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A Comparative European View on African Integration

why it has been much more difficult in Africa than in Europe

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– Why it has been much more
difficult in Africa than in
Europe**

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A Comparative European View on African Integration – Why it has been much more difficult in Africa than in Europe¹

Wolfgang Zank

Abstract

In this paper I compare African and European integration. Despite some important progress, so far African integration has not been as deep as the European one. Measured on the terms of intergovernmental versus supranational cooperation, the AU is essentially an intergovernmental arrangement, with a few elements which might have supranational potentialities in the future. In its present form, the AU is more akin to the UN than to the EU. By contrast, the EU is a complex set of arrangements of both intergovernmental and supranational character. In the broad policy fields under “pillar one”, the EU resembles already a federal state, with increasing tendencies in this direction.

The different degree of integration has been the cause of many factors. I highlight here the importance of two basic conditions for substantial progress at supranational integration. The first one is a consensus on basic constitutional principles. Such a consensus was in place in Western Europe after World War II (democratic rule by law), whereas Africa has exhibited a broad array of incompatible constitutional models after independence. The second condition has been compatible (not identical) socio-economic systems. The Western European countries have been mixed economies with a public sector, but where economic activities were mainly coordinated by market forces. This opened the possibilities to use these market forces, e.g. by removing trade barriers, to strengthen cooperation at ground level and create pressures for further integration. Adherence to such a socio-economic model has also become an explicit criterion for EU membership. By contrast, Africa has seen all kinds of economic systems, centrally-planned socialist ones included. The last ones are incompatible with market economies. The multitude of systems has therefore created additional barriers for African integration. Today there is reason to be moderately optimistic as regards some progress at African integration. Democratic principles are much stronger rooted today than previously, and the time of sweeping social experiments seems to be over. However, in the nearer and mid-term perspective progress is more likely to be achievable on a sub-continental scale; in many cases the first step must be the reconstruction of the

¹ This paper was presented at a seminar of the CCIS - Center for Comparative Integration Studies, Aalborg, 8 January 2007.

“failed state”. A further strengthening of cooperation at AU-level is conceivable, but it will hardly acquire supra-national characteristics for many years to come.

Introduction: A sympathetic, but not uncritical view on African integration.

This paper contains a “European View” because the contributor is European (born 1952 in Hamburg, now at Aalborg University, Denmark). Furthermore, I have worked predominantly with European problems, the last years mainly with problems of European Integration. And finally, my theoretical perspectives have been shaped predominantly by Western, i.e. European or North American thinkers. As it will become apparent, for instance functionalist types of ideas fill up some place in my thinking (of course not exclusively). In this perspective, as will be explained further below, the countries of the European Union had it much easier at integration than their African counterparts. The obstacles to African Unity have indeed been formidable. The paper concludes, however, in a moderately optimistic mood: The prospects of African Unity, at least in relative terms, have increased substantially the last years.

This is an academic paper where I try to assess some developments soberly. But it has perhaps also an implicit normative dimension given the point that I would like to see *more* progress at African unity. Certain conditions provided, I think that this will be in the interest of the African peoples. And also in the interest of Europeans. However, these “pan-African” sympathies do not necessarily imply that I share all political propositions which political proponents of Pan-Africanism have forwarded. I think, for instance, of Kwame Nkrumah. It even appears to me that criticism of some historical aspects of Pan-Africanism is a necessary condition for more *real* progress at African integration.

The paper can also be seen as a complementary contribution to the on-going debate of the potentials of Civil Society on African unification.² In fact, the emergence of numerous civil-society actors has already produced tangible political outcomes. Just to mention one example, it was due to a “spirited campaign” by women’s rights that the African leaders amended the Constitutive Act of the African Union, so that the promotion of gender equality became added to its objectives.³ However, increasing mobilisation of civil-society actors *alone* will not in itself bring more African integration about. Some structural

² See, for instance, Mammo Muchie, Adam Habib and Vishnu Padayachee, ‘African Integration and civil society: The case of the African Union’, *Development Research Series, Working Paper No. 137*, Research Center on Development and International Relations (DIR), Aalborg University, 2006.

³ Tiekou, Thomas Kwasi, ‘Explaining the Clash and Accomodation of Interests of Major Actors in the Creation of the African Union’, *African Affairs* (2004), 103, pp. 249-267, esp. p. 263f.

conditions must also be fulfilled. It is mainly above these which this paper is about. I highlight in particular two types of conditions, namely consensus on constitutional principles and compatible (not identical) socio-economic structures. I do not claim that this list is already all-comprehensive.

AU and EU compared.

Looking from Europe towards Africa in a comparative perspective is a fascinating enterprise. One sees two arrangements of regional integration, the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU). And these two arrangements share some apparent similarities of the institutional set-up. On both sides you find an assembly of heads of states of the member-countries, executive councils where ministers meet, a commission, a parliament, or an advisory council which unites various social groups. Of the two Unions, the African is roughly doubly as big as Europe's, with 53 countries on the African side (all except Morocco) and 27 in the EU (2007). 850 million people live in the African Union, in the EU "only" 483 million. And when it comes to the area, the African Union dwarfs the EU (30 as opposed to 4 million square kilometres).

But there are substantial differences in the institutional structures. I regard as particular important the degrees of *intergovernmental* and *supranational* arrangements, to use two concepts which have played an important role at analysing European integration. An integration process is called *intergovernmental* when it is mainly an institutionalised form of cooperation among governments, which, however, have retained full national sovereignty in legal terms. We talk of a *supranational* arrangements when the member states have given up (or at least "pooled", as some prefer it) important and precisely defined parts of their sovereignty and transferred them to a level above them, in an orderly legal-constitutional way, with specifically formulated delimitations of competences, decision-making procedures, obligations and enforcement mechanism for compliance. The terms *supranational* and *federal* are related in my view. I propose to see the installation of supranational arrangements as small steps towards a federation. If these supranational forms of cooperation have reached such a density, that important fields of politics are to be decided on the supranational level, we might call the new construction a "federation". But there is no consensus among scholars on how much supranationalism you need in order to qualify for a federation, nor which fields of policy should be covered by it. Traditional federations such as the USA or Germany of 1871 have transferred foreign and defence policy to the common supranational level. Measured on this

yardstick the EU is not a federation. But it is perhaps firmly on the way of becoming one.⁴

The African Union is essentially *intergovernmental* in character. Heads of state or government meet at least once a year at the meetings of the *Assembly of the AU*, the “supreme organ” of the AU.⁵ Ministers meet at the *Executive Council* on more specified issues such as foreign trade or transport, and they prepare materials for the Assembly of the heads of state. The ministerial meetings of the Executive Council get prepared by the Permanent Representatives’ Committee, nominated by the member states’ governments. An African *Commission*, located in Addis Ababa, is responsible for the administrative issues of the AU. A Parliament and the Economic, Social and Cultural Council are advisory bodies. There are also specialised Technical Committees. The Constitutive Act of the AU repeated the principle of strict non-interference into member states affairs, which the Organisation of African Unity formulated in 1963. However, in an important modification, Article 4 (h) of the Constitutive Act of the AU states a “right of the Union to intervene in a Member States pursuant a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity”. A new *Peace and Security Council* of the AU, with 15 elected members, has military forces for peace keeping at its disposal, currently 7,000 troops in Darfur. Furthermore, all 53 members of the AU have adhered to the development strategy of the *New Partnership for Africa’s Development* (NEPAD) which officially became recognised as an AU initiative. The *African Peer Review Mechanism* (APRM), being a part of NEPAD, will make the governance of African countries subject to official scrutiny – perhaps the most innovative part of the African reform initiatives.⁶

The build-up and evolution of these institutions have been important developments and improvements, when compared with the situation of the OAU just a decade ago. As the European Commission observed: “Africa is on the move ... The birth of the African Union (AU) and NEPAD, the reinforced role of Africa’s Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the emergence of a new generation of leaders at national level have changed Africa.”⁷

⁴ For a recent discussion of the EU developments in this perspective see e.g. Dosenrode, Søren (ed.), *Approaching the European Federation*, Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007.

⁵ African Union, ‘The Organs of the AU’, http://www.africa-union.org/root/au/organs/assembly_en.htm, as retrieved on 31 October 2006.

⁶ Jakobeit, Cord, ‘Fünf Jahre NEPAD’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 32-33/2006, pp. 21-25, esp. p. 22.

⁷ Commission of the European Communities, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee, *EU Strategy for Africa: Towards a Euro-African pact to accelerate Africa’s development*, Brussels, 12.10.2005, COM (2205) 489 final, p. 2.

However, when measured along the scale of intergovernmental versus supranational, then the arrangements of the African Union, or the numerous Regional Economic Communities at the sub-continental level, fall into the category of intergovernmentalism: All member countries of the AU have retained their full legal sovereignty. There is no field of politics where the African states have explicitly transferred national sovereignty to an AU level. The parliament of the AU is purely advisory and has no competences to make laws for the continent. Nor can the commission make any decisions which bind the member states. In the future, the reviews of the African Peer Review Mechanism may well produce real political results, given the point that public criticism coming from Africans might have an impact on public opinion. But also they have no legally-binding character. Besides, although NEPAD and APRM were declared to be AU initiatives, participation is voluntary. A row of member states have abstained.

The Constitutive Act is more ambiguous about the Assembly, of the heads of states and governments. This body can make “decisions” by a two-third majority. But there is virtually no sphere of politics where the member states have transferred sovereignty to the assembly. In other words, there is no explicit supranational level. This is also in line with the explicit statement of the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the member states (Article 3b). No member country has signed that it would regards decisions of the Assembly as automatically binding, or that a regulation issued by the Assembly would become a law within the country.

There are perhaps some elements of the AU construction which might have some supranational potential. An example is the above-stated Article 4(h) which proclaims a right of the African Union to intervene in cases of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. This is an important political declaration, namely that the principle of non-interference cannot evoked any more to fend off criticism of serious human-rights abuses. Furthermore, whereas a military intervention of individual countries into other ones are to be seen as breach of the Constitutive Act, the union *as union* can legitimately intervene in cases of genocide and serious crimes. However, the idea that military actions are legitimate in these circumstances is, at least in principle, accepted in *international law*. NATO argued in a similar way in order to justify the Kosovo intervention in 1999. Lawyers distinguish sharply between international law and domestic law. International law binds governments, but it does not give direct rights to the citizens which they could evoke going to court. And the big problem with international law has usually been the lack of a strong court and policeman to enforce it. At the time of writing (end of 2006/beginning of 2007), atrocities in Darfur go on, the conflict having spread to Chad and the Central African Republic. And Ethiopia has intervened in Somalia, without any

authority given by the AU. The existence of the AU as institutionalised network will hopefully make it easier to find solutions for these conflicts. And the 7,000 troops in Darfur are hopefully preventing some atrocities to happen. But until now, unfortunately, the declarations of the Constitutive Act have mainly remained declarations. We may hope that this will change in the future.

Also an African Court of Justice with competencies on human-rights issues, as provided for in Article 18 of the Constitutive Act, would be an institution with supranational potentialities. But characteristically, it does not exist yet. Nor are there any specifications in the Constitutive Act about its competencies. I regard it as impossible that, say, the regime in Khartoum or the many other authoritarian regimes on African soil (see below) will accept to be subjected to a court which they cannot control. Therefore, if we ever see a court in the nearer future, its decisions will presumably remain in the sphere of non-binding declarations. These might have political effect, e.g. through their influence on public opinion or on foreign investment. But this would not yet be a supranational institution.

Another element of *potential* supranationalism might also be seen in Article 23(2) which states that member states who fail to comply with AU decisions “may be subjected to other sanctions, such as the denial of transport and communication links with other Member States, and other measures of a political and economic nature to be determined by the Assembly”. In fact, Mauretania’s membership of the AU became suspended after a military coup, which violated the principle that changes of government have to happen in a constitutional way. But also this sanction mechanism does not create rights for the citizens. It is more a political declaration whereby African leaders declared that their actions against other African countries can be legitimate.

The Constitutive Act envisages three financial institutions, an African Investment Bank, an African Monetary Fund, and an African Central Bank. Founding an investment bank or a monetary fund could be done on an intergovernmental basis; after all, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are institutions of this kind on an almost world-wide scale. But a Central Bank would imply an African Monetary Union, the achievement of which is an explicit aim of the AU, to be realised by 2028. In fact, the envisaged African Economic Community shall comprise not only a common currency, but also a customs union and a common African market. These features would indeed produce a break-through to a heavy dose of supranationalism, given the point that a common central bank or common customs policy would imply that the African countries transfer substantial parts of their sovereignty to common African institutions. But apart from stating these aims, no progress has so far been achieved.

Basically, the African Union replicates many characteristics of the United Nations. In both cases, heads of governments or delegations meet and discuss. They all have declared their firm intention so respect Human Rights. A Security Council can legitimately impose sanctions, armed intervention included, against member states in case of grave violations of basic principles. But principles are formulated in rather general terms, and there is no political sphere where the member states explicitly have given up national sovereignty. In both cases general assemblies and security councils may pass resolutions, but they cannot pass legislation which binds the member states, and which the citizens could use in court. Both the UN and the AU are useful intergovernmental fora. But their efficiency and their ability to impose their principles are very restricted.

It would be mistaken not to see the progress which the establishment of the AU has already meant. After all, having institutionalised forms for dialogue and negotiation, for surveillance, for elaborating ideas as to common initiatives, is very useful. And having a Commission with the explicit mandate to *think* on common African initiatives, can have real effects.

Just to mention one example, the AU countries have been able to formulate a common position on the reform of the United Nations. Nor should the many political potentialities which might evolve from these foundations, e.g. the peer-review mechanism, be neglected. Two scholars of international, in an analysis of the Constitutive Act and its predecessors, called the AU “a guide map of where Africans want to go.”⁸ Guide maps can be extremely useful. But the way is still a long one.

By comparison, the European Union contains both intergovernmental and supranational characteristics. Since the Treaty of Maastricht, in force since 1993, the European Union consists of a supranational “pillar” one which contains the fields where integration has gone furthest, and the intergovernmental pillars 2 (foreign policy) and 3 (Justice and Home Affairs). To put matters a bit simplified⁹, in pillars 2 and 3 the member states have, at least in formal terms, retained their sovereignty. Except from some more technical matters, the governments of the member states can make decisions only unanimously. The European Court of Justice has no say, and the role of parliament and commission ranges from “very limited” to “non-existing”. By contrast, in the many policy fields under “pillar one”, for instance the Internal Market, the

⁸ Packer, Corinne A.A and Donald Rukare, ‘The New African Union and Its Constitutive Act’, *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 96, No. 2 (Apr., 2002), pp. 365-379, esp. p. 379.

⁹ There are numerous books which explain the structure of the EU in more detail, for instance, Hix, Simon, *The Political System of the European Union*, Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Palgrave, second edition, 2005.

European Union resembles a federal state. There is a bi-cameral legislative system, consisting of the council of ministers and the European parliament. In some cases the council, where the governments are represented, still has to approve decisions unanimously. But in most fields the council can take decisions by Qualified Majority Voting. Procedures are complex, but the productivity of the system, at least if measured by the number of legislative acts, is rather high. Currently, the *acquis communautaire*, i.e. the sum of community law, contains some 90,000 pages. And it has direct effect, which means it gives immediate rights to the EU citizens; they can go to court in case these rights become infringed.¹⁰ That means, EU laws are not international law, but have the quality of federal law.¹¹ On top of the juridical system is the European Court of Justice, which in numerous cases has “interfered” heavily into national affairs. It was also the Court of Justice which has “constitutionalized” the EU treaties early on, i.e. making it explicit that the treaties are above national legislation and even national constitutions; it is the latter ones which have to be altered if conflicting with the treaties. In this sense the “Constitutional Treaty”, the newest revision of the EU-Treaty, is a misnomer because legally the EU has a constitution already.¹² Within the area of pillar 1, the Commission has far-reaching competences. It has an (almost) exclusive right to initiate legislation, it represents the EU in international negotiations (e.g. on trade agreements), and it can also make binding decisions in its own right (e.g. in matters of competition policy).

There have been some slow, but systematic tendencies over time. Point one, unlike the African Union which counted its 53 members already from start, or the OAU of 1963 which organised all independent African states at that time, there were only six countries¹³ to start the process of European integration in 1951, when establishing the European Coal and Steel Community. Thereby, on a very limited field, the states transferred sovereignty to a supranational body. Also when enlarging this scheme to a European Economic Community in 1957, there were still only these six countries participating. Successive rounds of enlargement have increased the number of members to 27 by now, and there are more to come, Croatia presumably being the next. But it has been a gradual

¹⁰ To be technically precise, EU *regulations* become domestic law immediately, and they give the citizens rights vertically, towards the national authorities, and horizontally, towards other citizens. But EU directives are frame legislations which have to be transposed into national law. The member states are obliged to do this act of national legislation. Directives give immediately vertical rights (obliging the authorities), but horizontal rights only after they have been transposed into national legislation.

¹¹ Haltern, Ulrich (2004), ‘Integration Through Law’, Wiener, Antje and Thomas Dietz (eds.), *European Integration Theory*, Oxford University Press, pp. 177-196, esp.179-184.

¹² The Constitutional Treaty was signed in 2004, but currently is blocked after negative referenda in France and the Netherlands.

¹³ Belgium, France, (West-) Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, and the Netherlands.

process from small to increasing numbers; important European countries are still outside, some on their own will (e.g. Switzerland). Others (e.g. Georgia or Ukraine) declared a wish to join, but were not accepted as potential members, at least not yet.

Point two, the field of policies which became EU matter, has also increased substantially. Still in 1957 only economic problems were formally included, whereas foreign policy was kept outside the EU cooperation¹⁴, after 1973 not the least on the insistence of Great Britain. By now it is part of the EU cooperation (albeit mainly in an intergovernmental form). And among the fields which were declared to be EU matter, the supranational part has grown almost constantly, covering now for instance also migration policy. Also monetary policy is supranational by now (albeit not for all EU members), in the form of the Economic and Monetary Union, EMU. Against many dire warnings, the arrangements of the EMU have proven stable and brought monetary stability, the abolition of exchange-rate volatility and, perhaps most importantly, very low long-term interest rates.¹⁵

The EU decisions and legislations have also had a strong impact on fields which formally are not an EU matter. Examples are social policy, health care, or gender relations. For instance, the treaty provisions on free labour market mobility and non-discrimination, in combination with the rulings of the Court of Justice, have strengthened the position of Irish women considerably.¹⁶

Currently, the EU is in a process of “hardening” as a foreign political actor. Often, it has been very difficult, if not impossible, to find a common line. The beginning of the Iraq war in 2003 was a strong reminder of this. But on the other hand, the EU has been a unified actor for long on fields such as international trade or development aid. More recently, the EU could agree on the principles of several common policies such as the European Neighbourhood Policy, or a Strategy for Africa.¹⁷ And from 2003 onwards, the efforts of building EU military capabilities for peace-keeping missions have produced results. EU missions having been active in Macedonia, Bosnia, Aceh/Indonesia, and many other places. An EU mission played an important role in the context of securing peaceful elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2006. Actually, the

¹⁴ For the sake of simplicity I use the term EU also for the time prior to 1993, although it became official only from the Maastricht Treaty onwards.

¹⁵ Zank, Wolfgang, ‘EMU and the Budget: The Unusual but Rather Stable Monetary and Fiscal Arrangements of a Federation Sui Generis’, Søren Dosenrode (ed.), *Approaching the European Federation?*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, pp. 107-138.

¹⁶ Pierson, Paul, ‘The Path to European Integration: A Historical Institutional Analysis’, *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, April 1996, pp. 123-163, esp. p. 150-152.

¹⁷ Council of the European Union, *The EU and Africa: Towards a Strategic Partnership*, Brussels, 19 December 2005, 15961/05 (Presse 367).

EU has proven to be a rather effective peace-keeper, given the point that it can combine military and civilian activities (training police forces, educate lawyers, etc.) as no other international organisation. Furthermore, its international role and reputation is much less controversial than those of the US. These were the reasons why the parts in the Aceh conflict in Indonesia asked the EU to overtake peace-keeping; not the US, seen as problematic, nor the UN, seen as inefficient.

The Constitutional Treaty envisages some significant strengthening of the foreign policy dimension of the EU.¹⁸ It strengthens the connection between EU's principles and norms and its foreign policy, thereby presumably enhancing the coherence and compatibility of its various actions. Furthermore, the treaty envisages the creation of a Foreign Minister, chairing the meetings of the Council Foreign Affairs Committee and being vice-chairman of the commission. This will presumably also improve consistency. And finally, the various diplomatic service institutions of the EU will be transformed into a genuine European foreign service. Legally, foreign policy will remain mainly intergovernmental because there will be no move to qualified majority voting. However, the supranational aspects will be strengthened, not the least because information gathering, analysing developments and discussing possible solutions will be lifted upwards. Besides, some important instruments of foreign policy (e.g. trade, or development aid) are already at the EU level. Currently, it does not seem likely that the Constitutional Treaty will be ratified in its entirety. But it seems very likely that substantive parts will do so, among them the foreign-policy parts. And besides from treaty matters, there are strong factors which constantly press the member states to find common solutions. Among those can be mentioned: Energy dependence, the uneasiness which Russian policies create, or migration pressures out of Africa. There is a strong common awareness that the EU member countries are interdependent, and that on many fields only common solution are possible. This is not the case to the same effect in Africa..

All in all, as regards the EU we have witnesses a heavy and constantly increasing dose of supranationalism; also in fields where the member states still are sovereign we can observe a growing coherence. Cooperation within the EU is thereby much more compact, much more dense and much more obliging than among the members of the African Union. In fact, the African Union is more akin to the United Nations than to the EU.

¹⁸ Sørensen, Knud Erik, 'The State of EU Foreign Policy – Constituting a Global Player', Søren Dosenrode (ed.), *Approaching the European Federation?*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, pp. 165-184, esp. p. 177f..

Rational, self-interested elites and integration.

The differences between AU and EU are no coincidence, or just due to lack of will. In both cases, efforts at integration have faced substantial obstacles. But in the African case, these obstacles have been much more difficult to surmount than in Europe. The optimistic part of my reasoning is that conditions for further progress at African unification are currently better than ever before.

In order to shed some light on the formidable obstacles to African unification, we may start with a quote from a speech, which Julius Nyerere gave on 6 March 1997 in Accra, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Ghana's independence:

¹⁹

Prior to the independence of Tanganyika, I had been advocating that the East African countries should federate and then achieve independence as a single political unit. I had said publicly that I was willing to delay Tanganyika's independence in order to enable all the three mainland countries to achieve their independence together as a single federated state. I made the suggestion because of my fear – proved correct by later events – that it would be very difficult to unite our countries if we let them achieve independence separately.

Once you multiply national anthems, national flags and national passports, seats of the United Nations, and individuals entitled to a 21-gun salute, not to speak of a host of ministers, prime ministers and envoys, you would have a whole army of powerful people with vested interests in keeping Africa balkanised.

The problem which Nyerere depicted is actually a familiar one for students of European integration: States being ruled by elites who behave as self-interested actors, and who follow their own interests (or more precisely: what they see as their interest), and this has been first and foremost to stay in power and being able to exercise it without constraints from the outside. There has been a long tradition in social science to take rational, self-interested actors as the starting point for theoretical reasoning. Social constructivists have challenged this way on the ground that interests are nothing which are given objectively, but depend on actors' perceptions and values. I fully subscribe to this view. The analysis of concrete situations must necessarily imply how actors view the world, and what they want to achieve. These things can vary from culture to culture, from situation to situation, from time to time. However, the assumption that politicians want to stay in power, try to enlarge this power and the resources under their command, and try to avoid constraints from the outside, seems to be fairly valid irrespective of the cultural context.

¹⁹ Nyerere, Julius, 'Without unity, there is no future for Africa', *New African*, February 2006, pp. 20-23, esp. p. 22.

There has also been a long academic tradition (we might mention e.g. Max Weber, Rudolf Michels, Vilfredo Pareto or Gaetano Mosca) to focus on ruling, self-interested elites as the *most important* makers of policy. This is not to say that other actors such as social movements are of no importance. But the ruling elites are better organised than the population at large, and the elites command most resources, of power, of money, of information, of persuasion, so it is mainly them we have to look at, if we want to understand the outcome of politics. This reasoning can be applied, in principle, to oligarchic, monarchic, dictatorial or democratic states. In this perspective, the term “democracy”, rule by the people, is a misnomer: Also in democracies it is elites²⁰ to rule. But in democracies – and this is surely important – the elites have to accept *some restrictions* in their behaviour. They cannot, for instance, order the police to arrest and shoot people. In principle there is freedom of speech and organisation. The access to mass media is usually very unequally distributed, the elites commanding the loud-speakers. But at least it is not forbidden to speak out or to publish your own paper. In democracies it is also possible in elections at regular intervals to get rid of the elite group which occupies the government offices. However, after an election, you may get another elite group in these offices, but no “rule by the people”.

More specifically when it comes to processes of federation building (or establishing supranational structures, as in the terminology used above), it was in particular William Riker who placed the emphasis on the ruling elites in the countries in question, and their *federal bargain*.²¹ As the starting point, there are no proper reasons why politicians should endorse a step to a union, given the point that it undermines their control over their territory. Only exceptional conditions can motivate them to do such a move. Riker thought in the first place about external military or diplomatic threats which could be opposed only in common. Later he accepted that internal threats could create such a motive too.

But as a starting point it follows from this way of reasoning: Under normal conditions without big threats politicians have few incentives to accept supranational arrangements. Even on the contrary: If some are in place, national leaders have an interest at demolishing them because they disturb the control of

²⁰ I write “elites”, plural”, in order to avoid the misunderstanding that the ruling elite should be seen as one homogeneous group. It has been matter of long controversies, whether we should think of one ruling class, or whether it is more appropriate to think of functionally distinct and competing elite groups. An interesting overview over the classical and more recent controversies can be found e.g. at Haralambos, Michael, *Sociology. Themes and Perspectives*, London: Bell & Hyman, 1987, pp. 107-122.

²¹ A good overview over this discussion: McKay, David (1999), *Federalism and European Union: A Political Economy Perspective*, Oxford University Press, esp. p. 28f.

he politicians over their territory. In this light, there is nothing surprising about that Nyerere's attempts at establishing an East African Federation failed.

The efforts at supranational or federal arrangements were frustrated not only in East Africa. In West Africa prior to independence the idea of a united independence of five French West African territories was for some time on the agenda. It was destroyed mainly by Félix Houphouët-Boigny, of Ivory Coast.²² Only a rump federation of Soudan (Mali) and Senegal saw a short existence in 1960, to fall apart soon. And looking at the former British colonies in West Africa, there existed several supranational arrangements at the time of independence: The West African Currency Board, West African Court of Appeals, West African Cocoa Research Institute, West African Airways Cooperation.²³ They soon became abolished.

Interestingly, it was Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, otherwise perhaps the most vocal proponent of Pan-Africanism, who insisted on this. Nkrumah argued that regional arrangements were antithetical to real Pan-Africanism. Some East African politicians, for instance Uganda's Milton Obote, who also participated in bashing existing arrangements, forwarded similar view points.²⁴ Viewed against the background of European integration, Nkrumah's and Obote's argument was very strange indeed. As we have seen, in the European case, it was a few pioneering countries which took exactly concrete steps at integration on limited functional fields. They thereby paved the way to the larger and much closer union of today. And there have been many cases and forms of cooperation among European states besides the EU. Suffices perhaps to mention the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), the Nordic cooperation, the Benelux cooperation, the Council of Europe, or the Schengen cooperation (abolishing of border controls). Schengen became actually incorporated into the EU treaty, and in no case have the other forms of cooperation impeded progress of the EU. When Nkrumah, Obote and others demolished existing forms of cooperation, they thereby destroyed building blocks on which further practical unification could be built upon. If they said they did it in order to promote African unity, I see this as a rhetorical exercise, in order to re-conciliate a divisive practice with vocal Pan-Africanism. And their (and Houphouët-Boigny's) practical policy can easily be explained in terms forwarded by e.g. Riker: National political leaders want to secure their undivided control over their territories. Unless exceptional circumstances push them to do otherwise.

²² Duffield, Ian, 'Pan-Africanism since 1940', Crowder, Michael (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa, Volume 8 from c. 1940 to c. 1975*, Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp.95-141, esp. p. 120f.

²³ Muchie et al, p. 9.

²⁴ Duffie, p. 124.

Riker has stressed the importance of external threats. One might it perhaps formulate it somewhat softer: A motive to federate in order to strengthen the international standing of the new grouping. This type of motives, “strengthening Africa’s/Europe’s role in the world”, can be found in numerous speeches of leading politicians on both continents. But the factual outcome has been different. Not the least because the conditions were different.

The condition of a constitutional basis consensus

In fact, after the rush to independence and the consequent balkanization of Africa, the obstacles to African unity were formidable, much more so than in the European case. The African obstacles were partly rooted in social and political structures, partly in ideational structures.

When progressing to some form of federation, one must have a common understanding of how the new political unit is supposed to look like. Shall it be a proper federation? Or a new unitary state? Should it be based on democratic principles, with multi-partite elections, parliamentarism and the like, or should it be a one-party state? If there is no consensus as regards these elementary constitutional principles, intergovernmental and perhaps also some minor supranational arrangements are possible. But not substantial progress towards a federation.

In Europe matters were *relatively* simple. All six founding members of the EU were stable democracies. I use the term democracy mainly as a term which covers a set of rules, such as free elections to representative bodies, which are entitled to make laws. Governments are directly or indirectly dependent on elections. The citizens are in principle equal in legal terms, they enjoy rights such as freedom of speech or of organisation, and the judiciary is independent. All acts of state administration must be explicitly authorised by law, and they are to be controlled by the courts. In 1951/57 these principles were firmly in place, also in Germany and Italy which had quite different political systems before May 1945 (but which both had long traditions of constitutional government prior to the advent of Fascism and Nazism). These countries could therefore in 1951 and 1957 build up supranational structures which were compatible with their own constitutional orders: The supranational level can act only when explicitly and specifically empowered to do so by the national parliaments, and also the supranational level is subject to juridical scrutiny by an independent judiciary. Also the laws and acts of the supranational level are based on an unbroken chain of democratic legitimacy. There has been a long debate whether the EU suffers from a “democratic deficit”, given the point that many decisions are taken far away from the citizens. But from a formal-legal point of view, there is no democratic deficit. The structures of the EU are

another democratic layer on top of the national democracies, constructed along the same basic principles as the national legal systems.

The first EU enlargement of 1973 was unproblematic in this respect, given the point that also Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom were stable democracies. Negotiations could be done without explicit membership criteria. But in April 1978, when Greece, Portugal and Spain were approaching membership, the European Council, i.e. the heads of states and government, declared that “respect for and maintenance of representative democracy and human rights in each Member State are essential elements of membership in the European Communities”.²⁵ The EU leaders wanted to support democracy in these countries, but made it also clear that this was a non-negotiable condition. As the EU made clear in later enlargements, this condition must be in place before any negotiations about membership can begin.

This insistence on democracy and human rights can be seen as stating the values of the EU. But it can also be seen in strictly functional terms: The EU member states owe their stability to the legitimacy of their democratic arrangements. By granting non-democratic countries membership status, they would compromise the democratic character of their own laws and acts, given the point that any member state has some influence on the others via the supranational level. And what about an independent judiciary as a guardian of legality? How much trust could the democratic member states have in the compliance of EU legislation if there is a non-democratic government which is not in itself under independent judicial and democratic scrutiny? In short, a non-democratic state would have destabilising effects on the EU. In this case a structural-constructivist explanation emphasising values and a functionalist way of reasoning are perfectly compatible.

It is therefore excluded that e.g. Belarus in its present shape could become a member. No one questions that Belarus is European, but its undemocratic rule excludes membership.

At this point we have another important difference between the EU and the AU: In the AU every country on the African continent is welcome, regardless of its constitutional characteristics. This has the advantage that the impressive number of 53 states could enter the list. But it constitutes also a *substantial weakness* because there is no consensus as to basic constitutional principles. It is true, the Constitutional Act mentions among the objectives of the African Union to “promote democratic principles and institutions, popular participation and good

²⁵ Smith, Karen E., ‘The Evolution and Application of EU Membership Conditionality’, Cremona, Marise (ed.), *The Enlargement of the European Union*, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 105-140, esp. 109f.

governance” (Article 3g). But the rulers must have very different ideas about the concrete meaning of these words, given the stark differences in observable practices. Interestingly, *being* a despotic regime was no reason to be excluded from AU membership. But *becoming* one might cause problems. At least, Mauretania’s membership became suspended after a military coup, being an unconstitutional change of government. This shows that Article 3g *is not just* empty words. But a consensus in words and practical behaviour about *democracy as a certain type of rule by law* is evidently not, at least not yet, in place.

Many African countries are in a greyzone between democracy and autocratic rule. To measure the exact position of a country on such a scale is difficult. Scholars have constructed several indices for this purpose. A detailed and thoroughly-constructed index, on a world-wide basis is the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI).²⁶ 34 of the 48 states south of the Sahara became analysed within this frame. At the beginning of 2005 there were three proper democracies (Mauritius, Botswana and South Africa) and ten countries which are democracies with only *minor defects* (Namibia, Ghana, Senegal, Benin, Mali, Madagascar, Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique and Kenya). Democracies with *serious defects* were in place in Malawi, Uganda, Niger, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso and Nigeria.

Eight countries became classified as *autocracies* or *façade-democracies* (Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guinea, Rwanda, Cameroon, Togo and Chad). And seven countries are failed states or post-conflict states (Angola, Somalia, Burundi, Central African Republic, Liberia, Ivory Coast and DR Congo).²⁷ Other studies have produced groupings which are slightly different, without, however, altering the picture substantially.²⁸ As long as these conditions of widespread harsh deviations from democratic standards in many countries are not altered substantially, any attempt to construct an African Union along the

²⁶ www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de. The website which gives access to the material contains also a very graphic and instructive transformation atlas. For a discussion of the index and a comparison with e.g. the Freedom House Index, see: Schmidt, Siegmund, ‘Wie viel Demokratie gibt es in Afrika?’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 32-33/2006, pp.9-14.

²⁷ Schmidt, p. 13.

²⁸ For instance, other scholars use the term “electoral authoritarianism”, meaning political regimes which have “established the institutional façades of democracy, including regular multiparty elections for the chief executive, in order to conceal (and reproduce) harsh realities of authoritarian governance.” This characteristic can be applied, on the African continent, to Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Mauretania, Tanzania, Togo and Zambia. Scheller, Andreas (ed.), *Electoral Authoritarianism. The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006, pp. 1 and 3.

lines of the EU is excluded. Or is e.g. an effective independent judiciary imaginable in a failed state? Or legislation with democratic legitimacy when it becomes written by the regime in Khartoum?

Of course, democratic rule by law is not the only way how to organise a state, or how to organise a union of states. African states have seen many forms of government, for instance military rule or one-party systems. Also many Western observers have held the opinion that under African conditions one-party rule is more appropriate than Western-type democracies. And in principle, also a scheme of one-party rule could be extended to the African continent. This was a solution towards which Krumah's thoughts seem to have converged at the end of this rule, not the least under the impression of his travels to the Soviet Union. David Rooney, in a very well-researched and often very sympathising biography, wrote²⁹: A Ghananian delegation under Nkrumah went to the Soviet Union and visited many parts of the country, which had been poor and backward at the time of the 1917 revolution and which gave evidence of the remarkable achievements of the Soviet regime. Nkrumah also noted that the Soviets had welded together many people of different colour, race and tongue into a mighty superpower.

Nkrumah had further and long discussions with both Khrushchev and Brezhnev, and studied in detail the problems which the Soviet Union had successfully overcome ... Nkrumah became increasingly preoccupied with the question of whether the Soviet system, which had achieved so much in a short time, would be the best example for Ghana, and indeed for the whole of Africa, to follow. He began to ask himself whether, with dynamic leadership, Ghana could 'take off' out of its grinding poverty, and whether the whole of Africa could be welded together into a proud and unified country. The Soviet Union, as he had seen, from Moscow to Tashkent, from the Crimea to Leningrad, had achieved this – so why shouldn't Africa?

In the last years of his life, in exile in Guinea, he seemed to have settled for such a solution, and he worked actively for it. In his *Dark Days in Ghana*, he wrote that "Africa is ripe for armed revolution ... imperialism and neo-colonialism [*he meant the existing African governments, W.Z*] must be attacked ... and protracted peoples' wars must be fought until victory is achieved."³⁰ In 1970, in his *The Class Struggle in Africa*, he elaborated further on this theme, where he described a coming African Revolution as part of the world revolutionary socialist process. An All African People's Revolutionary Army would bring the African People's Revolutionary Party to power by military means. The Party

²⁹ Rooney, David, *Kwame Nkrumah. The Political Kingdom in the Third World*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd Publishers, 1988, p. 177f.

³⁰ As quoted *ibid.*, p. 267.

would be supported by an All African Trade Union Congress, so the organised socialist workers could forge an alliance and give leadership to the peasants.³¹

Nkrumah was not the only political leader who became seduced by Leninism, and not the only one to have an over-optimistic view of the achievements of the Soviet Union. Nor was he the only politician to whom protracted wars involving the civilian population were legitimate political means. My point here is not a critique of Nkrumah for its own sake, but to highlight the enormous differences which were to be found among African leaders *as to basic constitutional principles*.

In the light of these differences it cannot come as a surprise that African unification has progressed very little for many decades. Without a basic consensus no constitution can be written and no agreements signed which imply substantial supra-nationalism.

However, this reasoning on a necessary constitutional consensus can also lead to optimism: At least in relative terms, democracy is much more widespread than previously, with eleven countries on the list above being at least democracies with only minor defects. As to the other countries we might hope for democratic improvements to come, albeit perhaps only slowly. It is, of course, also encouraging that all AU member states have signed that the aim of the union is to “promote democratic principles”. There is little open opposition to the *idea* of democracy, Leninism is no serious competitor any more. And last not least, opinion polls show high levels of popular support for democracy.³²

Progress at democracy is valuable in itself. But here I want to stress that it also improves the chances for political unity. And seen in this perspective the chances for more African unity are better than ever before. But the conditions are not yet in place, at least not on the continental scale.

The condition, not of identical, but of compatible socio-economic systems

The EU has had it easier also with respect to another condition for progress at integration, namely largely compatible socio-economic structures. The six founding countries were mixed economies of a capitalist type, i.e. private property was protected and the coordination of economic activities was done mainly through markets. These countries had also built up rather complex welfare-state arrangements, in order to cushion the social effects of market economy and competition. But the welfare state has been more a complement to market economy, making it socially and politically acceptable, but not replacing it. State property has been substantial in many sectors, e.g. railways or energy or

³¹ Ibid., p. 256f.

³² Schmidt, op. cit., p. 13.

steel production. This could disturb market processes, and so could subsidies, in particular in agriculture. But these were more modifications of the principle of market economy than replacements of it. Crucially, as a basic principle people could choose freely in which activities to engage and where to invest their money. No government was entitled to impede them in this respect, save a few specifically defined areas such as drugs or arms.

Under these conditions, practical steps to integration were *relatively* easy. For instance, the Rome Treaty of March 1957 opened the way to a common market and a common agricultural policy (plus a common endeavour to exploit peaceful nuclear energy). In a process of twelve years all internal customs barriers were lifted and replaced by a common external tariff. The member countries thereby opened themselves to more competition from their neighbours, but they also gained better access to their neighbours' markets. On balance all countries won, the participating economies could stand the competitive pressure and exploit the new opportunities. This way the EU member countries began to cooperate much closer at ground level. However, lifting tariff barriers was not enough in order to create a common market because substantial non-tariff barriers, e.g. incompatible technical standards and requirements, impeded the free circulation of goods. This problem was dealt with after 1985 when the union launched the project of the Internal Market. This required huge amounts of technical regulations which in turn were difficult to achieve if unanimity was required at each step. Therefore a new treaty, the Single European Act, effectively introduced qualified majority voting on issues pertaining to the Internal Market. The Maastricht Treaty of 1991 thereafter additionally started the process towards a monetary union (to be achieved in 1999).

Economic matters and political unification have therefore been closely intertwined (and they are also today). In many instances the business community has been pressing for more unification, e.g. prior to the start of the Internal Market programme. However, it was not "capitalism" which created the drive towards European political integration. Instead it was mainly top-politicians who wanted integration for political reasons and who used economic processes as levers. Just to give an example: Prior to the Rome Treaty in 1957, the idea of a customs union was highly controversial in West-Germany, with Economy Minister Ludwig Erhard opposing it on the grounds that Germany should orient herself towards the world market. However, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer insisted that closer West European integration was in Germany's national interest, not the least with a view to bringing the united weight of Europe on the

scale when negotiating with the Soviet Union, e.g. on matters such as German unification.³³

Other examples have been the programme of the Internal Market with its transition to majority voting and the Economic and Monetary Union, driven forward in particular by French politicians such as Francois Mitterand or Jacques Delors, in order to add more installations to the *Construction Européenne*³⁴, primarily for political reasons.

However, such an integration path by starting and deepening a common market can only work if certain conditions are fulfilled. Quite simple, you can only create a common market if you agree on the idea of a market economy. If, say, one country is a market economy and the neighbouring one a centrally-planned economy, a common market is not possible. Then in principle only two outcomes are conceivable. Either, the borders become really open for economic transactions. But then central planning will collapse. Or tight border controls will be maintained and exchange will be allowed only in so far it fits to the previously established plan. But then you do not have a common market but instead two states which organise exchange on the basis of long-term trade agreements. Badly-functioning hybrids between these forms are possible too. But by definition, they are not a proper common market and can therefore not generate the integrating forces which the European common market did.

If there is a basic consensus on open market economy, then some economic integration will take place by market forces, e.g. companies will exploit export possibilities or organise joint ventures. Processes of this kind are observable even when there is hardly any institutional superstructure. East Asia is a case in point. There intra-regional trade flows have increased substantially since the early 1980s.³⁵ This could happen in spite of divergences in the constitutional order of these countries. But all these countries, albeit in varying degree, have embarked on a policy of mainly unilateral and global trade liberalisation, in order to gain access to the markets of advanced economies. But thereby they also turned open to each other, which companies and consumers could exploit. As a group of experts of the European Central Bank, who conducted a thorough piece of research on economic integration in various regions of the world,

³³ See e.g. Adenauer's instruction to the German cabinet ministers, 19th January 1956, Herbst, Ludolf, *Option für den Westen: Vom Marshallplan is zum deutsch-französischen Vertrag*, München: dtv, second edition, 1996, pp. 231-233.

³⁴ Dyson, Kenneth and Featherstone, Kevin (1999), *The Road to Maastricht: Negotiating Economic and Monetary Union*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 71-75.

³⁵ European Central Bank, 'Economic Integration in Selected Regions outside the European Union', *ECB Monthly Bulletin*, October 2004, pp. 67-84, esp. p. 72.

concluded: "... economic integration in East Asia can be mainly interpreted as the indirect result of countries pursuing compatible development goals."³⁶ In our context the key word is "compatible".

However, a deeper integration to a proper common market, i.e. without substantial remaining economic barriers, requires more. For instance, a common market will hardly be sustainable if one country has state-owned enterprises which receive subsidies from the state budget and which then can smash competitors through dumping prices. Therefore, in the EU state-owned enterprises are not allowed to receive state subsidies. The Commission controls this tightly. A common market also presupposes numerous technical controls. Take the example of food products. If a country opens its borders to a free inflow of goods from the outside, it must be reasonably sure that food imports are not poisonous. Or if you allow the free import of cars, you must rely on that the breaks of these cars work sufficiently. In other words, a system of commonly-agreed standards must be in place. For this reason, the EU has built up a very detailed system of market regulation and control.

It follows out of these simple functionalist reasons that the EU has had to formulate also economic and administrative conditions for membership when it opened up for eastern enlargement. In the declaration of the Copenhagen Council, of June 1993, these conditions were specified as follows:

Membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union. Membership presupposes the candidate's ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.³⁷

The countries of central and eastern Europe had to reform their economies quite thoroughly before they could become EU members. They also had to accept close scrutiny by the EU Commission which monitored these countries, and which also formulated the accession conditionals more specifically. For instance, "functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with the competitive pressure and market forces within the Union" was specified that it presupposed, among other things, a substantial share of small and medium-sized enterprises. Only they could give a sufficient amount of flexibility to the economy.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 75.

³⁷ Zank, Wolfgang: *The Politics of Eastern Enlargement: Historical Reconstruction and Theoretical Conclusions*, 2005 (56p). Aalborg University, European Research Unit, 38. Occasional Paper, p. 19 http://www2.ihis.aau.dk/eru/publications/38_Zank_2005.pdf.

This is not to say that EU member countries must be uniform in every aspect. Actually they show a high amount of diversity in many fields, from the character and generosity of welfare-state arrangements and health care systems over the school system to cultural policy. But a consensus on certain principles must have been in place before the EU could build such a close cooperation among the member states.

In principle there are alternatives to the market-compatible way of creating a common economy, which the EU followed. Again, a centrally-planned economy comes to the mind. Nkrumah and others were not completely mistaken, the Soviet Union functioned for many decades. And as to some tasks, e.g. the mass production of standardized military equipment during World War II, the Soviet economy was actually very efficient. However, it is important to understand that a capitalist market system and centrally-planned socialism are two systems which are incompatible. Following János Kornai, the Hungarian economist who perhaps has shaped academic thinking on the socialist systems like no one else, I understand “capitalist system” here as a very broad category. Its defining characteristics are political power being friendly to private property, private property being the dominant ownership form, and coordination of economic activities predominantly done by markets. In this definition, both the Nordic welfare states or the former French system with its *planification* fall under this broad definition of “capitalism”. By contrast, a socialist system according to Kornai is characterised by the point that a Marxist-leninist party possesses a power monopoly; state ownership is dominant, and economic coordination is done mainly by bureaucracies.³⁸ Both systems can work in their own way. But as voluminous high-quality research and a vast amount of practical experiences, before and after 1989, have shown: Both systems require a long set of conditions to be fulfilled if they are supposed to work, and there is a high degree of affinity among the elements of a system.³⁹ For instance, once you make the centrally-planned state sector the corner piece of your strategy, which should receive the bulk of national investment, an unregulated private sector can hardly be tolerated anymore. It would compete for labour force, and profits and assets could be brought abroad. Tight economic border controls become a necessity. And once market incentives are destroyed, bureaucratic instructions must replace them. And these instructions must become ever more detailed. “The system’s internal logic propels it toward ‘perfectionism’.”⁴⁰ A “mix” of the

³⁸ Kornai, János, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism*, Princeton University Press, 1992. A short overview over the main system characteristics: Kornai, János, ‘What the Chance of System From Socialism to Capitalism Does and Does Not Mean’, *Journal of Economic Perspectives* – Volume 14, Number 1 – Winter 2000, pp. 27-42.

³⁹ As regards the elements of the socialist system, see e.g. Kornai, 1992, pp. 365-8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

systems creates only non-performing hybrids. If was, for instance, not possible to “reform” the eastern and central European Soviet economic systems. This has been tried on many occasions. You could only go on with a Soviet-type of system, or you could abolish it and adopt capitalist market systems.

Therefore African economic unification could either progress on capitalist lines, understood in the very wide frame as defined here. Or along the lines of a socialist planned economy. But not on both simultaneously. Said differently, the wide disparity of economic systems in Africa, ranging from models close to the market systems up to numerous examples of centrally-planned socialism, created a new formidable obstacle to progress at African integration. Still in 1987 seven sub-Saharan countries could be grouped as socialist systems (Angola, Benin, Congo [Brazzaville], Ethiopia, Mozambique, Somalia, Zimbabwe).⁴¹ Other countries such as Ghana or Guinea had practised with this type of system before. Actually Ghana has been an instructive case early on: In his urge to industrialise Ghana quickly, Nkrumah placed heavy tax burdens on cocoa farmers and other profitable producers and spent the money on numerous industrial projects and state farms. In 1964 he tried to coordinate all activities under a Seven-Year Plan. However, these investments turned out to be financial sinks. In a single year, 1963, instead of producing profits, they made losses of £ 15m, “the industrial sector rapidly became a catalogue of disasters.”⁴² As the situation deteriorated, Nkrumah imposed import controls and then price controls, forbade the import of “non-essentials and privileged the state-owned sector. Inflation became rampant.”⁴³ A fall of cocoa prices in 1965 added to Ghana’s grave economic problems, but did not cause them. I find it important to underline in this context is that “the affinity of the elements of a socialist system” is traceable also here: Once the market economy was destroyed, the logical “way out” was to try more and more controls, including effectively closing the border. When Nkrumah was eventually disposed by a military coup in 1966, Ghana was almost completely “disunited” from the rest of Africa.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Ibid, p. 8.

⁴² Rooney, p. 186f..

⁴³ Ibid., p. 193.

⁴⁴ “At independence Ghana had foreign reserves worth £ 190 million, adequate infrastructure and an efficient government machine. When Nkrumah was overthrown, the country was literally bankrupt, with external debts – some, it is true, inflated by foreign companies – of some £ 250 million. Local food was prohibitively expensive and there was a chronic shortage of consumer goods turning the market women, for long powerful supporters, against the president. Frontiers with all Ghana’s neighbours were closed, while the prisons were full.” Williams, David, ‘English-Speaking West Africa’, Michael Crowder (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa, Volume 8 from c. 1940 to c. 1975*, pp. 331-382, esp, p. 359f.

The current state of affairs: Reasons for moderate optimism.

If we now leave these tragic experiences behind and look forward, we can state with a certain amount of optimism: The time of largely diverging experiments with socio-economic systems is over. Also in this respect the countries of Africa are much closer than before. This creates much better condition for progressing on the path of economic integration, and perhaps starting a virtuous cycle of intertwined economic and political integration.

We should, however, not lose out of sight that African economic integration is still at its beginnings. The above-mentioned experts of the European Central Bank concluded in this case: “With the exception of the most southern part of Africa, where the regional exchange of goods and services increased quite substantially over the 1990s, economic integration has remained low in Sub-Saharan Africa.”⁴⁵ As in the Middle East and North Africa, the general openness to trade is high, but they trade little among each other. One important reason is the dependency, still, of many countries on few primary commodities which they export to the world market, but which are not in much demand at the neighbour.

Here we can add that Western Europe has had an advantage more: Already in the 1950s her economies were comparatively highly developed, and this means a high degree of specialisation of labour and diversification of production. This in itself creates intertwined patterns of supply and demand which go across the national borders. This implies in turn a high degree of interdependency which creates a pressure for finding common solutions. This could often be observed in the course of European integration, currently for instance as regards energy policy. To some extent this is also already valid for e.g. East Asia, where more institutionalised cooperation, e.g. on monetary matters, has come on the agenda. But many African countries have had comparatively weakly-developed economies, with low degrees of specialisation of labour and diversification of production. Economic interdependence among them (as opposed to dependence on e.g. world-market prices for one particular commodity) has therefore also been weak.

Also tariff barriers still burden intra-African trade, but lowering or abolishing them is difficult because many governments depend on the income from them. One might hope that the positive economic growth which most parts of Africa have experienced the last years might ease this kind of problems.

⁴⁵ European Central Bank, ‘Economic Integration in Selected Regions outside the European Union’, *ECB Monthly Bulletin*, October 2004, pp. 67-84, esp. p. 71.

Numerous attempts at economic integration have been started, both at the continental level and at regional level. The AU has declared its intention to create an African Economic Community and African Monetary Union by 2028. Besides, there are now fourteen Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and three monetary unions. Most of these arrangements, however, “suffer from significant institutional weaknesses, which combined with governance problems at the country level, help to account for the low level of economic integration. In particular, compliance with the commitments made has remained low ...”⁴⁶ 47 out of 53 African Union countries are members of more than one REC, some up to four. This is possible, in order to take up the categories discussed before, because the REC are up till now purely *intergovernmental*, and a country can certainly participate in several of these deliberation fora. However, as soon as overlapping REC will acquire supranational qualities with e.g. binding legislation, the countries in question will have to make a choice.

Until now, only the three monetary unions, i.e. the South African Common Monetary Area and the two CFA monetary unions (which have linked these countries in monetary terms with the French franc and now the euro) show signs of economic integration, “benefiting from subdued inflation as well as lower interest rate and inflation differentials than elsewhere in the region.”⁴⁷ Would it be advisable to demolish the two CFA unions just because they are “relicts of French colonialism”?

Summary and Perspectives.

In the decades after independence the obstacles to progress at African integration have been formidable, not the least due to the diversity on basic constitutional principles and socio-economic characteristics. But there is reason for optimism because Africa seems to be much more homogeneous in these respects. The time of far-flung socio-economic experiments is over, and at least on the declamatory level democratic principles do not have serious competitors any more, with the exception of Islamic fundamentalism in some parts of Africa. Opinion polls show high levels of adherence to democratic ideals, and at least eleven countries can be classified as democratic, perhaps with “minor deficiencies.” Many authoritarian countries see at least elections, and there is perhaps room for hope that they progress to democracy.

This said the divergences are still substantial. Too substantial actually to expect an evolution to supranational arrangements at continental level, leave alone the transformation of the AU into a federation. It will still take many years for the failed states to recover, and to democratise the authoritarian ones. This does not

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 72.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

preclude more cooperation on the AU level, perhaps more institutionalised regular deliberations, perhaps the adoption of more common positions when it comes to international problems, or perhaps the founding of the investment bank which the Constitutive Act envisages. Normatively speaking, there is no reason not to try to develop more cooperation within the frame of the AU.

However, if the ambition is to find more obliging forms of integration, built on common supranational institutions, which can formulate decisions and regulations which are binding in practice, then the AU member countries seem still by far too divergent. How much compliance in practice, e.g. on trade rulings, can you expect in a failed state? Or when it comes to human rights: How much compliance can you expect in practice from a government which breaks them on a large scale on a daily basis?

In this perspective there seems to be much more chances for real progress on the level of the states or groupings of states. If democratic principles are a condition for supranational integration, they must be properly entrenched in the individual countries in the first place. And democratic countries can go on and build democratic supranational structures on top of their domestic democracies. It would be a tragedy, if real progress in this sense would be once again be impeded and the obstruction legitimised by unrealistic continental Pan-African rhetorics.

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