UEMOA) - have functioning customs unions, largely as a legacy of colonial rule and administration.

<sup>11</sup> See [East African Community integration: One step forward, two steps back](#).

<sup>12</sup> See [EAC secretariat keen to protect local industries, grow trade](#).

<sup>13</sup> See Rauschendorfer, Twum 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid 12.

<sup>15</sup> See Woolfrey and Verhaeghe 2017.

<sup>16</sup> [SADC Vision 2050; SADC RISDP 2020-30](#).

<sup>17</sup> See European Commission, [Overview of Economic Partnership Agreements](#).

<sup>18</sup> See [UK-Kenya Economic Partnership Agreement enters into force](#).

<sup>19</sup> See [The US and Kenya launch negotiations on a free trade agreement. Will they succeed?](#)

<sup>20</sup> See De Groof et al. 2019.

<sup>21</sup> See [Safekeeping the African Continental Free Trade Area from Externally-Imposed Threats of Fragmentation](#).

<sup>22</sup> See African Union, [Decisions, Declarations And Resolution](#).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid 18.

<sup>24</sup> 32nd ordinary session of the AU Assembly.

<sup>25</sup> See African Union 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid 20.

<sup>27</sup> The AfCFTA Secretariat has been given the responsibility for finalising the AfCFTA and steering AfCFTA implementation, but does not have a mandate to negotiate on behalf of AfCFTA state parties.

<sup>28</sup> See [Does the AfCFTA enable Africa to speak with one Voice on Trade Issues?](#)

<sup>29</sup> Ibid 20.

<sup>30</sup> See [Request For Observer Status By The African Union Communication From Benin On Behalf Of The African Group](#).

<sup>31</sup> Personal communication with an African trade expert.

<sup>32</sup> See [Africa in the Intricate Post-Cotonou Negotiation Process; Decision On The Draft Agreement Establishing The African Continental Free Trade Area \(AfCFTA\)](#).

<sup>33</sup> See [Africa in the Intricate Post-Cotonou Negotiation Process](#).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid 32.

<sup>35</sup> See Medinilla 2021.

<sup>36</sup> See Luke et al. 2020.

<sup>37</sup> See [REC Integration Approaches and their Implications](#).

<sup>38</sup> See Apiko, Woolfrey and Byiers 2020.

<sup>39</sup> See Berger et al. 2020.

<sup>40</sup> See Dadush and Myanchenkova 2018.

<sup>41</sup> See Stender et al. 2020.

<sup>42</sup> See GIZ 2021.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid 20.

<sup>44</sup> See [Reforming EU Trade Policy To Accelerate Economic Transformation In Africa](#).

<sup>45</sup> See Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: [Trade Policy Review - An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy](#).

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- Private sector engagement

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