Swords and Plowshares:
Regional Trade Agreements and Political Conflict in Africa

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Abstract

The end of the Cold War and the apparent stability of the contemporary international system, in which the probability of a major war is at its lowest for centuries, have spurred a lively debate on the causes of peace. One of the most popular explanations is based on the classic liberal statement that economic interdependence reduces political conflict. Globalisation, narrowly defined as the increase in the quantity and quality of international economic exchanges experienced in the last few years, would then be one of the main reasons for international political stability. Even at the regional level, therefore, the increase in economic intercourse should bring, as a welcome political externality, the amelioration of international conflict. This view posits, for instance, that the emergence of a «zone of peace» within Western Europe has been brought about by the creation of a common market which has created a powerful incentive to avoid political conflict. Or that in other areas, such as Latin America, the recent increase in regional stability would rest on the launch of Mercosur and the greater interdependence that it has brought about. The hypothesis is that Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) facilitate economic interdependence, which in turn facilitate political stability. In this paper we apply this hypothesis to the African case where a significant number of RTAs has been created in the last decades. Expectations of increased political stability have not, however, been confirmed. This does not necessarily undermine the general proposition of a positive correlation between interdependence and peace, but it does suggest that the relationship between the two elements may be more complicated than often acknowledged. On the one hand, African RTAs may simply not have produced the necessary level of trade and investment for a significant modification of political preferences. On the other hand, interdependence may be a necessary condition for peace, but it may also be insufficient, as its full impact on political preferences may require specific domestic institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War and the apparent stability of the contemporary international system, in which the probability of a major war is at its lowest for centuries, have spurred a lively public and scholarly debate on the causes of peace. One of the most popular explanations is based on the classic liberal statement that economic interdependence reduces political conflict. Globalisation, narrowly defined as the unprecedented increase in the quantity and quality of international economic exchanges which has been experienced in the last few years, would then be one of the main reasons for international political stability. Even at the regional level, therefore, the increase in economic intercourse should bring, as a welcome political externality, the amelioration of international conflict, based either on political development or on the resolution of outstanding issues for the sake of increased economic prosperity. This view posits that the emergence of a «zone of peace» within Western Europe has been brought about by the creation of a common market which has created a powerful incentive to avoid political conflict. According to this view, also in other areas, such as Latin America, the recent increase in regional stability would rest on the launch of the Mercosur and the increase of interdependence that it has brought about. The hypothesis would therefore be that an increase in Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) would facilitate economic interdependence, which would then facilitate political stability.

This paper applies this hypothesis to the African case, where a significant number of RTAs has been created. The expectations of increased political stability have not, however, been confirmed. This does not necessarily undermine the general proposition of a positive correlation between interdependence and peace, but it does suggest that the relationship between the two elements may be more complicated than often acknowledged. On the one hand, the relationship may hold only when the first element has reached a critical level, while at lower values it does not represent a sufficient reason for political change. In other words, African RTAs may simply not have produced the necessary level of trade and investment for a significant modification of political preferences. On the other hand, interdependence may be a necessary condition for peace, but it may also be insufficient, as its full impact on political preferences may require specific domestic institutions. Strong and democratic institutions may be necessary to ensure that the general interest in peaceful economic exchanges between neighbours prevails over the specific interests of economic and political pressure groups which may not coincide with either peaceful politics or free market economics. Furthermore, there may also be requirements at the international level. The relationship between interdependence and its political effects may involve conflict as well as cooperation, because it may expose the vulnerability of states to international economic processes and it may lead to their attempts to reduce it by political means. A certain amount of prior political stability may therefore be necessary for the "commercial peace" to operate.

The analysis therefore leads to the conclusion that simplistic strategies of mere encouragement of RTAs in the hope of producing significant economic or political effects are likely to be either irrelevant or even counterproductive. What is needed is a more complex approach dealing with domestic as well as international reform and with political as well as economic issues. The same type of international agreement which has worked in Europe or Latin America may in fact fail in a completely different context, where much more is needed in order to provide a suitable environment for economic interdependence to develop, and for it to produce its desirable political effects. The following pages are therefore organised in various sections. Firstly, the liberal hypothesis will be spelled out. Secondly, its main theoretical weaknesses will be summarised. Sections 3 and 4 analyse the shortcomings of the African environment in terms of economic structure, domestic institutions and international politics. Section 5 considers the growing political and military role of regional economic organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa. Finally, the last section will draw the conclusions and the policy implications.

1. The Standard Liberal Argument

The idea that free trade brings peace is at least as old as economic liberalism itself and it therefore rests on a distinguished tradition. The revolutionary reasoning exposed by Smith and Ricardo behind the concept of comparative advantage also lies behind the incentives and mutual advantages of abandoning political conflict for economic interdependence (Irwin (1996)). Montesquieu was one of the first philosophers to recognise that «the natural effect of commerce is to lead to peace. Two nations which trade with each other become mutually dependent: if one has an interest in buying the other has an interest in selling and all associations are based on mutual need» (Montesquieu (1748/1965)). The American radical, Tom Paine, also believed, among others, that «if commerce were allowed to operate at the universal level of which it is capable, it would extirpate the system of war» (Paine (1995)). The zenith of this school of thought was reached with the Manchester school, when Richard Cobden could argue that the unprecedented era of peace in the mid-XIX Century was due to the unprecedented levels of economic interdependence brought abut by the free trade doctrine after the repeal of the Corn Laws (Cain (1979)). Similarly, at the turn of the Century, liberals such as Sir Norman Angell were arguing that, given the high levels of economic interdependence, the idea that war could be profitable had become a Great Illusion (Angell (1908)). Analysing the same period in his classic study, Polanyi also subscribed to the idea that peace and interdependence in the XIX Century were inextricably linked (Polanyi (1957)).

Economic interdependence would thus facilitate political cooperation for three main reasons. Firstly, it would provide a more efficient and less dangerous way to accumulate benefits and resources, contributing to the obsolescence of war as a means for profit. In more recent times, the spread of industrialisation and trade liberalisation has been highlighted as a crucial factor in the diminished importance of territory for the accumulation of wealth and power, thereby reducing the incentives for armed expansion. Although this does not remove all the incentives for political conflict, which can be ideological as well as material, it would still represent a radical improvement in the way international relations are conducted. For example, Kaysen has recently argued that this might be one of the most potent explanations in the reduction of the incidence of major warfare after the second world war (Kaysen (1990)).

Secondly, the spread of economic interdependence would act as a disincentive for conflict because states would want to retain the gains extracted from their economic relationship. In a similar way as ancient Greek city-states exchanged hostages in order to guarantee the continuation of an alliance, the mutual gains from free trade would ensure that states refrained from aggressive moves which could jeopardise them. Since the efficiency gained from specialisation within an international division of labour are dependent upon the maintenance of the trade flows which make the pursuit of comparative advantage possible, states would renounce political conflict in order to preserve the benefits that a liberal strategy entails. Not only, therefore, would states find commerce more efficient, but they would come to cherish its advantages to a point in which they could modify their preferences toward a more co-operative bias (Rosecrance (1986); Keohane and Nye (1977)).

Lastly, the «spirit of commerce» would also modify preferences toward a more conciliatory stance, acting in an indirect as well as in a direct form. Montesquieu wrote of the «doux commerce» which would foster a more gentle approach toward other nations. Adam Smith highlighted that «commerce and industry have gradually introduced order and good government and, with these, the liberty and security of individuals» (Smith (1776/1981), 4/iv). According to Cobden, free trade was «the great panacea which, like a beneficial medical discovery, will serve to inoculate the healthy taste for civilisation in all the nations of the earth» (Cain (1979)). More recently Schumpeter, criticising the classical Marxist view that capitalism brings about imperialism, argued that, on the contrary, capitalism fostered international trade and understanding while imperialism was a relic of a pre-capitalist and aristocratic past incompatible with the rational search for profits of the modern bourgeoisie (Schumpeter (1919/1951)). In other words, international trade would facilitate domestic political development, which would then modify state preferences toward a more peaceful disposition.

By implication, this strand of liberalism suggests that each factor which is likely to increase trade between states is also going to bring about a strong incentive for the solution of political conflict. In particular, since the commodity composition of a free market economy is, in the short term, constant, the main policy prescription is that of reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade, possibly through a RTA, so as to eliminate obstacles to the strengthening of economic interdependence. The typical example of the connection between RTAs and the amelioration of international relations is the process of European integration (Deutsch *et al.* (1964); Haas (1958)). After centuries of war, the creation of the European Economic Community, and earlier of the European Coal and Steel Community, was explicitly designed, among other objectives, to overcome the Franco-German and other continental rivalries. If the vital industries and the economic prosperity of each country depended on the continuation of exchange with the others, another aggression would become suicidal or, at least, counterproductive. After four decades, the integration of European economies has reached a point in which conflict is utterly unthinkable, thereby creating what has been termed a «security community» (Deutsch *et al.* (1957)). Although other reasons, such as the democratic institution of European states or the role of outside powers like the Soviet Union and the United States, may contribute to the explanation of this remarkable achievement, it is taken for granted that it constitutes an instance of the connection between economic interdependence, and the institutions which help to bring it about, and political cooperation. The Western European experience has therefore become a model for export and the proliferation of regional agreements which has recently occurred in almost every region of the world has been often geared to replicate the political, as well as the economic, successes of the European Union. Some of these experiments, such as the Mercosur in Latin America and the ASEAN in South East Asia, have already brought some encouraging results both in terms of increased trade and of more co-operative international relations, thereby strengthening the expectation of a positive correlation between RTAs and peace.

2. Theoretical Limits of the Standard Argument

The expectation of a connection between an increase in the number of RTAs and an increase in the prospects for peace and collaboration among members has, however, not been confirmed by the African case because, as will later be shown in detail, the high institutional density of the continent has not been accompanied by any significant reduction in political conflict either within or between states. This can be due to three types of reasons, relative to the economic environment, domestic politics and the international system.

Firstly, from the economic point of view, the connection between trade and peace could still be theoretically valid but it may simply be inapplicable to the African case because local RTAs have not (yet) produced a sufficient amount of trade to reach a critical threshold. This may be either because the sectoral compatibility between African economies is insufficient, or because trade agreements have been more trade diverting than trade creating in establishing high external tariffs, or because insufficient attention has been given to the infra-structural and market requirements for an effective use of liberalisation. In other words, the connection between trade and peace may not be linear as low values for trade may not necessarily correspond to a significant or noticeable improvement of the political situation. Only after a critical point would economic advantages from international exchange constitute a sufficient political incentive. This type of relationship may be due to the fact that while the volume of trade is a continuous variable, political issues constitute a more discrete, often binary one, as political alignments between allies and enemies tend to be dichotomous (Gowa (1994)). As the following section of this paper demonstrates, African interdependence is still timid and underdeveloped, especially if compared with that of the OECD members. Furthermore, most exchanges tend to take informal if not illegal forms, making their impact harder to evaluate. In other words, the African case would not necessarily falsify the general proposition of the standard argument, because the prescriptions of the latter have not been put in practice, but it would point to the fact that interdependence must reach robust levels before any political consequence can be expected.

Secondly, the connection may be more complicated than often argued, because it may require other elements which are equally important for the result. These prerequisites may be taken for granted in other areas but may also be lacking in Africa. In particular, the standard argument assumes that, since a free trade policy is in the long run interest of all, states will translate that general interest into policy, so that the incentives of interdependence will constrain *all* states to refrain from political conflicts which may damage them. However, this assumption does not consider the fact that some domestic political systems may fail to produce a policy which is in the general interest, especially if, as in the African case, state institutions are weak and vulnerable (Holsti (1996)). In other words, an open and democratic political system may be as important for the development of economic interdependence as the mere production of RTAs, as argued, for example, by the neo-Kantian democratic peace literature (Doyle (1986); Russett (1993); Panebianco (1997)). Given the precarious nature of most African domestic regimes, it may be this political prerequisite, rather than any structural economic condition, which is needed for economic interdependence to develop and to bear its political fruits.

On the one hand, although a policy of economic interdependence is always in the general interest, because it favours all consumers with lower prices and it allows producers to specialise in those sectors for which they enjoy a comparative advantage and a higher efficiency, it may not necessarily be equally in the interest of all. In particular, producers and employees in non competitive sectors may experience short term losses as they have to reconvert to more productive enterprises. As emphasised by Olson in his classic work on economic development and decline, these groups have often both the incentive and the opportunity to influence state policy for their advantage, even at the expense of the general interest (Olson (1982)). The interests of concentrated groups are often more intense than the diffused interests of the majority, as their very existence as economic actors in their traditional sectors may be in jeopardy. Although their interests as consumers and as part of the whole community may lie in a liberal policy, their protectionist interests as part of their unproductive economic sectors are in fact likely to be prominent both because they affect their immediate economic welfare as well as because their identification with a smaller group, in which their membership is crucial, is likely to be stronger than that with their community as a whole, in which their membership is simply one among many. Furthermore, since they are minority groups, their smaller numbers, compared with those of the general public, also give them an organisational advantage as it is easier for them to overcome problems of collective action. Given the fact that political action is costly, each individual actor has an incentive to let others shoulder the burden of upholding a common interest, hoping to enjoy the benefits without paying the full amount of the costs. Since in larger groups the individual share of benefits is smaller because it must be divided into a higher number of parts, the probability that it will be sufficiently large to justify action is smaller than in smaller groups, in which the individual share of total benefits is larger. Small and intense interest groups may therefore be capable of hijacking state policy toward a protectionist course and away from the liberal economic policy which would benefit the majority (Snyder (1991)).

A recent study of trade policy in the Western world has shown that, even in developed states with a long standing liberal tradition, protectionist interest groups are capable of sabotaging the pursuit of a free trade strategy if international economic policy is not considered salient by the body politic (Verdier (1996)). Unless the issue in question is considered important in the political debate, the wider interests of the community are likely to succumb in front of the efforts and resources of pressure groups on the government. In Africa, where the channels for public debate either in parliament or in the media are much less developed, it is much more likely that concentrated interests groups, in the form of dominant ethnic groups, bureaucratic cliques and financial interests, are capable of resisting and overcoming the calls for a more efficient and open economic strategy by the general public. Either the government is too weak to overcome the entrenched position of local potentates, or it even colludes with them exploiting its privileged position to distort the most efficient and fair allocation of economic benefits. In other words, a free market approach is likely to require a free political debate as a basis for its sustainability. Without it, it may incur in the risk of being an empty *façade* for the perennial struggle of concentrated interests groups in the pursuit of their narrow advantage.

On the other hand, as an interesting study by Brawley has suggested, the shortcomings of democratic decision-making can be even more problematic in a non democratic setting (Brawley (1993)). Even if at the mercy of interest groups, democratic governments have at least a periodical electoral test in which they must confront their policies with the interests and desires of the majority. Conversely, autocratic governments can dispense with this objective trial and can rely on the more subjective instruments of propaganda and populist manipulation, in which free trade may be presented in less benign forms. In particular, given the absence of majority rule, interest groups may easily gain an access to political decision-making which is disproportionate to their narrow membership, forming what the economic historian Alexander Gershenkron called a cartelised system in which political and economic elites collude at the expense of the general public (Gerschenkron (1962)). The only way in which an economic interest may gain long term benefits larger than in a free trade system (in which efficiency is optimised) is by extracting large rents from the government at the expense of others. These rents may take the form of monopoly rights, subsidies and protective tariffs granting larger profits to privileged groups than in a truly open system. In the African case, this tendency may be reinforced by the commodity composition of industry, in which the overwhelming importance of agriculture and mining and their reliance on the physical possession of territorial or extraction rights granted by the government facilitates the allocation of rents. Other rents which are common to the African environment are the maximisation of custom revenues (often as high as a third of total government income) by bureaucratic interest groups as well as the large informal economies, which are run by local groups placed near frontiers and are based on smuggling and other illegal forms of trade, such as arms and drugs.

At the international level, some other political conditions are necessary. Interdependence may otherwise bring more mixed results than often recognised, fuelling political conflict as well as cooperation, if applied in the wrong circumstances. Not only would the African situation need further political development before the expected political externalities from interdependence take hold, but it may also have to face some negative externalities too. In particular, this is the case if the states feel vulnerable and may want to resist the loss of control that an open economy entails. The African situation may thus be blocked into a vicious circle in which states do not liberalise their economies because they do not perceive immediate advantages larger than the potential costs, but they do not perceive immediate advantages because they do not trust the system enough to liberalise.

Interdependence is often not a fully reciprocal exchange, because the relative importance of the relationship to each party is often asymmetric. If one actor is much smaller than the other, the importance of their relationship is likely to be a larger fraction of its total economic activity, with the consequences that it may be more dependent on the relationship than the other. As shown by Albert Hirschman in his classic study on German economic policy in the inter-war years, this asymmetry may be manipulated for political reasons by the stronger actor, inducing the weaker actor either to accept domination or to resist it by reducing the intensity of the relationship (Hirschman (1945/1980)). In the African case, in which at least two regions witness the presence of an actor larger than its neighbours (S. Africa and Nigeria) it may be the case that regional agreements are not geared to develop interdependence as much as to reinforce a regional hegemony, leading the smaller actors to be sceptical or to seek alternative relationships with more distant partners.

Interdependence may not only fail to resolve political conflict, but it may be even conducive to it, if developed in the wrong political circumstances. Interdependence may produce, as the standard argument suggests, an extra incentive to maintain good political relations once two nations have resolved their most important political difficulties, but its effect may be more uncertain between states which are openly in conflict. Interdependence may in fact even exacerbate conflict in certain particularly conflictual circumstances, because it may provide an extra stake for contenders to fight over and because it may be perceived, by a state concerned about another state's aggressiveness, as a dangerous vulnerability to be reduced, even at the cost of expanding the existing political conflict. In other words, in order to develop its beneficial effects, interdependence requires a previous minimum of political stability, which may be lacking in Africa both at the national and international level. Without this prerequisite, interdependence may deepen conflict rather than cooperation, because it makes political relationships –even negative ones- more intense. As Waltz has argued, «the most violent civil wars and the bloodiest international ones have been fought in arenas populated by similar peoples and whose affairs were tightly linked together» (Waltz (1971)). The African continent, in which civil wars are much more common than international ones, and in which international wars are often fought for the control of mineral and informal economies' rents, seems to fit this pessimistic description. The paradox is well described by the process in which international economic institutions, instead of producing peace by developing interdependence, are increasingly used for military peacekeeping operations which have little to do with their original purposes and which emphasise conflict management rather than, as in the standard argument, conflict prevention.

3. The Economic Limits of RTAs in Africa

The first regional characteristic which may inhibit the benign political consequences of economic interdependence has to do with the insufficient development of international trade, which is partly due to structural conditions and partly due to the fact that RTAs in SSA have often been developed for purposes other than economic exchange. The theories of regional integration provide some guidelines as to the relationship between the characteristics of the agreements and the likely benefits or costs for the participating countries. In effect, as we will see below, the experiences of SSA confirm most of the predictions of the models—and hence why we should not have expected in various cases any particular benefit for the joining countries—. This shows how the purpose of the regional arrangements consummated in Africa has only partially been economic and has been in several cases mainly political.

As Langhammer (1992) shows, the larger the share of intra-regional trade in total trade for the member countries before the setting of an RTA, the more likely trade creation will dominate trade diversion. In other words, the greater the existing trade links, the less likely trade will be diverted from low-cost firms outside the region to higher-cost firms within the region [Radelet, (1997)]. According to the evidence presented by Yeats (1998), SSA intra-trade accounted for about 12 per cent of the (whole) region total exports in (1995, up to 8 per cent in 1989. In particular, Yeats shows that established regional arrangements have not contributed to this increase, as their share of intra-trade was at best constant.

Given the importance of existing trade links, a consequent conclusion is that neighbouring countries should be natural candidates for RTA's. The evidence for SSA confirms this [Yeats, (1998)]. «The origins of exports in African intra-trade appear to be highly concentrated. The

Cote d'Ivoire accounts for one quarter of all exports, while Nigeria accounts for more than 20 per cent. On the import side, the importance of intra-regional trade varies markedly across countries–it accounts for less the 2 per cent of Kenya's imports to over 50 per cent in the case of Seychelles.» Most importantly, «that very little or no intra-trade occurs between countries that are 'geographically distant' (like those of the East as opposed to the West Coast of Africa) may indicate that transport and other logistical barriers to intra-trade are more important than often acknowledged.»[1]

Tariffs and differences in cost structures of firms in different member countries also play a role. Some of the African RTAs have been informed by "old regionalist" perspectives, and their retention of high external tariffs has produced distortions likely to offset the advantages of lower internal tariffs. On the other hand, in the newer agreements, the higher the pre-agreement initial tariff between member countries, the greater the room for trade creation. Lowering tariffs between members is likely to increase trade, leading to the replacement of high cost goods previously produced by protected domestic firms with low cost goods from more efficient firms in the region. Both the case of SACU and the bilateral trade agreements between South Africa and Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe confirm this [Yeats, (1998)]. In 1995, for instance, 65 per cent of Mozambique export to SSA was directed to the SACU area, while 80 per cent of its imports came from that same area. In the same year, 91 per cent of total Zimbabwean imports from SSA came from SACU, and 69 per cent of total Zambian imports from SSA came from SACU. Yet, it appears that SACU and Southern Africa in general are particular cases in which the overly dominance of one country (South Africa) alters the picture completely. [2]

In terms of goods and sectors, the evidence is equally telling. According to Bhagwati (1992), whenever goods produced by member countries are not close substitutes for goods previously imported from the rest of the world, trade diversion should be small. So, we should first look at what products do African countries trade with each other and then see whether there is any regional integration effect. Mineral fuels obviously dominate intra-African trade (between one third and one half of total exchange). Conversely, African intra-trade in machinery and transport equipment accounts for less than 4 per cent vis-à-vis a three quarter share of total SSA imports. In general, as Yeats (1998) points out, «available data show that very little intra-trade occurs in non-oil products that are of primary importance in Africa's total imports».[3]

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[1] As Bhagwati (1992) has pointed out, other factors, such as geo-strategic alliances, colonial links, and complementarity of production can play a more relevant role in determining trade flows. This structural characteristic of African economies is partly the result of the policy of valorisation of resources for export adopted by the previous colonial powers, and subsequently aggravated by the failure of African governments' industrialisation policies aimed at replacing dependence upon raw material exports, introduced after independence. It has considerably complicated the liberalisation of trade at the regional level, given that the economies that should be integrated all produce similar products rather than complementary ones (Foroutan, (1993: 252-254).

[2] One of the characteristics of the SACU agreement is its asymmetry in favour of South Africa. On the other hand, one of the real benefits for the small members has been the elimination of lobbying and rent-seeking in the small members, given that all trade policy decisions are (mostly) taken by South Africa.

[3] Also, the role of rules of origin as a barrier for intra-regional trade should be mentioned. Bhagwati's spaghetti-bowl phenomenon may be part of the explanation of the little effect these RTAs had in intra-

A different way to look at possible regional integration effect is to see how important is African intra-industry trade. Some theoretical and empirical analyses conclude that a high-level of intra-industry trade should play an important role in the success of a RTA. Cross-country production sharing (often involving intra-industry trade)–a from of «regional globalisation»–leads to fuller integration into regional and global markets and may favour industrialisation and economic growth. Yet, it appears that «almost no intra-industry trade occurs among SSA countries, or between Africa and developed countries. This implies that an activity that is often associated with regional integration is not taking place» [Yeats (1998)].

The effects of regional integration may be difficult to judge only in terms of tariffs or trade flows, and yet these are ultimately the benchmarks for evaluating an RTA's performance. In general, the greater the geographic size of the RTA and its share in world trade, the greater the scope for trade creation and the smaller the room for trade diversion [Robson (1987), Langhammer (1992)]. Likewise, the broader the sectoral coverage of the RTA, the greater the potential for exploiting a comparative advantage in some products by member countries.[4]

What is the overall evidence on RTA's in SSA? Radelet (1997) concludes that «RTA's involving developing countries have failed to promote trade or industrialisation, or to result in significant economic gains for member countries». Langhammer and Heimenz (1990) could find no case of RTA in the developing world contributing significantly to trade expansion or economic growth. Within SSA, only SACU, according to Foroutan (1993), has achieved any significant goods market integration, while CEAO has had a positive impact on trade growth only initially.

The positive evidence for industrialised countries, by the way, shows that trade creation tends to be larger the more the countries are integrated even *before* any regional arrangement. In poorer countries, economic integration is lacking, product differentiation is limited, and intra-industry trade is almost non-existing. But more fundamentally, «the failure of many RIA's in developing countries can be traced directly to their basic strategy of attempting to foster industrialisation based on import substitution» [Radelet (1997)]. The evidence shows that inward-oriented RTA's have consistently failed to support the expansion of either trade or industry [Langhammer and Hiemenz (1990), de la Torre and Kelly (1992), de Melo and Panagariya (1993)].[5]

This is true for trade policies of individual countries as well, not just for RTA's. The story of

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regional trade.

[4] As we said, high pre-agreement tariffs will tend to generate more trade creation. However, if this high pre-agreement tariffs are transformed into high post-agreement external tariffs, the scope for trade diversion is relatively more important. Thus, the higher the external tariffs the more dangerous the RTA becomes. An often quoted reason for the success of the new-regionalism in Latin America is that it has been accompanied by reductions in MFN tariffs (Lawrence (1999), Ethier, (1998)) and as above this may be the real problem with the lack of success of RTA initiatives in Africa (i.e., Africa regionalism still has the characteristics of the "old" regionalism).

[5] Indeed, as Langhammer (1992) argues, trade diversion has been an implicit objective of many RTA's, whereby members have tried to expand intra–regional trade at the expenses of world trade, rather than fostering competition. This is the case of SADC, for instance. The problem then becomes how to distribute costs and benefits of the agreement.

Mozambique sugar industry might well become a case in point, as it happened with its cashew industry. An inward-oriented trade policy like the Mozambican sugar policy will develop a high level of effective protection. This might well lead to excess capacity, which will be purportedly avoided by barriers to entry (besides the high external tariff). In other words, a protected oligopolistic sugar industry will develop, at the expense of consumers (and with what gains in terms of employment?). An inward-oriented policy always appears to protect vested interests at the expenses of competition.

Although the magnitude of *actual* trade flows in SSA is certainly larger than the official figures indicate because of unrecorded flows,[6] we can state that the great bulk of trade flows take place with countries outside the region. Foroutan and Pritchett (1993) concluded that «the fundamental explanation for the failure of regional integration in SSA to increase intra-regional trade share is to be linked to the inability and/or unwillingness of these countries to carry out the preferential trade liberalisation measures that represent the prerequisite for trade creation among integrated markets».

Radelet (1997) concludes that «formal RIA's have worked best when they have built on previous steps towards openness and integration». Based on the available data, Foroutan (1998) also «does not find any systematic relation between regional trade agreement membership and trade policy. More precisely, [her] paper finds no evidence that participation in a regional trade agreement necessarily leads to a more liberal import regime.» As Foroutan points out, «in the absence of a unified all-comprehensive measure to gauge the *restrictiveness* of a trade regime, the trade policy stance of a country is ordinarily measured by a wide variety of indicators, including the incidence of *non-tariff barriers* (NTB's), such as quotas, import license requirements, domestic content requirement, and so forth; the height of tariff and para–tariff charges; a country's commitments under the GATT, including the level and share of tariff bindings; and the black market premium as a proxy for foreign exchange rationing at the going exchange rate.» But what do the data reveal for SSA? «In Africa, few countries had undertaken any noticeable import liberalisation until very recently (…). Despite these reforms, however, the average rate of protection in SSA remains high, at around 22 per cent with little difference between countries that are classified as belonging to an effective RIA and those that are not.» [Foroutan (1998)].[7]

Table 5 in the Annex shows the evolution of SSA countries' and regional groupings' degree of openness over time, measured as total imports plus exports of non-fuel products as a percentage of their GDP. To the extent that the growth in imports and exports and hence the openness of a country respond to trade liberalisation, a more rapid increase in the degree of openness (which deflates growth in trade by that in GDP) indirectly bears witness to the breath and scope of a country's trade liberalisation effort. Since data on trade flows are more readily available than those on tariffs and NTB's, the information reported in Table 5

[6] See e.g. Barad (1990).

[7] Other than Ghana and Guinea, which according to the available data had undertaken a serious tariff reform in the second half of the 1980s, the average rate of tariff protection in all other countries remains unchanged in the (1990s. The most important reforms in African countries have occurred only during (1996, when the seven UDEAC members as well as Benin (a member of UEMOA) drastically reduced their average tariff and simplified the structure of tariff rates and other indirect taxes thereby greatly reducing the level and dispersion of the average rate of protection (Foroutan (1998)).

complements that in Tables 1 to 4 by providing further evidence as to which countries have liberalised the most their trade regimes. The data show that the degree of openness increased in the first half of the (1990s compared to the previous five years, but despite this increase, openness in all countries with the exception of Mauritius has remained well below its high levels in the second half of the 1970’s.

The evidence indicates that, in the words of Yeats (1998), «problems associated with African regional trade arrangements are more daunting than is generally recognised. Africa’s non-oil exports are highly concentrated in a very few products–none of which are important in regional imports. SSA countries appear to have relatively little to trade with each other» (and this absence-of-complementarity problem certainly cannot be solved quickly). Not only, but «African intra-trade is also highly concentrated within sub-regional geographic groups with almost no trade occurring between East and West Africa». «The range of processed products African countries export competitively is extremely narrow. Many have a common comparative advantage in the same items–sugar preparations and refined petroleum products» and in general «in products accounting for about 5 per cent of total regional imports».

In an economic situation characterised by the considerable fragmentation of national markets, where as a result of the political priority given to the growth of the national economy, institutionalised regional integration has been seriously impeded, there has been a noticeable development of unofficial and/or illegal trade networks. Rather than the result of the exploitation of the comparative advantages—and thus of the factors of production—of each state, these networks are a result of those artificial politico-administrative barriers that have been erected between African states.

The unofficial and/or illegal channels of trade that have developed in many areas of Sub-Saharan Africa can be explained in terms of the exploitation of the «opportunities offered by the inequality of the tax, customs and monetary regimes that materialise on both sides of the border» (Bach, 1985: 1034). So it was thanks to completely artificial economic incentives, like the exploitation of increased inflation or of a guaranteed higher price to the producer for the sale of certain products in the neighbouring country, that fully-developed trans–national trade networks arose. These networks deal not only in local manufactured products but also in raw materials, as well as in goods imported from outside Africa and then re-sold by one country to another[8].

In Southern Africa one of the sources of regional tension is the flow of clandestine immigrants entering South Africa from neighbouring countries, and in particular from Mozambique. Given the economically unbalanced nature of the region, and the failure of

[8] One example of intense cross-border trade is that between Ghana and the Ivory Coast. Due to the higher prices Ivory Coast cocoa producers are guaranteed by the Stabilisation Office of the Ivory Coast, during the 1980s and the early ‘90s a close-knit network of producers (from Ghana), carriers and buyers (from the Ivory Coast) developed along the border between the two countries: through the sale of Ghanaian cocoa to the Stabilisation Office of the Ivory Coast, all those involved stood to gain from this speculative transaction. This sale of raw materials was accompanied by the trading of manufactured goods which could be bought at a lower price in Ghana and then sold in the towns of the Ivory Coast: this was part of a wider regional trade network which centred around the Nigerian market, and which used the large Guinea Gulf ports as a source of supplies (Stary, (1999).

those co-operative projects aimed at guaranteeing a more evenly-balanced form of economic growth throughout the region, it is inevitable that the country with the strongest economy is going to attract a growing number of workers from neighbouring countries [Davies, (1996)]. These trade and cross-border migratory flows have a number of negative effects on both the sustainability and working of regional organisations, and on the economic and political stability of the states involved. In fact, while on the one hand the «dynamic nature of cross-border flows promulgates the break-down of economies, the crumbling of state control over these economies, and the accentuation of their de-institutionalisation», on the other hand it should be said that «trans–national regionalism challenges the ability of the state to organise the country, without there being any official questioning of borders (…) the border is still indispensable for trade (…) hence the opposition of trans–national traders to the implementation of plans for the liberalisation of trade» [Bach, 1985: 1035)].

In Sub-Saharan Africa there is conflict between attempts at formal regional economic integration, and the economic and political subjects who wish to exploit the benefits of those artificial barriers created by national economic development policies[9]. The cross-border flow of migrant workers impedes regional economic integration, as is clear from the South African government's opposition to the idea of establishing the free circulation of workers within the SADC. This form of economic integration would in fact lead to an indiscriminate flow of workers into South Africa, which would in turn have serious consequences for the latter's labour market and political and economic stability. Moreover, the very same forms of conflict may increase profitable trade flows in the African context as a result of the barriers and splits (in this case political and military) not only between the states within one region, but also between different areas within the same state.

As a result of the pressure created by the current globalisation of trade and capital flows, there is an ever-increasing degree of interaction between the national/regional context and the intercontinental one. This leads to the introduction of certain African countries and regions into global trading networks, most of which are either illegal (drugs) or illegally managed (arms). Africa thus finds itself part of the globalisation process, but in a role destined to increase Africa's current marginal status. Thus it is clear that continued attempts at official economic integration become of particular importance within the African political and economic framework. The creation of effective regional organisations should guarantee the setting up of standardised tax, customs and administrative regimes at the interstate level, which in turn represent a fundamental precondition for the development of official regional trade interdependence [Guillaumont and Guillaumont, (1993: 399-402)].

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[9] Political tension arose between Senegal and Gambia as a result of the flow of products which, after importation into Gambia, was being illegally re-exported to Senegal: in order to try and eliminate the causes of this flow, an ambitious political objective was set involving an attempt to set up a Senegalese-Gambian Confederation. However, the Treaty setting up the Confederation failed to provide any form of compensation or support for the inevitable blow these measures would have for the Gambian economy as a result of the liberalisation of trade between the two countries and of the setting up of a TEC, and this constituted one of the principal weaknesses of the format of the Confederation. As a result of the vehement protests made by Gambian interest groups, the Gambian government refused to introduce the trade liberalisation measures agreed upon during negotiations, and the Senegalese-Gambian Confederation ceased to exist (in 1989) (Bach, (1999: 11).

The structural adjustment policies adopted by African governments from the mid-1980s onwards, in agreement with the World Bank and the IMF, failed to properly address the problems of dependency on the exportation of a limited number of raw materials and the fragmentation of African markets. The paradoxical aspect of the adjustment programmes introduced in Africa is that whereas they should have eliminated, or at least reduced, (artificial) fragmentation of the African economic systems [Robson, (1993: 336)], what they actually did was to accentuate the barriers and divisions between these systems, thus further destabilising the existing processes of regional integration. The inclusion of the Sub-Saharan African countries in the global market, which was the main objective of adjustment policies, thus came about in a distorted fashion. It in fact led to the growing economic marginalisation of African states. The main features of this marginalisation are the weakly diversified productive base and the relatively marginal flow of direct foreign investment into Sub-Saharan Africa.

The theoretical assumption underlying the structural adjustment programmes is that the best economic solution in terms of overall well-being is the unilateral, non-discriminatory liberalisation of trade by each country. This assumption, however, has prevented reform plans from taking into consideration the regional aspects of the political and economic interaction of the countries in question. The nationally-oriented character of structural adjustment plans has meant that the possibility of co-ordinating national reforms at the regional level has been overlooked. This, in turn, has led to a time lag between the macroeconomic reforms introduced in different countries, and subsequently to the creation of further artificial trade and financial barriers between these countries. It has also meant that wider, more positive measures in support of regional economic organisations have failed to be introduced: measures such as the funding of regional infrastructural programmes, the creation of structural and compensatory funds, the supplying of technical assistance to regional institutions, which together could have helped towards the real reconstruction of African economies, making it possible not only to level out existing economic imbalances among the various members of regional economic groupings, but also to ensure the stronger presence of these countries in the global economy.

Over the last few years the debate over regionalisation in Sub-Saharan Africa has seen a realignment of previously opposing positions. The World Bank and the IMF no longer have such strong reservations about regional integration, and have come to accept the idea that this integration may be seen as a temporary economic reorganisation phase in a wider process leading to full global integration. The African subjects and institutions involved, together with a growing number of donor countries, however, have come to accept the idea that regionalisation should not, and cannot, in any way constitute a means to permanent protection from the rest of the world, and thus cannot replace healthy national macroeconomic policy. In fact, rather than a reciprocal reconciliation of opposing positions, it seems that there has been a separation of the questions on the agenda. The undergoing processes of economic globalisation and political regionalisation in Sub-Saharan Africa, though concurrent, are considered to belong to two different spheres: the first to the economic sphere and the second to the political sphere. As far as the economic aspects are concerned, this separation has led to debate over regionalisation being transformed into a mere question of the fastest liberalisation of trade tariffs possible. The questions of the industrialisation of individual countries, and of a more evenly-balanced form of structural development within the grouping, have thus been largely overlooked [Oden, (1999: 158-162)]. This can be clearly seen from the implementation of the Cross Border Initiative, and from the current phase of re-elaboration of regional integration plans within the SADC.

The Cross Border Initiative consists of a programme funded by the World Bank, the IMF, the African Development Bank and the European Union, and involves fifteen Eastern and Southern African countries. It guarantees various forms of funding to the governments of those countries that unilaterally introduce staggered reductions in trade tariffs as agreed with the international donors in question. This measure is supported by international institutions of vital importance within the African context, and cuts across the currently-existing regional economic organisations (EAC, COMESA and SADC). It has an agenda, centred exclusively around the liberalisation of trade, that is superimposed on that of the individual regional groupings. The Cross Border Initiative may therefore contribute to weaken the chances of achieving a form of integration that takes account of the structural inequality between the countries within a region, and between them and the rest of the world, but may also exacerbate the legal and political uncertainty of the already complex dynamics of regionalisation in Eastern and Southern Africa [Keet, (1994: 10-16)].

The SADC was designed to further cooperation between those countries surrounding South Africa in certain specific economic sectors: transportation, communications and manufacturing. This was designed to act directly on the root causes of underdevelopment in Southern Africa, and thus to reduce its economic dependence on South Africa and on the industrialised nations in general. Regardless of the degree to which this was achieved or not, the unique nature of such a plan was severely challenged by the entry of South Africa into the SADC. In fact, the normalisation of relations between South Africa and its neighbours marked a new phase in the process of regional integration in Southern Africa. The pressure exercised by globalisation on South Africa and its neighbours, at the very moment that the entire region was faced with the economic and political effects of apartheid, led to the questions of trade liberalisation and support for the private sector coming to the fore, albeit amid great political turmoil. As a result, regional cooperation got relegated to a rather ambiguous role, and it still remains to be seen whether trade liberalisation and economic cooperation can be pursued at the same time [Oden, (1999: 166-171)].

4. State Weakness and its Effects

The above-mentioned economic factors are paralleled by a series of political factors that have contributed towards hindering the implementation of regional economic integration plans in Sub-Saharan Africa. Without these political prerequisites, economic interdependence remains underdeveloped and its political effects remain small. These factors include the intrinsic weakness of African states, the conflicts that have arisen within the latter and that have often taken on regional proportions, and the institutional fragility of the very regional economic organisations.

Once independence from colonial domination had been achieved, African political leaders lost no time in claiming the complete sovereignty of their countries in continental and international circles. The OAU’s founding Charter, adopted in 1963, declared that the borders inherited from the colonial period were to remain untouched, and sanctioned the non-interference in the internal affairs of member states. These two principles constituted the cornerstones of interstate relations in Africa, with but a few exceptions, at least until the end of the cold war period.

Despite the serious shortage of human and material resources available to the post-colonial states, with which they had to govern geographical areas characterised by a combination of a frail national identity and the fragmentary nature of the economy, and in the majority of cases by weak social infrastructures, recognition of national independence meant that these countries were at least formally protected from external destabilising factors. This enabled them to concentrate their energies on the drawing up and implementation of national economic and social development policies.

However, instead of experiencing economic growth and the re-enforcement of their political institutions, just a few years after independence these Sub-Saharan African countries found themselves being sucked into a downward spiral of economic crises and the decline of their political systems. The failure of development policies led to a crisis of legitimacy for the post-colonial states, exacerbated conflicts and the competition for access to resources, and severely hindered the consolidation of democratic institutions. At the same time, the breaking-up of certain sectors of the state apparatus (the army and the bureaucracy) compromised any chance of economic development, preventing the formation of an African entrepreneurial class.

Recognition of the principles of the non-modifiable nature of colonial boundaries, and of the non-interference in the internal affairs of individual states, as sanctioned by the OAU and accepted to their advantage by the ex-colonial powers and the super powers, the USA and the USSR, led to a unique situation in Africa. The absence of any real war between African countries was accompanied by increasing instability within the majority of the same countries.[10]

The end of the cold war led to a significant change in conflict in Africa. The disappearance of the super-power struggle, in fact, meant an end to the option African countries had been given up to that point of military and economic support from the USSR and the other communist bloc countries. This in turn led to a drastic reduction in the continent's strategic importance for the USA and other western powers. These changes led to the reduction or even the end of western economic and military aid to numerous African states, and meant that a growing number of bilateral and multilateral donors were to impose strictly political conditions linked to democratisation, alongside those macroeconomic ones already part of structural adjustment programmes, on their granting of economic aid.

While the end of the cold war made it possible to resolve a number of conflicts that had been going on in Africa for a considerable time, such as those in Southern Africa (with the important exception of Angola) and in Eritrea, it also led to the explosion of a number of

[10] Of course there were exceptions to this: the most important being the Ogaden war between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1977-78, Tanzanian army intervention in Uganda in 1979 designed to defeat the brutal dictatorship of General Idi Amin, and finally the strange situation in Southern Africa which saw Cuban and South African troops fighting each other in Angola, and the South African army trying to trigger off a process of military destabilisation within the other countries in the region.

other, latent hostilities whose root causes had existed for some time in Somalia, in the Congo (the former Zaire), in Liberia and in Sierra Leone, and it led to the collapse of the state and its various structures. These conflicts were accompanied by a resurgence of ethnic and religious conflict in Sudan, Rwanda and Burundi, after a period of apparent détente and peace efforts which later revealed as a complete failure.

The conflicts that emerged in Africa with the ending of the cold war clearly had regional repercussions, not only because the flows of refugees and the destruction of natural resources failed to recognise existing national borders, but also because the various political and economic players within the different regions often had a considerable role in the conflagration of the conflict in question and/or are currently involved in trying to resolve the same conflict.

From the institutional point of view, assertion of national sovereignty and the priority given to national development, the political, institutional and economic fragility of the African states, their internal political instability and the survival instincts of the regimes in power, together with the present degree of conflict throughout Africa, have had numerous effects on both the institutional framework and the working of the African regional economic organisations.

The priority given by political leaders at the time of independence to state sovereignty and national economic development has meant that economic organisations have not been given any super-national powers.

With the one exception of the SACU, where the politically, economically and militarily dominant country within the region has been granted the power to unilaterally adopt and modify the customs union rules, Africa fails to offer any examples of super-national authorities with effective political and economic powers. This weakness is accompanied by the absence of any mechanisms with which to bring sanctions against those member states who fail to abide by the treaties and decisions made by regional bodies [Takirambudde, (1999: 155-158)].

Given that the member states have failed to observe the agreed terms for the liberalisation of trade, or have not paid the financial contributions due to the community institutions, and that the latter have no power to penalise such non-fulfilment of obligations, there is no choice left but to try and exercise unofficial pressure on the countries in question, or in the case of prolonged inaction, to propose the re-negotiation of the terms of the entire agreement. Regional economic agreements in Sub-Saharan Africa have thus been characterised by their purely rhetorical nature, since there is no institutional structure capable of guaranteeing the achievement of complex objectives such as the creation of a customs union or a common market.

This institutional weakness of the African economic groupings has been exacerbated by the overlap in many cases of the roles and membership of the same regional institutions.[11] The reasons for this apparently irrational overlap can still be traced back to the frailty of the post-

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[11] This overlap drains increasing financial and human resources from the governments of African countries (Mulat, (1998: 123).

colonial states, which despite their claiming full political sovereignty, were forced to seek the political and economic support of the former colonial powers and thus continued to maintain their preferential relations with the latter. Thus the North-South axis of regionalisation, characterised above all by the Franc Zone and the series of agreements between African countries and the European Union, is superimposed on the plans for integration between African countries, leading to considerable political tension and paralysing plans for the liberalisation of trade, as happened in the case of CEAO and ECOWAS.

African countries' need for international economic aid has led to the search for funding and technical support for regional organisations and to the setting up of various kinds of regional project. The system of relations with bilateral and multilateral donors created by the SADCC during the course of the 1980s, which had guaranteed a considerable flow of foreign finance for regional projects, particularly in the infrastructural field, became an integral part of the same organisation which member countries decided they did not want to lose when the idea of a merger between the SADCC and the PTA was put forward [Carrim, (1994: 21)].

Similarly when fifteen Eastern and Southern African countries, who were already members of other regional economic organisations, decided to sign the Cross Border Initiative despite the sheer contradiction between membership of this latter grouping and other similar trade liberalisation programmes they were already involved in, this was a clear indication of their need to hold on to the political and economic support of the countries who were financing the Initiative.

The failure of those industrialisation policies aimed at reducing reliance on imports that the majority of African governments adopted during the 1960s and '70s has led to the further weakening of the same African countries and has inevitably contributed towards impeding plans for regional integration in Sub-Saharan Africa, because in an increasingly critical economic situation, African governments were reluctant to lose the customs revenue from such imports. The working of the same clearing houses set up by a number of African economic organisations was hindered by the fact that the member states did not wish to lose the foreign currency that interregional trade could provide them with [Aly, (1994: 48-58)].

The problem of the indispensable nature of customs revenue and of poor compliance with the trade liberalisation calendar established at the time the founding agreements were signed, points to a further weakness in the majority of regional integration plans in Africa: a form of integration based on the mere abolition of trade barriers has failed to ensure that those states involved in the integration process proceed to eliminate customs tariffs as provided for in the treaties. The existence of compensatory mechanisms, or even of structural funds (perhaps financed by donor nations), designed to guarantee the reorganisation of the industrial base of member states, should have favoured the creation of regional markets, by reassuring the governments and economic organisations of the member countries that the benefits of economic integration would have been fairly distributed among all the countries. This would have prevented any further exacerbation of the already-existing imbalances in available resources and economic development within the various regions [Aly, (1994: 58-62)].

This kind of situation facilitates the task of those interest groups who risk losing the benefits of political and economic fragmentation, given that the aspirations of the political classes are not great enough to give proper direction to the regional integration process, and there are too few groups offering support for economic integration within each of the member countries[12].

The growth of conflict within a number of Sub-Saharan African countries has constituted a further hindrance to regional economic integration, because of both the destruction it has brought about, and of the destabilising effects it has had on neighbouring countries as a result of the waves of refugees leaving the war-ravaged states, the illegal arms traffic across borders and the creation of unofficial trade networks (dealing in gold and diamonds, for example).

The outbreak of hostilities across Africa during the (1990s, together with the growing awareness among various African and non-African players of the potential negative effects of conflict on development, have led to a re-thinking of the role played by African regional economic organisations, with increasing emphasis being placed on their need to assume responsibility for the prevention and resolution of such conflict.

5. Conflict Prevention and the New Role of Regional Economic Organisations in Sub-Saharan Africa

The end of the cold war saw the beginning of a process whereby the international and continental strategies adopted in the attempt to resolve conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa were redefined. The outbreak of violent conflict within numerous African countries during the (1990s not only contributed towards destabilising the region, but in some cases led to the collapse of the state's central institutions. This was accompanied by a growing reluctance on the part of the industrialised world to send peace-keeping forces into Africa and other parts of the world, given the uncertain results obtained by such operations. The outcome of this was that both African and external decision-makers agreed on the need to develop Africa's own capacity to resolve such conflict.

The effectiveness and sustainability of outside multilateral intervention in situations of crisis arising around the world were quickly to come under fire as a result of the failure of humanitarian/military intervention in Somalia. In fact, the US decided to lead multilateral intervention in Somalia in order to resolve the humanitarian crisis resulting from the civil war that had been ravaging the country since 1989, and that had led to the fall of Siad Barre's regime and the subsequent collapse of state institutions. The difficulty the multilateral force found itself in was to catch the mission's military leaders unprepared, and in the end they were forced to abandon their previously-established objectives [Vogt (1997)]. This failure was to lead to heated international debate over the inadequacy of current peace-keeping operations. As regards the specific case of Sub-Saharan Africa, the failure of intervention in Somalia has led to a reappraisal of conflict-resolving strategies available to the international community. The outcome of this analysis has been the abandoning of the interventionist option on the part of western powers, and increased emphasis on the role of the OAU and of other African regional organisations in the prevention and resolution of conflict.[13]

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[12] See the case of the Senegalese-Gambian Confederation.

[13] Another factor that has contributed towards the caution expressed by western diplomacy derives from the different views France and the US have about the nature of intervention and about the setting up of special African crisis-intervention forces. The separate interests of the two countries have led to

The idea of finding “African solutions to African problems” leads to the questioning of the principle of non-interference in a state’s domestic affairs, one of the cornerstones of the post-colonial African order, and it has therefore called for an integrated and complex approach. The policy of “African solutions to African problems” formulated during the (1990s involves three main features: the introduction of conflict prevention mechanisms and processes throughout Africa; a growing involvement of African regional economic organisations in the resolving of member countries’ domestic conflicts; and the introduction by western countries and the UN of military exercises, part of peace-keeping operations, involving the armies of numerous African countries.

Between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the (1990s, debate among African states considered the possibility of setting up an Africa-wide mechanism for the prevention and resolution of conflict. This debate was sparked off by the growing awareness of African countries that the new post-cold war international scenario meant both advantages and disadvantages for Africa. In fact, while the end of the cold war put an end to the unconditional political, economic and military aid to dictatorial regimes that hid strategic interests and could help to resolve certain conflicts, it also meant the risk of Africa’s marginalisation. Prompt, effective solutions had to be found by the African nations if they were to re-launch their economies, but this was conditional upon a furthering of their capacity to guarantee the control and resolution of conflict. Given the problems encountered by the OAU in trying to reform the conflict control-and-prevention system it had previously set up, the period between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the (1990 saw the Africa Leadership Forum conduct a profound analysis of the reasons behind the African crisis and of possible answers to it. This reflection eventually led to the signing of the “Kampala Document” in May (1991 by eight African heads of state and government and a consistent group of representatives from various African organisations. This document proposed the organisation of a Conference on Security, Stability, Development and Cooperation in Africa (CSSDCA). Based on the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the CSSDCA was designed to mark the beginning of cooperation among African countries with regard to two crucially important, interdependent questions: security and economic development. [Nathan, (1992; Zartman, (1996)].

Doubts about the chances of actually putting the Kampala Document’s proposals into practice, and about the relationship between the institutions envisaged by the Document for the prevention and the resolution of conflict, on the one hand, and the measures adopted by the OAU on the other still exist. The Africa Leadership Forum project was accompanied by debate within the OAU on the consequences the new international political scenario would have for the OAU’s role in the management of conflict in Africa. In June 1993, African heads of state and government meeting in Cairo set up a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution within the OAU. The OAU heads of state see the new mechanism as operating within a pyramid of roles in the prevention and resolution of conflict,

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considerable disagreement at times, especially after the Kivu crisis that followed the upheaval in the Great Lakes region due to the genocide in Rwanda, and that openly triggered off hostilities once again in what was Zaire at the time. The difficult situation had put France, the historical “gendarme” of the region, in an extremely difficult position, while at the same time the USA displayed growing interest in events that involved, and that continue to involve, one of the regions giants, the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as other countries such as Uganda, South Africa and Nigeria (Huliaras (1998).

involving both the UN, the OAU and the African sub-regional organisations. The pyramid is to be headed by the UN, given its role as world peace-keeping organisation. The base of the pyramid, on the other hand, is to be formed by the African sub-regional organisations, whose job it is to safeguard peace and security as far as possible within their regions. The new OAU Mechanism is to co-ordinate the sub-regional organisations' activities at the continental level, and therefore to act as intermediary between the latter and the international activities of the UN [Keller (1996)].

Despite the innovative nature of the OAU Mechanism, specifically designed as it is for the prevention and resolution of conflict in Africa, with respect to the informal diplomatic activities traditionally undertaken in Africa, the scarce resources made available to the Mechanism, together with many countries' reluctance to exchange information, have prevented the Mechanism and the OAU from playing any effective part in the resolution of existing conflict within Africa [Cilliers (1999) Olonisakin (2000)]. Conflict management in Africa in the (1990s was therefore distinguished by the growing role played by sub-regional organisations in the resolution of conflict. The security gap created in Africa after the end of the cold war, which persisted despite multilateral intervention by the international community and by the OAU, has been filled by the African sub-regional organisations, and in particular those of an economic nature. African regional economic organisations are thus undergoing a process of political transformation as a result of which they are becoming the primary agents of political and military stability in Africa. This transformation is particularly evident in the cases of the ECOWAS and the SADC.

Military intervention in Liberia by the ECOMOG (the Monitoring Group set up by the ECOWAS in 1990 to supervise implementation of the Banjul Agreement) constituted the first case of direct military intervention by a group of African states in the domestic affairs of an individual state within that region. Intervention began in August 1990, and ended in July 1997 with presidential elections being held, subsequently won by Charles Taylor. ECOMOG's intervention in Liberia is seen as a model for future peace-keeping operations in Africa, which should see the increasingly direct military involvement of African regional bodies. In truth, a number of objections could be made concerning the manner by which intervention took place. As we will shortly see, similar reservations may also be advanced in cases of intervention by the SADC countries in Lesotho and in the Congo. First of all, although the conflict clearly had regional implications as a result of the political and economic support given to the National Patriotic Front of Liberia led by Charles Taylor by numerous countries within the region [Kwesi-Aming (1997)], and as a result of the politically and economically destabilising effects civil war in Liberia had, or could have had, the kind of military intervention carried out by the ECOWAS lacked any kind of legal grounding [Hutchful (1998)]. Secondly, it could be said that rather a case of the co-ordination and pyramidal division of responsibilities between the international level (UN), the continental level (OAU) and the sub-regional level (ECOWAS), the Liberian case was one of military intervention by a regional institution that had intervened in a situation where the two higher multilateral levels, for various reasons, were prevented from acting. The UN's acknowledgement of ECOMOG intervention came only later, while for the entire duration of the conflict, the UN played a largely marginal part (with its sending of the UNOMIL) compared with that played by the ECOWAS [Malan (1999)]. The same could be said of the role played by the UN in ECOMOG's subsequent intervention in Sierra Leone from 1997 onwards. Thirdly, ECOWAS' intervention in Liberia was a very complex matter from the political point of view, and was subsequently to lead to a clear division between the region's French-speaking and English-speaking countries that put the existence of the entire organisation at risk [Vogt (1996)]. Fourthly, ECOWAS' principal bodies exercised very little control over intervention, which gave national military contingents and their commanders considerable freedom of action. On the one hand, this meant that military operations could be extremely flexible, thus eliminating the usual bureaucratic problems involved in peace-keeping operations, but on the other hand it gave the various national contingents the chance to pursue their own aims within the context of the Liberian conflict [Hutchful (1998)]. Lastly, there has been widespread criticism of the sustainability of such prolonged, costly operations in the future. In fact, it has been said that the ECOMOG intervention in Liberia was made possible by the absence of truly democratic political systems in the majority of the region's countries, and in particular in Nigeria. The democratisation process that has recently begun in Nigeria may thus contribute towards impeding future costly, large-scale military operations such as those conducted in Liberia [Hutchful (1998)].

In Southern Africa, SADC member countries led two military interventions during the course of 1998, one in the Democratic Republic of Congo and one in Lesotho. These two operations were clearly very different as a result of the different contexts in which they took place, and the different countries that undertook them. Nevertheless, as in the case of ECOWAS' intervention in Liberia, both operations not only marked the potential political role that the SADC could play in Southern Africa, but also raised a series of questions concerning the sustainability and nature of this new conflict prevention and resolution role.[14] The interventions in the Congo (ex-Zaire) and in Lesotho have led to political polarisation within the SADC between Zimbabwe and South Africa. This risked compromising not only the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security, but more generally speaking the entire process of political and economic integration which the SADC was aiming for. Furthermore, both interventions have underlined the absence of a clear regulatory framework within which military peace-keeping or peace-re-enforcement operations in Southern Africa are to be conducted. The lack of any pre-defined standards against which the legality of operations may be controlled compromises control over the way intervention takes place, and thus contributes

[14] In June (1996, after a long debate between the region's governments, the SADC summit of heads of state, held in Gaborone, decided to set up an Organ on Politics, Defence and Security. However, this decision remained a dead letter because the member governments were split on the questions of the political leadership of the organ and its institutional status within, or parallel to, the SADC (Malan (1998). Faced with this deadlock, the region's countries did not hesitate to organise military intervention in member states of the SADC, which in turn created a situation of considerable uncertainty with regard to the very future of the Organ itself. In August (1998 the government of Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe militarily intervened on the side of Laurent Kabila's government in the civil war that had flared up once again in the Democratic Republic of Congo. While a subsequent meeting saw the SADC defence ministers express their support for the intervention by the three member countries, the president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, openly contested the line taken by Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe in the Congo, claiming that the SADC had not given its unanimous support to intervention (Malan (1999)). A few days later, however, Mandela changed his mind and agreed that military intervention in the Congo had been conducted under the auspices of the SADC. Surprise shown at this change in his position was shortly to find an explanation, when the South African army intervened in Lesotho in September (1998. In fact, South Africa quickly affirmed that this was a multilateral SADC operation, aimed at re-establishing order in Lesotho, even though the subsequent arrival of troops from Botswana failed to confirm this legitimisation of intervention (Malan (1998)).

towards the climate of insecurity within the region [Neethling (1999)].

The cases of ECOWAS and of SADC show how regional economic organisations that have failed over a long period of time to achieve their economic objectives, are currently taking on a new, increasingly important role in the prevention and resolution of conflict in their respective sub-regions. This new role has led African regional organisations to initiate a process of institutionalisation of conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms. Apart from the SADC, IGAD and ECOWAS (which in 1998 set up its own Regional Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution), also COMESA and EAC are considering the possibility of creating conflict resolution mechanisms.

The above analysis shows how Africa is no exception to the global trend that emerged during the 1990s, which saw regional organisations being given increasing responsibility for the prevention and resolution of conflict between, and within, countries in the region. In particular, in the case of Africa it has been the regional economic organisations that have gone beyond their plans for economic integration, and have taken on the political task of managing interstate and domestic conflict. This transformation has been inspired by the idea that political stability and the absence of conflict are indispensable pre-requisites for the economic development of African countries. However, this transformation of the role of the African economic organisations has raised a number of questions.

First, despite military intervention, it has still proven impossible to guarantee long-term regional stability if the crisis of the African state is not also dealt with. The weakness of the structure of the African state requires a series of capacity-building measures based on funding, training and technical assistance from donor countries. The building of a stable regional framework would undoubtedly facilitate the re-launching of the African economies: however, stabilisation plans risk remaining a dead letter if they are not accompanied by the democratisation of the states making up that region [Lyons (1998), Nathan (1998)].

Secondly, criticism of the cardinal principles of the inviolability of those national borders inherited from the colonial past, and of the non-interference in the domestic affairs of individual states, which held up the post-colonial order in Africa and enabled more effective peace-keeping intervention operations to be conducted, also carries certain risks. ECOMOG intervention in Sierra Leone, and SADC intervention in the Congo and in Lesotho, have shown just how militarily powerful countries have not hesitated to intervene in other counties' domestic conflicts. The questioning of the principles on which relations between African states are based would therefore seem to underline the need to formulate new, clear regulations and principles for military intervention by African countries in the domestic conflict of another state. The fact that in the majority of cases the countries that conducted such intervention operations were hardly democratic regimes, is a further cause for concern with regard to the democratic effects of such operations, on top of that of the future sustainability of costly, prolonged military intervention.

Thirdly, the new role of the African regional organisations in the prevention and resolution of conflict may negatively effect the economic role they are expected to play. The tension that has arisen between member countries of the same regional organisation has repeatedly put the existence of the organisation itself at risk. Therefore the question of whether conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms ought to be kept separate from economic structure needs to be given careful consideration. The very weakness of the administrative structure of such regional organisations, together with the scarcity of funds available to them, are two good reasons why caution should be taken when considering any further extension of their existing roles.

Fourthly, the debate on regional conflict prevention mechanisms in Africa, together with those peace-keeping capacity-building programmes funded by foreign donors, only take into consideration the military aspect of security. This constitutes a serious limitation to any strategy that wishes to guarantee medium- and long-term political stability at the regional level. In fact, insecurity in Africa is not so much caused by military threats as by economic and social factors, such as the economic polarisation between countries or within individual countries, which in turn has socially destabilising effects (e.g. flows of migrants), or by climactic and geographical factors (e.g. drought or the scarcity of water). Given the destabilising effects these factors have on the countries' political systems, together with their regional dimension itself, any conflict-prevention strategy that ignores them will be incapable of providing a sufficient degree of security for the re-launching of development policies [Booth and Vale (1995); Swatuk and Omari (1997)].

CONCLUSIONS

The number of RTAs in Africa has exploded in the last decade and they are increasingly seen as promoters of political stability. This paper offers some reflections on the question of why the increase in RTAs in SSA has not produced the expected beneficial effect in terms of domestic and international political stability. The most prominent role taken by regional economic institutions has in fact been in military rather than economic aspects and this may be both a cause and an effect of the difficulties of establishing genuine economic integration in Africa. On the one hand, the political role of RTAs may be too ambitious and it demonstrates the complex agenda of African governments, which were not interested exclusively in economic development but had political objectives in mind as well. On the other hand, the fact that regional organisations are engaged in peacekeeping testifies the failure to provide a more stable environment to continental politics.

In the paper we advance two different (though related) reasons why the positive link between economic interdependence and political stability observed in other parts of the world (Europe and Latin America) may not work in Africa. First, the level of intra-regional trade within this blocks has probably never reached the necessary threshold to abandon political conflict for economic interdependence. Second, the level of institutional development in Africa has not reached the necessary minimum level for economic interdependence to translate into political stability. These are two very interesting hypothesis that have not been tested in the empirical literature, which has always assumed that the link between trade (economic interdependence) and peace was a smooth continuous phenomenon. To test for threshold effects on the level of trade between countries and on the level of institutional development for peace should certainly be in the future research agenda on RTAs in Africa.

As has been argued throughout, the reasons for the failure of RTAs in Sub-Saharan Africa may be numerous. Firstly, economic conditions in most African countries may not allow for a full exploitation of the efficiency gains of a more open economy, implying a threshold effect for the relationship between economic interdependence and political stability. Secondly, the precarious nature of domestic institutions may frustrate the development of adequate economic policies and favour the rent seeking of bureaucratic interests, protectionist interest groups and entrepreneurs in illegal trades. Thirdly, persistent regional instability jeopardises the operation of economic mechanisms and it focuses minds on other, more urgent, priorities, postponing the pursuit of an authentic free market. On top of these problems, many African RTAs are hindered by poor institutional design, which has led to rhetorical statement rather than concrete reforms.

One important problem with RTAs in Africa is also the one of re-distribution of tariff revenues. Typically, in SSA countries more than 30 per cent of government revenue comes from trade taxes: tariff preferences, trade diversion and deflection may impose an important constraint on the viability of these agreements and may be the source of conflicts among members of RTA (the SACU redistributive systems is an example of the potential problems that may exists, in particular with landlocked countries). Besides, issues like infrastructure, water, migration, or technical assistance, show that there well may be much more efficient ways of achieving peace than RTAs (leave aside the high benefits that regional cooperation in these areas may bring).

The conclusions which can be drawn from this analysis are that the intellectual efforts of the research and policy-making communities should take into account a more complex and integrated approach, considering political as well as purely economic aspects, and focussing on those prerequisites which may have allowed economic regionalism to produce positive results in other areas, but which may be still lacking in SSA. Mechanical and automatic application of development strategies which have worked in different environments may even be counterproductive in the specific African contest. Given the political and economic importance of relations between individual African countries and developed states and associations, such as the European Union, which are often more significant than regional bilateral links, these considerations should inform the making of Western policy with respect to SSA. Outside countries and organisation may in fact be in a privileged position to help break the short circuit of poverty and instability which has not allowed Africans, so far, to realise their full potential.

ANNEX

Table 1**. Total Intra-Group Import Trade as Percentage of Total Imports, Non-Fuel Trade, 1965-95**

	1965-69	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84	1985-89	1990-95	1995
ECOWAS							
CEAO UEMOA	5.20	5.49	5.13	6.75	6.74	8.83	8.91
UDEAC	1.88	4.21	3.17	2.27	2.84	4.23	4.43
PTA COMESA	7.92	7.32	4.54	4.76	4.38	5.00	6.22
SADCC SADC	8.57	3.87	1.81	3.10	3.22	3.32	4.32
CBI	10.22	9.95	5.42	5.26	5.10	5.81	6.72

Source: Foroutan (1998)

Table 2. **Total Intra-Group Export Trade as Percentage of Total Exports, Non-Fuel Trade, 1965-95**

	1965-69	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84	1985-89	1990-95	1995
ECOWAS							
CEAO UEMOA	6.36	8.86	9.46	10.12	8.60	10.80	8.91
UDEAC	1.92	3.97	2.31	1.69	3.00	2.21	2.32
PTA COMESA	7.21	7.786	7.566	6.992	5.298	6.5	7.78
SADCC SADC	6.07	3.09	2.51	3.55	3.13	3.78	4.68
CBI	8.26	10.20	7.89	7.52	6.40	8.36	6.72

Source: Foroutan (1998)

Table 3. **Export Trade Intensity of Various Regional or Bilateral Groupings with Each Other, Non-Fuel Trade,1965-95**

	1965-69	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84	1985-89	1990-95	1995
ECOWAS							
CEAO UEMOA	19.3	30.0	30.1	36.1	38.7	64.6	49.7
UDEAC	9.9	25.3	14.0	10.6	23.0	25.8	30.2
PTA COMESA	6.4	8.8	13.9	11.8	10.7	15.6	19.9
SADCC SADC	9.1	6.1	12.1	13.3	13.9	18.6	25.9
CBI	10.8	17.2	18.2	18.9	19.4	28.8	24.0

Source: Foroutan (1998)

Table 4. **Total World Exports to African Regional Groupings as Percentage of Total World Exports Non-Fuel Trade, 1965-95**

	1965-69	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84	1985-89	1990-95	1995
ECOWAS							
CEAO UEMOA	0.33	0.30	0.31	0.28	0.22	0.17	0.18
UDEAC							
PTA COMESA	1.13	0.89	0.54	0.59	0.50	0.42	0.39
SADCC SADC	0.67	0.50	0.21	0.27	0.23	0.20	0.18
CBI	0.76	0.59	0.43	0.40	0.33	0.29	0.28
Total	2.89	2.28	1.50	1.54	1.27	1.08	1.03

Source: Foroutan (1998)

Table 5. **The Evolution of Openness in Various Countries in SSA**
Openness = (Total Exports plus Imports minus fuels) / GDP

	1965-69	1970-74	1975-79	1980-84	1985-89	1990-95
Benin	0.20	0.30	0.35	0.38	0.30	0.24
Ethiopia	na	Na	na	0.22	0.20	0.16
Ghana	na	Na	na	Na	na	na
Guinea	na	Na	na	Na	na	na
Kenya	0.42	0.45	0.50	0.45	0.37	0.46
Madagascar	0.27	0.26	0.29	0.23	0.25	0.28
Malawi	0.45	0.50	0.57	0.49	0.51	0.57
Mauritania	0.45	0.68	0.00	0.55	0.90	0.92
Mauritius	0.56	0.71	0.85	0.80	1.03	0.98
Nigeria	na	Na	na	Na	na	na
Sierra	Leone	Na	na	Na	na	na
Tanzania	na	Na	na	0.24	0.24	0.47
Uganda	0.31	Na	na	0.28	0.15	0.19
Simple Average	*0.38*	*0.48*	*0.43*	*0.40*	*0.44*	*0.48*
Countries Belonging to an effective PTA						
Cameroon	0.34	0.37	0.41	0.31	0.23	0.29
Cote d'Ivoire	0.57	0.57	0.59	0.60	0.55	0.58
Senegal	0.38	0.45	0.58	0.63	0.45	0.32
South Africa	na	na	na	Na	na	na
Zimbabwe	0.19	na	na	0.33	0.41	0.60
Simple Average	*0.37*	*0.47*	*0.52*	*0.47*	*0.41*	*0.45*
Countries in state of war						
Burundi	0.19	0.20	0.28	0.26	0.27	0.32
Rwanda	0.20	0.24	0.28	0.27	0.22	0.26
Somalia	na	na	na	Na	na	na
Sudan	0.29	0.29	0.24	0.26	0.13	0.23
Zaire	0.16	0.23	0.14	0.00	0.16	na
Simple Average	*0.21*	*0.24*	*0.24*	*0.20*	*0.20*	*0.27*

Source: Foroutan (1998)

Table 6**. The Value and Share of Intra-Trade in Regional Sub-Saharan African Groups**

	Value of intra-trade in US$ millions					
Regional Grouping	1970	1980	1985	1990	1992	1993
CEPGL	3	2	9	7	12	14
ECCAS	29	98	118	168	156	169
ECOWAS	86	693	1,026	1,539	1,501	1,699
MRU	1	7	4	3	1	1
PTA	306	693	407	837	676	746
SADC	100	107	198	356	299	338
UDEAC	22	84	85	139	120	129
UEMOA	54	476	431	625	502	578

	Intra-trade as a percentage of total exports of the grouping (%)					
Regional Grouping	1970	1980	1985	1990	1992	1993
CEPGL	0.4	0.1	0.8	0.5	0.7	1.1
ECCAS	2.4	1.5	2.1	2.2	2.1	2.5
ECOWAS	3.0	10.2	5.3	7.9	7.4	8.6
MRU	0.2	0.8	0.4	0.1	0.0	0.0
PTA	9.6	12.1	5.5	7.6	6.0	7.0
SADC	5.2	5.1	4.7	5.2	4.2	5.1
UDEAC	4.9	1.8	1.9	2.3	2.1	2.3
UEMOA	6.4	9.9	8.7	12.0	9.3	10.4

CEPGL - Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (Burundi, Rwanda and Zaire)
ECCAS - Economic Community of Central African States (Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Zaire).
ECOWAS - Economic Community of West African States (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d' Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo).
MRU - Mano River Union (Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone).
PTA - Preferential Trade Area (Angola, Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe -- data for Namibia and Swaziland are unavailable).
SADC - Southern African Development Community (Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe -- data were unavailable for Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland)
UDEAC - Central African Customs and Economic Union (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon)
UEMOA - West African Economic and Monetary Union (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d' Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo.

Source: Yeats (1998

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