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EU promotion of regional cooperation in the African Union – supporting symbolic regionalism or bringing about peace?

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the EU's promotion of African Union (AU) regionalism and tests the potential of a norm diffusion approach to study the promotion of regionalism. The paper starts by briefly outlining the motivations of the EU in promoting regionalism abroad to concentrate on the two most interesting motivations for the AU case: self-legitimation of the EU / legitimation of the AU ("Symbolic regionalism") as well as the promotion of crisis management capabilities. Subsequently, it develops a theoretical framework to scrutinise the diffusion of regional integration that points the analysis at the reception and possible adoption of regional integration patterns. Accepting that such an analysis would require more primary data than available in the scope of this paper, the approach is then tested. The paper concludes by discussing the potential of the proposed theoretical framework and finds that it cannot be argued that the EU is supporting "symbolic regionalism" in the AU.

I. Introduction

In what can be judged either as a cacophony or as a case of so-far unwitnessed swift multinational crisis coordination in action, the current conflict in Libya involves a wide range of actors: from France and the UK, through NATO and the Arab League to the EU, to name just a few. Seen from this perspective, the African Union (AU), which did not support the intervention, might seem just one among many others.

Still, at the time of writing this paper (Mid-June 2011) the AU is – mainly through South African president Jacob Zuma¹ – playing an important role in trying to enable a negotiated exit to a conflict that is stalemated between an international coalition that - in fear of further mission creep - rejects to put boots on the ground to support the insurgents and a dictator that discards to step down. And above all, the AU will most probably have an important role to play when it comes to post-conflict settlement in Libya.

A brief look at the history of the AU explains the kind of its involvement in the current Libyan conflict as well as its likeliness of playing a more important role in the future. The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), predecessor of the AU, was founded in 1963, after the peak of African decolonisation. Its main objectives were uniting Africa, becoming self-reliant and avoiding external intervention to overcome the fragmentation and lack of development that were both seen as the heritage of colonialism. These elements form – broadly speaking – the core of Pan-Africanism, the defining ideology behind the OAU and the AU (Murithi 2005, pp. 7–39). Severely damaged by decades of heavy political disputes, numerous regime changes and violent conflicts among and in its member states as well as harmed by the widespread perception of not having an impact on people's lives, African governments decided to dismantle the OAU and established the AU in 2002 following the declaration of Sirte in 1999.

One of the most important differences – if not the most important - between the OAU and the AU lies in the latter's express will to tackle African crises regionally and in the overcoming of the extremely strict reading of the principle of non-intervention that had characterised the OAU and which had contributed to its failure in times of, among other, the Rwanda genocide. In stark contrast to the OAU, the AU's Constitutive Act spells out "the right of the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity" (African Union 2000, nos. 4h) in a clarity that is probably unique among any regional organisation. This strong orientation towards peace and security was reaffirmed in 2004 with the establishment of the Peace and Security Council (PSC) as central part of the so-called African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (African Union 2002). Under this architecture, the AU has already conducted numerous peacekeeping missions, among other in Sierra Leone, Sudan or Somalia (Fawcett, Gandois 2010, pp. 620–621).

Notwithstanding the AU's commitment to promote peace and security in Africa, the context both for successful regionalism and especially for the external promotion of regionalism is not a promising one. While "enabling the AU and African sub-regional organisations to plan and conduct peace support operations" {DG DEVCO 2011 #166} is one of the main justifications behind the EU's support for AU regional integration - for which it spends a considerable amount of money and resources -, African states are especially reluctant to accept external meddling. Adding on this, African regionalism has an especially long history of proclaiming very high aspirations and then falling short of both African and international expectations. This is especially because of the strong importance that African governments give to the protection of national sovereignty. This has led some authors to speak about the "symbolic" or "sovereignty-boosting" character of African regionalism (Söderbaum 2004, 2010). It is this complicated context

¹ It has to be noted that this mediation is not free from dispute in the AU as South Africa has closer ties to the Gaddafi regime than many other members of the AU and because of Libya's previous attempt to assume the leadership of the AU.

which - among other reasons² - makes studying the potential of EU promotion of regional integration in Africa an interesting exercise.

Taking the AU's current role in the Libyan conflict and its potential in crisis management as a vehicle, this paper pursues two objectives. First, to assess the value of the theoretical framework that will be applied and second, to draw conclusions on the impact of the EU's support to regional cooperation in the AU. The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section II draws the general setting of the EU's efforts in promoting regional integration and cooperation³ and briefly introduces the motivation and goals behind it to earmark the two options which seem the most relevant ones in the AU case and on which the analysis will concentrate: conflict prevention / crisis management and the pursuit of legitimacy. It also refers to the concept of "symbolic regionalism" as a possible driver for African cooperation. Drawing from this, section III introduces the diffusion approach, a theoretical approach that provides different patterns that seem suited to test for the two options outlined. Section IV tests for the two hypotheses and analyses the AU's reaction to the promotion of regional integration by the EU. Section V concludes by highlighting the results of the paper both regarding the potential and limitations of the diffusion approach as well as regarding the effectiveness of regionalism promotion in the case under discussion.

II. EU promotion of regionalism – instruments and aims⁴

Promotion of regionalism by the EU is far from being just declamatory but pursued through a widespread set of policies and instruments throughout the Union's portfolio of external policies. On the diplomatic level, the EU sustains a series of so-called biregional relationships with the world's most important regions, including East Asia, Latin America and Africa. Embedded in and alongside these relationships, meetings are held with subregional integration organisations (e.g. ASEAN or MERCOSUR) and common agendas developed. Treaty ties are in place with most subregional integration organisations (European Commission). From a trade perspective, trade agreements exist or are pursued with many (sub-)regional organisations in the world (DG Trade 2011; DG Trade 2011). In the sphere of development assistance, support for regional integration complements the assistance given to individual states and amounts to a substantial share of total aid commitments by the EU. Parliamentary relations between the European Parliament and regional and sub-regional parliamentary assemblies encompass almost every region of the world (European Parliament 2011b, 2011a).

Several reasons lie behind the EU's endeavour in promoting regionalism abroad. First, the rationale widely discussed in academia (Bicchi 2006; Smith 2008, pp. 79–109; Bretherton, Vogler 2006, p. 249) by which the EU promotes similar entities to legitimate itself definitely bears some truth. When the EU claims that "[t]he European experience is a point of reference for many ACP regions" (European Commission 2008, p. 3) regarding regional integration, it is portraying itself as a case of success. Closely related with this is the argument that a normative conviction exists among leading EU actors that the EU's path to an unparalleled success both in terms of political stability as in economic terms is a feasible solution also for many other states and regions all over the world.⁵ By doing this, the Union is at the same time offering other

² Most notably, the correlation and possible causal link between stable regionalism and the consolidation of democracy as suggested by Fawcett, Gandois 2010, pp. 628–629 .

³ Regional integration is often used to refer to economic and trade integration, while the term regional cooperation often aims at political cooperation. But regional integration can also be understood as a form of cooperation which involves the pooling of sovereignty. Since the EU engages in the promotion of both types and the AU also involves some pooling of sovereignty, both terms are used in this paper.

⁴ This section of the paper draws on the draft of a paper to be published as working paper of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI).

⁵ These views were confirmed in interviews with leading EU foreign policy officials in May 2011.

regions to profit from its legitimacy as regional integration's frontrunner. This relates also to the concept of "symbolic regionalism" which will be introduced at the end of this section.

A second, also EU internal reason that could explain the EU's interest in engaging directly with other regional organisations can be found in the Union's institutional development. Born as an economic instrument to bridge the political alienation and overcome the economic ruin that followed World War II, European integration saw the step-by-step growth of external competences, which were first introduced as complementary policies to the Community's common trade policy. Always eager to expand its competences, the European Commission could have sought to develop its own foreign policy parcel in relative independence from member states by promoting relations with other regional organisations.⁶ This argument gains prominence if one takes into account that development policy was one of the first non-trade external policies of the then EC and that the support to regional integration is – due to the EU's own nature – one of the areas in which Europe can achieve international outreach most easily.

Easier to grasp and to underlie with data are, thirdly, those arguments relating the EU's promotion of regional integration to trade promotion and the will to open up new markets for European exporters, investors and customers. While the majority of developing economies benefits from the unilateral trade benefits granted by the EU under the GSP (Generalised System of Preferences) trade schemes, most of these states protect their markets behind considerable barriers. This situation creates an interest for the EU to gain access to those markets. Talking to regions instead of addressing individual countries would then ease the negotiation process considerably by limiting the number of counterparts the EU has to deal with. But a closer look at negotiations shows that the will to open up new markets does not justify the often very cumbersome process of negotiating with regional organisations (which often suffer from a lack of coordination) as done by the EU for many years.⁷ Instead, concentrating on those individual countries that have a sufficient trade potential to justify a trade agreement would seem the most rational approach. Therefore the trade aspect alone falls short from justifying group-to-group dialogues.

Finally, the emphasis the EU puts on providing support to conflict prevention and to the set-up of crisis management capacities, especially but not only towards the African Union (AU)⁸, shows that the Union conceives regional organisations as possible actors to respond to threats before they reach the global stage and/or to increase local ownership when acting together with external actors. Also related with this approach is the conviction that regional organisations could play a stronger role on the global stage and serve as building blocks to agree on common positions towards global negotiations and international institutions. Often voiced in academia as one of the possible benefits of cooperation between regional organisations⁹, overall results in this area are so far discrete according to EU sources.¹⁰

⁶ This hypothesis was deemed probable by a former high official of the EU as well as by the ambassador of an Andean state to the EU although rejected by a high Commission official during interviews conducted in May 2011.

⁷ While the European Commission has, after being granted a mandate by the Council, the competence to negotiate trade and association agreements on its own, these negotiations are closely monitored by the Council and Member States, which at the end of the day have to approve and often (the case of so-called 'mixed agreements') also individually ratify the agreement. This leads to considerable tensions and makes negotiations more difficult than they appear on paper. On the other side of the negotiating table, the EU's counterpart is most often represented by all its member states.

⁸ A good example is the African Peace Facility (APF), through which the EU supports the funding of AU peace operations.

⁹ See for example Rüländ 2010.

¹⁰ Interviews with EU officials in Brussels in May 2011.

• Self-legitimation
• EU institutional development
• Trade promotion
• Conflict prevention / crisis management

Table 1: EU motivations in promoting regionalism (own compilation)

As for the case under discussion here, it seems adequate to reduce the scope of analysis to the first and the last of the motivations exposed above for two reasons. First, and since the focus of this paper lies on testing the effectiveness of the EU's promotion of regional cooperation, the possible historical-institutional motivations behind the policy can be neglected here. Second, and as outlined in the introduction, the AU is not an economic integration scheme but an eminently political animal and trade promotion does not play a prominent role in EU-AU relations, with trade being mainly dealt with towards subregional organisations as ECOWAS and SADC.

In contrast, the question of the EU's effort in promoting regional cooperation as a means of legitimising itself and as an opportunity for the AU to adhere to a recognised 'champion' of regionalism does play an important role in assessing the effectiveness of the policy: if legitimacy issues stand at the centre of the policy, visibility will be more important than substance. The importance of Pan-Africanism and of non-interference in the AU's normative grounding also hint at a possibly prominent role of legitimacy issues.

Conflict prevention, management and post-conflict settlement are relevant both because of the declared aspiration of the EU to cope with conflicts without external involvement and because of the EU's clearly stated will and more than considerable financial commitment¹¹ to support such endeavours.

Adding to the discussion on legitimacy concerns as a driver for the promotion of regionalism, a relatively critical strand of literature on African regionalism provides a useful concept to test in the case under discussion here. According to the main proponent of that literature, Fredrik Söderbaum, the (rhetorical) enthusiasm of many African states in pursuing regionalism can often be explained as an effort driven mainly by "symbolism". "Symbolic" or "regime-boosting regionalism" contends that "regimes and political leaders in Africa engage in symbolic and discursive activities, whereby they praise the goals of regionalism and regional organizations, sign cooperation treaties and agreements, and take part in 'summitry regionalism', but without having a commitment to or bearing the costs of policy implementation" (Söderbaum 2010, p. 6) in order to "strengthen the status, legitimacy and the general interests of the political regime (rather than the nation-state [sic!]¹² *per se*), both on the international arena and domestically." (Söderbaum 2010, p. 6). Symbolic regionalism would – following Söderbaum – at least strongly contribute to explain why some African regional organisations lack progress as to tangible integration. The argument also confronts research that argues that regional organisations play a supportive role in transition to democracy and in its stabilisation (Söderbaum 2010, p. 12). While Söderbaum's argument is mainly based on the Southern African Development Community (SADC), he argues that symbolic regionalism can be witnessed in most African regional organisations including the AU (Söderbaum 2010, 2004).

In order to shed some light on these questions, the following part of the paper will outline a theoretical framework that concentrates on possible paths of influence and on their impact.

¹¹ The EU's support to the African Peace Facility (see fn. 8 above) amounts to more than 755 million € for the period 2007-2010.

¹² The use of the term nation-state in the African context seems quite uncommon taking into account that borders and institutions of many African states are inherited from colonialism.

III. Theoretical framework – tracing the impact of the promotion of regionalism

The main and ever-returning challenge when trying to assess the impact of the promotion of regional integration can be put in just two words: tracing causality. That one regional organisation develops in this or in the other way does not necessarily have to be related to the engagement of – for example – the EU. Many other reasons could – and most probably will – be playing an important role in fostering regional integration: economic development, crises in the region, the need of weaker states to get on the bandwagon of a regional power – to name just a few that seem relevant to the AU’s development.

Apart from the availability of primary data, the scope of the theories and methods used is of utmost importance when tracing causality. The way of dealing with the challenge of causality is what distinguishes the suitable approaches to study the promotion of regionalism. Understanding promotion of regionalism as a process in which a sender (i.e. the EU) and a recipient exist, a rough division can be undertaken between approaches which concentrate on what the sender does (e.g. the ‘external governance’ approach by Lavenex, Schimmelfennig 2010¹³) and those which put the weight on how the recipient reacts to external inputs (as in the ‘norm localisation’ approach by Acharya Acharya 2004, 2009). While both perspectives are appealing and have their strength for specific issues, it seems most interesting to look at both sender and recipient in order to capture the whole picture and trace causality.

Such a combination is provided by the diffusion approach proposed by Börzel and Risse (2010; 2009). Drawing from other theories, mainly from the field of Europeanisation, they develop an actor-oriented theory of norm diffusion that focuses on norm entrepreneurs and distinguishes four different mechanisms by which norms can be transmitted. Differentiating for the main actor and for the logic of action (rationalist or related to the social context) these mechanisms can be summed-up as follows:

Main actor / logic of action	Sender	Recipient
Consequentialism	Incentives / conditionality	Lesson-drawing
Appropriateness	Persuasion	Mimicry

Table 2: Mechanisms of Norm Diffusion slightly simplified from Börzel, Risse 2010¹⁴

The diffusion approach refers to ‘norms’.¹⁵ In what seems a convenient way to capture a broad array of possible influences (e.g. purely normative ones as the assertion of a multilateral system, legal ones as the adoption of parts of the *acquis communautaire*, monetary ones as financial transfers, or others difficult to characterise as the design of institutions, etc.) a broad understanding of norms is applied. Since the proponents of the diffusion approach do not explicitly define what they understand by the term ‘norms’ (although the afore-mentioned broad understanding of norms becomes obvious implicitly), this paper will adhere to the definition of norms as (a set of) collectively shared ideas that influence behaviour.¹⁶

¹³ This does not mean that the ‘external governance’ approach cannot be used to trace causality and impact, as shown impressively by Knill, Tosun 2010 using quantitative methodology.

¹⁴ For a previous but similar version available in print see Börzel, Risse 2009.

¹⁵ Using a more narrow definition that matches the more elaborate nature of their model, Schimmelfennig, Sedelmeier 2005 refer to ‘policy transfer’.

¹⁶ This definition follows Goldstein 1993 as quoted in Acharya 2004.

As outlined in Table 2, the diffusion approach distinguishes between processes that are mainly driven by the sender and those which are mainly driven by the recipient. In what follows, the different processes are shortly outlined and indicators are developed.

Starting with those processes driven by the sender, 'incentives and conditionality' refers to those cases in which the external actor tries to manipulate the utility calculations of the recipient by connecting the adoption of certain norms to financial or political rewards or by sanctioning non-adoption. This is the pattern most often used by the EU when dealing with accession countries and also in parts of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (Schimmelfennig, Sedelmeier 2005).¹⁷ Indicators for the existence of an incentive / conditionality process are the connection of financial or political actions to the achievement, non-achievement of a specific objective or the use of capacity-building measures by the sender.

'Persuasion' takes up a constructivist logic to capture cases in which no direct use of incentives exists and norms are transferred or promoted by convincing the recipient that those norms are the most appropriate ones to follow. Persuasion processes have been seen as responsible for the adoption of norms (e.g. human rights norms) as a result of the legitimacy given to them by international organisations as the UN (Acharya 2009, p. 152). While grasping cases of persuasion is more difficult than identifying conditionality, political dialogues - as those often promoted by the EU - can be seen as possible arenas for the adoption of norms by persuasion. Therefore the agendas of political dialogues (and implemented elements thereof) can be seen as possible indicators for (effective) persuasion. Still, persuasion has to be taken with a grain of salt as it can be difficult to exclude hidden conditionality or bargaining tactics (as for example adopting relatively costless norms in order to gain a better position to reject the 'nasty' ones).

Moving to those diffusion processes in which the recipient is in the thick of the action, 'lesson-drawing' refers to those situations in which policymakers look abroad for a more appropriate way of dealing with a problem that is not being dealt with adequately. The presence of such a process is highly probable when foreign norms are adopted (and effectively applied) without incentives or persuasion being involved.¹⁸

Finally, 'mimicry' refers to the purely formal adoption of norms in order to profit from their adoption without having the intention of applying them in practice (and of bearing the costs from applying them). The formal adoption of norms can be the result of the will to increase the legitimacy of the own organisation by approximating it to a model that is *en vogue* or widely recognised (Börzel, Risse 2010). Such a process resembles the institutional isomorphism hypothesis brought forward by DiMaggio and Powell by which organisations - especially if uncertainty - for example regarding funding of the organisation - is high - will approximate to the design of successful organisations not to improve their records but in order to profit from their legitimacy (DiMaggio, Powell 1991, pp. 67-72) . Indicators for such a process are the adoption of norms without their application in practice combined with prominent references to the success of the model followed.

Although parsimonious and clear on paper, one has to take into account that the norm diffusion approach bears some complications when translated into practice. Difficulties arise especially in the conceptual separation between the two logics of action (logic of consequentialism and logic of appropriateness), as they may go hand in hand and be arduous to distinguish from each other in the real world.¹⁹ A similar - although less grave - problem arises between lesson-drawing and

¹⁷ This also reminds us of the theoretical provenience of the diffusion approach in Europeanisation studies. A useful overview of up to date studies and study topics in Europeanisation is provided in the bibliography of Exadaktylos, Radaelli Claudio M. March 29th - April 1st 2010.

¹⁸ As this indicator is a 'residual' indicator based on the probable absence of any other processes it is not yet fully convincing. **Any suggestions regarding this issue are especially welcome.**

¹⁹ For the sake of clarity, the different logics of actions have not been explained in this paper. Making a long story short, consequentialism refers to rational-choice situations in which actions can be modelled and explained as a weighting between two (or more) options with expected outcomes. The logic of appropriateness applies when actions can be explained through the wish of actors to adapt or react to a certain social context.

mimicry. Even though mimicry clearly implies that the transfer of norms is pursued just on a shallow level, it can be difficult to separate between unsuccessful lesson-drawing and plain mimicry. The only way to get the distinction right and to solve these problems is by heavily relying on primary data, which cannot be accomplished within the scope and taking into account the exploratory nature of this paper.

Although it has to be kept in mind that such an analysis would need much more empirical work in order to be conclusive, these categories will be used to test for possible reasons and classify the results in the two following empirical sections of this paper.

Bearing these problems in mind, the following section of the paper will assess the potential of the model outlined to measure the impact of the EU's promotion of regionalism by testing for two possible motivations behind EU-AU cooperation: legitimacy / "symbolic regionalism" and conflict prevention and management.

IV. Empirical analysis

Before moving to the empirical analysis, it seems convenient to put the different modes of diffusion presented in the previous section of this paper in relation to the motivations outlined in section II. This will allow concentrating on the respective indicators when analysing the two possible motivations. It is reasonable to assume that there is a close relationship between self-legitimation/ symbolic regionalism as a goal and persuasion and mimicry as the mechanisms by which norm transmission will most frequently occur. Incentives and conditionality could also play a role where an external power is trying to promote its model to legitimise itself. By contrast, lesson-drawing will not play a role if – as posited by the legitimisation / symbolic regionalism hypothesis – transmission of regionalism is not about coping with specific problems but about pretending to be *en vogue*.

Regarding conflict prevention / crisis management, again one of the diffusion processes – namely mimicry – can be excluded almost certainly. If the will to prevent conflicts or to manage crises exists, then shallow imitation will not be of much help and will not be tolerated by the actor promoting regional integration. Instead, incentives / conditionality and lesson-drawing seem the most probable processes here, whereas persuasion may also play a role.

IV.1 Self-legitimation and symbolic regionalism

The fact that the EU and the AU share a number of institutional features, policies and denominations has been widely highlighted by the literature and will not be part of the analysis conducted in this paper. It is just to be shortly noted that these similarities exist despite the quite different character of the two organisations. While the EU was in its beginning a mainly economic integration project that has later acquired further competences, the AU's continent-wide scope of membership²⁰ and its goals show more resemblance to the Council of the Europe. The existence of similarities despite the differences in aims can already be seen as a hint at the importance of following a legitimate model when designing regional organisations.

Persuasion

Apart from this general sign, more specific signs for the existence of a persuasion process with the goal of legitimising the EU as a regional organisation can be found when studying the fundamental documents and public statements of the EU on its relation with the AU. In a broad statement including the AU, the EU states that „[t]he European experience is a point of reference for many ACP regions“ (European Commission 2008, p. 3) regarding regional cooperation.²¹

²⁰ All African states except for Morocco.

²¹ As already mentioned in the introduction.

Andris Piebalgs, European Commissioner for Development, puts it quite clear stating that "[p]olitical and economic integration is the right answer to achieve peace and security, to fight poverty and to develop societies and economies. What has been true for Europe is also true for Africa. This is why we have supported the African Union from its very early days" (European Commission 21/05/2010). Although Piebalgs' statement is an outlier in its bluntness and the amount and prominence of such statements is lower than in the EU's relations to – for example – Latin American regional organisations²², several other documents portray the EU as an example to follow, including documents agreed upon by AU and EU (African Union, European Union 2007b, p. 16).

The deeply institutionalised political dialogue between the AU and the EU could in theory provide an almost ideal arena for persuading the AU into strengthening regional integration. The commissions of both organisations meet on a yearly basis²³, AU-EU foreign ministers are to meet every six months, dialogues exist also on human rights as well as between the AU Peace and Security Council and the EU Political and Security Committee (PSC) (Pirozzi 2009, pp. 19–20). On a working level, regular meetings of so-called Joint Expert Groups are held and the EU delegation in Addis Abeba takes part in AU meetings. Indeed the promotion of regional integration does play a prominent role in some of these dialogues as can be concluded from the Joint Africa-EU Strategy and especially from the specific measures resulting from the strategy (African Union, European Union 2007a, pp. 4–6, 2007a, pp. 9–12, 2007b, pp. 3-4,6-7,8,16-19, 2010, pp. 18-19, 26). But, in contrast to the EU's own communications, it cannot be argued that the way regional cooperation is dealt with in the political dialogues is aimed at legitimising the EU model as the dialogues are framed in a quite general way without highlighting the EU experience.²⁴

Mimicry

A striking case of mimicry could be seen in the conspicuously frequent and systematic reiteration of the "sharedness" between the EU and the AU of the values of human rights, democracy and rule of law that goes all through the documents on the AU and EU cooperation.²⁵ Even taking into account that the EU always includes clauses on human rights, democracy and rule of law in its agreements with third states and regions, the amount and fame that these values acquire in AU-EU documents is unusual. Indeed, the prominence given to these values and especially to highlighting that they are "shared" by EU and AU is in such a stark contrast to the actual performance of many AU member states in human rights, democracy and rule of law that mimicry can be suspected. Nonetheless, the case for mimicry is a weak one. While the constitutional documents of the AU as the abovementioned Constitutive Act also highlight these values, a review of policy documents on the AU website in the areas of 'Peace and Security', 'Political Affairs' and 'Legal'²⁶ shows that the special prominence of these values is restricted to those documents issued together with the EU. If mimicry was at work, one would expect the legitimacy of the EU to be used to promote the AU's standing.

This leads to a two-pronged result regarding mimicry: First, a clear orientation towards the EU (or the EU's direct influence) are causal for the praise of human rights, democracy and rule of law - all values on which the AU's practical record is far from justifying their documentary prominence. At the same time, and contradicting what would be expected in a mimicry process, the AU does not consider it necessary to refer to the 'sharedness' of these values with the EU in order to legitimise itself.

²² Interviews with EU officials working in EU-Latin America relations conducted in Brussels in May 2011.

²³ The last meeting was held in Brussels on May 30th-June 1st 2011.

²⁴ Analysis looking further than at the agenda of the political dialogues would be needed to fully confirm this.

²⁵ To name just a few examples African Union, European Union 2007a, pp. 7–9, 2007b, p. 11, 2010, pp. 1, 21, 2011, p. 1.

²⁶ These being the areas of AU cooperation in which the mentioned values play the most important role.

Incentives and conditionality

The use of incentives and conditionality to increase the EU's legitimacy could be seen at work in the cases of the EU's extensive financial support to AU institutionalisation and in the provision of capacity-building. In fact, the EU provides a huge amount of support through the AU Support Programme that is tied to the build-up of an institutional structure (Delegation of the EU to the African Union 2011). The envisaged structure clearly resembles that of the EU, which has also stressed that the African organisation should pursue supranationalism for successful integration (Commission of the European Communities 2005, p. 20; Sicurelli 2010, pp. 148–149). As a specific example of capacity-building, the EU Delegation to the AU has taken part in AU meetings as an external adviser to report on the EU's model of integration (Sicurelli 2010, pp. 148–149). Still, and as Sicurelli (2010, pp. 152–153) points out, the cautious reaction of the AU to the European attempts of promoting supranationalism, have not led to a reduction of the support given to the AU for its institutionalisation. Therefore conditionality cannot be seen as a strong one. Taking also into account that the promotion of supranationalism can be a matter of conviction and not just one of self-legitimation, the lack of strict conditionality weakens the argument for an 'incentives and conditionality' process.

Summing up the above analysis, examples have been found for persuasion both aimed at highlighting the EU's role as an example of regional integration (self-legitimation) as well as at promoting regional integration in the AU, but the latter without highlighting the EU experience. Mimicry, a process that would have most clearly pointed at the pursuit of "symbolic regionalism" by the AU²⁷, could not be confirmed for the reiterated assertion of certain values in documents on EU-AU cooperation. Finally, it has been found that conditionality and incentives are used by the EU to promote its model of integration, although this does not suffice to argue that it does so out of an interest in self-legitimation.

IV.2 Conflict prevention and crisis management

According to the strategies of AU and EU and to the funding devoted, the promotion of peace and security and the empowerment of the AU to deal with African crises without external intervention are the central objectives of cooperation between the two regional organisations (African Union, European Union 2007a, pp. 4–5; Commission of the European Communities 2005, p. 3, 2005, p. 22). Prominent examples of this cooperation are the African Peace Facility, which mainly provides funding for AU-led peace operations (DG DEVCO 2011) or support to the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) (Pirozzi 2009, pp. 19–32). The following paragraphs will test for the different modes of regionalism promotion outlined above.

Incentives and conditionality

While direct conditionality does not play an important role in the EU's support to African conflict prevention and crisis management²⁸, the effort put by the EU in capacity-building is high. As outlined by Pirozzi (2009, pp. 33–37), several training programmes exist for military and civilian personnel involved in AU peace operations. Some of these programmes include the cooperation of personnel of different AU states. At the same time, the military-civilian African Standby Force brigades supported through the APF are multinational ones (Pirozzi 2009, nos. Annex II) in a design intended to increase regional ownership and cooperation and crisis management.

²⁷ And subsequently to (unintended) support of the EU to "symbolic regionalism".

²⁸ Although exceptions to this rule exist, they are due to other motivations than promoting cooperation. For example the EU refused to provide funding for a training centre in Zimbabwe for political reasons Pirozzi 2009, p. 35.

This shows a clear approach to foster regional cooperation and integration through the use of capacity-building and the setting of financial incentives to do so. An assessment of the impact would nevertheless require the micro-level analysis of training measures or the finalisation of the setup of the regional brigades, which is not finished yet.

Lesson-drawing and persuasion

Apart from the political dialogues already mentioned in the previous subsection, elements for lesson-drawing and persuasion in the area of crisis management are most probably to be found on the working level of EU-AU cooperation. The establishment of so-called Joint Expert Groups (JEGs) comprised of an equal number of AU and EU experts provides a possible scenario for such processes. The task of the JEGs is to implement the measures foreseen in the priority areas of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. Still, an assessment of the work of the JEGs is not possible at this time, as their setup has been delayed due to the AU's difficulties in appointing its share of experts (Pirozzi 2010, p. 92). Their setup is currently planned under the 2011-2013 Action Plan of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (African Union, European Union 2010, pp. 11–12).

Apart from the JEGs a possible case of persuasion lies in the pressures of the EU (and therein of the DG Development of the European Commission) as a consequence of the Darfur conflict. Following Sicurelli, the EU would have tried to convince AU actors of the necessity to introduce a supranational approach to peacekeeping in order to be able to cope with future crises (Sicurelli 2010, p. 59). A lack of further information makes it impossible to trace this case further. Still, taking into account that peacekeeping is still an area in which AU member states emphasize sovereignty, this case of persuasion would be a failed one.

The analysis of diffusion processes in the area of conflict prevention and crisis management leads to a twofold result: while several prominent and funding-intensive examples have been found that show that incentives and capacity-building are used to foster regional integration, lesson-drawing and persuasion processes could not be tested for because of the lack of appropriate examples.

V. Conclusion

This paper has addressed two main questions, one of theoretical / methodological nature and one regarding substance of EU-AU relations.

On the theoretical thread, the potential of the norm diffusion approach was explored as a means of tracing the course and impact of EU promotion of regional integration. As already announced in the theoretical section of the paper the norm diffusion approach is reliant on the availability of sufficient primary qualitative data (e.g. from interviews) to unfold its full potential. While such data was only available from the EU side, the diffusion approach has proven useful in pointing research at relevant cases or subcases on which to study the promotion of regional integration. This is important in order to avoid a perspective too strongly focused on the macro or systemic picture of the promotion of regionalism and unable to trace the causality of this phenomenon. Still, and mainly due to the need to rely heavily on institutional communications and documents and on secondary literature (which also impedes to always reach the micro-level) several questions could not be answered and remain open as invitations for further research to be addressed relying on more and richer empirical material.

Regarding the case studied and returning to the question that has opened this paper, it could be rejected that the EU support to regional integration is in the danger of enabling or supporting “symbolic regionalism”, although – and taking into account the scope of the paper - only for a small but important portion of the whole picture: the promotion of human rights, democracy and rule of law norms. Instead, examples were found that the EU uses its relationship with the AU to promote itself as a successful model to be pursued also by others.

Concerning the support to crisis management, the paper found substantial proof for the use of capacity-building and incentives as a way of promoting regional cooperation in this area. While two possible cases of lesson-drawing and persuasion were identified, concluding testing of the hypotheses could not be fulfilled as a consequence of the still infant development of the EU-AU Joint Expert Groups and the lack of primary data on the EU's promotion of supranationalism in peacekeeping matters.

Interviews conducted

Interview with an EU high official dealing with relations to the Andean region, May 2011, Brussels.

Interview with an EU high official dealing with relations to Latin America, May 2011, Brussels.

Interview with two officials of DG DEVCO dealing with the support to regional organisations, May 2011, Brussels

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