

EU-Southern Africa Relations in the Post-Lomé Era: An Assessment of EPAs as a Development Proposal for the Region?

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In recent years the EU has substantially changed its development cooperation relations with its former colonies united in the group of ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific), most of whose members belong to sub-Saharan Africa. The Lomé Conventions (I-IV) established since 1975 the framework for the relations between the former metropolis and colonies on the basis, inter alia, of non-reciprocal trade relations. But the Cotonou Agreement and the subsequent negotiation of the EPAs (Economic Partnership Agreements), still ongoing, has taken reciprocity as one of its basic principles, through the future creation of free trade areas between the EU and previously established regional groupings of ACP countries. At the same time, together with the reciprocal liberalization of trade in goods, other controversial issues such as services, capital, intellectual property rights, government procurement, etc. are also being included in the negotiations.

In this context, this paper aims to show the changes and potential consequences in the relations between the EU and one of the regions being most affected by the negotiations and the future implementation of the framework of the EPAs, namely Southern Africa. The main arguments for changing the previous scheme, and for the development of a new discourse and practice by the EU, seem to clash with the proposals and demands of various European and Southern African social movements and NGOs, as well as with those of some governments in the region. Therefore, it is certainly pertinent to ask to what extent these new agreements promoted by the EU are an appropriate tool for fostering development in Southern Africa or coherent with the principles of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership. The potential impact of this new framework of economic relations on the development of the region is at the heart of the recent debates that this paper tries to explore.