

## The European Union and Africa: trade liberalisation, constructive disengagement and the securitisation of Europe's external frontiers

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During the past decade, emerging countries and a number of corporate players have come to see the African continent as a frontier and a pioneering front. The lecture argues that such representations do not apply to the analysis of Africa-EU interactions over the same period. Implementation of the ambitious objectives assigned to the first Action Plan of the Joint Africa-EU Strategic Partnership (JAES) launched in 2007 has been hampered by poor involvement and weak mobilisation on the part of both African and European member-states. The JAES - almost exclusively funded by the European Commission - has become heavily dependent on the dynamics of interactions between the European Union (EU) and African Union (AU) commissions. This has, in turn, generated specific problems due to the wide disparity between their resources and powers, and the difficulty for Europeans to 'speak as one' in the field of foreign policy. Poor mobilisation of member states has been compounded by an all-encompassing agenda, the absence of clearly stated priorities, and the problems of co-ordination with the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) or the AU's Regional Economic Communities (RECs). European pledges to 'treat Africa as one' have contributed to the a 'construction' of African unity bound to appeal to the two commissions and their College to College (C2C) meetings, but oblivious to the diversity of interests and weak enforcement capacity of the AU.

Public pledges to build a 'strategic' inter-continental relationship with Africa are also undermined by European policy orientations that undercut such an objective. Europe's 'Africa policy' is *de facto* about trade liberalisation, the endorsement of European norms, constructive disengagement in the field of peace-keeping and, most importantly, the securitisation of external frontiers and borderlands. These core components contribute to the formation of bifurcated regimes of interactions between Europe, on the one hand, North and sub-Saharan Africa on the other hand. While North Africa is feared or valued as a *limes*, sub-Saharan Africa is treated as a distant 'abroad', not as a 'new' frontier or a gathering of states whose interests converge with those of Europe. The capabilities-expectation gap that has become the hallmark of the Africa-EU strategic partnership calls

for a clearer discussion of the stakes involved. The lecture will make a number of suggestions in this respect.