



ATLANTIC
FUTURE

ATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES INTERVIEWS REPORT

05

Perspectives from Angola

Pedro Seabra
IPRI-UNL

ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates Angolan perceptions on matters concerning the Atlantic Basin. Through multiple interviews with representatives from a wide spectrum of Angola's society, the main trends, risks and opportunities in this area are explored while the role of norms and values, cooperation and regionalism as potential drivers of further relations are weighted in and evaluated. Ultimately, the paper addresses the main question of knowing whether or not Angola perceives new dynamics in the Atlantic as existent and/or desirable and reflects on what role the country might play in the long run in such kind of regional scenario.

The preliminary results of the interviews were presented at the ATLANTIC FUTURE Seminar in Lisbon, April 2015

ATLANTIC FUTURE – Towards an Atlantic area? Mapping trends, perspectives and interregional dynamics between Europe, Africa and the Americas, is a project financed by the European Union under the 7th Framework Programme. European Commission Project Number: 320091.



ATLANTIC FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

05

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Trends, changes and continuities	4
3. Convergence and divergence in norms and values.....	8
4. Prospective cooperation scenarios	10
5. Regional actors and interregional initiatives	13
6. Conclusions	14

1. Introduction

Is it possible to speak of a new pan-Atlantic system of relations emerging in the Atlantic space, beyond the traditional North Atlantic alliance and North-South dependency? Such overall research question permeates the work of the ATLANTIC FUTURE project as it seeks to grasp previously neglected views from several actors, with perceived potential to lead further intraregional connections. In this regard, Angola comprises an unavoidable country in the African context, still puzzling many external observers in terms of its foreign agenda, interests and privileged partners. Understanding its positions, preferences and perceptions in this space thus becomes a crucial task.

With such purpose in mind, this paper draws its inferences from fieldwork conducted in early 2015, concerning 13 interviews with selected Angolan individuals from different field areas, including economy and finance (2), security (5), people and institutions (4), and resources and environment (2). Their profiles evidence a levelled selection between public and private elements from different specialized domains and with different levels of interaction with the country's foreign insertions and interests towards the Atlantic space. The sample in question includes representatives from academia, armed forces, governmental ministries, international organizations, private sector and public society, whether based in Angola or stationed/working abroad.

Two important methodological caveats encase this kind of analysis. Firstly, general conclusions over the entire population or even the entire country should be drawn with considerable caution as the selected interviews offer, at best, a mere insight into actors that play a part in Angola's current society as well as their subjective take of the current national and regional context. The different analyses extracted are therefore entirely contingent to the answers obtained during the period of field research, with no prejudice of other unaccounted views and opinions over the same subject. Moreover, the relative park sample used, strongly underscores the logistical difficulties of conducting such kind of research in Angola. It does not, however, impair the validity of the answers obtained or its subsequent treatment.

Secondly, within each area, differences in content are bound to arise due to varied reasons. Individuals living or working abroad, for instance, can be expected to provide more dissonant views than those in-country. Moreover, the existence of cross-thematic interactions between many of the interviewees is also inescapable. Angolan officials from the security field, for example, often find themselves in a position of political relevance or with ties to the country's main economic structures. Accordingly, such level of professional ambivalence is regularly reflected throughout the paper.

Overall, this work is structured as follows. The first section reflects the different thematic professional areas covered by the project while seeking to highlight the main trends, risks and opportunities in each area. Afterwards, norms and values, cooperation and regionalism receive their own separate focus, following a similar framework. The paper then concludes by addressing the main questions at the centre of this research, namely whether or not Angolans perceive new dynamics in the Atlantic space as existent and/or desirable, while reflecting on what role Angola might play in the long run in such kind of regional scenario.

2. Trends, changes and continuities

- *Economy and finance*

Views extracted from this specific area can be considered fairly consistent. Despite some political, social and economic contradictions, Africa is deemed the region that became more relevant in recent years due to significant growth rates and important transformations in its respective countries economies. This does not necessarily mean that the remaining regions did not retained their share of relevance, but rather that Africa exhibited the largest exponential growth, when compared with the others' starting points.

Looking onwards, though, current low oil prices hold the potential to significantly impact not only international dynamics but also Angola's own economy, given its continuing dependence on dividends from its yearly oil production. Initial expectations that Africa and Latin America would come to increase the most thus need to be proportionally dampened. The latter, in particular, can expect its profile to be eventually downgraded due to the poor economic performance and high inflations and interests rates of its two main 'engines', Argentina and Brazil. In contrast, North America is seen as holding the lead within the Atlantic due to its slow but growing economic recovery, with subsequent spill-over effects on the surrounding regions, as well as to its energetic self-sufficiency, propelled by new shale oil/gas reserves discoveries.

As for common trends in the local economic agenda, similar emphasis is placed on negotiation of free trade agreements and the construction of new infrastructures as the two main priorities. The former's current relevance points to the increasing openness of Angola's economy to the outside world and particularly in the regional context, under the framework of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Fomenting further ties with neighbourly economies is thus understood as not only securing further national gains but also as advancing regional integration and securing necessary political capital for other initiatives. Its limitations, however, are sufficiently acknowledged in terms of dependence on other potential partners' willingness to engage or develop such kind of agreements.

Infrastructures, on the other hand, continues to comprise a lingering challenge for Angola as they relate not only to the still on-going national reconstruction process but also to the growing need of adequately providing sufficient capacities that can support an increased urban population and their corresponding social demands. In this context, the growth of trade and investments is understood as an overarching theme that either propels or discourages advancements in the other two issues as well as in terms of new transport routes.

- *Security*

Views over regional trends vary more significantly within this specific domain. Although Africa continues to be primarily heralded as the region that evolved the most in recent years, Europe and North America also received similar accolades, worthy of mention. This noticeable gap of perspectives can be essentially attributed to current and past professional experience of some interviewees but it is also based upon the notion that the partnership between Europe and Northern America – with NATO at its core, functioning as an example for multiple joint civil and economic projects – and the US's continuing political relevance, helped to sustain such geographic relevance over time. This option, however, comes with a more pessimistic view of Africa's place in the world, based on three central elements: that the continent's moment has come to pass, that

African countries are now turning their focus inwards, and as one interviewee puts it, that "its rights [continue to be] written in pencil" and not in ink.

This latter point is particularly relevant for it substantiates claims that try to go beyond economic growth expectations and focus on potential political conundrums, namely the several significant transition moments that Africa will face in the middle-run, with important consequences for its overall stability and development. In particular, 2022 is pointed out as a possible '*annus horribilis*' due to a series of expected electoral processes in such regionally critical countries as Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Gabon, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mauritania and Nigeria. Hence, governing uncertainty coupled with continuing problems of pacification and regional disunion as well as with little transformation capacity of the different local economies, ends up composing a bleak picture of Africa in the coming years.

But despite these stark assessments, the narrative that Africa has been on the rise and will continue to follow down that path, still finds considerable echo. The resurgence of the continent's geostrategic importance in a post-Cold War context or even the interest of Western countries in its energetic potential, dictate this recurrent highlight. It should be noted though, that such kind of evaluations does not ignore the fact that the gap between Africa's 'starting point' and the development of Northern regions is still overwhelming. To put it differently, Africa can be expected to continue on growing, thus warranting increased international visibility, but it will also continue to lag behind the US and Europe on a number of important dimensions, including good governance, democracy, and overall development.

These perceptions notwithstanding, maritime security comes across as the number one priority. Essentially understood as an overarching concept under which many other security problems fall or are connected to, it has stoked considerable interest due both to its novelty amidst Angolan policy agenda and to its underlined drivers. Indeed, Angola's protracted civil war turned the country more inland-looking, which then led military investments to be mostly focused on army and air forces rather than on naval capabilities to protect its maritime space. Recent high-profile purchases of navy hardware thus represent an attempt to provide the country with credible forces to fill an operational gap. On the other hand, such means are also required in light of several contingencies, all based or derived from Angola's extensive 1150km of coastline. For instance, the pending-international submission to formally extend the limits of its maritime borders before the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) as well as the lack of definition of maritime boundaries with the DRC clearly warrant a modicum of permanent surveillance and deterrence structures. Moreover, even though piracy incidents have yet to foment a clear public debate, they are slowly being raised as a growing concern.¹ Unsurprisingly, though, the need to adequately protect Angola's vast offshore oil and natural gas reserves also wholesomely justifies this process.

Illicit traffic, for its part, comprises the second most pressing topic in the agenda, despite variations within its fold. Human trafficking, for example, is considered to be associated with illegal immigration from the DRC while drug trafficking is becoming an increasing public issue in association with a corresponding higher profile of Angola's role as a transit point to other final destinations. Similar causes and effects, though, can be attributed to both phenomena, in terms of the porosity of the country's land borders and the significant challenges for the local economy in trying to cope with their impact, respectively.

¹ On January 2014, and despite publically conflicting reports, Greek-oil tanker Kerala became the first vessel hijacked by pirates in Angolan offshore waters.

Regardless, all these issues can be subsumed under the matter of fragile states. As one public representative notes, due to the historical "preference in Africa for strong leaderships instead of strong institutions", any sort of instability around Angolan borders can propitiate all kinds of potential threats, including the ones already outlined. The hierarchy of priorities can therefore become difficult to establish. For instance, drawing from a private sector perception, "maritime insecurity makes states more fragile but fragile states also promote maritime insecurity". That said, neighbourly fragility/instability has been recently mentioned as a national concern in order to justify Angola's political involvement in the Great Lakes region, before it spill-overs significantly into its own borders.

- ***People and institutions***

The near majority of the views collected within this area indicate a common understanding over both Latin America and Africa's growing relevance amidst the Atlantic space in the last twenty years, with increased transatlantic affinity and complicity pointed out as possible drivers of a mutual path of increased international prominence. From the two, however, Latin America receives the largest share of recognition and is even touted as an example of sorts for what Africa can potentially achieve, despite the latter's deep regional divisions in contemporary history. In contrast, North America is unanimously regarded as the least relevant region.

Similar choices are also observed when considering a prospective exercise. Indeed, both Latin America and Africa are expected to continue on growing in the coming years, to the continuing detriment of Northern actors/regions. In this case though, the picture slightly changes, as Africa is considered more prone to eventually achieve a higher level of notoriety due to its expected levels of sustained economic expansion. Even so, the length of time that it might take for local populations to benefit from more balanced economic productions associated to such a presumed higher profile, could comprise a challenge to overall expectations.

On a different note, chief concerns in this area invariably emulate the interviewees' professional fields. For instance, public representatives tend to deem diplomatic relations as their number one priority topic. Still, it is also possible to identify the state of democracy and migration as important points currently figuring high in the national agenda. The former, in particular, is even labelled by one official, as a "process that needs to be constructed" given that "the [Angolan] state implanted policies towards democracy, created the laws, but everything is dependent on how the society admits this change and can culturally adapt itself". In other words, general progress achieved in this front as of recently, is usually accompanied by a sense of wariness over existing or latent pitfalls in the short and middle term that might compromise such gains.

Migration issues, on the other hand, even though pointed out as more of a national security problem rather than a political-institutional one, are cited as an escalating dilemma that can affect local democratic structures considered more fragile, with special incidence around the country's porous borders with the DRC. Finally, the human rights theme is mostly understood as a sub-dimension of the country's own independence and civil war struggle, thus making it difficult to operationalize as an autonomous unit of concern all the while being subsumed by the state of democracy's conceptual gist.

- ***Resources and environment***

Views in this domain reflect two distinct but interrelated origins, both from the public society and private sector's point of view. Regarding the former, Africa and Latin

America clearly evolved the most over the years, from its previous overly-dependent position as Official Development Aid (ODA) recipients. As the need for such kind of assistance decreased – but did not cease to exist – both regions were able to project themselves as mild-success stories, while navigating occasional relapses by some problematic countries, particularly in Africa. The other side of the coin of this evaluation though, implies admitting that North America and Europe continued on withholding their prior relevance in world stages, not the least of which, because of their overwhelming donor status. With that trait in mind, there is no indication that such dual relation will change significantly, despite recent aid spurs from some Southern countries, such as Brazil. Hence, Africa and, to a lesser extent, Latin America can only be expected to continue on trying to catch up to the other regions' high regional profile.

On the other hand, if private sector views are acknowledged, such distinctions are more diluted, given that all regions in the Atlantic are considered to have constantly possessed a degree of relevance of their own. The shale oil/gas revolution in North America, for example, quickly turned the US from an energetic importer to an important exporter while Latin America saw its energetic profile rise due to considerable pre-salt discoveries on Brazilian shores. Europe, for its part, witnessed a reduction in the consumption of derivate products but increased competition between its main private companies, assured the region a central position in global market dynamics. Meanwhile, according to an industry perspective, "Africa kept its potential", thus underscoring its lower rank in overall comparisons. However, long-term energetic prospects help to substantiate a generalized expectation that Africa will eventually assume a greater role in the Atlantic space while North America also continues on its upward trend.

Bearing in mind these rather different views, a similar disconnection can be found in terms of priorities and agenda. For the public society, resources depletion is considered more important given that national riches are squandered without proper accountability or even minimal efficiency. Moreover, if we look beyond traditional mineral resources and consider food production as included in this thematic, then intersections with issues of transformation of the energy sector can also be identified, particularly in terms of how that might affect the local sustainability of small communities. In turn, all these topics can be tied to the (un)equal and (un)fair distribution of proceedings, which is transversal to the entire society. But despite such overall relevance and a multitude of national institutions that deal with such issues, representatives tend to observe not only a lack of articulation and coordination amongst each other but also a "tightening of space for public debate", thus preventing further participation of other civil society movements.

In the private sector, however, resources depletion is considered the least relevant given Africa will probably only have to deal with such issue in 50 years time. Water resources might become an exception but many more energetic reserves will be likely found throughout the African continent in the coming years, especially in terms of untapped oil and natural gas deposits. Transformation of the energy sector, on the other hand, is considered of the essence given that in 10 to 20/30 years, it is possible to expect changes in terms of energy sources, with a particular focus on renewable energies. Biomass energy, for example, has considerable potential in Angola with its potential bound to rise as oil prices remain relatively low and it is used abroad only in petrochemical industry rather than for energy production. Finally, a common point where consensus can be found concerns the matter of climate change. Given that it has yet to enter the society's debate as an issue, its full contours in terms of impact for the country have not yet been properly assimilated either, thus comprising the biggest unknown in this area.

3. Convergence and divergence in norms and values

Suggesting the existence of common norms and values within the Atlantic space, between Angola and the outside world and in particular with regard to Northern countries, can easily comprise an exercise as difficult as vague. That much can be deduced from the different views arising within the varied domains sampled.

In terms of representatives from a political-institutional and economical area, opinions are clearly more favourable to the existence of such common traits across a wide region, with particular reference to the legal and political domain. Principles of state sovereignty, common democratic aspirations, access to justice or even the social welfare model, for instance, are pointed out as possible products of transferences of knowledge and practices between different regions. More interesting though, are the sources identified. Given Angola's insertion in the Lusophone space, it is acknowledged some degree of absorption from Portuguese culture. Likewise, the part played by Catholicism as an internal socialization instrument had an equally important effect in terms of regional dealings and interactions with several neighbours, thus helping to adjust or compensate previous bellicose patterns of engagement.

However, the picture is considerably thornier when accounting for security and environment/resources-based perceptions. On one hand, a common thrive towards economic development and stable political aspirations is noted. The logic is simple enough: given that most countries within the Atlantic have embraced market economies instead of centralized ones, interdependency has exponentially grown, thus becoming the most homogeneous trait in this space. The best example comes from the increase of multinational banking operations that only further consolidate such a free market ideal. Hence, instead of focusing on political communalities, hard to grasp as they may be, economics can be considered as taking the lead in terms of fostering regional affinity. Moreover, the fact that many African elites and their offspring were or are currently trained and educated outside of Africa – particularly in Europe and in the US – assures that at the very least some degree of transference of norms and values is regularly achieved, even if at a mere discursive or formal level.

Underlined in this dual rationale, though, is the accompanying conviction that any pretentious norms and values' point of origin up North does not necessarily coincide with more Southern perspectives. In other words, given the self-perceived high number of norms and values within each country, with corresponding difficulties in conciliating them, to start and think more broadly towards the Atlantic would merely provide a far too complex picture of the subject. These sectors' perception of the subject is therefore essentially diffuse and non-committal, thus avoiding explicit linkages to any potential external influence and, subsequently, any possible connotation with more 'provocative' features.

Meanwhile, this difficult equilibrium helps illustrating the context in which near-unanimity can be found, this time over contestation to outside pressures that seek to distort Angola's path. Indeed, overall criticisms from Western countries regarding visible shortcomings in local, national and regional development processes are increasingly disputed by Angolan authorities, which deem them biased, one-sided and ultimately, colonial-based. Four central-related points can be flashed out in more detail.

First, the gist of these frictions and corresponding backlash cover a wide spectrum of issues ranging from economic to cultural matters but remain mostly focused on one general theme: the state of democracy. On one hand, progress achieved in recent years is simply not sufficiently recognized. The fact that one public official claims

"Angola is a young democracy where freedom does not exist as we would probably want, but it is heading there", evidences just that. On the other hand, different interpretations of democracy, and all its associated dimensions like corruption and respect for human rights, can be traced back to different levels of priority attributed to, for instance, the role of local customs, family structures and respect for the elderly, which comprise core structural elements of local societies and whose importance is often poorly grasp by the outside. This, in turn, fuels the notion that "the West's democratic sense is different from the one in Africa and Latin America", as another public official puts it. But other concrete issues are also worthy of mention. The case of international maritime regulation, for example, is equally considered a Western product, with little if any African input in its formulation. Indeed, representatives from this field area acknowledge that, in the current global context, "whoever has the power, establishes the norms; those who have not, do not stand a chance". For Angola, the choices or options to influence such kind of outcomes, with direct linkages to its own national interests, are therefore considerably low.

A second embedded idea in this discussion concerns the insistent need to adapt outside formulas to local specificities and temper wider expectations of change or structural evolution towards any pre-determined model. Generally speaking, similar laws and concepts may be eventually accepted and enshrined into Angolan legal frameworks but their implementation will tend to vary greatly over time. Or as noted by public authorities, even though "the pillars of democracy are the same, their practical application should depend on each country", thus avoiding any kind of "imposed Western democracy" while taking into account the concept's different nuances. In Angola's case and above all else, these nuances relate primarily to its historical background, including not only its colonial legacy but also the lingering memory of the civil war days. Without taking these factors into account, it can only be expected frequent mutual misperceptions as well as continuing resistance to any perceived imposition of external formulas.

Thirdly, despite these stances on regional/national idiosyncrasies, there are also those who argue that the interpretation or misinterpretation of values is not really an issue in itself. In the case of Angola, this kind of discussion can, alternatively, be best explained by a lack of willingness by its own elites in materializing the society's interest in democracy. Ultimately, however, the concept of democracy can be consciously relative and is therefore tacitly agreed that it does not necessarily comprise the best way to govern, except when it fits local interests and contingencies. According to a public society perception, "pseudo-democratic instruments may be used to perpetuate the length of political leaderships", who can then showcase its Western-inspired credentials on occasion for purposes of gaining or retaining legitimacy. But sustained pressure from foreign entities over local peace and democratic issues are also welcomed by NGOs on equal measure as a way to lay the ground for their subsequent activities. This double-edged application of norms and values can thus vary according to the lens of analysis adopted.

A final point to be raised concerns the West's own positioning in these matters. Admittedly, foreign powers easily focus on the shortcomings of local democratic structures in Africa. But whenever other interests come into play, they change their positioning and highlight the mere existence of elections (undemocratic or irregular as they may be) as a worthy and sufficient step. Hence, common norms and values are claimed to exist, often enough with the purpose of favouring one specific African partner over the other or establishing public good relations (development aid, information sharing, etc.) with one in detriment of the other. The use of one-size-fits-all international indicators, in particular, contributes to those ends. Such an apparent lack of operational scrupulous only substantiates the impression that international actors

and organizations are not originally unbiased when choosing to concentrate their share of recriminations on one single country. Unsurprisingly, local mistrust over the outside's positions and complains then frequently takes root.

4. Prospective cooperation scenarios

Interests, incentives and obstacles

In a space as wide as the Atlantic, further cooperation between every region, and particularly between Africa and its counterparts, is far from a given fact. Indeed, within each respective area of expertise it is possible to identify several possible obstacles towards such a goal, while sustained by diverging interests and only occasionally punctuated by meagre opportunities for cooperation.

In political-institutional terms, and despite the increased globalization of relations, continuing mobility issues in terms of visa emission for Angolan citizens, for instance, invariably produces a less than favourable context for additional interregional contacts. Moreover, overall instability in certain African regions, both at a political and economic level, fuels concerns that recent positive results might be backtracked, thus compromising the delicate equilibrium in some pivot regional actors, like Nigeria. Continuing misperceptions that Africa constitutes one single unit, devoid of national specificities and lagging behind other Atlantic regions, can also become an extra obstacle, especially when Southern countries take a more vocal stand against such kind of labels. The fact that these countries are seen as currently exhibiting greater dynamism than Northern ones in their pursuit for more adequate international representation can thus be easily misconstrued as leading to inevitable clashes. Such perception alone is enough to stall new cooperation initiatives.

From a security point of view, however, challenges abound even more. Possible changes in Southern Africa's political leadership or territorial issues in the Great Lakes region, on one hand, and Nigeria and Cameroon (due to Boko Haram activities) on the other, are considered potential regional flashpoints. But the increase of non-stately/transnational threats, the lack of a concrete/common legal framework on issues ranging from piracy to financial markets regulation, and general economic-energetic interests are also understood as conducive to further competition and eventually tension between different countries.

In this background, two factors deserve further mention. Firstly, the underlined notion that even though responsibility for dealing with such problems should not fall exclusively on African states alone, African countries have not been left to manage their respective regions alone, without foreign interference. The continuing use of CFA franc currency, the presence of French military forces in Africa, the external misappropriation of African regional structures – the African Union (AU) by the US and China or the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) by France, for example – or even the interference of European powers in the redrawn of previous African borders (e.g. Eritrea, South Sudan) in the name of more oil concessions, comprise just some possible examples of lingering issues that feed into such kind of narrative. Secondly, the unlawful exploration of untapped seabed resources in the South Atlantic might become, in the long term, a point of contention, particularly in terms of the South versus the North Atlantic. If trust-building measures are not adopted and if regional cooperation is not reinforced, there is a fair possibility of witnessing some countries adopting unilateral stances instead of collectively or, at the very least, coordinated amongst each other.

Meanwhile, the resources and environment sector provides, yet again, dual perspectives. On one hand, lack of funding for independent research and the activities of NGOs and civil society movements, might comprise a noticeable obstacle. As the logic of aid recipient country wears down, such kind of initiatives will inevitably be constrained by public funding, which will only be granted if such kind of local actors avoids politically sensitive issues. On the other hand, possible increases of piracy attacks around the Gulf of Guinea poses risks even to the best well-equipped navies in the region, with corresponding effects on local oil production. Additionally, the constant craving by Southern countries for transference of adequate technology might constitute another problem, given that it requires a considerable intervention and active role by the state in its own economy.

Finally, some prospects of dialogue may happen in the economic and business side. However, bearing in mind that Angola and other Sub-Saharan African countries are keener on first breaking free from previous dependency models and intensifying their economic and political relations amongst each other, any new external entanglements will only occur under very specific political conditions. Moreover, the presence of China in Africa in the coming years will most likely intensify, thus leaving little room for any other meaningful external relations, be that new or intensification of old ones. Concerns over protectionist trends, on the other hand, should also not be discarded so easily. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP) in particular, is presented as heralding considerable profits for both its proponents, Europe and the US, but clearly less so for Southern economies. Ultimately, such an agreement is expected to have a great impact in terms of accentuating the distinction lines between the North and the South Atlantic area as it will only reinforce the economic and trade disparities between one side and the other.

These views notwithstanding, overall cooperation is not necessarily forestalled in absolute terms. If actors choose to be politically moderate in their cross-regional interactions and if external powers avoid post-colonial/bellicose behaviours, then it can be expected a new set of balanced dynamics. Moreover, there are several institutions in Africa, Brazil and even Europe that focus on social, economic, political and historical research over Africa, thus producing and distributing mutual knowledge amongst each other. This can, in turn, generate shared common interests and the pursuit of common values. Likewise, previous cooperative experiments like the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, offer promising signs of mutual understanding and regional cooperation that can serve as springboards for future interactions.²

Perceptions on the EU

In this mixed context, perceptions on the European Union (EU) comprise a sensitive issue to tackle given the diversity of views on the subject, without any clear patterns emerging from each considered area. Still, a slight majoritarian attribution of a relevant role to EU in Africa and, by association, in Angola can be noted. The inescapable historical relations as well as the interchangeable communities in each side – both the African migrants communities in Europe and the European migrants communities in Africa – clearly play a part in this regard. Moreover, as one public official states, the symbolical appeal continues to be frequently brought up given that "the EU is more

² The Yaoundé Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery Against Ships, and Illicit Maritime Activity in West and Central Africa was signed on June 25, 2013 by all state members of ECCAS, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC).

than an union, it is also a concept" and therefore exerts considerable appeal as the ultimate model to be sought out by other regional projects in Africa.

That said, four central caveats permeate both positive and negative evaluations of the EU and thus need to be highlighted. The first concerns the fact that the EU's role in Angola has decreased over time and not the opposite. Indeed, despite early expectations of greater engagement after the end of the civil war, the EU is considered as not having brought enough to the table in terms of the reconstruction and national reconciliation process that followed. As a consequence, and also as a direct result of increasing competition with other external actors like China, it was left with little manoeuvring room. Secondly, the overdependence on individual countries, both in terms of their single insertions in Angola and of blocking the EU's institutional decision-making process, constrains any larger collective presence on the ground. For all purposes, excessive reliance on countries with privileged relations and interests in common with Angolan elites, like Portugal or France, inhibits further investments on the EU's own structures and communication channels as much as the French-German not-always-coinciding axis comprises a bureaucratic hurdle to any possible prioritization of Angola amidst Europe's African agenda.

This, in turn, leads to a third point, namely the lack of vision for what the EU actually wants of Africa and, more importantly, Angola. Without meaningful global aspirations or strategic thinking towards the continent and while focused primarily inwards, on its own economic crisis-related problems, the EU can hardly be considered a cohesive force abroad. Lastly, occasional attempts to impose or dictate outside governance models and economic practices can easily become counterproductive. The perception that, often enough, the EU sees Africa solely as a market to sell its products or as source of natural resources to be extracted inevitably generates a negative effect on African impressions over Europe.

Regardless, it should be noted that a future increased role of the EU in Africa is still considered fairly positive, especially when accounting for the former's funding capabilities at its disposal and the possibility of incrementing its distribution throughout the continent. In fact, a more serious financial commitment that meets the structural demands of African countries can be pointed out as a near unanimous trait. Health, education, science and technology and agriculture are just some of the possible areas where such funds could be potentially allocated. Emphasis, however, should be placed in initiatives that can produce mutual gains and not be merely one-sided or produce relations of further dependence. On the other hand, it would be equally advisable more regular meetings between EU and African authorities and mid-level officials, in order to better translate what is frequently agreed in interregional summits into concrete deeds.

Finally, the issue of association between the funding of development projects and democracy/human right clauses deserves particular caution. A possible compromise solution could lie in fomenting technical formation/basic education in local populations with the purpose of raising local awareness over such issues and thus generate ripple effects across local societies, all the while managing to sidestep potential criticisms and backlash from national authorities. As one public official states, "If I do not know my rights, how can I understand those that criticize or point out that they are lacking?". Increasing electoral support and international observers assigned to the multiple electoral processes that already occur throughout Africa nowadays, would further complement such an approach.

5. Regional actors and interregional initiatives

Bearing in mind the varying context of regional dynamics in the Atlantic, it is worth trying to pinpoint possible leadership spurs or a more visible prominence by concrete actors, who, from an Angolan point of view, might take leading roles in any kind of wider trans-regional dialogue in the near future.

Unsurprisingly, when it comes to Africa, Angola sees itself as playing a central part both within the continent and beyond, as an eventual representative or spokesperson of sorts. Given its on-going development woes, some may still consider it 'a giant with feet of clay' but the fact is, Angola's overwhelming energetic wealth coupled with a growing regional positioning and assertiveness – whether with regards to the Great Lakes region or even Guinea-Bissau –³ makes the country growingly inescapable in any geopolitical calculations. More importantly, the state of its relations with two other regional powers, South Africa and Nigeria, is considered crucial for a minimum degree of cooperation in Africa. In the latter's case, despite the potential disruptive impact of inner strife fuelled by Boko Haram, it is assumed that regional peace and cooperation will only happen if the two countries respect each other, in light of Nigeria and Angola's recurrent competition for neighbourly clout. Additionally, Gabon, Ghana, Ivory Coast and Senegal also comprise countries with sufficient gravitas in West Africa that could potentially play a meaningful part in Atlantic relations.

In terms of external actors, considerable accolade is granted to Brazil in Angola. Indeed, as it seeks to increase its presence in Africa, the country is growingly heralded as an alternative worthy player in the continent, while benefiting from the good results of its internal policies, ranging from eradication of poverty to the fight against AIDS, together with increased investment and cooperation assistance as well as strong political and cultural relations. Its discursive focus on South-South cooperation, on the other hand, has also won considerable acceptance on the ground as it accompanies an equal emphasis of a fracturing line around the South Atlantic, somewhat perceived as a reaction to the North's interest in expanding down south.

Such geographically exclusivist narrative, however, is not without its flaws. For one, current South-South exchanges are based more on ties of sympathy and identity between those that consider themselves near rather than on strict economic motives. Indeed, as one industry representative notes, in order "for a country to develop itself, it needs to engage with partners that are able to add something to its economy". Accordingly, the sustainability of such a model might be eventually brought into question. Secondly, Brazil's African insertions are also not exempt from risks of their own making. For instance, Brazilian civil construction companies' privileged access to Angolan governmental echelons and the use of overly intensive agricultural techniques might come to produce some obstacles. Hence, according to public officials, for all the rhetoric behind bilateral relations, "the perception that [Angola has] from Brazil, is not the same perception that Brazil has from Angola", which could eventually open some cracks in terms of a cohesive Southern front.

On opposite sides, the US is expected to continue on withholding the greatest military and foreign projection capability, thus retaining global power status and an unavoidable position both in Africa and in the Atlantic. Its record of poor cooperation with African

³ In 2011, Angola sent a Technical-Military Mission to Guinea-Bissau, to assist in local Security Sector Reform (SSR) efforts. In 2012, however, it was forced to leave the country due to a different political context on the ground, generated by yet another military coup.

regional initiatives, though, does not bode well for future engagement, given that the US frequently supports its creation and development but soon afterwards, detaches itself and stops participating or cooperating all together. This, in turn, only opens room for such countries as China, whose presence in the continent will most likely intensify in the coming years, while continuing to be dissociated from local civil societies' most immediate needs.

On the multilateral domain, SADC is clearly the uncontested preferred platform from an Angolan perspective. Originally constrained by the competition between Angola and South Africa, it is now likely to develop itself based on the interpersonal relations between the two countries respective leaderships. As such, it is considered the organization that can best foster regional integration in Africa all the while driving social, economic and political stability not only for Angola but also for the nearby region. Such promising expectations ran contrary to those associated with the second most relevant body, namely the Gulf of Guinea Commission. Even though it might comprise the best-tailored organization in terms of regional coordination (and not integration) towards maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea area with well thought-out goals and a clear agenda, the lack of funding due to the lack of sufficient international support and occasional blockade by France of its intended activities, has left its structures functioning only through inertia. More problematic, it now faces the competition of the US and France-backed Inter-regional Coordination Centre (ICC) for Maritime Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea, based in Yaoundé. This is perceived as opposing the fragile equilibrium between Nigeria and Angola that was achieved in recent years and could therefore comprise unexpected hurdles in the regional scenario.

On the other hand, the Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic (ZPCAS) is deemed a natural fit to the oceanic area, in light of the significant navigation and trade flows that go in-between. For the time being though, the forum is focused on strengthening itself, while drawing on the interest of Angola – who played a part in revitalizing its activities back in 2007 – and Brazil. Still, lack of concrete interest by other African countries and initial tokens of opposition by France and the US to its overall purpose, have somewhat reduced the prospects for long-term effectiveness.

Two additional points can be drawn from this complex institutional picture, based on the different collected perspectives. First, it is one thing to create institutions from the bottom-up; another completely different is the capacity of those same institutions to impose themselves, amidst a myriad of other alternatives. In other words, 'shallow institutions' with overreaching agendas but reduced concrete results, already abound in Africa. As such, envisioning yet another institution without a specific purpose and widespread support in sight, would easily overlap with existing structures and thus fall under the same pitfalls as previous projects. Secondly, any Angolan participation in multilateral solutions needs to be contextualized by an underlined effort to uplift the country's image abroad. As such, increasing Angola's presence and entanglement with a series of regional organizations needs to be understood under a wider legacy-building process, without necessarily corresponding to national long-term interests or well-thought out strategy.

6. Conclusions

Angola's insertion within its neighbourhood and towards its near abroad has often been dictated by one single and inescapable event: the 20-year old civil war that grassed through the country and left deep marks in the political and economic fabric of the

country, with still important ramifications until this date. At one point, in order to know whether or not Angola had a particular interest in a given foreign endeavour, one needed first and foremost to grasp the intricacies of such evolving context prior to any intended analysis. However, the fact is, such dictums have altered significantly in recent years as the country entered a new phase of openness and engagement with the outside world, while continuing to deal with deep lingering political, social and economic issues. Accordingly, any attempt to trace the country's perceptions over such concepts as the 'Atlantic space' requires taking into account how such important variations over time currently frame Angolan priorities.

Admittedly, it is already possible to observe some signs that highlight, at the very least, an openness to discuss the theme of wider Atlantic interactions. Bearing in mind the favourable geographic conditions and lack of natural barriers in the way of further outward connections, increased exchanges of goods and services can be thus seen as driving heightened interest over the Atlantic area. Moreover, if such a space were to be based on specific common concerns, such as the protection of Atlantic shorelines or migration issues, it would not be too farfetched to envision Angola's interest in accompanying such kind of dynamics more closely. In any case, it would need to comprise an incremental process, where a fair exchange of perspectives, knowledge and practices would take precedence over overarching and over-sized structures and institutions. To put it differently, 'think big but start small' represents a working rationale that could find some appeal, both locally and across the continent. Towards that end, the EU could even potentially retain and expand its financing status of related sub-sectorial enterprises. That, however, would first entail some resolution of its own internal affairs, in order to be able to successfully lead by example. Ultimately, the less Europe presents itself as a single cohesive regional unit with a clear engagement strategy towards certain pivotal states, the more difficult it will be to speak of an Atlantic basin or region of its own.

A further bleaker assessment helps putting such future scenarios into perspective. Indeed, the dissociation between the existent discourse over a brewing overall Atlantic scenario and Angola's own understanding of what that may comprise, cannot be ignored. The best token of example of this mismatch is found in the growing advancement of the South Atlantic notion as a single unit of analysis, which currently holds considerably more rhetorical appeal and makes more sense to some countries in Africa than other possible wider related conceptualizations. More importantly, for the time being, Angola seems content enough to subscribe to such narrative and play out tentative divisions between the North and South Atlantic as two different and separate geographical areas, all the while reaping continuing international interest over its energetic wealth and economic opportunities.

This kind of ambiguous positioning is, in turn, best explained by two general conclusions. First, for Angola, fostering relations within the Atlantic does not necessarily imply dealing with the entire Atlantic *per se*, but rather with countries with which already possesses intense relations (e.g. Portugal in Europe, Brazil in Latin America). As such, imprecision and vagueness over what exactly the Atlantic comprises or is made of, ends up representing a smokescreen that effectively hides the country's own fuzzy interpretation of its maritime interactions. Secondly, long-standing suspicions over the underlined purpose of such wider projects can never be easily casted aside in a continent so deeply marked by its past interactions with external powers. Memories of interference in internal affairs, meddling in regional politics and even past colonial grievances are constantly brought up as a control variable of sorts, when evaluating this kind of initiatives, generated outside of Africa. In this regard, Angola unmistakably has no qualms in juggling multiple partners according to its own

set of interests and it would be ill-advised to think that in the case of the Atlantic space, that stance would evolve in any significantly different form.

All in all, the bottom-line of this research is composed by neither an absolute rejection nor an emphatic adherence to such kind of project, thus underscoring Angola's continuing ambivalence to any kind of external endeavours that requires permanent commitment and sustained investment. Hence, in the coming years and from an Angolan perspective, the Atlantic will likely remain of interest more for the content of its individual parts rather than for the unrequited idea of a wholesome concept.