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Faculty of European Studies
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**The Relations between the African Union and the European Union
in the restructuring process of the international system
-Abstract-**

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Thesis Summary

This research aimed to analyze the relationship between the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) in the process of restructuring the international system. This is a broad research area that sought to determine the complexity of the global arena concerning the AU and EU partnership. The international system is marked by emerging complex challenges such as wars, geopolitical turbulence, climate change, economic crises, and migration issues, all of which threaten peace and human security. The global challenges, including climate change, peace and security and economic issues, have increasingly fostered international cooperation and integration (Sandler 1997:1; Toromade et al., 2024). The primary concern is the intricacy of global challenges impacting the relationship between these two unions in the international arena. Indeed, these challenges have contributed to reshaping the global structure, changing perspectives on international relations and transforming the international order.

Throughout the RIS, relations between the AU and the EU remain a persistent paradox - unified, yet at considerable odds. This study examined aspects of this complex relationship both in historical terms and contemporary system. The economic relations between Africa and Europe date back as far as the 1963 Yaoundé Convention, which was signed in Cameroon (West Africa) between the European Economic Community (EEC) and the Associated African States and Madagascar (AASM). There has been a transformation of the relations between Africa and Europe as reflected by the Lome Conventions, Cotonou Agreements, the SAMOA agreement and Summits. The summits began with the first Africa-EU edition in Cairo, Egypt, in 2000, followed by the summit in Lisbon, Portugal, in December 2007, which adopted a Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) and its action plan. The third EU-AU summit took place in Tripoli, Libya, in November 2010. The 4th EU-AU summit was held in Brussels in 2014, and the 5th EU-AU summit was held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, in November 2017. So far, the 6th EU-AU summit took place in Brussels on 17–18 February 2022, just before the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022.

The relationship between Africa and Europe has been overly always been complex and difficult due to the historical context and colonization of Africa. Despite the progress in the relations between the two actors in cooperation to address common challenges, unfortunately, the two are facing complex challenges and limited results in their projects. The 2022 Summit

established Two Unions with one vision, saw member states' commitment to equal partnership as strategic partners, however, the relations between the two Unions in the complex global arena remain to be analyzed. In this case, this study sought to determine the factors that could drive the relations of the two Actors and to clarify the AU and the EU as essential partners in the complex international system.

Mutual interests and a shared zeal to address global challenges have fostered bilateral partnerships. However, Gray (2018:1) states that while many organizations regularly convene and formulate policies, others deteriorate into 'zombies' without any impact, becoming mere gathering places devoid of tangible results. The challenges have escalated dramatically, reshaping the global order and affecting relationships among states. At the same time, these numerous challenges prompt questions about the capabilities of the AU and the EU to tackle such issues while maintaining a mutual level of understanding. Not only have global challenges expanded the need for cooperation, but they have also posed difficulties for bilateral partnerships in both theoretical and practical discussions of international relations. The perceived benefits of integration serve as the primary motivators for member states to unite in anticipation of future rewards. The United Nations (2023:1), the increasing threats to peace and security in the global arena, call for a global partnership to address issues of common concern¹.

African Union (2015) states that the Continent's objective is to foster inclusive and sustainable development under the drive of Pan-Africanism and African Renaissance and Agenda 2063². Likewise, Parsons (2002), the EU is mandated to promote the pavement for peace and security, regional and external cooperation, global development and uphold its European values, such as democracy and the rule of law. Africa and Europe are geographically distant but close strategic partners in mindset and actions in addressing common issues³. This study reveals that contemporary EU-AU relations are founded on complementary frameworks or processes, where their areas of operation extend beyond trade opportunities to include addressing climate change, migration issues, and peace and security. The study offers a critical analysis of the challenges faced

¹ United Nations, Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9 A New Agenda for Peace July 2023. Accessed on 27 March 2025. Available at; [our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-peace-en.pdf](#)

² African Union. (2015). Agenda 2063. The Africa we want. Accessed on 23 February 2023. Available at [33126-doc-framework document book.pdf](#)

³ European Commission. Accessed on 18 June 2023. Available at; [Africa-EU Partnership - European Commission](#)

by the AU and the EU in restructuring the international system. Therefore, this study aims to primarily focus on the nexus of relations between Africa and Europe in the new geopolitical order.

This thesis has been guided by three questions;

1. What are the factors that could drive the AU and the EU relations in the restructuring process of the international system?
2. To what extent can the AU and the EU be considered as essential partners in the restructuring process of the international system?
3. What recommendations can be provided to the AU and the EU in the restructuring process of the international system?

The study is organized into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the study into perspectives on the AU and the EU relations in the restructuring of the international system. In this section, a brief background of the study is provided to give a fair idea of the motivations of the research, objectives and the study's significance. The study adhered to academic ethical codes of conduct. The conceptual framework that guides this study is also offered in this section to understand the operational complex international system.

The second chapter provides the transformation of the international system. This chapter provides the complexities of the international system associated with geopolitical events and complex challenges. The global challenges have brought an escalating threat to human security. According to the UN, the international system is threatened by complex challenges that do not respect national borders⁴. The aspect of power concerning international organizations is discussed in this section. Climate change issues, the slow economic progress due to Covid 19 pandemic, the rise of geopolitical actors, armed conflicts, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) enlargement, G20 transformation, migration issues and trade wars have been discussed to determine the complexity of the global arena. In the complexity of the transformation of global order, the AU and the EU perceive each other as strategic partners, and they are concerned with promoting peace and sustainable development. In case, the theoretical background acknowledges the holistic approach of the international scene and geopolitical arena. It is recognized that there is

⁴ United Nations. 2015. Accessed on 27 March 2023. Available at; [Global Issues | United Nations](#)

a transformation of global order and structure, and the role of international organizations is to resolve the challenges. At the same time, it can be noted that the manifestation of global challenges is creating opportunities for cooperation in the present and beyond AU and the EU relations. Not only does the AU need the EU in the restoration of global order, but the EU also equally needs Africa in generating possible solutions in multilateralism that represent an approach in trade policy where each country must ensure a global balance in its trade relations with other countries.

The third chapter clarified the AU and the EU as global actors in the international system. This chapter provides the development and establishment of AU, previously the Organizational African Union (OAU). This section further provides an understanding of Pan-Africanism and the AU Agenda 2063. Pan-Africanism refers to the ideology that promotes unity, solidarity, and collaboration among all people of African origin, regardless of nationality or geographical location. Its goal is to advance African interests on a global level and to recognize the shared cultural and historical heritage of African people.

European integration is reflected upon and offers the transformation of the EU, as reflected in the 1950 Schuman Declaration, 1951 Treaty of Paris, 1957 Treaty of Rome, Single European Act 1986, Maastricht Treaty 1992, Treaty of Amsterdam 1997, Treaty of Nice 2001 and the Lisbon Treaty of 2007. Moreover, this chapter also addresses the countries that joined the European Union in stages, expanding from the initial 6 member states to the 27 that are part of it today.

Having an understanding of the AU and the EU, this paper discusses the transformational relations between the two Unions through various conventions and summits such as the 1963 and 1969 Yaoundé Conventions, 1975 and 1979 Lome Conventions, the Cotonou Agreements, the 2007 Joint Africa-EU Strategy, the 2020 Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS). It is established that the areas of cooperation in the AU and the EU relations have progressively widened in tandem with the increase in global challenges.

This chapter three also presents an analysis of the theoretical framework using regional integration, functionalism, neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism to explain the significant changes and transformation in the AU and the EU. Functionalists believed that integration is driven by economic and social welfare, whilst neo-functionalists acknowledged political differences and spill-over effects to partners beyond personal interests. Intergovernmentalism focuses on the role of governments in response to the complexity of the global scenario. The rationale for the selected

theoretical frameworks contributes towards a detailed understanding of the relations between the two Unions as well as the methodology aspects adopted for this study.

The fourth chapter provided the methodology and the design of the research and open ended interviews. The study used mixed methodologies and presented both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Document analysis, content analysis, questionnaires and interviews were used as methods of research in this study. The questionnaire responses were based on 93 respondents from policymakers and key experts in the AU and the EU. The questionnaire, which was distributed using Google Forms, sought to collect closed-ended questions to determine the AU and the EU relations in the restructuring of the international system. The interview responses were conducted with 24 Diplomats from the AU and EU States and EU delegations. The interview was an open ended one, and each interview lasted not more than 45 minutes, conducted on Webex. The whole study respected academic ethical codes of conduct, such as informed consent, no harm to the participants and respect for anonymity.

The fifth chapter provides the quantitative and qualitative interpretation of the answers which were asked of the participants. This paper was guided by the research questions of the present study. To provide a clear analysis of the results, this section was divided into sub-sections 1. The questionnaire and 2. The interview. The final interpretation of the questionnaire and the interviews is provided to determine the relations between the AU and the EU amidst the transformation of the global arena.

The sixth chapter provided the conclusions, recommendations, and areas of further research. The conclusion and recommendations are provided in alignment with the research questions. Thus, a variety of factors contributing to the relationships between the AU and the EU in the complex global arena have been observed, including climate change, trade opportunities, research and innovation, and health issues.

Starting from the three questions that formed the basis of the research, mentioned in the introductory part of the thesis, the study developed through this work has arrived at answers that have contributed to the development of the relationship between the mentioned unions. These actors find themselves entangled in a global crisis, which they cannot overcome independently. These geopolitical problems also provide an opportunity for the AU to participate in global governance. The primary sources established that 4Ps – “ **p**eople, **p**lanet, **p**rosperity and **p**eace ”

are driving the AU and the EU in the changing dynamics of the global order. However, the roadmap to the restoration of global order is not a smooth one, as it requires more from the global actors and reciprocal efforts. It still reflects that the AU is changing, the EU is changing so is the international system.

The study concludes that the AU and the EU are appreciated as essential strategic partners in the realignment of the international system. The relations between the AU and the EU have been characterized as positive bilateral relations due to the manifestation of the global challenges and unfolding structural changes of the international system. The AU and the EU continue to be strategic partners amid a complex environment, despite economic imbalances, institutional challenges, and rising conflicts on the global stage. Their relationship reflects an extension of the synergy between the Agenda 2063 and the Global Goals.

This partnership emphasizes the significance of intercontinental cooperation in promoting sustainable development and peace for multilateralism and collective action. In nurturing their relationship, the AU and the EU share common interests and values through collaboration in dimensions such as migration issues, commitment to promoting peace in conflict zones in collaboration with African regional organizations such as the Southern African Development Community, and addressing political instabilities in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique. The collaborations between these two Unions reflects effectively utilizing trade opportunities; notably, “*The African Continental Free Trade Area*” (AfCFTA) is an initiative that the EU is supporting to advance economic development for the AU. Promoting the European Green Deal and the AU Green Recovery Action Plan is vital for enhancing energy and food security.

The results reflected that the transformation from donor funding relations to equal partnership remains low. As a result, the primary sources expressed that beyond a win-win partnership lies a significant development of financial initiatives that should consider the current context of trade wars and socio-political uncertainty. Additionally, another crucial finding from the study reflected the vitality of diversifying bilateral friendships amid emerging global competition and geopolitical actors, such as China, Russia, and the U.S. The roadmap restoration of global order calls for inter-regional partnerships to tackle the challenges of the 21st century. However, the present and beyond AU and EU deepened bilateral relations are conditional on the level of commitment of the member States towards a consolidated and firm AU and EU partnership in the complex global scenario.

Despite the flagship projects and action plans in the AU and the EU relations, it remains important for the mentioned Unions to strengthen their relations when it comes to multilateralism and global solutions in the emerging complex geopolitical issues. However, taking into consideration the AU 2025 Summit theme on “ reparations for injustices by the former colonial powers ”⁵, it remains a complicated partnership. In this case, the historical context of the AU and the EU, differences in economic and social development, BRICS enlargement and President Donald Trump's 2nd presidential mandate are some of the factors that leave room for further research. The international system is in constant change, so as the utmost importance to track the changes in geopolitical order and related complex challenges influencing the reshaping of AU and the EU relations.

Being aware that the thesis does not provide exhaustive research, the possibility remains open for further studies to continue addressing this dynamic topic. Of great interest not only to international relations enthusiasts but also to the general public, the study reflects society, spanning over many years. Since 1963, as indicated in the thesis, the foundation for the economic relationship between Africa and Europe was established through the Yaoundé Convention. It is significant to observe how this development has continued, as the thesis reflects only a snapshot of the progress made until the present. However, even now, changes are still happening in the global arena and appear in complexity, for the benefit and interest of states.

⁵ African Union. 2025. Accessed on 15 March 2025. [AU THEME OF THE YEAR 2025 | African Union](#)

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