



EAST AND WEST: CONTACTS AND CONTRADICTIONS ВОСТОК — ЗАПАД: КОНТАКТЫ И ПРОТИВОРЕЧИЯ

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Features of the formation of the EU foreign policy strategy towards Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract. The relevance of the topic is driven by the heightened attention that developed countries are paying to Sub-Saharan Africa. In conditions of geopolitical and economic uncertainty, global leaders seek to build relationships with Africa that are advantageous to themselves, actively incorporating this vector into their foreign-policy strategies. One of the major players in this new “scramble for Africa” is the European Union (EU), which, from the beginning of the formation of this economic and political association, has paid attention to the development problems of African regions. However, this issue has received insufficient attention in Russian historiography. Accordingly, the aim of the study is to determine the place and role of Africa in the EU’s foreign-policy strategy. The study employs the principle of historicism, systems analysis, and analysis of the texts of foreign-policy doctrinal documents and official publications of the EU in order to identify the contradictory path of relationship formation between the parties and the key prerequisites for incorporating Africa into the EU’s foreign policy. The article also proposes to analyze the role of the European Union in the development of the new “scramble for Africa” and attempts at neocolonialism. The study concludes by identifying the reasons that prompted the EU to join the “scramble for Africa” and the efforts the Union has made to address the stated problems.

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Особенности формирования внешнеполитической стратегии ЕС в отношении Африки южнее Сахары

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Аннотация. Повышенное внимание развитых стран к Африке южнее Сахары обосновывает актуальность темы. В условиях геополитической и экономической неопределенности мировые лидеры стремятся выстроить выгодные для себя отношения с Африкой, активно включая данное направление во внешнеполитические стратегии. Одним из значимых игроков в этой новой «борьбе за Африку» является Европейский Союз (ЕС), который с начала своего формирования стал обращать внимание на проблемы развития африканских регионов, которым в российской историографии уделяется недостаточно внимания. Цель исследования — определить место и роль Африки во внешнеполитической стратегии ЕС. Предполагается изучить роль ЕС в развитии новой «борьбы за Африку» — попытки неокOLONиализма. Сделан вывод: причины, побудившие ЕС включиться в «борьбу за Африку», зиждутся одновременно на внешних и внутренних потребностях — проблемах безопасности, доступа к ресурсам и сохранении политического влияния в регионе.

Ключевые слова: постколониальные подходы, panaфриканизм, общая внешняя политика, политика безопасности ЕС, АКТ, саммитовая дипломатия, борьба за Африку, Сахель, Африканский Рог

Вклад авторов. В разработку концепции, сбор данных и их интерпретацию, подготовку статьи к публикации авторы внесли равный вклад.

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Introduction

The term “Scramble for Africa” refers to colonial policies adopted by many European states toward various African territories between 1833 and 1914, a period known as “new imperialism”, brought an end after the two world wars when most African colonies gained independence. Post-colonial Africa with its rapid economic development and the rise of Pan-African movement [1] drew growing interest of the world’s largest economies, in particular in the sub-Saharan region, as evidenced in the increase in direct investment, establishment of diplomatic ties, provision of humanitarian aid, as well as in their strive to establish new geopolitical and economic influence in the region. Economic and political interests of developed countries in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa are somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, following the collapse of colonial system, Africa became a “continent of conflicts” [2. P. 91]; on the other hand, despite the fact that most African countries are among the poorest, the African continent is currently regarded as the world’s most dynamically developing region [3].

Now, direct methods of political and economic control through open colonization, territorial encroachment, and coercion — characteristic of the 19th and early 20th centuries — are replaced with foreign policy strategies as key means of boosting international influence, used by the West to develop cooperation with African states. This is particularly true of the European Union (EU), which from its very inception sought to establish itself as a major geopolitical and economic actor, notably through engagement with external partners such as African states. However, the EU’s foreign policy in Africa took the form of unilateral sanctions, military-political interventions, and informational neocolonialism [2], which made EU-Africa cooperation somewhat ambiguous.

This study aims to examine the position and function of sub-Saharan Africa within the European Union’s foreign policy framework. In the context of contemporary global transformations and the EU’s strategic imperatives, exploring this issue is essential for understanding mechanisms underlying foreign policy decision-making.

Theoretical framework for this study is based on postcolonial perspectives on developed-developing states dynamics. The focus on European Union policy in sub-Saharan Africa extends that framework, given that postcolonial studies has traditionally focused on the colonial legacies of the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Portugal, and Germany — the predominant imperial powers of the nineteenth century. However, recent evidence indicates a gradual decline in the influence exerted by individual European states in Africa over the past decade. Consequently, analyzing European Union policy as a supranational entity — non-existent in the colonial epoch — acquires particular relevance.

EU Foreign Policy Development

Unified EU foreign policy has emerged through a complex process characterized by both institutional reforms and internal contradictions [4. P. 86]. The EU foreign policy course reflects its member states' aspiration to establish a mechanism capable of effectively addressing global challenges while simultaneously enhancing their own international agency. Nonetheless, the interaction between sovereign states and the Union's supranational institutions has led to numerous contradictions, both in the sphere of governance and in the implementation of foreign policy objectives [5].

A pivotal development in the evolution of the European Union's foreign policy strategy was the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, which outlined the new Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as a key pillar of European integration. Incorporating a foreign-policy dimension into the Union's institutional architecture constituted a significant advancement; however, in the immediate aftermath of the bipolar world's collapse, differences among Member States persisted. These disagreements stemmed primarily from the intricate task of reconciling national interests with the imperative to safeguard sovereignty in the sphere of international relations. The introduction of the CFSP was accompanied by several institutional innovations, notably the enhanced involvement of the European Parliament and the European Council in the decision-making process; nevertheless, the coordination of foreign-policy decisions remained slow and vulnerable to the effects of intergovernmental conflict.

The 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam was an attempt to address the problems that had arisen in the previous phase; it proposed a number of mechanisms to streamline the decision-making process. In particular, the introduction of constructive abstention

in voting and qualified majority voting (QMV), as well as the establishment of the post of High Representative of the CFSP, were further steps toward the more centralized EU foreign policy decision-making.

Despite a number of reforms that had been implemented, debates on the role of nation-states and supranational institutions dragged on. Foreign policy decisions still required coordinated positions of member states, thereby impeding the European Union's capacity to respond promptly to international crises.

The Treaty of Nice, adopted in 2001 and effective of 2003, streamlined the decision-making process and expanded the powers of the Political and Security Committee (PSC), entrusting it with responsibility to carry out strategic planning of anti-crisis operations. Although its principal focus was on institutional reforms in the run-up to the EU's enlargement to include Central and Eastern European states, the treaty also addressed the EU's foreign policy matters.

Thus, one of the key innovations was the streamlining of decision-making process within the CFSP, which enhanced the EU's effectiveness in foreign policy matters. Furthermore, the change in the voting system within the European Council, although not directly related to foreign policy, has influenced foreign policy decision-making, thereby altering the balance of power among member states.

In 2003, the EU implemented the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), a precursor to the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). At the same time, the EU devised the European Security Strategy (ESS), outlining the threats facing the bloc, its strategic objectives and political priorities. Prepared under the guidance of Javier Solana, the document was ratified by the European Council in December 2003.

It is important to note that with regard to Africa, the 2003 Agreement of Nice can count as a starting point for the transition from liberal intergovernmentalism to neofunctionalism. While the former keeps in place state sovereignty and intergovernmental cooperation within the bloc, where each state retains control over key EU decisions, the latter, conversely, provides for a gradual transfer of powers from national governments to supranational institutions. At the same time, both intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism "explain a certain degree of fragmentation and even the potential for disintegration within the European space" [6; 7].

Thus, the history of EU foreign policy strategy development between 1993 and 2003 is a series of institutional reforms aimed at overcoming internal disagreements and establishing a unified foreign policy stance. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that from its very inception, the EU intended to be if not a military but certainly a political force, acting not only within its

area of responsibility but also beyond its borders. Thus, the aspiration of its member states to expand their influence was motivated not solely by domestic economic imperatives but also by the ambition to secure a prominent position within international relations. As integration progressed, the European Union confronted the imperative of transcending mere economic cooperation to fulfill its political objectives, notably by enhancing its position on the global geopolitical arena. Nonetheless, despite considerable accomplishments, institutional complexities that arose with the introduction of the Maastricht Treaty persisted.

Rationale for Incorporating Africa into EU Foreign Policy

The need to incorporate Sub-Saharan Africa into the EU's foreign policy is conditioned by a number of factors. First, the collapse of the colonial system of international relations compelled most actors to devise entirely new practices of engaging with sovereign African states. Second, the region's abundant natural resources constitute a strategic necessity for European states. Third, the political relations between the EU and Sub-Saharan African countries present an opportunity for the EU to articulate and extend its political identity beyond its current sphere of influence.

Although France and the United Kingdom established their own systems of neocolonial influence, such as *Francafrigue* and the Commonwealth [2. P. 97–99], those did not fully serve the interests of the EU. On the contrary, such mechanisms of influence were often associated with efforts to preserve colonial structures and paternalism that hindered the implementation of certain EU initiatives. This is precisely why the Union initiated the development of its own framework for cooperation with sub-Saharan African states. This initiative materialized through a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements with African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) states, establishing novel modalities of cooperation [8]. Simultaneously, there persisted a need to address global challenges, such as rapid escalation of migration flows and the threat of terrorism.

The EU has initiated a number of programs designed to address migration challenges through cooperation with the ACP states, including economic assistance and support for infrastructure development. Examples of such initiatives are the provisions of the Fourth Lomé Convention, the Barcelona Process launched in 1995, the 1999 Trade, Development, and Cooperation Agreement (TDCA) between the European Union and South Africa, among others.

Global fight on terrorism has been an equally important factor in bringing Africa into the sphere of EU strategic interests [9]. Notably, between 1993 and 2003 the EU did not undertake substantial counter-terrorism operations in Africa comparable to those conducted in the subsequent decade, when heightened Western interest — particularly within the framework of the US global war on terrorism — prompted increased EU engagement [2. P. 93]. Nevertheless, as early as the 1990s the EU began laying its own groundwork for intensified security cooperation with Africa, especially through the mechanisms of the Barcelona Process.

Similar to other actors, the European Union is pursuing novel strategies to develop relations with sub-Saharan African states. One such strategy is summit diplomacy (Table).

EU — Africa Summits

Summit Dates	Host country/city	Key Results	Documents
April 3–4, 2000	Egypt (Cairo)	An official political dialogue established	—
December 8–9, 2007	Portugal (Lisbon)	Key institutional frameworks outlined to implement EU initiatives in Africa	Joint Africa — EU Strategy (JAES)
November 29–30, 2010	Libya (Tripoli)	Eight core areas of cooperation between the EU and Africa identified	Tripoli Declaration, Second Action Plan (2011–2013), Joint Declaration on Climate Change
April 2–3, 2014	Belgium (Brussels)	A thematic dossier and an implicit hierarchy of priorities established — peace and security, economic growth, and youth employment	EU — Africa Roadmap (2014–2017)
November 29–30, 2017	Ivory Coast (Abidjan)	Emphasis on issues relevant to the EU: migration and climate	Agenda 2063
February 17–18, 2022	Belgium (Brussels)	Focus on peace and security issues, discussion of issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic	Joint Vision 2030
November 24–25, 2025	Angola (Luanda)	Focus on the North-South economic integration of African countries, peace and security issues, and environmental problems	Addendum to the Joint Vision 2030

Source: compiled by the authors based on materials from EU institutions¹.

¹ EU-Africa: Global Gateway Investment Package. https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/initiatives-sub-saharan-africa/eu-africa-global-gateway-investment-package_en (accessed: 06.11.2025), A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/global-strategy-european-unions-foreign-and-security-policy_en (accessed: 06.11.2025), Towards a new EU strategy with Africa. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/651965/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)651965_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/651965/EPRS_BRI(2020)651965_EN.pdf) (accessed: 06.11.2025).

The presented data indicate that the format has been deemed successful, given the progressive increase in complexity of the issues addressed across successive summits. However, it is also clear that the corpus of documents lacks consistency. This suggests that a relevant — and, more importantly, long-term — strategy for adopting documents is yet to be developed. Moreover, the agenda of the summits predominantly reflects European interests. Even matters such as peace and security appear to constitute an EU-driven initiative, pursued within the summit diplomacy framework, whereby the Union ascribes to itself the development of a military-political identity [9].

Implementation of EU Foreign Policy Strategy toward Africa

Periods within EU relations with sub-Saharan African states can be singled out based on various principles. This study proposes to draw directly on documents adopted by the European side. The first period spans 1993–2003 — from the Maastricht Treaty to the Nice Treaty. Throughout this period, the EU's foreign-policy strategy toward Africa was in its formative stage: the European actors endeavored to articulate long-term objectives for cooperation, explicitly repudiating colonial and post-colonial foundations: the European side sought to define long-term goals for cooperation, explicitly rejecting colonial and postcolonial foundations. Under the Lomé Conventions, and later the Cotonou Agreement, adopted in 2000 and effective of 2003, the EU implemented projects for economic modernization of African states; however, the results proved controversial. In contrast to the Lomé Conventions, the emerging EU policy trajectory incorporated the development of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) intended to establish free-trade areas between the EU and regional economic communities of African countries. These agreements were designed to promote regional integration, thereby facilitating the creation of larger markets and stimulating economic growth [10].

At first inspection, the Lomé and Cotonou Conventions seem to embody the European Union's ostensibly altruistic intent to foster development within African nations. However, a more thorough examination uncovers a persistent asymmetry in the relationship between the parties. On the one hand, the agreements grant the ACP countries access to EU markets; on the other, they impose restrictions on specific categories of agricultural and industrial produce. This dynamic reflects the enduring neocolonial trade paradigm, wherein ACP countries export raw materials and import industrial goods from the EU. Moreover, a political dimension is evident: the majority of documents adopted alongside the Lomé and

Cotonou Conventions contain stipulations concerning respect for human rights and principles of good governance, exemplifying indirect political control — that is EU interference in the internal affairs of African states.

The same applies to EPAs. These agreements require African countries to open up a significant portion of their markets to goods and services from the EU, which makes it difficult for local producers to compete. On the one hand, the EU argues that EPAs have replaced trade preferences with terms compliant with World Trade Organization (WTO) requirements, which, according to the EU vision, strengthens trade ties on a mutually beneficial basis. On the other hand, it is becoming more difficult for African countries to stimulate domestic production and restrict land purchases by foreigners. Moreover, EPA terms jeopardize South-South regional integration within Africa by fragmenting trade policies of member states across various blocs, consequently reinforcing intra-regional barriers.

The second phase of the proposed chronology spans from 2003 to the present day. During this period, a number of documents have been adopted, including those addressing new threats, such as the COVID-19 pandemic [11]. In 2016, the European Union adopted its Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, which designates Africa as a principal partner in the spheres of security, migration management, and regional stability. However, the document does not portray the continent as an active actor with its own interests, but rather as a theater for combating threats. This was also confirmed by a later strategy — the 2022 “Strategic Compass” — where Africa, particularly the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, is designated as an area of heightened focus due to the potential for expanding European peacekeeping and counterterrorism capabilities to stabilize the situation in the EU.

Besides its economic considerations, a central component of the European Union’s foreign policy framework in sub-Saharan Africa is security. Confronted with escalating conflicts in the region, the EU has launched peacekeeping missions, provided assistance in training peacekeeping forces, and promoted the resolution of crises through diplomatic means. As previous studies have shown, the EU’s decision to deploy peacekeeping forces in the region is associated with the bloc’s pursuit of a distinct military-political identity.

The European Union’s inaugural Operation Artemis was undertaken in 2003. It was launched in response to humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that arose following the withdrawal of Ugandan troops and the resurgence of hostilities between the Union of Congolese Patriots and the Ituri Patriotic Resistance Front [12]. The mission’s formally articulated objectives were

to stabilize the situation in Bunia, enhance humanitarian conditions, and protect refugees in the camps. Led by France, the operation created safe conditions for further deployment of a UN mission.

Although the EU demonstrated its ability to conduct operations independently, several aspects of the newly adopted policy remained untested. Operation Artemis was limited in scope, duration, and area of operations; planning was conducted primarily at the national (French) level, thereby precluding a comprehensive assessment of the EU rapid-response system [13]. Scholarly literature underscores that the operation was partially motivated by a political need to show unity in the aftermath of the Iraq debacle [14].

The deployment of European Union forces was limited to the city of Bunia; however, the precise and proportionate use of force exerted significant pressure on local armed factions. Arms shipments, predominantly delivered by air, were markedly curtailed owing to effective monitoring mechanisms. Military and aerial surveillance, supplemented by successful psychological operations, mitigated regional tensions and helped avert an escalation of the conflict between Rwanda and Uganda.

Cooperation between the UN and the EU has highlighted the need for both entities to further adapt to joint operations. Operation Artemis cemented new concepts of EU military strategy: autonomous operations without NATO participation, and actions carried out under a UN mandate and at the UN request. The operation yielded impressive outcomes, including rapid deployment of forces to a remote region, protection of civilians with minimal casualties, and effective coordination with international and humanitarian organizations.

A central element of the European Union's policy framework in Africa is the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO)², instituted in 1992. This agency is tasked with delivering swift assistance during crises and natural catastrophes, with a particular focus on the needs of Africa. Its programs aim to save lives, mitigate the consequences of disasters, and preserve human dignity. Its primary objective is to respond rapidly to natural and man-made disasters, improve emergency preparedness, and protect vulnerable population strata. In Africa, DG ECHO operates in situations of conflict, acute food shortages, natural disasters, and health crises. Among the initiatives implemented are humanitarian aid in response to the genocide in Rwanda (1994), support for flood victims in Mozambique (2000), and fight on hunger in South Africa (2002).

² European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. European Commission. Available from: https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/who/30-years-eu-humanitarian-aid_en [Accessed: September 9, 2024].

Nevertheless, cooperation in the implementation of foreign policy still lacks efficacy. The reasons behind it include fragmented efforts and the absence of a cohesive coordination mechanism within the EU for engaging with African institutions and states. The EU's doctrinal and legislative framework was taking shape amid internal contradictions, yet foreign policy has consistently occupied a pivotal position within its architecture since inception.

I. Manners, a leading expert on the EU's normative power, identified three epistemological categories of the EU's "normative power":

- ontological: the conception of the EU as a transformative agent of norms;
- positivist: an explanation of how the EU changes international norms and influences other actors;
- normative: an indication of how the EU extends its norms beyond the Union's borders [15].

This "epistemological plurality," as U. Staeger puts it, constitutes a source of discord in Africa — EU relations [16]. Accordingly, the implementation of the European Union's foreign-policy strategy toward Africa cannot be regarded as complete or unequivocally successful, given its entanglement with contradictions between liberal intergovernmentalism and neofunctionalism.

Contemporary academic literature highlights an intensified "scramble for Africa," wherein not only European powers but also other major global actors — notably the United States, China, and Russia [17; 18] — are actively engaged, each having something to offer to African countries. This is precisely why former colonial powers, as well as other European players, exert considerable effort [19] to keep in place their neocolonial mechanisms of influence in the region.

Conclusion or The EU in a New Era of Scramble for Africa

An examination of the doctrinal underpinnings of the EU foreign policy reveals that, notwithstanding rhetorical assertions that the bloc intends to renounce neocolonial practices, Eurocentrism persists as the foundational paradigm governing the Union's patterns of conduct in sub-Saharan Africa. In this specific case, it manifests as a system of practices based on the assumption that the development of non-European societies is possible only through emulation of Western models. EU rhetoric, based on the principles of "partnership" with Africa, declares equality, yet such "partnership" masks the real influence of the colonial legacy, where African states are granted only limited freedom within the

existing world order based on Eurocentric ideas. This gives rise to new trends that can be characterized as elements of a “new type” of colonialism.

The outcomes of the European Union’s foreign policy initiatives toward Africa are best characterized as mixed. This assessment is corroborated by the recent stances of Sahelian states toward France, which historically has been a principal advocate of EU interests in sub-Saharan Africa. Mali, Niger, Chad, and Burkina Faso now reject exclusive reliance on conditions imposed by the French government. By diversifying their external partners, these countries are able to broaden their engagements both within the continent and beyond, capitalizing on economic investments from China and political backing from Russia.

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