



Critical European Studies

PERCEPTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S IDENTITY IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Edited by
Anna Skolimowska



Perceptions of the European Union's Identity in International Relations

This book examines the perception of European Union's identity by the main actors in international relations.

Analysing issues related to public discourse in third countries as demonstrated by, amongst others, their political elites, civil society, and think-tanks, the book highlights a 'normative gap' with regard to the European Union's self-definition/perception and its perception in the international environment. It also shows that the European Union's perception of normative power in international relations is not shared consistently by the main principal actor yet is differentiated relative to geographical area and scope of activities undertaken by the EU. It demonstrates that the perception of the EU's normative identity is a source of the crisis of the European Union as an effective and significant player in the international arena.

This book will be of key interest to scholar and students of European Union politics, European politics/studies, European integration, identity politics, and international relations.

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7 From the hopeless continent towards the rising star

The perceptions of the European Union by African elites

Anna Mastoń-Oracz and Iwona Janczyk

Introduction

In the past decades Africa was seen as a hopeless continent.¹ Due to huge Chinese investment (in 2001 the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation [FOCAC] was established and has so far invested more than \$300 billion in different African states, mostly in infrastructure) the Pan-African vision of an integrated, prosperous and peaceful continent guided by its citizens, acting as a dynamic force in the international arena, has shaped a new order in international relations.

Manners binds the idea of the normative power of the EU with its ability to exert an ideological, cultural and symbolic influence on actors in international relations.² To underline the importance of the chosen analysis one should draw the reader's attention to the Mozambican president who stated: 'We must help each other to improve our governance on the basis of friendship and mutual trust. It is only in this way that we can dissipate the negative image of our continent as an incapable Africa without a future'.³ Africa's role and participation in international relations can be traced back to 'The slave trade, the scramble for Africa and the subsequent colonial period; the proxy wars of the Cold War; and the increasing importance of the continent's natural resources'.⁴

This chapter includes parallel and independent examination of the analysis of public discourse, public opinion research and the analysis of think-tank opinions.

The preceding research problem, the defined task and the objectives of this chapter determined the research methodology. The following methods have been used:

- 1 the analysis of the literature, source materials as well as program documents;
- 2 the comparative and descriptive analysis.

The completion of the defined research task and objectives was based on foreign literature, mainly including English-speaking economic literature devoted to the role and identity of the European Union in African States. However, due to the lack of empirical data on perceptions and mass opinion, the conclusions can only be tentative. The research questions were:

- 1 Who are the African elites?
- 2 What is the perception of the European Union by African elites?

The word 'elite', used in science for about two hundred years, is derived from the Latin word *eligere*, or from Old French *eslite* (or *eslit*), which is past participle of the verb *eslire*.⁵ Political African elite as a category is one of the most unexplored phenomena in social science. The lack of quantitative, representative data accounts for the fact that most publications continue to depict the role and character of the African ruling class selectively and vaguely, usually referring to the elite of a particular state, to individuals, or to specific spheres of social life in modern Africa or the historical period. On the other hand, while dealing with Africa's development too much attention was paid to economic issues, overlooking the highly important political dimension of the process.⁶

The gap between the political leaders and the mass

African elites struggle to engender effective leadership and governance in Africa. However, there is a big chasm between the African political class and the masses. This is the consequence of the collision between two Africas, namely: pre-colonial and the new post-colonial one. European residues interfere with traditional Black Land values. Many African people associate the concept of the Western civilisation with a highly organised system of domination that is functioning to coerce the rest of the world into submissiveness within such domains as politics, economics, or culture. As a result, pre-colonial African society based on the rules like equalitarianism and coexistence, was changed by Western capitalism and colonial administration into a class and corporative society. The rising discrepancy, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, between the narrow elites and the rest of the societies, and the alienation process of the former may result in an unforeseeable fallout in the future.⁷

Due to the alienation process, the elitist social groups have a similar approach to the rest of Africans as boomers did have in the past. The position of African elites is polymorphic. It constitutes the symbol of autonomy and power, yet the world perceived it as something worse because from the European point of view elites should be supported by masses, yet, in Africa it is not always the case.⁸

In Africa there is no separation between political and economic dimension of the authority. Therefore, the ruling party is automatically the most important beneficiary of economic power. The border between private incomes and public revenues is vague or as such does not exist. One other problem connected with the African elites is the so-called *psycho-existential complex*, meaning that for instance once Africans gained profound educational background from Western European universities, they succumbed to Occidentalism/westernisation. Due to this process, they disposed of their 'black soul' and were more prone to be like a European race. Thus, African identity somehow gave in to atrophy because a well-educated African is not understood by the majority of representatives of his/her own race. Looking for the alternatives, he/she is more willing to coexist with Europeans and cut off his/her cultural and ethnic roots. F. Fanon, a political activist and psychiatrist of Martinique origin, calls it *ambivalence of fidelity* to African values and ideas. As a result, many African leaders created their own

concepts, based on glorification of Negroid race, humanism, or *ujamaa* (meaning 'familyhood' in Swahili) to constrain the ongoing identity degradation. However, African elites were unsuccessful to combat totally the impact of westernisation processes.⁹

Types of African elites

Marek Szczepanski divides African elites into several categories, namely: political and administrative cadre, intellectual elite, officer elite, group of technocrats and managers, trade bourgeoisie (mainly wealthy merchants), and relatively rare industrial and financial bourgeoisie. The first mentioned group constitutes the upper class. They gained control over both political and economic machinery of state. The affiliation to elitist groups is very often associated with not only educational background or wealth but also with participation in the nationalist and independence fights. Even now, many fighters for freedom or decolonisation hold presidential or ministerial offices. Moreover, in some African countries (Nigeria, Ghana or Uganda), endemic rulers, tribal chieftains, ancestral nobilities and dynastic families play a significant role in the ruling process. The so-called *basis of huge prestige* (namely: the state, army, economic institutions) is highly monopolised and personalised, as the same representatives of leading groups move from the military to the government and later from administration to powerful economic/financial institutions.¹⁰

Half of African countries have undergone various processes of transition from single party and military rule to multiparty forms of politics. In the new geopolitics order this development has, however, tended to prevent scholars from addressing critical questions about the elites that exercise and wield political power on the continent beyond banal generalisations about (neo-) patrimonialism and the post-colony.¹¹

African perceptions of the EU

Based on studies of EU foreign policy, such as EU effectiveness¹² and Normative Power Europe,¹³ the chapter presents different aspects of African perceptions of the EU:

- 1 EU as a promoter of democracy and human rights;
- 2 EU trade policy with Economic Partnership Agreement and its role in transition economies;
- 3 EU engagement in peace and security matters.

Moreover, this chapter explores the perception of the European Union in some African countries, placing particular emphasis on the themes of European integration and the external policies of the EU. In order to capture the image of the EU in Africa, the perceptions from key elite groups in selected countries are explored.

The EU's external policy, in normative terms, assumes that it is not an expression of particular interests of individual states, but an articulation of the common conviction of the member states about what must be done in the face of this international challenge. For African elites economic nationalism is based on: 'empirically verifiable figures (. . .) which must carry conviction by means of rational arguments' rather than being based upon: 'metaphysical essences or subjective emotions', to quote Carreras.¹⁴

In Africa, the European Union is perceived both politically as the home of former colonial masters and the promoter of free trade and liberal democracy and economically as a body assisting the African Union in implementing its Agenda 2063 vision.¹⁵

The colonial and slavish past are deep-rooted reasons for the mutual mistrust still present in the relations between Europeans and Africans. In the eyes of the latter the EU countries are regarded as former colonial powers, and, although the independence was gained by African states decades ago, the colonialism has left a difficult legacy. The famous book written by Guyanese historian Walter Rodney titled 'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa',¹⁶ although a classic of anti-imperialist literature,¹⁷ is still present in the mode of thinking of both African mass and elites, who from time to time are invoking the right to obtain reparations and write off their debts.

As aptly stated by S. Schmidt,¹⁸ African perceptions of the EU and its role in Africa are ambivalent as the perception of the EU depends on the field of cooperation. Generally, the EU is seen as a normative actor fostering values (namely: democratic principles, human rights, and good governance) and a supportive force for African efforts to spread peace and security. As found by the previously mentioned author, various activities and instruments to foster peace and security are also understood by Africans as value driven. There is not much critique in principle against democracy and peace promotion from the African side. However, African elites and intellectuals do not accept conditionality as a policy instrument. The practice by the EU and other donors to withhold funds or to postpone the disbursement of ODA (Official Development Assistance) in cases of human rights violations is criticised by African governments and civil society as selective and inappropriate because it would hit the poor and not the perpetrators. Africans often argue that they should have a say in using the conditionality instrument and that violations of human rights and democratic principles are foremost an African problem which should be addressed by Africans.¹⁹ However, we might find different voices. According to Denis Mukwege²⁰, a medical doctor and activist from Congo:

'Development aid without conditions often rolls out the red carpet for dictators. And we know very well that such people let their citizens starve, cheat in elections, change the constitution and lose all European respect (. . .) Democracy and good governance are not purely European concepts. They belong to mankind's common heritage, which includes Africa (. . .) The future relations between Africa and Europe must be based on such values (. . .)'. 'If you look at some African countries today, their problems do not come from a lack of human or material resources, but from bad government'.

Moreover, Mukwege believes that Africa must free itself from the role of being the eternal beggar. There is a link between peace, security and development, but this is only possible if there is an established basis of democracy and good governance.²¹

The specific way in which the policies are conducted, however, is often criticised. As pointed out by S. Schmidt,²² the self-attributed image of the EU as a promoter of values is to a considerable extent shared by Africans. The foreign policy identity of the EU manifested in such roles as civilian power is supported and strengthened by Africans. But the findings in the trade sector are not corresponding to the EU's self-proclaimed foreign policy identity. In trade relations the perception of the EU policy is much more critical. The EU is seen as a protectionist and paternalistic power with limited will for compromise and respect for African interests. Africans argue that in trade negotiations the EU shows a different face: The EU is regarded as a tough negotiator driven by economic interests and using instruments of coercion. Critics come not only from governments, but also from the AU, sub-regional organisations and non-state actors.²³ For instance, AU leaders argue that the EU both overlooks the development demands of its African counterparts and also limits the EU market access for African products, thereby contributing to keeping African economies in a disadvantaged position. Moreover, they underline that notwithstanding the EU pressures for liberalisation agreements, the block itself has not yet dismantled protectionist measures against foreign products.²⁴ Furthermore, with comparison to China, according to African elites, the EU's trade agreements are by far too conditional. The EU, by including in its trade deals human rights and democracy clauses, is regarded as less attractive or competitive than the Chinese counterpart.²⁵

Besides, trade agreements (Economic Partnership Agreements) are regarded by some African officials as simply neo-colonial tools that use a *divide and conquer* tactic with African countries. For instance, the present Tanzanian President John Magufuli stated that 'after studying EPA he had realized that African countries would not benefit from it economically as its architects touted' and that this trade deal is 'bad for our country'.²⁶ Additionally, EPAs are perceived as a way to threaten the regional integration.²⁷ According to the former Nigerian Federal Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment, Olusegun Aganga:

Africa is on the rise. It is a very big and strategic market for any trading partner. That is what the EU wants from us but Africa must jealously protect what it has (. . .) We should leverage our abundant natural resources and large market to develop our industries; create jobs for our people; increase intra-African trade and achieve regional integration. We must not be in a hurry to give away what we have. We must not sign an agreement without first of all carrying out a robust economic analysis of the overall impact the agreement will have on the region, our children and future generations (. . .) The population of Africa is growing very rapidly. Statistics shows that more than 50 per cent of our population are between 18 and 30 years. If we sign the

EPA, how do we create the jobs that we require for our growing population; how do we stop the illegal migration of our youths to developed countries?²⁸

As observed by S. Schmidt,²⁹ the main reasons for the ambivalent perceptions are the different roles the EU performs and policy incoherencies between democracy and peace promotion on the one hand and trade policy on the other hand. The EU is neither perceived exclusively as a soft power nor as a neo-colonial power. The limited character of the EU military interventions shows that the EU is risk-averse and clearly not motivated by neo-colonialist or neo-imperialist ambitions. But from a realistic interpretation one could argue that the EU tries to increase its prestige and emphasise its actorness by military operations.

An interesting research was conducted by F. Keuleers on the basis of AfroBarometer data from 19 countries comparing the perceptions of the EU and China by the African public opinion. Firstly, it indicated that the EU is not very well known among sub-Saharan African populations. China has succeeded in achieving a clearer profile in almost all countries in the study, and has done this in a very limited period of time. Despite its longer engagement, the EU is struggling in terms of its visibility. Secondly, both the EU and China enjoy broad-based support as a development partner. Thirdly, African evaluations of the EU versus Chinese support do not at all reflect the antagonistic representations that are dominant in much of the scholarly literature. African populations appear to see engagement by traditional and emerging development partners as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.³⁰

Despite the 2008 global financial crisis, in Africa there are the world's fastest-growing economies, such as Mozambique, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Rwanda. Their growth is phenomenal considering the small base from which it comes. The EU, while helping the African countries, appears to be reacting to an engagement in Africa by other global actors: China, Turkey, USA, and Russia.

EU policy in Africa is based on the European experience. The rollback of the state from health care, education and other essential sectors has slowed economic development in many African countries. And privatisation of key services like water and electricity added the next setback to poor African countries which relied on the state for providing their livelihoods.

In November 2017 the fifth African Union (AU)–European Union (EU) summit was held in Abidjan, Ivory Coast,³¹ under the central theme: 'Investing in youth for a sustainable future'. The European and African leaders adopted a joint declaration outlining common priorities for the EU–Africa partnership in four strategic areas, namely: economic opportunities for youth; peace and security; mobility and migration; and cooperation on governance. Opinions of the meetings' outcomes are diverse. According to Tighisti Amare and Paul Melly from the Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs: 'the EU continues to set the agenda, often fails to consult its African partners and remains stuck in a post-colonial mentality' and 'Building a new Africa–EU relationship based on mutual respect and collective decision-making presents a huge challenge'.³²

According to the Tanzanian Jenerali Ulimwengu, a political analyst and regular contributor to the *Deutsche Welle*: 'It is all well to have countries and governments abroad who are willing to underwrite your development and other expenditure, but one has to always worry about over-dependency on this kind of funding. It is not only that this kind of support is essentially unsustainable, simply because it flows from the forces that Africa cannot hope to control, and it may dry up just when it is most needed and there is no fallback plan. Past experience has shown this to be true, and it is indeed extraordinary that African leaders have allowed themselves back into this kind of situation'.³³

It is crucial for African governments, sub-regional and regional organisations to closely work with foreign powers in creating future development plans. African states should decide what they want from the countries investing in their economies and how this policy must be developed.

Western assistance was long conditioned by colonial masters. The early aid strategy focused on rescuing 'backward Africa' from poverty and disease. However, critics rightly point out that aid has prevented African growth by creating its overdependence on aid.

The end of the Cold War in the 1990s brought a resurgence of internationalism which sought to bring trade and aid together into a developmental framework. The 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) became the guide for Africa's future. The MDGs were to be achieved through a consolidated global effort. Indicators were to be periodically revived to measure development. At the heart of MDGs is the notion that the most peaceful and stable democratic governments can register substantial development.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals are the successors of the MDGs. There are 17 goals with 169 targets crucial to African states. Generally African countries performed poorly in the MDGs. Only Botswana and Equatorial Guinea met the first goal of halving the number of people living below the poverty line. Experts were of the opinion that to meet some of the goals, African states would have needed to register annual growth rates of 7%. This could be achieved only by acceleration of the African development. That is why EU engagement is essential for the accomplishment of these goals. African underdevelopment has long been a topic of contentious debate at different EU forums. Calls for reparations for colonialism and the scrapping of African debt are often voiced at different levels of the EU-African cooperation.

Conclusions

Agenda 2063 is the African Union's blueprint for the future based on inclusive growth and sustainable development. It calls for an integrated Africa guided by Pan-African ideals: an Africa shaped by good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and rule of law; a peaceful and secure Africa; an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics; an Africa whose development is people-driven with a key role for women and the

youth; a strong, united Africa that can be an influential global player. These strategies were worked out taking into consideration the EU cooperation and ideals.

Africa needs to strengthen its ties with other global powers, among which the leading EU countries play an important role. Through these relations, African states can benefit from increased investment and cooperation within multilateral organisations like the World Trade Organisation and United Nations Trade and Development Conference.

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