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The European Union and the Promotion of Regional
Integration: A Viable Approach to the Resolution of
Regional Conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa?

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Abstract

The European Union has been seen as a new type of 'normative power', aiming at diffusing its values through its external policy. The EU influence in Sub-Saharan Africa is particularly worth noting. The EU is historically a leading partner for Africa and it presents itself to the African continent as a successful model of conflict transformation by regional integration. The European institutions have spent a considerable amount of material resources and diplomatic efforts for promoting regionalism in Africa and for encouraging the transition of African regional organizations from a security culture of 'non interference' to one of 'non indifference'. Yet, the expectation that the promotion of regional integration will contribute to the resolution of regional conflicts in Africa faces two sets of challenges. First, the historical, political and economic context of Africa may not be conducive to the success of regional cooperation as a conflict resolution strategy. Second, the effectiveness and the coherence of the EU's promotion of regional integration and regional conflict resolution in Africa are disputed. This paper presents REGIOCONF, a new collective research project aiming at investigating systematically the EU's engagement in addressing regional conflicts worldwide, particularly by promoting regional integration. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the project will address the cases of Sahel and the Great Lakes region.

Introduction

The persistence of regional conflicts is a core challenge for Africa. Many current and past African wars, although conventionally seen as 'civil wars', have in fact a notable regional

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dimension and have triggered violence well beyond the borders of a single nation-state (Ansorg 2011; Söderbaum and Tavares 2009).

A strategy to tackle the challenge posed by regional conflicts is the promotion of regional cooperation and regional integration. As a matter of fact, regional organizations have experienced a revival since the beginning of the new millennium in Africa. This trend has been to a large extent driven by the need to address violent conflicts, notably through initiatives such as the creation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA).

The growth of African regionalism has been encouraged by both the example and the active support of the European Union (EU). The EU has not only acted as a model for regional and sub-regional integration schemes, in Africa and in other parts of the world. It has also in the first place spent considerable material resources and diplomatic efforts on promoting regionalism worldwide. Moreover, African regional conflicts have assumed a particular relevance for European institutions, which has resulted in the EU to get directly involved in conflict management and conflict prevention in the continent (Olsen 2009; Piccolino 2010).

Regional conflict management mechanisms (CMM) involve short term efforts directly aimed at addressing regional conflicts, such as mediation and peace support operations. Regional cooperation and integration may also be promoted with ostensible goals other than resolving violent conflicts (i.e. trade liberalization, free circulation of people). However, behind regional integration initiatives, there is an expectation, to a good extent based on the EU experience, that, by fostering constructive links between neighbouring countries, it may help in the long term building lasting peace. Is it, however, the EU path of 'transforming conflicts through integration' exportable? To what extent conflict transformation through regional integration can be promoted by an outsider like the EU? Moreover, does the EU practices what it preaches or has it in reality shown little attention for the regional dimension of African conflicts?

This paper is written as part of the research project: 'The EU, Regional Conflicts and the Promotion of Regional Cooperation: A successful strategy for a global challenge?' (REGIOCONF). The aim of the REGIOCONF project is to address the EU's role in the transformation of regional conflicts through the promotion of regional integration in a comparative and comprehensive manner in four different regions of the world: Sub-Saharan Africa, the Mediterranean, South America and East Asia.

The first part of this paper defines regional conflicts and discusses the potential of regional integration with regards to conflict transformation. The second paragraph retraces the

evolution of regionalism in Sub-Saharan Africa and the third part addresses the main critiques raised against regional cooperation in Africa and its promotion by the EU. The last paragraph presents the operationalization of the research project and the choice of two African case studies: regional conflicts in the Sahel and in the Great Lakes Region.

Regional conflicts, regional integration and conflict transformation

With the end of the Cold War, there has been a growing recognition that regional dynamics have become increasingly important in shaping international security. International relations theory has tried to account for the importance of the regional dimension (Emmanuel Adler and Barnett 1998; Buzan, Waever, and De Wilde 1998; Buzan and Wæver 2003) and, empirically, peace and conflict scholars have analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively regional conflict dynamics.[1]

In spite of this interest for the regional dimension of security and conflicts, there is no agreed definition about what a regional conflict is and what differentiates it from an internal war or a global conflict. The REGIOCONF project defines regional conflicts by integrating two different criteria: the *actors* involved and the *issues* involved. So, a conflict is 'regional' when it is inter-state and involves more than two states in a given region, or it is intra-state but involves the extensive implication of regional external actors. Alternatively, a conflict can be defined as regional when its causes, symptoms and impact affect in an important manner more than one state in a given region.

At the time of the Cold War, regional conflicts were 'globalized', as they were seen as an extension of the global Cold War, even when their roots were internal. In the post-Cold War era, this attitude has been replaced by a general belief that violent conflicts should find some kind of negotiated solution and by the development of international mechanisms aiming at addressing conflicts (Clapham 1998; Duffield 2001; Paris 2004). The EU has become an important member of the international society of 'peacemakers'. Both through its development cooperation policy and its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) it aims to contribute to the prevention and resolution of violent conflicts around the world.

International efforts to foster peace may intervene at very different levels. Conflict management includes short term actions aiming at containing a conflict and reducing its destructiveness, such as the deployment of peacekeepers or the adoption of sanctions. Conflict resolution and conflict transformation imply a deep seated change of attitude, where conflict

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[1] For a literature review, see Ansorg 2011.

parties do not just find a bargain over their current priorities but change them, effectively stopping to see each others as antagonists (Diez, Stetter, and Albert 2006; Galtung 1969; Lederach 1997).

What role can regional cooperation and integration play, both at the level of the management and of the resolution of regional conflicts? Regional organizations can be expressly established for security purposes or can develop Conflict Management Mechanisms (CMM) independently by the initial rationale for their creation. The role of regional organizations in conflict management is recognized by the UN Charter, although this subordinates decisions over the use of force to the Security Council (United Nations 1945). However, regional integration and cooperation can also shape regional security less directly (Khan 2008). The European Economic Community/EU is a prominent example: in spite of the fact that the organization has lacked an explicit mandate on peace and security for most of its history, enhancing peace in Europe was one of the main objectives of its founders. The organization has contributed to the transformation of European conflicts not by setting up mediation bodies or peace operations but by indirect mechanisms, such as the pooling of key economic resources, the reinforcement of economic interdependence and the diffusion of a democratic culture.

There exist much policy-oriented literature that explores the pros and cons of regional CMM. Key arguments advanced in favour of regional conflict management include the capacity of regional organizations to provide greater local knowledge and support the development of a greater regional consensus (Crocker, Hampson, and Aall 2007; Diehl and Lepgold 2003; Peck 1998; Thakur 2006). The literature on regional CMM has however certain limitations. It often focuses on specific forms of conflict intervention (peacekeeping, mediation, etc.), with a 'problem-solving' approach (Cox 1981), and neglects more general theoretical debates about regionalism and regionalization and their impact over inter-state and intra-state regional conflicts (Söderbaum and Tavares 2009). By consequence, it also neglects to address the potential long-term and indirect effects of regional cooperation schemes not explicitly focused on conflict management.

There is a plausible argument for assuming that regional integration would play a positive role in conflict transformation (Diez et al. 2013). Regional integration can enhance interdependencies between states, it can create dependable expectations that conflicts are resolved peacefully and it can establish institutional mechanisms to build confidence and settle disputes through rule-based action (Haftel 2007). At a minimal level, regional integration may be a channel to manage conflict through the institutionalization of relations

between conflict parties. At a more ambitious level, regional integration is viewed as a recipe to address the root causes of the conflict itself.

The assumption of a positive effect of regional integration informs the external policy of the EU (Diez et al. 2013), notably in its relationships with developing countries (EU 1995; 2008). The EU openly states that 'regional integration is an effective means of achieving prosperity, peace and security'[2] and the promotion of regional integration is central to the EU´s idea to foster 'security, stability and prosperity at the EU's borders and beyond' (Börzel and Risse 2009, 5). The promotion of regionalism is to a great extent a 'distinct European idea' (Bicchi 2006; Börzel and Risse 2009; Grugel 2004) and it has been characterized as one of the core pillars of the EU´s normative power (Emanuel Adler and Crawford 2006; Hänggi 2003; Santander 2005).

The EU promotes regional integration deliberately, through instruments such as interregional cooperation agreements as well as interregional dialogues. The aim of the EU in applying these instruments is the support of 'endogenous processes of regional integration' (Börzel and Risse 2009, 11). But the EU shapes regional cooperation in the rest of the world also less directly. The REGIOCONF project identifies four possible 'paths of influence' in the promotion of regionalism. The EU exercises its influence through *compulsion*, the provision of conditional incentives and sanctions. But it can also engage in a *social learning* process through dialogue and interaction with its counterparts. It can also bring changes by providing new formal and informal rules, a process that can be called *changing context*. Finally, *model setting* entails the reconstruction of conflict parties' identities by drawing lessons and deliberately emulating the European integration experience.

Officially, the EU acknowledges that 'the European model, shaped by the continent's history, is not easily transferable nor necessarily appropriate for other regions' (Commission of the European Union 1995, 8). However, in practice, its external policy is to a good extent shaped by a 'one size fit all' or even a 'our size fit all' (Bicchi 2006) approach, where the EU tends to project its own model to other regions. Can the expectation of a positive link between regional integration and conflict transformation hold in other regions where the historical, political and economic context is very different, such as Sub-Saharan Africa?

There are in fact some arguments that may undermine the belief that the EU's promotion of regional integration may contribute to conflict resolution in other regions. On the one hand, the type of regional integration promoted by the EU may not match the

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[2] See EU official website: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/economic-support/regional-integration/index_en.htm (June 14, 2013).

challenges faced by non-European states, particularly economically underdeveloped weak states, and thus be ineffective. EU support is channelled through existing formal regional organizations, presuming that they are capable to play the role attributed to them by their founding agreements, or that they will become so with external help. This assumption may not be applicable in a context where informal dynamics prevail and where formal institutions are notoriously weak (Bach 1999, 2005; Bøås, Marchand, and Shaw 1999). Another problem relates to the type of conflicts that regional integration is supposed to prevent. When the EU is regarded as a successful model of conflict resolution through integration, this is usually done with reference to the inter-state rivalries that have punctuated Europe's history, particularly the one between France and Germany. But what can be said with respect to Sub-Saharan Africa where inter-state conflicts have been rare but internal political instability is widespread (Herbst 2000; Jackson 1990; Kacowicz 1997)? There are in fact several mechanisms through which regional integration may contribute to the resolution of internal conflicts. First, regional CMM may be mandated not only to address external threats and solve inter-state disputes but also to help restore stability in member states under certain conditions. Second, regional integration may help reinforce shared norms and institutions that contribute not only to international but also to internal peace and stability, in particular democratic governance (Steves 2001). This mechanism is particularly relevant to the EU's 'normative power', which encompasses the promotion of regional integration and democracy at the same time and that encourages regional organizations in becoming a vector of democracy promotion. Finally, the distinction between intra-state and inter-state wars is often blurred in practice: many regional conflicts are in fact internationalized civil wars, where neighbouring countries intervene openly or covertly in support of one of the internal factions. Thus, the same mechanisms by which regional integration may contribute to the prevention of inter-state regional conflicts may also help with solving intra-state conflicts that have a regional dimension. However, it is also possible that the casual arrow goes in the opposite sense. If the states that want to engage in regional integration exhibit a high degree of internal instability, this may undermine effective regional integration and its conflict resolution potential. Large-scale internal violence may render dependable expectations of peaceful change unattainable and prevent states from achieving a sense of collective identity and mutual trust (Nathan 2006).

Second, regional integration can have *unintended effects* that may foster regional spill over dynamics and contribute to the diffusion of instability, rather than the resolution of conflicts. The abatement of obstacles to the free circulation of goods and people, for instance, can favour illegal traffics and terrorism (Onwuka 1982). The intensification of contacts

between neighbouring countries can encourage dialogue but also foster rivalries for regional hegemony and increase occasions for confrontation and conflict. Economic integration may not deliver the expected benefits to countries whose economies are underdeveloped and mainly oriented towards the export of primary goods. In fact when differences in the level of development are significant, trade liberalization may affect the weakest economies and contribute to economic downturn that can have a negative impact on regional peace (Khan 2008). The dismantlement of custom barriers in particular entails important financial losses for many African already weak states, whose fiscal systems are highly dependent on import and export taxes.

What empirical evidence do we have in support of the hypothesis that the promotion of regional integration contributes to the resolution of regional conflicts? So far, research has focused on the impact of European integration and the prospects for conflict resolution in the EU neighbourhood (Diez, Stetter, and Albert 2006; Tocci 2004, 2007; Coppieters et al. 2004). The REGIOCONF project aims at widening the geographical focus, looking at regions outside the Europe's near abroad. The next two paragraphs focus on regionalism in Sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting those aspects of Sub-Saharan Africa's regionalism that may support or undermine the hypothesis of a positive impact. There are here two related set of questions that need to be addressed. First, are formal regional schemes the most appropriate way to tackle regional conflicts in Africa and to address transnational concerns more in general? Does formal regionalism in Sub-Saharan Africa risk to be undermined by non conducive historical, political, economical and geographical conditions? Second, is Europe really serious in promoting regional integration in Africa? Is the EU approach to regional integration promotion viable?

Regional cooperation and integration in Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa's regionalism exhibits contradictory trends. On the one hand, since decolonization the continent has seen the birth of a large number of regional cooperation and integration initiatives. On the other hand, African regionalism is often decried as ineffective or inappropriate to the challenges that it is supposed to meet. The number of regional organizations itself, rather than testifying the vitality of regionalism, is often seen as a sign of the incoherence and ineffectiveness of African regional organizations, some of which have little existence besides their founding treaties (Fioramonti 2013; Franke 2007; Møller 2009a; UNECA 2006).

Only two current African regional arrangements may qualify as examples of 'regional integration' (Bach 2006). These are the Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA), which includes eight West African countries, all former French colonies but Guinea Bissau, and the Southern African Customs Union/Common Monetary Area (SACU/CMA), whose members are Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland. Both consist in a monetary union and custom union. Indeed, SACU is the oldest custom union in the world, dating back to 1910. A significant common feature of UEMOA and SACU is that they both originate in colonial arrangements. Their genesis has little in common with the ideology of Panafricanism and the expressed aim to encourage self-reliance that have underscored the birth of Africa's main continental organizations, the African Union (AU) and its antecedent, the Organization of the African Unity (OAU). These schemes are also only loosely related with the EU's efforts to promote regional integration, insofar as they predate European integration, although in the case of UEMOA the automatic convertibility of the CFA Franc with the French Franc and later the Euro may have contributed to the endurance of the organization.

The other African regional organizations can be seen as instances of regional cooperation conducted at the inter-governmental level, although some recent developments may signal an increasing involvement of these organizations in matters once seen as falling under the scope of their members' sovereign prerogatives. The most important example is the continental-wide AU, which has replaced in 2002 the OAU. At the sub-continental level, eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have been recognized by the AU as the 'building blocks' of African economic and security integration: these are the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS/CEEAC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and, outside Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). Besides the RECs and the two monetary unions, many other sub-regional arrangements have been concluded in Sub-Saharan Africa but some exist only on paper or are highly ineffective.

The high number of regional arrangements means that almost all Sub-Saharan African countries are affiliated with more than one sub-regional organizations (UNECA 2006). These patterns of overlapping membership and uneven development of sub-regional organizations renders the African integration process confuse and sometimes incoherent. The reasons for

this situation are in part historical. Africa has experienced at least two great waves of regionalisation, one associated with de-colonisation and the second with the end of the Cold War (Fioramonti 2013; Franke 2007). During the first wave, the contrast between radical and pro-Western African countries dominated the debate on regionalism. The formers, forming the so-called Casablanca group, insisted on Panafricanism and on African unity, while the latter, organized through the Monrovia group of states, preferred a loose continental cooperation and defended national sovereignty and post-colonial boundaries. This opposition was complemented by other cleavages, such as the divide between former British and French colonies, particularly in West Africa (Franke 2007), and by personalized rivalries for regional leadership, which contributed to the fragmentation of African regionalism. Thus, post-colonial African regional arrangements were often created in opposition the one to the other and based on very different ideological and political grounds.

Since the end of the Cold War, however, two trends have emerged. First, there has been a considerable, although still insufficient, effort to rationalize the African regional architecture. Second, African organizations, most of which were born with a focus on trade and economic cooperation, have increasingly invested themselves in regional conflict management. The most visible manifestation of these trends have been the conclusion of the Abuja treaty in 1991 and the creation of the AU.

The Abuja treaty aims, in the span of forty years, at creating an African Economic Community, consisting of a single market where people and capital will be able to circulate freely, in a monetary union overseen by an African central bank and a Pan-African Parliament with supra-national powers. In the short and mid term, it reposes over the strengthening of economic integration within the existing sub-regional RECs, some of which are in the process of establishing new custom unions.

The other innovation in post-Cold War African regionalism has been the gradual involvement of African regional organizations in conflict management. This trend has been to a large extent a direct response to the wave of regional conflicts that Africa has experienced in the early '90s, as a consequences of the fall of the international order shaped by the Cold War. ECOMOG, the first peace support operation set up by an African regional organization, was launched by ECOWAS in 1990 in response to the conflict in Liberia, at a time when the organization still lacked a formal mandate to carry out military missions (Adebajo 2002). Following ECOWAS, IGAD, ECCAS, SADC, EAC, AMU and COMESA have included peace and conflicts within their mandates (AU 2004) and some of them have led their own peace support operations (Møller 2009a).

At a continental level, the creation of the AU has marked a decisive shift with respect to the implication of African regional organizations in conflict management. Although the OAU had established in 1993 a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, the AU has a considerably broader mandate. The AU Constitutive Act lists among the principles that are supposed to guide the new organization 'the establishment of a common defence policy for the African continent' (AU 2000, art4.d) and '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' (AU 2000, art4.h). Its Peace and Security Council, established by a separate protocol in 2002, has a mandate encompassing early warning and preventive diplomacy, peace-making, peace support operations, post-conflict reconstruction and humanitarian action and disaster management (AU 2002, art.6). Through the concept of the APSA, the AU has also tried to bring under a single framework the regional conflict management initiatives undertaken by the RECs. The APSA involves the creation of an African stand by force, composed by sub-regional brigades provided by the RECs (AU 2004).

The evolution of the AU's political and security culture is also worth noting (Williams 2007). The original security culture of the OAU emphasized the principle of non interference and the old organization was not concerned with democratization and the respect of human rights. By contrast, the AU has endorsed a policy of 'condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of governments' (AU 2000, art. 4p) and, through its aforementioned article 4h, the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which authorizes it to intervene in its member states, including by the use of force, in extreme circumstances. Furthermore, the AU has brought under its cap the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which aims not only at promoting economic development but also at reinforcing good governance in Africa, notably through the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), a voluntary self-monitoring exercise where countries are evaluated in the fields of democracy and political governance, economic governance, corporate governance and socio-economic development. In some respect thus, the AU seems to be shifting from a doctrine of regime security to one of human security and to endorse democracy both as an end in itself and as a mean to promote peace and development. Yet, most members of the AU are not fully fledged democracies and, while it can sanction unconstitutional changes of government, the AU has the same inclusive membership of the OAU, where states are not prevented from joining the organization by the nature of their political regime. This represent a significant difference between the African the EU's integration process (Fioramonti 2013).

The development of regional conflict management in Africa has raised many expectations. In addition to the benefits that are supposed to stem from regional conflict management in general – such as better knowledge of the region and burden-sharing – some of these expectations stem from Africa's history of colonialism and marginalization. Notably, the growth of regional organizations and the development of 'African solutions' has been seen as a way to prevent undue foreign interference and neocolonialism and encourage African self-reliance (Gebrewold 2010; Møller 2009b; Söderbaum and Tavares 2009; Williams 2008). For some authors, the evolution of the APSA and the growth of security cooperation are even the sign that, although Sub-Saharan Africa and its sub-regions cannot yet be described as 'security communities' according to Karl Deutsch's original definition (Deutsch 1968), a process that may lead to the establishment of security communities is in motion (Franke 2010; Shaw and Nyang 2000; Söderbaum 2009).

How important has been the influence of the EU's promotion of regional integration on African regional organizations? To what extent can the EU be credited for the reinforcement of regional cooperation in Africa in the last two decades? Since the creation of the European Economic Community (ECC), European institutions' relations with Sub-Saharan Africa have been particularly intense.

Development and trade cooperation constitutes the oldest form of interregional cooperation between the EU and Africa. Through the format of the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group, relations between the European institution and Sub-Saharan Africa stretch back to the Yaoundé agreement of 1963 to the current Cotonou agreement, concluded in 2000 for twenty years and subject to mid term renegotiations in 2005 and 2010. Since the conclusion of the Cotonou Agreement, the EU explicitly includes the promotion of regional integration among the objectives of the EU-ACP partnership. While providing for the gradual introduction of a free trade regime between the EU and the ACP countries, the agreement enshrines the principle that economic integration between the two regions must be preceded by regional economic integration among the ACP countries themselves. It also affirms that development cooperation shall contribute to endogenous regional integration and cooperation, both at the continental and sub-regional level (European Union 2006, art. 28).[3] The 2010 revised text is even more explicit in stating the commitment to foster regional cooperation and integration, which is included among the fundamental principles of the agreement (European Union 2012, art.2). Following the provisions of the Cotonou agreement, Regional Strategy

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[3] In the 2006 consolidated version of the agreement published by the European Commission, amendments made in 2005 are highlighted in red. The passage quoted comes from the original 2000 text.

Papers and Regional Indicative Programme for each African sub-region are negotiated in the framework of the European Development Fund (EDF). They aim to finance initiatives aimed at strengthening regional integration and they include direct contributions to sub-regional organizations, with the most conspicuous recipients being ECOWAS in West Africa and SADC in Southern Africa.[4]

Although regional conflicts were not originally a focus of Europe-ACP cooperation, political and security concerns have gradually been included since the end of the Cold War. Since the fourth Lomé convention, concluded in 1989, democracy and human rights are listed among the fundamental principles of EU-ACP cooperation. The Cotonou agreement incorporates conflict prevention and conflict resolution as part of the political dialogue between Europe and its counterparts (European Union 2006, art.8.6). The 2010 revised text specifically acknowledges the role of regional organizations in promoting peace and security and provides for their inclusion in the political dialogue (European Union 2012, art. 8.5).

The creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) have provided the EU with other instruments to promote regional cooperation in Africa. Since 2000, the Africa-EU summits and the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (EU and AU 2007) have provided a new platform of dialogue between the EU and the AU. In the framework of the Africa-EU dialogue, a Partnership on Trade and Regional integration and a Partnership on Peace and Security have been launched. Through the latter, the EU supports the AU's and RECs' efforts to build an African Peace and Security Architecture trough its African Peace Facility (APF). The primary aim of the facility is to finance regionally-led Peace Support Operations (PSO), with currently 600 million euro earmarked.[5] The APF also contributes to capacity building initiatives linked to the operationalization of the APSA and the strengthening of the Africa-EU dialogue and includes funding for early responses mechanisms. Since the beginning of the new millennium, the EU has furthermore become one major actor in peacemaking and peacebuilding in Africa, both through its development and humanitarian aid and CSDP military and civilian missions. When confronted to specific conflicts or crisis in Africa, the EU typically pledges to champion a 'regional approach' to tackling these crises and advocates the adoption of regional peacemaking in its dialogue with the states and sub-regional organizations involved. The promotion of a 'regional approach' may entail the adoption of region-based strategies as a

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[4] See http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/acp/overview/rsp/rsp_10th_edf_en.htm (19 May 2013) for the current strategy papers.
[5] Figures come from the EU official website: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/where/acp/regional-cooperation/peace/index_en.htm (19 May 2013).

basis for EU policy in the region or efforts to revitalize regional cooperation institutions and turn them into a conflict management instrument. In the Great Lakes region, where the EU has been involved as a key actor in both peace enforcement and peacebuilding, one of the EU's first moves has been to nominate a Special Representative with a regional mandate and to advocate the organization of a regional conference (Piccolino 2010). More recently, the EU has been developing regional strategies to address regional instability in the Sahel and in the Horn of Africa.[6]

The initiatives outlined represent a direct attempt of the EU at strengthening regional cooperation in Africa through financial and technical contributions. Yet, the intensity of EU-Africa's ties suggests that the influence of the EU manifests also indirectly. Although regional cooperation in Africa retains significant differences from the European integration process (Fioramonti 2013) there is evidence that AU officials look at the EU as a model of achieving peace through integration (Fioramonti 2009). The EU model has been invoked by African officials during the transition from the OAU to the AU in 2002 and is more generally mentioned as a reference from which the AU should draw lessons (Fioramonti 2009). The extent to which the AU and sub-regional organizations have mimicked the EU's organs is worth noting. Limiting the focus to the AU, its Assembly and the Executive Council remind, in both their composition and functions, the European Council and the Council of the European Union. The Commission and the Pan-African Parliament also take inspiration from the EU institutional model. Similarly, as Daniel Bach notices, the process of creation of the African Economic Community 'is evocative of a quasi-federal system inspired by the experience of Europe, although this is not explicitly mentioned' (Bach 2006: 4).

The role of the EU has manifested also in altering the normative settings that underpins African integration in the field of conflict management, encouraging the shift from 'non-interference to non-indifference' (Williams 2007). The influence of the EU in this domain is less easy to detect, because the EU shares the role of norm entrepreneur with other international actors. Indeed, as Paul Williams observes 'foreigners did more than just finance 'African solutions'; some of them encouraged the OAU's members to subscribe to the international discourses on human rights and liberal democratization' (Williams 2007, 270). Benedikt Franke and Romain Esmenejaud go as far as stating that 'external actors like the US and France, but also the United Nations and the European Union, have essentially shaped the discussion about the meaning of 'African security' in their own image' (Franke and

Esmenejaud 2008: 149), by introducing non traditional understandings of security, such as 'human security' and 'new threats' in the African debate. Although these notions are shared by other Western actors, it is important to stress the extent to which have been adopted and promoted by the EU (Glasius and Kaldor 2005; Kostopoulos 2006; Sira, Grans 2010). It can be thus argued that the EU's role in encouraging the AU to change its understanding of security has been important.

The limits of conflict resolution through integration in Africa

In spite of the progresses realized by Sub-Saharan African countries in the field of regional cooperation, African regional institutions still manifest a series of limits that may hamper their potentiality to address regional conflicts. This paragraph summarizes the main critiques to African regionalism and discusses their possible implications for the EU's efforts to promote conflict resolution through regional integration.

In the economic domain, many of the preconditions of the EU's successful integration process are lacking in Africa. In Europe, the establishment of a common market has brought enhanced prosperity and the reinforcement of economic interdependence, which have both contributed to regional peace. However, differently from European economies at the beginning of the European integration process, African economies are small, not highly interdependent and oriented towards trade exchanges with the industrialized North, rather than among each others. Existing RECs have not proved very effective in stimulating formal intra-African trade. Intra-REC trade in Sub-Saharan Africa ranges from 33% of exports within SADC and CEN-SAD (probably attributable to the large size of the organization, rather than to its dynamism) to a dismal 1% of exports within ECCAS (UNECA 2010). Moreover, formal intra-regional trade is overwhelmingly dominated by a small number of countries, such as South Africa in the case of SADC and Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire within ECOWAS. The record of existing custom and monetary unions is equally disappointing: for instance, in spite of the advanced level of integration, exports towards member states still represent less than 10% of UEMOA exports (UNECA 2010).

Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe also differ radically from the point of view of economic and political governance. A number of authors have argued that regional organizations in Africa – and their efforts to emulate the EU model – are undermined by the weakness of formal institutions and the importance of political and economic informal dynamics in Sub-Saharan Africa (Bach 1999, 2005; Bøås, Marchand, and Shaw 1999; Söderbaum and Taylor 2008). These authors not only criticize African formal regionalism but

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also previous research focusing on the development of formal institutions and inspired to the study of regionalism in Europe (Bøås, Marchand, and Shaw 1999; Söderbaum and Taylor 2008). For these authors the most important regional phenomena in Sub-Saharan Africa, such informal economic activities, illicit trade flows and warlordism (Bøås, Marchand, and Shaw 1999), are happening in the informal realm. The analysis differs with respect to the nature of the interaction between formal regionalism and informal regionalization. Daniel Bach has argued that, rather than being complementary, the two processes are opposite and informal dynamics undermines formal integration: for instance, smuggling thrives over illiberal trade policies and high custom tariffs and citizens and state officials involved in smuggling develop an interest in opposing trade liberalization (Bach 1999). Less pessimistically, other authors argue that informal dynamics could contribute to regional integration if regional organizations were able to reconnect to them and account for them in their development plans (Bøås, Marchand, and Shaw 1999). They however observe that up to date this has seldom happened.

A slightly different general critique of African regionalism is advanced by Richard Gibb. According to Gibb 'both traditional and new regionalism approaches fail to evaluate critically the internal dynamics of the African state and linkages between those dynamics and external relations' (Gibb 2009: 715). He seeks to explain the gap between the number of regional arrangements concluded in Africa and their modest record by focusing on the post-colonial African state and on the nature of African states' sovereignty. For him, neopatrimonial African states regard formal regionalism as a way to booster their legitimacy and reinforce their sovereignty, while not being seriously interested in its success in addressing development and security concerns. In fact, 'belonging to a formal, state-structured, regional organisation is interpreted as an important symbol of the virility of sovereignty, as regional integration is based on and presupposes formal state sovereignty. Regionalism is seen, both internationally and locally, to confirm state sovereignty and regime legitimacy… Thus regional integration, so long as it does not promote democracy, the sharing of sovereignty, or development outside of clientelism, supports the neo-patrimonial state' (Gibb 2009, 716).

While these critiques refer to regionalism in Africa in general terms, a second strand of literature addresses the viability and comparative advantages of regional CMM in Africa and criticizes the over-optimistic belief in the potentialities of 'African solutions'.[7] First, African regional organizations have been accused to be under-resourced and technically unprepared to

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[7] For a more comprehensive summary of critiques and a rebuttal, see Franke 2005.

the huge tasks of conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction (Williams 2008). The uneven development of African RECs and the lack of a hegemonic state able to lead regional peace operations in Central and Eastern Africa are also cited as causes of concern (Møller 2009a). Second, the rise of regional conflict management is accused to undermine the authority of the UN and of the Security Council and to distract attention from supporting UN-led conflict management initiatives, particularly UN peace operations (Söderbaum and Tavares 2009; Williams 2008). Closely related to this argument is the assertion that 'African problems', including regional conflicts, are in reality 'global problems', which need be addressed at the global level (Gebrewold 2010; Williams 2008). Other critiques focus over the political implications of giving to regional organizations the primary responsibility of African security. The 'African solution' approach is said to be based on an idealized version of 'Africa' as a unitary actor, neglecting ideological and political differences and rivalries between African states (Söderbaum and Tavares 2009; Williams 2007). Rather than being considered as an asset, proximity is seen as implicating the danger to put in charge of regional conflict management actors that are too close to the conflict to be neutral and not to have a stake in it. The failure of the AU to deal with Ethiopia's implication in regional conflicts in the Horn of Africa (Williams 2008) and the Nigeria-led ECOMOG intervention in Liberia, which has been accused to engage in war crimes and postpone the resolution of the crisis (Adebajo 2002; Ellis 1999), are examples that are brought in support of this criticism.

A core theoretical debate focus on whether a process of convergence of values, norms and identities on security issues is really taking place at the sub-regional and continental level and if the AU or the RECs can be really said to constitute 'security communities' in construction (Adler and Barnett 1998; Deutsch 1968). It has been argued that the codification of new norms on the responsibility to protect and opposition to unconstitutional changes of government by the AU hide the fact that member states have interiorized them unevenly (Williams 2007), that many of them still privilege regime security over human security and are interested in regional conflict management only as far as it can secure national leaders and help obtaining foreign aid and military training (Williams 2008). Thus, for instance, Ian Taylor and Paul Williams argue, with respect to ECOWAS, that West African leaders share a political culture based on neo-patrimonialism and clientelism and that 'future scenarios for ECOWAS living up to a security culture that promotes human security are doomed to be theoretical rather than practical as long as its members are primarily interested in preserving regime security and their exclusive access to the state's resources' (Taylor and Williams 2008, 145). Barriers to the diffusion of human security may in part stem from structural

constraints, notably the persistence of internal instability in many African post-colonial states, which reinforces the preoccupation of their rulers for regime security. Looking at Southern Africa and the Great Lakes region and at Africa's history of proxy wars fought among neighbours, Laurie Nathan argues that, in spite of the process of intensification of security cooperation, structural domestic instability prevents African regions to attain the status of security communities (Nathan 2006, 2010). Reverting the positive relationship between regional integration and conflict transformation, he contends that widespread domestic instability is an obstacle to effective regional integration in most of Sub-Saharan Africa (Nathan 2006).

Scepticism about African formal regional integration and its conflict transformation potential has important implications for the EU. Although EU-ACP and EU-AU cooperation are built around the notion of 'partnership', the relations between Europe and Africa continue to be shaped by the huge difference in economic and political power between the two continents (Bayart 2004; Fioramonti 2011; Hurt 2003). Second, the history of Sub-Saharan Africa has been marked by many attempts at transferring foreign models of political and economic governance on the continent which in most cases have not delivered the expected results. This is in part due to the fact that, because of their subordinate position in the international system, African elites see the formal adoption of foreign models as a way to boost their international legitimacy and obtain foreign 'resources of extraversion', such as development aid and military cooperation. Yet, they may not be seriously interested in successfully appropriating those models.

Because of the difference in economic and political power between the EU and other Western countries on the one hand and Sub-Saharan Africa on the other, the EU has a great capacity to influence Africa following a logic of consequentialism, i.e., by manipulating incentives. Yet, when the EU strives to diffuse new norms and practices the logic of consequentialism needs to be combined with the logic of appropriatness in order to produce a lasting internalization. If the latter lacks, what follows is the failure of a project that is not really 'owned' by the actors involved or, at best, a syndrome of partial reform (Söderbaum and Taylor 2008; Van de Walle 2001), where local actors implement only those components of a foreign-sponsored agenda that do not endanger their interests and their entrenched governance practices, voiding it of its substance.

As the preconditions of the EU integration process (prevalence of inter-state conflicts, strong economic interdependence, unambiguous consensus around the democratic model) are absent in Africa, some authors contend that the EU is using its considerable power to diffuse,

whether deliberately or not, a model of regionalism that is inappropriate to Sub-Saharan Africa. They also attribute some of the shortcomings of African formal regionalism to the fact that this is the product of an unsuccessful importation (Bøås, Marchand, and Shaw 1999; Gibb 2009; Söderbaum and Taylor 2008). Thus, Gibbs argues that 'the West has been able successfully to assert and reimpose a cultural, economic, linguistic and political agenda for regional integration on the South… Thus, throughout the developing world, and in particular in sub-Saharan Africa, regional integration schemes have been established in terms of a completely misconceived analogy with the European Union' (Gibb 2009, 702). Similarly, Söderbaum and Taylor qualify the brand of regionalism promoted by the EU and by other Western actors as 'neoliberal regionalism', 'a distinctive "project", with a highly political content, fashioned and pursued by identifiable actors, institutions and interests' (Söderbaum and Taylor 2008, 26). They suggest that political elites in Sub-Saharan Africa implement neoliberal regionalism only to the extent that it may foster their interests, usually based on the preservation of neo-patrimonial modes of governance, and use grandiose statements and high-sounding rhetoric on regional integration for attracting 'resources of extraversion' in the form of aid and technical cooperation from the EU and from other foreign partners.

In the field of conflict management, the importance of Western support and funding in the establishment of the APSA and other initiatives on peace and security has led to question the authenticity of their claim to advance 'African ownership'. For Franke and Esmenejaud, for instance 'Western actors have essentially abused Africa's dependence on foreign aid in order to shape the emerging security structures to their liking… it is once again Western and not African actors that decide on when, where and how the 'African solution' is applied because without significant financial and military means of their own, African states (and organisations) have no choice but to bow to the strategic, operational and tactical demands of their "benefactors"' (Franke and Esmenjaud 2008, 149). Yet, the qualification of African regions as 'communities of insecurities' and the criticism moved to the security culture of African state elites suggest that there may be limits to the influence of external actors in changing in patterns that are structural or, at least, deeply entrenched. To be fair, the same authors that argue that African elites harbours a political culture non conducive to conflict transformation through integration also recognize that the picture is not static and that the EU and other international partners have played a role in the emergence of a new culture of 'non indifference' (Williams 2007). Yet, they argue that the process is only at its beginnings and fraught with difficulties.

The critiques discussed focus on African regionalism and on the difficulties that the promotion of regional integration by the EU (whether direct or indirect) faces in its encounter with Sub-Saharan Africa. A distinct question relates to the sincerity and the depth of the EU's engagement in the promotion of regional integration itself. It may be argued that, in Africa as in other parts of the world, rhetoric has not always been followed by action and that in some cases the EU has privileged traditional bilateral policies to the promotion of integration or has even taken stances that have undermined, rather than promoted, regional cooperation.

The most contentious case is constituted by the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and the ACP group. These agreements are supposed to operationalize the new free trade regime provided for by the Cotonou agreement. Although they have been 'sold' to the public as a mean to strengthen regional integration in Africa, the EPAs have been accused to undermine it in practice (Fioramonti 2009; Stevens 2006; AU 2006). This would happen because the EPAs force African countries into specific groupings that are not always coterminous with the existing RECs and because the EPA formula neglects implementation issues, particularly the challenges posed by differences in the economic development of states from a single sub-region (Stevens 2006). Indeed, the EU has been accused to prioritize its commitments towards the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its own neo-liberal agenda and economic interests over the concerns of ACP states, both in the field of development and of regional integration (Farrell 2005; Fioramonti 2011; Hurt 2003). Since the Cotonou agreement only lays down the general principles that shall underpin the EPAs and leaves their precise definition to subsequent negotiations between the EU and sub-regional groupings, the follow up of the agreement has been particularly difficult and has revealed a diffused opposition from the African side to the EU's pretensions. Contrary to the expectation that regional groupings would have been able to sign EPAs by the deadline of 2007, imposed by the WTO for the removal of the previous preferential trade regime, regional negotiations have stalled and so far the only full EPA signed has been concluded with the Caribbean countries. At the same time a number of African states have negotiated Interim EPAs (IEPA) on a bilateral basis,[8] a move that has been accused to further endanger regional integration. The AU has openly expressed the fear that the EPAs may undermine regional integration and argued that the EU must 'refrain from pursuing negotiating objectives that would adversely

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[8] For an overview of the status of EPAs negotiations, updated as of September 2012, see
http://www.ecdpm.org/Web_ECDPM/Web/Content/Download.nsf/0/1996F06294E00C85C1257A86004118B0/
$FILE/ECDPM_EPA%20status_Overview%20Table_09_2012.pdf (June 3, 2013).

affect these existing programmes and process for economic integration in Africa' (AU 2006, 5).

For some authors, the neo-liberal agenda promoted by the EPAs constitute 'a model of regional integration that is far removed from the model of regional integration that has evolved within the EU itself. In fact, what the EU is promoting is a model of economic liberalisation across the African continent (Farrell 2005, 266). As this model of integration has a narrow focus on trade liberalization, its potential to contribute to the resolution of regional conflicts appears rather limited and in fact the EPA negotiations appears to have rather weakened regional consensus in Africa. The EPAs may constitute a case where the EU, in spite of its rhetorical claims, has privileged the neo-liberal component of its agenda of 'europeanization beyond Europe' (Schimmelfennig 2007) to the exportation of the European model. In fact, the Cotonou agreement was negotiated at a time when Sub-Saharan Africa was shifting down in the EU's list of priorities, with European policy-makers more concerned with enlargement and with dialogue with the Mediterranean region than with their partnership with the ACP group. After 2007, the EU seems in the process of revising its approach to the EPA negotiations and has been more explicit in affirming its commitment to support regional integration in the ACP countries (EU 2008; 2012).

Other critiques to the inconsistencies and weaknesses of the EU's policies on regional integration focus more directly on the EU's approach to regional conflicts. The process of decision-making within the EU institutions itself is not always conducive to the development of a regional approach to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Regional initiatives are developed in Brussels, while EU country delegations in the same region do not coordinate between them (Westerkamp, Feil and Thompson 2009). Development aid programmes, which constitute one of the most important policy instruments of the EU in its relationships with Sub-Saharan Africa, are negotiated on a bilateral basis with recipient countries. Decisions over the application of political and human rights conditionality, which may play a crucial role in conflict resolution, are taken on a case by case basis. Inconsistencies in its application to countries of the same region may compromise the quest for regional solutions (Piccolino 2010; Youngs 2006). Looking at the Great Lakes region, Meike Froitzheim, Fredrik Söderbaum and Ian Taylor contend that the EU has not lived up to its expressed commitments to address the crisis trough a regional focus and that, on the other hand, the case of the DRC demonstrates that 'the EU is organized and designed to deal with nation-states (however dysfunctional these may be) and not with regions' (Froitzheim, Söderbaum, and Taylor 2011, 59). Looking at past conflicts in West Africa, Richard Youngs find that, although rhetorically

'the EU approach was predicated strongly on the notion that regional integration offered the strongest contribution to democracy and conflict resolution' (Youngs 2006, 337) 'in practice countries have been approached largely on an individual basis, the United Kingdom 'doing' Sierra Leone and France 'doing' Ivory Coast' (Youngs 2006, 351). He attributes this tendency to the predominance of post-colonial ties in the region, which undermines prospects for multilateral solutions. The fact that the United Kingdom and France have been capable to mount successful peace enforcement missions in Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, while the balance sheet of ECOWAS' operations has been modest, may also have encouraged a move away from interregional cooperation to direct bilateral involvement.

In order to assess claims about the contribution of the EU's promotion of regional integration to conflict resolution in Sub-Saharan Africa, an in depth analysis of selected case studies is necessary. The next session outlines the operationalization of the Sub-Saharan Africa component of the REGIOCONF project and presents the case studies chosen for the empirical part of the research project.

The operationalization of the REGIOCONF project

To what extent the specific economic and political characteristics of Sub-Saharan Africa and the weaknesses of existing African processes of regional cooperation pose a challenge to the EU's effort to transform conflicts through the promotion of region integration? And to what extent accusations levied against the EU of promoting regional integration only in rhetorical terms are justified?

The research team of the REGIOCONF project aims to account for the direct and indirect consequences of EU regional integration through semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders and the analysis of official documents and the media. The purpose of fieldwork interviews is twofold. First, to map actors directly or indirectly involved in conflict resolution and regional integration; second, to facilitate the identification of the four influence paths (compulsion, social learning, changing context, model setting) affecting the promotion of regionalism.

The African case studies will address two regional conflicts from different sub-regional areas in Africa: Mali and the Sahel region (West Africa) and the regionalized conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (the Great Lakes region). These case studies have been selected because they take place in two different sub-regions and because they offer substantial variations in degree of regional integration and the importance of EU's involvement.

The Sahel has long been one of the poorest areas of the world and a particularly fragile political and social environment. In policy-debates, the exact boundaries of Sahel are debated, but certain countries – in particular Mali, Niger and Mauritania – can be considered 'core' Sahelian states. These states encompass large desert and semi-desert regions and they experience growing difficulties in terms of policing and governmental control. This particular geography and the porosity of borders have facilitated the diffusion of illegal traffic and the establishment of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) in the area. Instability has led to attacks against foreign citizens and companies and has recently culminated in the occupation of Northern Mali by Ansar Dine, an insurgent Islamist organization allegedly associated with AQMI.

Regional integration in the West African portion of Sahel is relatively advanced with respect to other African sub-regions (Francis 2009). Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Senegal are members of ECOWAS, which is deeply involved in efforts to solve the current crisis in Mali, and share the same currency being part of the UEMOA. All Sahel countries except Mauritania are also members of CEN-SAD. One problem however stems from the fact that the Sahel regional conflict complex includes also North African countries, such as Algeria, or countries whose collocation is disputed, such as Mauritania, which has left ECOWAS in order to stress its Arab and North African identity.

Although the EU's involvement in West African crisis has been up to today less direct than in other regions of Africa (Youngs 2006), the EU has played an important role in supporting regional cooperation. ECOWAS is one of the top beneficiaries of the EU's regional cooperation aid and the EU has also established a formal mechanism for political dialogue with the organization, which also includes the UN regional office in Dakar. In the case of Sahel, the EU's engagement is becoming stronger than in the case of previous West African conflicts, as the EU is worried about the impact of the crisis on the spread of terrorism and the security of European citizens. The European strategy for Sahel is the first regional strategy adopted by the EU in Africa (EU 2011). The EU is supporting the ECOWAS-sponsored African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) and has recently set up two CSDP missions with the task of strenghtening local capacities in the fight against terrorism in Mali and Niger.

Besides the EU's direct involvement in the region, West Africa has very strong ties with Europe, which is the main trade partner for most West African countries and the major recipient of West African emigration. Recent developments, such as the transformation of the ECOWAS Secretariat into a Commission in 2006, further highlight the EU's already

important influence on West African institutions. However, economic inequality and post-colonial ties shape West Africa's relations with Europe. To some extent and in the light of the organization's history, ECOWAS' mimicking of the EU may be driven by its dependency on aid, rather than from a deep-seated commitment to EU-inspired norms (Francis 2009; Taylor and Williams 2008). The weight of colonial history is particularly evident in the case of French-speaking countries. The decision of France to intervene militarily in Mali, while effective in military terms, may have affected the quest for a solution that is genuinely multilateral and regional.

The Great Lakes region has been one of the most unstable and violent parts of Africa for more than twenty years. As in the case of Sahel, the exact delimitation of the region is somehow blurred, although it is generally thought to include Burundi, Rwanda, the north-eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Uganda and north-western Kenya and Tanzania.

The Rwandan genocide in 1994 and the massive refugee flows that followed the genocide contributed to the diffusion of the conflict in the Eastern DRC. The refugee crisis eventually led to the invasion of the DRC by Rwanda, Uganda and Angola in 1996 and to the fall of the discredited regime of Mobutu Sese Seko. In 1998 a new and even more violent conflict broke out, pitting Rwanda and Uganda against the new Congolese regime of Laurent Kabila, supported by Zimbabwe and Angola. The war – labelled 'the first African world war' for the number of players involved and the extreme violence – officially ended in 2003. However, the Eastern part of the DRC – the North Kivu and South Kivu regions – has remained in a state of permanent instability.

The DRC is often regarded as a paradigmatic 'failed state', unable to control its territory and to provide security to its citizens. The conflict is at the same time intra-state and inter-state. Eastern Congo is a sanctuary for many armed groups opposing both the Congolese regime and the incumbent governments in the neighbouring states. Continued interference of Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi in the Eastern DRC has been documented by a recent United Nations report (UN 2012).

Regional cooperation has been often invoked as a way out of the Great Lakes regional crisis, especially in so far as it can ease the enduring tension between the DRC and Rwanda (Westerkamp et al. 2009). However, formal regional integration in the area is extremely complicated, due to the overlapping memberships of the countries most involved in the conflict complex – DRC, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi – in many different regional organizations. Regional fora having some or all states of the Great Lakes region among their

members include the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL), the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), ECCAS, SADC and EAS. The involvement of these organizations in the resolution of the conflict has been uneven and at times controversial, such as in the case of Zimbabwe and Angola's claim in 1998 to be intervening in the DRC on SADC behalf.

The EU is deeply involved in conflict resolution in the Great Lakes region. Its engagement has been considerably more important and direct than in West Africa. The DRC was notably the location of the first out-of-area ESDP mission (*Artemis*) in 2003 and the country is a major recipient of the EU development and humanitarian aid. The EU has insisted on a regional approach to the resolution of the crisis (Piccolino 2010; Frotzeim, Söderbaum and Taylor 2011) and has sponsored the creation of the ICGLR, which has the explicit purpose of fostering regional conflict resolution, and the reestablishment of the CEPGL. Yet, it has been claimed that its statist approach and its tendency to focus on formal regional mechanisms – particularly the ineffective CEPGL – have prevented the formulation of an effective regional approach (Froitzheim, Söderbaum, and Taylor 2011, 46).

Conflict transformation through regional integration in the Great Lakes region is considerably more complicated than in the Sahel. First, the governments of the region, particularly the DRC and Rwanda, do not oppose a common enemy but have fought against each other in the recent past and are divided by rivalries and mistrust. Second, the most obvious candidate for promoting regional integration – the CEPGL – is an extremely weak organization, while the ICGLR is only a few years old. A strong sub-regional organization involved in conflict resolution such as ECOWAS is lacking. The sustained financial and political engagement of the EU does not seem to be matched by a local demand for regional integration, at least at the level privileged by the EU – the one of the political elites and of highly formalized institutional relations. The EU seems to have only partially tapped the more promising potential for constructive regionalism at the civil society level (Westerkamp et al. 2009). This may have limited its capacity to exercise its influence on regional dynamics in the Great Lakes region.

Conclusion

The launch of processes of regional integration and cooperation is accompanied by expectations that they may not only contribute to address socio-economic concerns but also that they will help with achieving the sustained resolution of regional conflicts. The belief in the existence of a casual link between regional integration and successful conflict resolution

underpins the external policy of the EU and is one of the motivations beyond the financial, technical and political support that the EU gives to regional organizations, including in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The expectation that regional cooperation may help addressing regional conflict has also been one of the main drivers of the growth of regional cooperation in Africa since the end of the Cold War, in particular the creation of the AU and the launch of the APSA. Yet, certain material and cultural features of Sub-Saharan Africa, such as the disjuncture between formal and informal economic and political processes and the extraversion of the African continent, have shaped regional cooperation in Africa, making it very different from the European model. Moreover, the type of regional conflicts that affect Africa are quite different from the ones that have historically affected Europe and pose distinctive challenges to the possibility that Africa may evolve into a 'security community'. Indeed, although opinions diverge, a general scepticism in the effectiveness of regional cooperation in contributing to the resolution of regional conflicts in Africa emerges from the existing literature. Such scepticism is particularly directed at the type of formal, highly institutionalized regional schemes that have been so successful in Europe and that the EU champions in other regions of the world.

There are also elements that suggest that the EU's policy in Sub-Saharan Africa has been at times inconsistent and that post-colonial relations and a narrow neo-liberal approach to regionalism, as well as the incapacity to go beyond old-fashioned patterns of policy formulation and implementation that emphasize relations with individual states, have undermined the declared aim of supporting regional integration.

Previous research on the impact of the EU's promotion of regional integration on regional conflicts has focused on the European neighbourhood and we still do not know to what extent its conclusions may be applicable to Sub-Saharan Africa. This is why the REGIOCONF project aims at investigating the impact of the EU's promotion of regional integration on two African conflicts – in the Sahel and in the Great Lakes region. By conceptualizing four different patterns of influence, the operationalization of the research project will consider both the direct and indirect effect of the EU's promotion of regional integration on regional conflicts, as well as the possibility that the EU may have followed different policies from the ones it claims to pursue.

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