

Assessing EU-Francophone Africa Collaboration: A Systematic Review

Mbey Etete Gregory and Agboh Jeremiah Adie

Abstract— Over the years, the EU's soft power has phenomenally grown and spread in the world to the extent that many critics arguably view the Union as a superpower or one of the major global players in today's world. EU's global influence is seen in the fact that it is the second largest economy in the world and has continuously represented a very active partner in the development of many sub-regions in the world, including Africa. In effect, the EU has not only been a model for African economies. Through its multiform collaboration with the Black continent, the EU has sought to directly or indirectly affect the lives and growth of specific, if not all African countries. From initiatives aimed at pushing for democracy, peace and economic stability in Africa to infrastructural development and social reforms in Africa, the EU has proved to be a key partner in the socio-political and economic development of Africa. This essay sets out to examine EU policies and programs which in one way or the other have affected the political, economic and socio-cultural sectors of Francophone African countries. The paper specifically looks at the extent to which Francophone African countries' collaboration with the EU has improved or hindered the progress of African States in terms of political autonomy, economic and technological development and educational and socio-cultural development. The paper is thus divided into three main parts. The first part provides a brief presentation of the EU highlighting its growing influence in the world. The second part critically explores EU presence in Africa and indexes of its impact on the life of African nations. The third part focuses more specifically on the impact of EU-Africa collaboration on Francophone African countries.

Keywords: European Union; French Speaking Africa; Neocolonialism; African Union; Soft Power.

1, Department of Modern Languages and Translation Studies, University of Calabar, Nigeria.

2, Department of Political Science, University of Calabar, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Since its creation in 1992 (following the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty), the European Union (EU) has sought to magnify its soft power and global influence (Meunier & Nicolaïdis, 2006). Over the years, the Union has actually (re)designed or rethought its ways of functioning so as to have a footprint even in very remote regions such as the Caribbean counties, Asia and Africa. Today, many Western critics arguably describe the EU as one of the major – nay, the most powerful – players on global stage. Observers and international politics pundits such as Reid (2004), J.Rifkin (2004), M. Leonard (2005) and A. Reding (2014) among others go to the extent of referring to the EU as an emerging superpower on the grounds of (i) the union's very large population, (ii) its large economy (the EU is the second largest economy in the world), and (iii) the fact that the US foreign policy has most often been viewed as unpopular or has simply failed in the Union. Parag Khanna in particular contends that "Europe is overtaking its rivals to become the world's most successful empire" in the world. Khanna further argues that regions such as South America, East Asia and Africa have over the years preferred to emulate the "European Dream" to following the American Variant. This, to an extent is true to Africa's adoption of continental integration (African Union) somehow modeled with strong similarities with the EU.

In effect, the EU has not only been a model for many African economies. Through its multiform collaboration with the Black continent, the EU has sought to directly or indirectly affect the lives of specific, if not all African countries. From initiatives aimed at pushing for democracy, peace and economic stability in Africa to infrastructural development and social reforms in Africa, the EU has proved to be a partner in the socio-political and economic development of Africa. In this essay, attention will specifically be given to EU policies and programs which in one way or the other have affected the political, economic and socio-cultural sectors of Francophone African countries. The paper will specifically look at the extent to which Francophone African countries' collaboration with the EU has improved or hindered the progress of African States in terms of political autonomy, economic and technological development and educational and socio-cultural development. Based on the above mentioned objectives, the paper will be divided into three main parts. The first part provides a brief presentation of the EU highlighting its growing influence in the world. The second part critically explores EU presence in Africa and indexes of its impact on the life of African nations. The third part focuses more specifically on the impact of EU-Africa collaboration on Francophone African countries.

THE EU AS A MAJOR GLOBAL PLAYER WHICH IS PRESENT IN AFRICA

The EU is a unified trade and monetary body comprised of 28 member countries including France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Britain, Portugal, Germany, Greece, Sweden, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Finland, Denmark, Estonia and Cyprus, among others (Hollanders & Kanerva, 2015). The Union eliminates all border control between state members, thereby allowing the free flow of good and people across the national borders

of member states. In tandem with this, public contracts are open to bidders from all member countries, products manufactured in any country can be sold to any member without tariffs or duties; taxes are all standardized and practitioners of services such as law, tourism and banking among others can operate in all member countries. In addition to this, the Union transmits state-of-the-art technologies to its members particularly in such domains as research and development, environmental protection and energy.

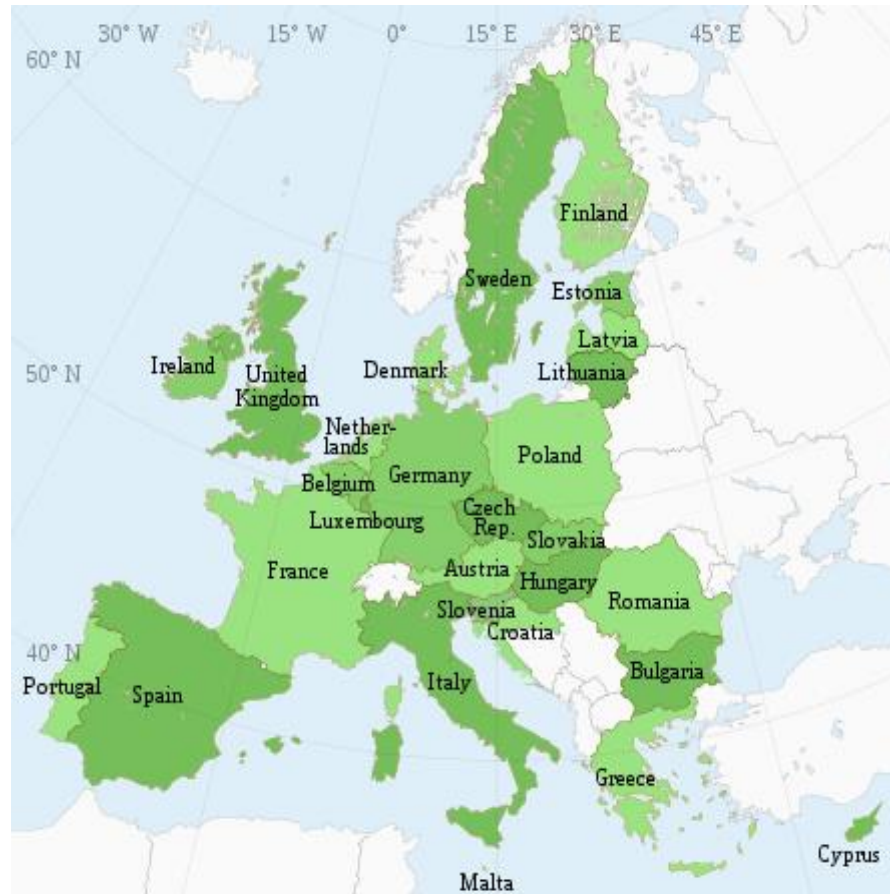


Plate 1: EU Countries

Created with the purpose of being a competitive entity in the global marketplace, the EU has quickly grown to become the second largest economy of the world. According to the European Commission Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs (ECDGEFA), the EU is one of the largest economic players of the world measured by share of global GDP (Mucha-Leszko, 2018). It also trades more than the other major economies of the planet (notably the US, China and Japan among others) and is home to some of the greatest secondary, tertiary and quaternary industries in the world. Comparing the Union with the USA and Japan, the ECDGEFA (2018) explains that:

The figures for both the EU-25 and the euro area show that the EU holds the largest shares of global external trade. [...] As a major global financial centre, the EU is home to many of the largest banks in the world. As EMU progresses, further consolidation of the financial sector is expected, leading to the creation of pan-European financial institutions with global reach. For businesses, the fragmented national economies made it difficult for European enterprises to become truly global. However, within the single market, pan-European companies are emerging with the size and brand power to compete worldwide. (p. 1).

In the same line of argument, Sauderbaum and Van Langenhove (2007) contend that since the end of the Cold War, the EU has progressively expanded not only its economic influence in the world but also its external relations and foreign policies, to the point of becoming a veritable global actor in world politics. The two authors write that:

During the last decade interregionalism has become a key component of the EU's external relations and foreign policies. In fact, the EU has quickly become the hub of a large number of interregional arrangements with a number of regions around the world. Promoting regional and interregional relations not only justifies and enhances the EU's own existence and efficiency as a global 'player', the strategy also promotes the legitimacy and status of other regions, giving rise to a deepening of cross-cutting interregional relations in trade and economic relations, political dialogue, development cooperation, cultural relations and security cooperation. (Sauderbaum and Van Langenhove, 2007, p. xii).

One of the regions where EU's presence, influence or activities have been palpable is Africa. In effect, the EU has, for some decades now, entered into various partnerships with Africa - or specific African countries (Gillespie & Youngs, 2002). These partnerships have enabled it to consolidate its relations with the "Black Continent" and to magnify its footprints in Africa. A case in point is 1975 Lome Convention which engendered or inspired the 2000 Cotonou Agreement with African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries, and spelt out EU's commitment to collaborate with 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. The fundamental principles of the Cotonou Agreement include "equality of partners, global participation (States and non-state actors), dialogue and regionalisation. The Agreement entered into force in April 2003 and has been revised in 2005 and 2010 in accordance with the revision clause to re-examine the Agreement every five years" (Hulse, 2016, p. 12). Furthermore, the Cotonou Agreement was designed to establish a comprehensive partnership with 3 pillars:

- i. Development cooperation
- ii. Political cooperation
- iii. Economic and trade cooperation (for the period 2000-2007)

Another evidence of EU's engagement in Africa is the Africa-EU Partnership established during the first Africa-EU Summit held in the year 2000 in Cairo. Since its creation in 2000, the Africa-EU Partnership has been a "formal political channel through

which the European Union (EU) and the African continent work together, engage in political and policy dialogues and define their cooperative relationship” (African Union, 2019). As noted by the African Union (AU), since its adoption, the Africa-EU Partnership has been striving to “bring Africa and Europe closer together through strengthening economic cooperation and promoting sustainable development, with both continents co-existing in peace, security, democracy, prosperity, solidarity and human dignity” (p. 19). Guided by the partnership mentioned above, the EU and Africa established the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) during the 2007 Africa-EU Summit of Lisbon. This JAES sets out the intention of both the EU and Africa to operate beyond the donor/recipient relationship and to work towards long term cooperation on jointly identified mutual complementary interests. Being based on the principles of ownership, partnership and solidarity, this Strategy (JAES) has marked a new phase in Africa-EU relations as it has sought to shatter the questionable donor/receiver relationship that has been existing between Africa and the EU.

In line with the Partnerships mentioned above, Africa and the EU have demonstrated their determination to work together on “a strategic, long-term footing to develop a shared vision for EU-Africa relations in a globalised world”. The two continents’ common interests have included issues such as climate change, global security and the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Apart from instruments such as the Africa-EU partnerships and the JAES, the EU has used bilateral and regional accords to enable its collaboration with specific African countries. A case in point is the series of “Sahel Strategy” aimed at fostering security and development within the Sahel region, particularly in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad and Mauritania (Çonkar, 2020). Since March, 2011, the Strategy has remained the key framework for EU action at both individual and collective levels to help countries in the wider Sahel-Sahara region address key security and development challenges such as terrorism, the shrinking of Lake Chad, desertification, migration and poverty among others. Another regional framework defining EU’s collaboration with specific African sub-regions or countries is the “EU Strategy on the Gulf of Guinea” which has as main objectives to:

Help the states of the region to achieve peace, security and prosperity through the successful and legitimate development of their economies and their institutions, in line with the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA); building political consensus, enabling and respecting African ownership and synchronising existing programmes in a comprehensive approach to regional development and security. (Council of the European Union, 2014, p. 2).

Thus, the EU has established various forms of partnerships with the African continent (as a whole) and specific African countries and Africa based Non-governmental organisation and regional integration bodies. It will be very herculean and even outside the methodological preview of this discourse to review all these partnerships. The

following section will thus specifically focus on relevant cases of EU collaboration with some French speaking countries.

ASSESSING THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE EU AND FRANCOPHONE AFRICA

Although the EU has diversified its collaboration with African countries and has sometimes tailored its cooperation with Africa to involved only specific regions or countries of the continent, the institution has not, according to literature available, conceived a framework for collaboration specifically with Francophone African states as a block. Thus, in this section of the paper, attention will be devoted to bilateral cooperation between the EU and specific Francophone countries. The section will examine the impact of this EU-Francophone countries cooperation in terms of how it has facilitated or hampered (i) political autonomy, (ii) economic and technological development and (iii) educational and socio-cultural development in Francophone African countries.

It will be helpful from the onset, to highlight the fact that EU's collaboration with individual Francophone countries has been multifaceted, the same as its cooperation with other African political entities has been diversified. The Union has in many cases shaped its collaboration with French speaking African countries according to the interests it has in common with them; as well as according to periods in time and issues at hand. For instance, its 2011-2015 "Sahel Strategy" involving Sahel-Saharan countries such as Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Chad has largely been informed by the recrudescence of terrorism, organized crime, arm and human trafficking and insecurity in the Sahel region (Helly & Galeazzi, 2015). EU's cooperation within the context of this Strategy has mainly been geared towards working in synergy with French speaking Sahel-Saharan countries to neutralize terrorist movements such as the MUJAO, AQMI and Boko Haram in the region, thereby fostering security and enabling development in these countries. The fight against terrorism in the Sahel region has also naturally been aimed at protecting the economic interests of EU member States.

Another EU-Francophone African country collaboration which has been a win-win venture is the "Partnership for Labor Migration" involving four Francophone African countries (Benin, Mali, Senegal and Cameroon) and aimed among other things at arresting clandestine immigration of Malians, Cameroonians, Senegalese and Beninese into EU countries. As explained by the AFRICAN Union, the Partnership for Labor Migration has as objective to foster:

The promotion and efficient management of labour migration within the region [West and Central Africa] and towards the Member States of the EU through the strengthening of the institutional and operational capacities of the PES from the four beneficiary countries. It is also intended to enhance the positive impact of labour migration on development and encourage cooperation and dialogue between source and destination countries (p.9).

One notices that, in its collaboration with French African countries, the EU has always claimed to act as an assisting partner, thereby making evident or real, the myth that there is some sort of inequality between French African countries and EU member States. The National Indicative Program (for Cameroon) for instance, highlights the objectives of EU collaboration with Cameroon from 2014-2020 as follows:

1. promote and support efforts made by the Cameroonian government in the domain of human right protection, good governance, the amelioration of the business environment, the sustainable management of natural resources, fight against corruption, gender equality and minorities rights protection, in the strict respect of international accords ratified by Cameroon and which promote social stability and security;
2. Foster the coherence of national policies as enshrined in the Strategic Plan for Economic Growth and Employment (DSCE); this, to enable a modern, transparent and efficacious management of public finances, as well as a modernization of the system of production in the country, steps that are necessary for poverty alleviation and job creation;
3. Support the agricultural sector towards sustained growth; promote development in the grassroots and in semi-urban and vulnerable zones through integrated rural development initiatives;
4. Implement strategies such as the Economic Partnership Accord and the EU-Africa Regional Economic Partnership with the aid of the European Fund for Development, the Indicative National Program and other forms of financial assistance (Republic of Cameroon & European Union, 2017).

EU collaboration with French speaking African countries has had serious impact in the economic, political and socio-cultural lives of the Francophone African countries. This impact can be examined in three domains namely political autonomy, economic and technological development and education and socio-cultural development.

POLITICAL AUTONOMY

Although laudable to some extent, EU cooperation in French speaking African countries – the same as in other African countries – has sometimes been instrument of neo-colonialism. Though frameworks such as the JAES have sought to redefine EU-African collaboration as a relation between equals, Africa (including Francophone countries) have continue to share a donor-receiver relation and this has had serious negative implications for the autonomy of African countries in general and French speaking African countries in particular. Corroborating this observation Miyandazi et al (2020), contend that:

Despite continued engagement between the European Union (EU) and (Francophone) Africa, cooperation continues to present challenges. The EU is frequently viewed as ‘the donor’ and Africa as ‘the recipient’, creating an unequal partnership. [...] While the parties have developed joint frameworks for cooperation and concluded relevant agreements, overall implementation has been limited owing to differences in

capacities, perceptions and priorities. [...] These differences have hindered the implementation of EU-Africa policy frameworks for joint action. Often, solutions are seen as imposed instead of owned – especially in Africa. Building trust is thus essential, through redefining the basis for cooperation between the EU and Africa and analysing what has and has not worked in the implementation of their cooperation framework (p. 236).

In effect, EU contribution to French African countries economic and socio-political growth has in many cases had string attached to it. Such contribution has in some cases been used by the EU to control – or attempt to control – specific French African countries. For instance, the EU attempted in 2014 to pressured African nation among which featured Senegal, Cameroon and Burkina Faso to withhold its aid to Africa in a bid to force the latter countries to reverse themselves on homosexuality. Thus the EU used its aid to, and collaboration with African countries as a leverage to obliged African nations including French speaking ones to abandon homophobic legislations.

A part from using its aid to control Francophone African countries, the EU has sometimes allowed France to “hijack” the aid its provide to specific Francophone countries and use such an aid for a pro-France agenda. For instance, the EU allowed France to hijack more than 100 million Euro disbursed by the EU to support G5 Sahel force. Rumel recount the incident thus:

In line with its commitment, the European Union has, after the creation of the G5 Sahel group by France, paid an advance of aid of 100 million Euros in guise of support to the G5 Sahel group. France hastened to grab the aid. The tabloid *Lettre du Continent* submits that: “the first European contribution of 100 million Euros was largely managed by French experts. The latter supervised the acquisition of Bastion amour tanks made by Arqus and of diverse other non-lethal equipments (bullets proofs, etc.) (*Lettre du Continent*, no. 782). France blocked the supply of these weapons and equipments. It is only when Burkinabe authorities officially complained about delays in the delivery of the weapons that France announced the arrival of the first stock of amour tanks “in the zone, in the first trimester of 2020” (p. 18).

It could therefore be observed that though key to the success of some nation building initiatives in Francophone Africa, EU’s assistance to French Africa States has not exclusively been a blessing. Such assistance or cooperation has most often has string attached to it, thereby being been an instrument of Western neo-colonialism in French speaking countries.

ECONOMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

The EU has been a major partner in the economic and technological development of French speaking countries (Cameron, 2000). In Cameroon for instance, the EU cooperation has focused on improving governance, boosting trade and regional

integration through initiatives such as the European Development Fund, the Multiannual Action Program and the National Indicative Program for Cameroon. In the governance sector more precisely, the EU has been contributing to the consolidation of the rule of law, the management of public finances, forestry governance and the sustainable management of natural resources.

In the domain of trade and regional integration, the EU has focused on competitiveness and fostering trade. It has contributed to strengthening production and exports as well as improving road networks in the country. According to the Report of the National Indicative Program for Cameroon, the EU has since 2014 disbursed a total amount of 282 million Euros, to support macro-economic projects and technology-related initiatives in Cameroon (Republic of Cameroon & European Union, 2017). EU assistance focused on three main sectors including governance (84 million Euro), rural development (179 Euro) and support programs (20 million Euros).

In addition to this, the Union has designed initiatives such as the “thematic budgets” which have assisted decentralization and non-state actors (NSAs). It has equally adopted the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) as a framework guiding its cooperation with Cameroon and some other Francophone central African countries (notably Congo, Gabon, Chad and Central African Republic). The Agreement aims at the progressive liberalization of EU and Francophone countries’ markets. By this Agreement, the above mentioned Francophone countries have been made to enjoy free access to the EU market for all their products, including bananas, aluminum, processed cocoa products, plywood and other fresh and transformed agricultural products. The Agreement was negotiated primarily to prevent a disruption of the above mentioned Francophone countries’ exports to the EU, after the trade provisions of the Cotonou Agreement expired on 31st December 2007. The Agreement also enabled the EU to benefit from a gradual liberalization of its finished products on the Cameroonian, Gabonese, and Congolese markets (Nguenpang Padjip, 2016).

There is no denying the fact that the different trade and development agreements signed between the EU and Francophone African countries have provided immense opportunities for both European and African parties,. However, many of these agreements have their dark side and so, represent threats to the economic development of Francophone countries. The EPA for instance, has engendered a controversy in many French speaking African countries notably in Cameroon. Many critics, have viewed it as a serious danger to local Cameroonian industries. Such critics have lamented the fact that, by advocating for the dismantling of custom barriers, the Agreement neutralizes one of Cameroon’s major sources of income, taxation. In effect, Cameroon earns more than 600 billion CFA (1 billion, 895 million euro) yearly in custom duties. Besides limiting the potentials of French African countries’ custom departments, the EPA makes a case for total liberalization of Francophone African countries’ markets which is a serious threat to the survival of local African industries. Still with respect to the Cameroonian local industries, lawmaker, Kindzeka (2016) decries that:

We don't have developed industries that are up to a level that they can compete with industries in Europe. A trade imbalance [is] more or less inevitable. We are a country that is dealing with agricultural products and the rest and they are dealing with goods that are already finalized goods (p. 5).

Another Cameroonian observer, Tabe Nkongho sees no win-win characteristic in the EPA deal. To him, the Agreement is more of a drive in favour of the “capitalist mode of production which benefits the capitalist states but not the peripheral states in the world economy” (Kindzeka, 2016, p. 6). Thus, the collaboration/cooperation between the EU and Francophone African countries is not always a win-win venture. There are therefore strong reasons to doubt the ability of such frameworks as the EPA to provide concrete solutions to Francophone Africa’s economic problems. Some of the EU-Francophone African countries partnerships rather tend to subjugate African economies to the needs of European capital.

EDUCATION AND SOCIO-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

According to the Cotonou Agreement, culture is one of the 5 areas of priority of the cooperation between the EU and the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) countries, 21 of which are French speaking African nations (Huck, 2020). The collaboration of the EU with these 21 African countries in the cultural and educational sector has been through a panoply of platforms. In this essay, attention will be given to two of such platforms namely the ACP Culture + program and the Erasmus Mondus Program.

The overall objective of the ACP Culture+ program has been to increase the contribution of cultural activity sectors in the fight against poverty and the socio-economic and sustainable development of the partner countries, through targeted structuring of sectors and a better circulation of works and dissemination of culture in ACP countries, also preserving cultural diversity. The specific objectives of the program have been are to:

- i. strengthen the creation and production of cultural goods and services of the ACP States in an integrated approach with distribution circuits;
- ii. support better strengthened access to local, regional, intra-ACP, European and international markets for cultural goods and services of the ACP States;
- iii. strengthen the capacity of stakeholders, operators and cultural entrepreneurs in ACP countries; contribute to the improvement of the regulatory environment for cultural sectors within ACP countries.

Since its institution in 2005, the program has provided multiform support to the cultural sector in African countries as a whole and French speaking countries in particular. It is hard to find statistics on the impact of the program on Francophone African countries’ cultural industries. However, the UNESCO (2019) assesses the program thus:

The mid-term evaluation (2016) showed that the [...] program is fully relevant for the development cooperation strategies and support to culture from ACP countries and EU. The amount spent e.g. on cinematographic and audio-visual sectors are significant and supported more than 50 projects, following 2 calls for proposals, involving more than 200 operators.

Established partnerships have resulted in lasting collaborations and exchanges between operators from different countries, strengthening impact, and taking advantage of synergies in production, technical skills, circulation and market access. For the cinema and audio-visual sector, the results show the program had a positive impact, namely in the production capacity, technical skills and quality of the works. The program also had good results in terms of production quality, eg., in arts including music. Dance and theatre showed positive results as regards national and international circulation, with a large number of representations both in ACP countries and in Europe. Circulation and visibility of ACP works has also increased. Another program that yearly contribute to the educational and cultural development of Francophone Africa citizens is the Erasmus+ program. This program is aimed at education, training, and youth and sport. The program has been funding academic and youth mobility as well as cooperation between Europe and other regions in the world, including Francophone Africa (Griffiths, 2010). The program has also enabled Francophone African countries to take part to projects aimed at the training of their youths as well as in youth cooperation projects. Although the Erasmus+ has really enable the training of millions of francophone Africans in some of Europe most reputed universities, the program remains an instrument of neocolonialism as it is designed mainly according to EU's priorities for policy cooperation with Africa. Young Africans who take part in Erasmus programs are made to embrace the western culture. They go through Western system of education and are made to embrace Western ideologies.

CONCLUSION

It will be herculean to review all the frameworks and instruments deploy by the EU in its cooperation to collaboration with French speaking African countries. In this essay, we have mainly looked at few, stressing their impact in the political, economic and socio-cultural development of Francophone African countries. On the basis of our analysis, it may be argued that not all EU-Francophone African countries partnerships are really beneficial to Francophone African nations. While programs such as the ACP Culture+ and the Erasmus Mundus have had immense contribution to the educational and cultural sectors of French speaking African countries, other programs such as the EPA have rather functioned as threat to the economic and industrial development of African countries. The EPA in particular has, through its anti custom duties character, made condition favorable for the exploitation of Francophone African countries. The EPA indirectly subjugates Francophone African countries to the needs of EU countries.

Beside the fact that they are clearly a threat to the economic growth of French speaking Africa countries, many aspect of EU cooperation are kind of tools for western neocolonialism in Africa. The EU aid to Francophone African countries most often has strings attached to it. EU nations used such an aid, most often to control Francophone African counterparts, “tele-guide” them. As has been discussed in this paper, the EU most often use its aid to “blackmail” Francophone African countries particularly when the latter adopt policies that do not rhyme or square well with western nations’ ideals and ideologies. For instance, EU members often threaten to withdraw their aid to Francophone African countries that seem hostile to western concepts such as gay proselytism and western version of democracy among others.

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