ATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES INTERVIEWS REPORT

04
Perspectives from Cameroon, South Africa and West Africa

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies how selected experts from West Africa, Cameroon and South Africa assess the potential of an emerging Atlantic space. Covering representatives from various sectors in society, the analysed interviews reveal how divergence and convergence is perceived in terms of economics, institutions, energy and security. The findings reveal a very cautious approach to the idea of an Atlantic space. The priorities of political imaginations appear to be centred on national interests and on the rise of Asia in the global order, leaving very little excitement for a project with regions that are either seen as dominant (Europe and North America) or unknown (South America). The strengthening of an Atlantic identity and of a potential Pan-Atlantic institution will therefore require a decided change of perception among the targeted actors in West Africa, Cameroon and South Africa towards the other Atlantic regions.

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

ATLANTIC FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

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1. Introduction

This paper provides an analysis of selected perspectives on the Atlantic from the African continent. The main guiding questions are in which areas the Atlantic is gaining relevance from an African perspective and whether an Atlantic space is perceived to be emerging from this African perspective. In order to answer these questions, original empirical material was gathered between September 2014 and February 2015. The material consisted of interviews conducted on the basis of a questionnaire developed by the ATLANTIC FUTURE project. One part consisted of prioritising the main policy topics of concern for the project and a second part was designed semi-openly to allow for interviewees to develop their perceptions and their reflections on the concepts of an Atlantic space and an Atlantic basin. The interviewees were conducted in equal parts in three different regions or countries: South Africa, Cameroon, and West Africa (Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana). By spreading the interviews over different sectors of the African Atlantic coast and by considering both Francophone and Anglophone countries, a large pool was made available in order to account for the specialised topic at stake. Some of the West African interviews had to be done by phone due to restrictions for traveling in the interview period (mainly the Ebola outbreak and terrorist attacks, as well as the respective counter-policies).

In order to provide a rich source of material, the interviewees had to be able to relate to the Atlantic space through their work experience. The main selection criteria was thus for interviewees to be in the capacity to observe, assess and influence the discourse on the Atlantic in their country. So as to strike a balance between different policy areas, the interviewees were selected from different fields of society, including government, civil society, academics, business and state bureaucracy. Some fields such as business turned out to be less responsive. A second balance was aimed at in terms of policy areas. Again, some areas, such as environment were more difficult to tap in some regions but overall all sectors were represented. Some interviewees had a particular wide range of expertise, experience and influence concerning Atlantic issues, so that they were questions on more than one policy area.

The responses of the interviewees were transcribed in a standardised report sheet. Thereupon, the different categories were analysed for each region or country in order detect general trends and relativize singular opinions. While this does not allow for a full generalisation on an "African" view of the Atlantic, it does provide insights into how the Atlantic is perceived by selected elites (mainly intellectual and political) in three African regions and countries. The following chapters outline how different thematic areas were prioritised and on what account an Atlantic convergence or divergence was perceived by the respondents.

2.   Cameroon

2.1.   Taking stock

Fifteen interviewees were included in this exercise including roughly equally numbers from the public, private and academic sectors. Only one interviewee came from civil society and two from the media. Seven interviewees had a background in people and institutions, four in economy and finance, three in security and one in environment and resources.

There was a perception amongst the interviewees that the relevance of Europe was declining, especially with regards to the US, Latin America and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). While some interviewees saw the US as taking a leading role in Africa over the last ten years shifting engagement from aid to trade, others saw the influence of the US as declining. One interviewee from the private sector saw the US as a country in crisis with inconsistent growth, "they will need to address their domestic problems to be more involved abroad". Although Europe was acknowledged by some as still the most traditionally important actor in Africa, its influence was thought to be decreasing. Europe was perceived as stagnating and regressing, losing market share in Africa so that it was no longer that competitive in certain sectors. In the future, it was perceived that the influence of China and other Asian countries (e.g. India) would increase and challenge the dominance of the US and Europe. As one interviewee from the private sector claimed: "Our contacts with the Asian economies remain the way of the future for us".

In addition, it was thought by some interviewees that Africa was growing stronger *vis a vis* Europe in both human and natural resources. On the other hand another interviewee acknowledged that Africa's progress had been uneven, with periods of growth but also with persistent conflict. One interviewee highlighted that the continent still bore the "scars of colonialisation and the slave trade and was still not respected nor given it due rights and opportunities". In future another interviewee thought that it was sensible to assume that at least a few African countries, such as Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania, would emerge as more influential. Other interviewees highlighted the growing importance of Latin America, and particularly Brazil, as a driving force for change due to its global economic performance.

2.2.   Thematic Areas

- ### *Economy and Finance*

The two top themes of concern were growth of trade and investment on the one hand and the construction of infrastructure on the other. For one interviewee from the public sector these two were closely linked: "Infrastructure remains key because it helps with trade and eventually would encourage flow of investment". There was also a concern from one interviewee that the countries of West Africa surrounding the Gulf of Guinea were of interest to other countries and regions mainly for their vast underground natural resources and that this interest was not in general very "advantageous" to the region and other countries and regions (conceptual or otherwise) should be examined to see "how such a region would benefit us in Africa".

- ### *Security*

Terrorism and fragile states were thought to be the most critical issues within these thematic areas. The trafficking of drugs was also of concern to one interviewee from the public sector as it was thought that this feeds terrorism and the buying of weapons. Based on very recent developments around security concerns, North America will continue to be important for security considerations in the short term. The U.S. are a crucial provider of security concerning the spread of Boko Haram across the region and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

The United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) were mentioned as forums that address these issues and specifically the UN Initiative on Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic as well as the United Nations Consultative Community for Security in Central Africa.

- *People and Institutions*

The state of democracy was the primary concern amongst the interviewees under this theme. Democracy was seen as still lacking in Africa but more advanced in some Latin American countries. This advancement was linked to the building of strong institutions by one interviewee from the media. A democratic deficit was seen to lead to bad governance and consequently some of the other issues suggested in the questionnaire such as the abuse of human rights and increasing migration problems. Respect for human rights was considered the next most important issue by all but one of the interviewees. The African Peer Review Mechanism within the AU was mentioned by several of the interviewees as a forum for dealing with issues of democracy on the continent, as was the Commonwealth. However, it was acknowledged that the AU in particular had faced capacity and decision-taking challenges with dealing with these issues.

In terms of drivers of change, several interviewees pointed out Africa's strength in its young population. It was argued by an interviewee from the private sector that, demographically, Africa looks promising over the next 15 years since more than 50% of its close to 1 billion population is less than 18 years old (interview 1). According to this interviewee, Africa needs to turn this to its advantage by transforming the educational system as well as investing in its health and agricultural systems.

- *Resources and the Environment*

In the field of environment, the main concern was around resource depletion as well as energy transformation. It was pointed out by an interviewee from the public sector that "from an African perspective, climate change is the least of our concerns, its an industrialised world induced problem and our greatest concern will be depletion of biodiversity with deforestation". Africa's natural resources were perceived as integral to its rising influence in future.

The main forums to deal with these issues are the international discussions surrounding REDD - Reduction of Emission due to Deforestation and Degradation as well as actions on biodiversity. In the field of environment a lot of exchanges have taken place with Europe. But in the future (next ten years or so) including the UNFCCC, the focus will also be on Asia (China, India and Japan) as well as the Middle East (Egypt and the Gulf) and to an extent Canada.

2.3.   Norms, values and Cooperation

Convergence or divergence in norms and values

There was a perception that there were very few shared norms and values between Africa and North America and Europe beyond perhaps the basic importance of honesty and the desire to live in peace. It was claimed by one interviewee from the private sector that there was a tendency for African norms and values to be closer to those of Asia and particularly the Chinese: "that's why they fit easily into our business environment". Several interviewees claimed that, while there were attempts to promote (or even impose) certain norms by Europe and North America in Africa, in reality there was little convergence of interests between the regions. Rather this lead to resentment and suspicion from Africa actors. As one interviewee put it "as Africans as we have an unresolved history with Europe and to some extent USA, breeding a mistrust in our relations". In addition, a lack of consistency in the practice of Europe and the US of their norms in Africa, for example in the European Union's (EU) pursuit of Economic Partnership Agreements, was seen to further undermine the legitimacy and influence of their norms.

One area where there was thought to be a great deal of difference between the regions was sexual norms. For example, the right to choose your sexuality is considered important by both the EU and Africa but with different connotations: In Europe and America it manifests as the freedom to be openly homosexual while in Africa it is the right to practice polygamy. Neither of these cultural norms is regarded as 'right' in the other's culture and the perceived interference of Europe in Africa's norms has led to suspicion. One interviewee from the research sector even claimed that the EU promoted homosexuality in Africa as a "ploy to control the demographic expansion in Africa". Another interviewee from the private sector argued that there is also a difference in the understanding of democracy between the regions. According to this interviewee, the US and Europe have a definition which is linked to their cultural path dependency and in Africa the social and cultural realities are different, for example, social coherence (e.g. through the extended family) is more important. Another interviewee from civil society saw the norms espoused by both western and African leaders alike as simply rhetoric, which are not matched by action.

In the field of environment, there was a "broad consensus that we need to slow down the effect on the environment" reported by one interviewee. However, more broadly, and including the other interviewees, environmental norms appeared controversial. North America and especially Europe were perceived as caring far more about the environment than African countries while at the same time failing to pay the inevitable costs, especially for curbing Greenhouse Gas emissions. Interests around oil and gas extraction were seen as a source of differing interests and controversy by one private sector interviewee.

Interest and Incentives for cooperation

One of the main barriers to more effective cooperation was reported to be the economic inequality between the different regions and specifically Africa's underdevelopment. This was also linked to political inequality, which was strongly termed by one interview from the public sector as the "psychology of dominance". According to this interviewee, "the notion of being equal at the table is still rhetorical" and the more powerful regions often dictate the rules of the game. From another perspective, one interviewee admitted that the depth and the weight of the historical relationship was a major obstacle to more effective cooperation between Africa and Europe, as well as the US. This has left Africa with a strong bias against Europe and its norms and values that it prevents the establishment of objective interactions. Another commonly cited obstacle to more cooperation between the regions is the lack of

communications and transport infrastructure. One reason for hope that these obstacles will be overcome is for economic as well as environmental reasons. In particular, one interviewee from the private sector claimed that Africa is one of the main sources of raw materials and associated extractive industries. Another interviewee from the private sector argued that a shared concern for the sustainable management of these resources would lead to more cooperation.

Regional and interregional cooperation initiatives

States and especially groupings of states were generally considered to be the most important actors likely to bring about greater cooperation. Some interviewees thought that international organizations would also drive greater cooperation and others that regional organizations such as the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS), the AU and other regional bodies which are active in some regions might take the lead. While others thought that regional organizations were not that active in Africa. One interviewee from the private sector thought that the EU could be more influential in the Atlantic if it created better links to Latin America building on its Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) as the US benefits from its African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). In addition it was proposed that Europe could be key to linking Africa to Latin America and by doing so reposition itself geopolitically. When asked about their reactions to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the interviewees gave mixed responses. Some thought that it would have a positive effect on the Atlantic as it would strengthen the Atlantic regions by further cementing the Transatlantic relationship and pulling along the other parts (e.g. Africa) indirectly through other existing trade agreements such as the EPAs and AGOA. At the same time other interviewees saw the TTIP as having a negative impact further isolating African economies.

2.4. Conclusion – Cameroon

Emerging Atlantic space(s)?

There was almost universal agreement among the interviewees that there is not an Atlantic space forming. There was a perception that the relationship between the regions was currently characterized more by economic and political competition and the unequal political and economic positions of the countries. For progress towards an Atlantic space one interviewee from the private sector suggested that the Europe and the US would have to "drop its paternalistic view and see the opportunity of Africa's and Latin America's growth". Another interviewee argued that the formation of an Atlantic space would require "a radical change in the way of viewing some of our key problems, like trade and migration by all the partners". It was also thought that it was not in Africa's interest to lock down its options in terms of which regions or countries it cooperates with, especially if these did not include Asian countries. In contrast another interviewee from the media suggested that there is some merit in the idea of an Atlantic space forming since, "the Transatlantic Europe-American relationship that [already] exists is leading the way and the rest of the regions are trying to copy or emulate".

The role of the EU

Almost all interviewees thought that the EU's role in Africa is relevant. This was argued by one interviewee from the public sector to be more due to the lack of credible alternatives than genuine choice on the part of African countries. This applies especially when the openness to the East, including China, was still producing mixed results. A common challenge to EU-Africa relations that was raised by a number of interviewees from different sectors was the sometimes 'hypocritical nature of the EU's stance, especially with regards to the Economic Partnership Agreements. These agreements were generally perceived to be unfair and forced upon African countries. One interviewee from the private sector argued that the Member States rather than the EU were more visible in Cameroon while another interviewee from the media claimed that the EU's support for civil society was strengthening governance.

3.   South Africa

3.1.   Tacking Stock

A total of fifteen experts were interviewed for the South Africa survey. Eight interviewees represented the economy and finance sector, three from security, three from the category of people and institutions and one from resources and environment.

There was general accordance amongst the interviewees that a political shift, whether real or perceived, was occurring. Africa and Latin America were on the rise, representing leadership from the global South, while North America remained stable and Europe suffered relative decline. However, almost all interviewees acknowledged that in economic terms, and as a donor, Europe remained of importance in Africa even if "saturated and self-sufficient". Emerging markets enjoyed greater growth potential. Linked to this was also repeated mention of growing markets beyond the Atlantic region, specifically those in Asia and China in particular.

China was credited with increasing Africa's international prominence and offering an alternative development model to the past in which the agenda was set by the west and did not necessarily assure fairness or benefits for all. This feeling of the west imposing standards was repeated on several occasions, including with respect to the multilateral order where "international institutions are too routed in the west and top down towards African countries. This is not an equal basis for south actors in these institutions or any potential new regional groupings like in the (broader) Atlantic". China in contrast addressed Africa's infrastructure weaknesses by offering technical and financial support in this area in exchange for access to commodities.

3.2.   Thematic Areas

• *Economy and Finance*

When asked about the most important relevant changes in economy and finance in the region, answers varied widely. Trade and investment was deemed by many as a crucial area and a category most ripe to exploit for further cooperation at the Atlantic level. Some identified infrastructure as crucial to development, with one interviewee noting that China's focus on this sector allowed it to exploit a niche. Still, infrastructure was seen by another respondent as too weak to be discussed in the same breadth about an Atlantic space, underlining that infrastructure integration remained weak not only in Africa but also the Americas.

There was a sanguine view by one respondent that more economic interdependence

would lead to less conflict and more cooperation. However, several others stressed that the failure of the Doha round was leading to global protectionism and the naked promotion of self-interest.

In the case of South Africa, the EU was identified by most as still a key economic partner and market for high-end exports. Several interviewees also cited the TTIP as generally positive free trade agreement between the western members of the Atlantic basin because it would lead to a harmonisation of regulatory frameworks and standards. There was, however, also concern about a "super block" being created of which Africa was not a member.. The G20 or the BRICS were identified as potentially driving better global infrastructure.

- *Security*

Asked about the most important social and political changes facing the region, answers were again varied. Maritime security was cited as a key area of focus and as an issue with possible implications for broader Atlantic cooperation. Similar cooperation was possible around the stemming of illicit trade, another identified hot button area. Security was also deemed by some to have Atlantic implications although others felt the region was simply too big to focus minds and elicit new cooperation.

Security remains a focal point of international and regional attention in Africa. Yet interpretations about the role of Atlantic actors on the continent differed. National interests were cited as creating more divergence than convergence. Furthermore, international institutions in Africa were "...too routed in the west and top down towards African countries." This problem was reinforced by the mostly western funding that was going in to security initiatives. An Atlantic area could provide an alternative and more equal north-south approach in the future.

In South Africa's case cooperation between it and Brazil to fight trafficking was extensive and stretched up the Atlantic basin as far as Guinea-Bissau. South Africa also maintains peace-keeping troops throughout Africa. However, another interviewee felt South Africa was disinvesting from security, making the prioritisation of target areas difficult.

While arguably declining in economic and trade relevance, Europe and North American were referred to by many as remaining the most important contributors to security initiatives.

- *People and Institutions*

Human rights were identified as a top social and political challenge in Africa. Human rights abuses in some countries affected marginalised groups the most, such as homosexuals or those suffering from HIV-AIDS. In South Africa human rights were deemed to be a central issue post-apartheid, but have since diminished in importance.

The EU's huge presence in HIV-AIDS programming and funding was acknowledged, while North American engagement was judged to be on the decline. Links between Africa and South America in HIV-AIDS were low although contacts between Brazilian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and African ones were growing. The importance of democracy was mentioned on several occasions, though with little elaboration, except for one respondent who argued that the state of democracy determined all other issues.

- *Resources and the Environment*

Though just one interviewee came from a resources and environment background, several comments by interviewees referred to this domain. One challenge cited was the question of resource depletion and Africa's over reliance on the extractive industry. This dependency on one resource was deemed a continental problem, including in South Africa where reliance on coal was problematic. South Africa's role was further scrutinised as a contributor to climate change through coal emissions.

In terms of wider Atlantic cooperation on resources and environment, relatively few examples were given, though mention was made of the Brazilian effort in the Grand Inga Dam hydro-electric project in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

3.3.   Norms, values and Cooperation

Convergence or divergence in norms and values

The broad sentiment from most of the responders was that norm convergence was still very distant, not just with respect to the larger Atlantic basin but also between its component parts. Cultural differences between Africa, Europe, North America and South America remained "huge".

In terms of specific norms, several interviewees believed a broad commitment to democracy, human rights, development and security existed. Yet even in this instance there was divergence in terms of implementation and different models such as democracy. The divide also reflected North-South lines.

Several respondents observed that the colonial legacy of Europe also left some norms in Africa, particularly with respect to the rule of law. This however was an imposition rather than convergence. The EU's big brother attitude was also mentioned as a contributor to divergence. Similarly the USA was criticised for its "Machiavellian" norms, that is, a willingness to act unilaterally and in contravention of international norms when it felt obliged.

International trade norms were considered to still reflect a Europe-USA agenda. Even Latin America was closer to that agenda than Africa. However, Africa was slowly challenging the order, though outside the Atlantic, through its burgeoning ties with China.

South Africa was deemed to be trying to reduce the EU's influence in Africa. Yet norm convergence with non-western actors was not always straightforward since language remained an inhibitor (e.g. relations with Brazil). One novel area where convergence with Brazil was occurring was within social movements. Trade unions and people forums were specifically mentioned.

Interest and Incentives for cooperation

Almost all interviewees underlined the pre-eminence of national interests in driving international cooperation. An Atlantic area was disadvantaged from the very start because of the complexity of coordinating such a vast array of countries and interests. This was further complicated by the lack of a common objective for the Atlantic area or the political will to cooperate at such a broad level.

Other obstacles cited were the North-South divide and the management of inequality between the two poles of the Atlantic. One interviewee also felt African regional

organisations had difficulties managing their own integration projects let alone the prospect of handling more cooperation at the Atlantic level. Driver states were needed if progress was to be made.

In terms of incentives for cooperation, the idea of a pan-Atlantic forum for cooperation was a compelling one; an opportunity for dialogue. Yet several respondents noted that dialogue without concrete plans and implementation was not useful in an already crowded multilateral field. Africa's youth and Europe's ageing population was offered as another incentive to cooperate. South Africa was seen by one respondent as a possible North-South liaison in an Atlantic area.

Regional and interregional cooperation initiatives

Few regional or interregional cooperation initiatives were identified as operating at the pan-Atlantic level. Most were ad hoc, such as civil society group cooperation, and even now reflected colonial or hegemonic legacies. Bilateral ties between different actors within the larger region were of course mentioned, such as Brazil and South Africa through BRICS.

Established regional relationships such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the North American Free Trade Agreement, the AU and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) were cited as possible drivers of a larger Atlantic model. TTIP was also mentioned by several respondents as an arrangement which could serve as a foundation for the Atlantic, but the risk of duplication with the jurisdictions of other regional organisations and interregional relationships was also noted.

3.4.   Conclusion – South Africa

Emerging Atlantic space(s)?

Little, if any, sense of an emerging Atlantic space was evident in the fifteen interviews. One criticism repeated on several occasions was the lack of sufficient incentive to drive such a large and disparate region to cooperate on a broader level. It was too fragmented. Formalising an Atlantic space would be akin to putting the cart before the horse, since traditional drivers of interdependence like trade were not yet sufficient. Some felt any type of association would simply create more overlap with other existing institutions and serve more as a talk shop than an institution with an implementable agenda.

The frequent references to the role of China, the BRICS and Asia in Africa also indirectly point to other priority areas beyond the Atlantic. In the case of South Africa the Indian Ocean was identified as more important.

The role of the EU

Irrespective of the number of ambiguous sentiments about the presence of the EU in Africa, the European regional organisation was acknowledged by all as having a huge influence in on the continent and beyond. Its role as a major funder in Africa was referred to most. Mention of its importance as a security actor was also made. Emphasis on its declining political role in Africa was also made although one interviewee believed the EU's wide scope of contact and knowledge of the broader Atlantic region (e.g. Mercosur, Canada) could position it as a leader in creating an

Atlantic space. However, the EU also received strong criticism for its promotion of the Economic Partnership Agreements which it was argued to disunite and weaken regional integration. Finally, several respondents alluded to the EU's continuing diminishment of political importance to South Africa.

4.   West Africa

4.1.   Tacking stock

Eleven interviewees from Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal were included in this exercise including three from the public sector and four academics. Four interviewees came from civil society. Five interviewees mainly concentrated on people and institutions, two in economy and finance, four in security and one also in environment and resources.

A general trend among the interviewees from all backgrounds was that, due to economic recessions in Europe and North America, these two regions are becoming less important and more so for Europe than North America. A few interviewees, representing the private sector, claimed that the US has increased its significance, or at least remains strong, especially in the areas of trade and security. On the other hand, the relevance of Africa and Latin America is increasing according to five out of six interviewees from the public sector. One public sector representative emphasised the fact that Africa has experienced significant growth during the past 5 years. Together with Latin America, Africa has "an enormous potential for growth", according to another representative from the public sector, hosting important emerging nations.

Almost all interviewees, from all three sectors, believed that the above trend will persist in the next ten years or so. Hence, the importance of Africa and Latin America will continue to increase, at the expense of Europe and North America, which will struggle to maintain their historically high levels of influence. Especially Europe will continue to decline. According to one interviewee from the public sector, one important reason for the increasing significance of Africa is the persisting security threats on the continent, especially in West Africa where Boko Haram will be a major problem in the future, which will attract European and US attention. Other interviewees, especially from the public sector, called the attention to the prospect for Africa, but also Latin America, to maintain and even increase growth. One interviewee from the private sector emphasise that Asia will gain importance in the future due to its economic and political rise.

4.2.   Thematic Areas

- ### *Economy and Finance*

For the two interviewees involved in this area, representing the public and private sector respectively, the two most important themes were growth of trade and investment flows; and construction of new infrastructure, even if the mutual hierarchy between the two differs. In terms of the former, Intra-African trade (an interviewee from the public sector) and the inflow of foreign direct investment to Nigeria from the EU and North America were highlighted (an interviewee from the private sector).

In terms of which forums are important for discussing these issues, the interviewees were not in agreement. One interviewee representing the public sector highlighted multilateral institutions such as the World Trade Organisation and the G20 and another interviewee from the private sector puts forward African regional (continental and sub-regional) forums such as the AU and ECOWAS. Here, G20 was discredited because the African regional hegemon Nigeria is not part of it.

- *Security*

Illicit trafficking was perceived as the most relevant theme, closely followed by terrorism. Fragile states and maritime security are ranked as number three and four. It should be said, however, that the mutual hierarchy among the four themes is rather vague, meaning that there was no clear consensus among the interviewees (three NGO representatives and one from the public sector) regarding the relevance of these themes. This has to do with the intimate interconnection between the themes, underlined by one interviewee, for example the relationship between failed states and the resultant weak control of illicit trafficking in the region (interviewee from the public sector).

In terms of important forums, West African sub-regional institutions such as the Gulf of Guinea Forum were mentioned before multilateral institutions, i.e. the UN.

- *People and Institutions*

The state of democracy was the overwhelmingly most important concern for the four interviewees (three from the public and one from the private sector), followed by respect for human rights. Diplomatic exchanges and migration trends were of least relevance. According to one interviewee from the public sector, having a multiplier effect on survival, sustainable development and governance, the state of democracy had an impact on all other themes.

Regional (continental and sub-regional) and interregional forums, such as the AU, RECs and EU-Africa Summit were deemed the most important among the interviewees. The UN was only mentioned once (in an interview with a representative from the private sector).

- *Resources and the Environment*

In terms of resources and environment, transformation of the energy sector was seen as the main challenge, followed by resource depletion and impacts of climate change. It was argued that power production in West Africa is not stable due to existing utilities being underperforming and inefficient. Regarding resource depletion, oil reserves are shrinking as well as the supply of tin, coal and gas. China has replaced the US as Nigeria's biggest oil customer.

ECOWAS was not considered an important forum for discussing environmental issues. The multilateral level is more important and especially the UN is concerned about natural resources and environment.

4.3. Norms, values and Cooperation

Convergence or divergence in norms and values

There was agreement between many interviewees from the public, private as well as NGO sector that there is a convergence of norms and values related to democracy, human rights, rule of law, justice etc. within the Atlantic space, especially between Africa and Europe. However, these cultural commonalities evolve on European and American terms since Western democratic norms are often imposed on Africa by various state and international institutions, often linked to structural adjustment programmes and aid. One interviewee underlined that African democracies are often modelled after European understanding of democracy (NGO representative). Furthermore, similar social issues affecting Africa and Latin America and many new democracies emerging there, facing common challenges, make the two continents culturally approach each other. One interviewee talked of "[African] voluntary convergence with Latin America in the context of South-South cooperation" (an interviewee from the public sector). Only in one interview (from the private sector) were commonalities with Asia mentioned.

Among the interviewees, all from the public sector, a great majority believed that the most controversial issues, causing tensions between Africa and Europe/North America, relate to sexuality and sexual rights. For example, there are diverging views on homosexuality and polygamy; homosexuality being accepted in Europe and contested in Africa, and vice versa for polygamy.

In terms of what are the most shared values and norms in the Atlantic, democracy, protection of vulnerable social groups and, in second place, respect for human rights were mentioned most frequently by the interviewees, all whom represent the public sector.

Interest and Incentives for cooperation

The most pronounced obstacle for greater cooperation among the interviewees, from across all three sectors, related to the unequal economic relations between Africa and Europe/US, manifested for example by development aid to Africa and unfair trade terms. European and American economic and security interests are imposed on Africa (according to one interviewee from the public sector). However, one interviewee (from the public sector) pointed out that the European-American hegemony is not in synch with the emerging global power shift where strong economies in the South arise. Despite this, the US refuses to let go of its influence over global institutions such as the World Bank, which negatively affects relations with Africa.

Furthermore, the language barrier is generally a major obstacle for African-Latin American cooperation to develop. Another more overarching problem for increased Atlantic cooperation is the facts that actors in the Atlantic, particularly from Africa and Europe/North America, generally don't share the same concerns and interests generally don't converge. For example, Europe wants to limit migration from Africa and on the other hand Africa encourages migration to Europe (an interviewee from the public sector). Also, EUs and African countries' approach to EPAs diverge, according to another interviewee from the public sector. Yet, in the Southern part of the Atlantic, there is more convergence of interests (interview with a representative from the public sector).

In the future, South-South cooperation will increase. In terms of Afro-European collaboration the latter, tensions between the two will develop relating to Europe's

involvement in conflict resolution in Africa and interference in African regional integration processes (an interviewee from the public sector). At the same time, according to two interviewees from the public sector, shared security concerns between Europe and Africa, as well as the discovery of new resources in Africa, which African states are unable to extract, can also lead to greater cooperation. However, only one interviewee, from the public sector, went so far as to foresee more conflicts in the future: China and Europe/US might create conflicts relating to rivalry over access to resources in Africa.

Regional and interregional cooperation initiatives

State actors were considered most important for fostering Atlantic relations, especially regional organizations such as EU, AU and African RECs (i.e. Southern African Development Community and ECOWAS). This is not only highlighted by interviewees from the public sector but also those representing private actors and NGOs. Interregional frameworks such as the EU-Africa and US-Africa summits were also mentioned (by an interview from the public sector). Two interviewees, from the public sector, drew the attention to the fact that the concept of (inter-)regionalism has expanded to go beyond shared geographical spaces such as the Atlantic. By implication, some states align themselves to non-Atlantic formations such as the BRICS.

European and African non-state actors and especially civil society organisations were also brought up as important by interviewees from both the public and NGO sector. According to one interviewee from the public sector, civil society is crucial to ensure a bottom up approach to Atlantic cooperation. One interview from the private sector believed that business actors will take the lead in interregional relations in the future. However, there are also challenges for strengthening regionalism and interregionalism. The great variety of, state and non-state, stakeholders in these processes can lead to dispersed efforts to promote cooperation (an interviewee from the public sector). Related to this, both the AU and EU need better consolidation. In terms of the former, South Africa and Nigeria as major members of the AU are not on good terms and the perceived belonging to the AU on behalf of many Arab states is weak. Similarly, as a major EU-member France is more engaged in African francophone states (an interviewee from the private sector).

Furthermore, in terms of the prospects for a pan-Atlantic forum to be developed, the opinions among the interviewees answering this question, all from the public sector, diverged. Some were sceptical claiming that no real exchanges between the regions exist and that the Atlantic area is geographically less cohesive than, for example, the Asia-Pacific. Others believed there are prospects for a pan-Atlantic forum to emerge, especially in terms of South-South cooperation, i.e. Africa-Latin America. However, there are many challenges, for example the need to forge common norms and values, which is difficult due to cultural differences.

Lastly, the TTIP was not considered a driving force for wider Atlantic cooperation as it foremost advances the interests of EU and the US, for example in terms of solving trade disputes between the two. In fact, the TTIP will strengthen EU and US interests in the Atlantic and enable them to set the agenda for future Atlantic collaboration. Only representatives from the public sector answered this question.

4.4. Conclusion – West Africa

Emerging Atlantic space(s)?

The interviewees gave an ambiguous response to the question regarding the emergence of a pan-Atlantic space. A slight majority, representing the public, private as well as NGO sector, was pessimistic about the prospects for such a process to take place and many question marks were raised. The foundations for greater pan-Atlantic cooperation are indeed in place, such as existing RECs and interregional forums, i.e. the Atlantic Dialogues, but it is still a long process to go (an interviewee from the public sector). Many challenges remain to be overcome. For example, many development issues hamper greater cooperation in the short run (an interviewee from the private sector) and there is a need for increased active engagement from various stakeholders, according to an NGO-representative. In relation to the latter, non-governmental actors are taking the lead in the pan-Atlantic process with state actors lagging behind (an interviewee from the public sector). The most sceptical commentators came from the public and NGO sectors. One interviewee, from the NGO sector, claimed that the sub-regions within the Atlantic are too different for a common Atlantic space to emerge and another interviewee, from the public sector, added that there are too many competing geostrategic interests among the involved actors. In comparison with Asia there is no similar potential for wider collaboration (an interviewee from the public sector). Furthermore, in terms of what it takes for a pan-Atlantic space to develop, a few points were mentioned. Firstly, trade exchanges between the various regions have to increase further (an interviewee from the public sector). Secondly, "it should have human interest at its centre in order to succeed and should not be based on the projection of raw power" (an interviewee from the public sector). Hence, according to another representative of the public sector, for a true pan-Atlantic space to develop, popular participation in the process is crucial.

The role of the EU

EU's role in Africa is (still) relevant, according to almost all interviewees across the three sectors. European and African countries have long historical ties stemming from colonialism. Today, the EU has an important presence on the African continent, supporting development and institution building, especially relating to regional integration on both a sub-regional and continental level. Funding African peace and security mechanisms is highlighted by one interviewee from the public sector. Furthermore, even if trade relations between the EU and Africa are significant (an interviewee from the public sector), the mutual access to markets is not equal due to power imbalances manifested by EPAs, according to another representative from the public sector. In fact, the involvement of the EU in Africa was characterised by "a divide and rule strategy" (an interviewee from the public sector). One interviewee from the private considered the role of the EU as remotely relevant, due to the strong economic influence of China, India and the US. In the future, the EU could play a more positive role in Africa if the relations between the two continents are more characterised by partnership with mutual respect. The EU, then, needs to take African governments more seriously and treat them as partners (highlighted by two interviewees from the public sector). Also, the EU can serve as a good example of effective governance on a supranational level, according to another interviewee from the public sector.

5. Concluding remarks: Convergence and divergence towards an Atlantic space

A broader picture on the perspectives from Cameroon, West Africa and South Africa reveal important common trends. Most importantly and across the board, most interviewees did not exhibit a notion of an Atlantic space. It became clear that the notion of "Global South" was still very present, i.e. of being located in a disadvantaged position towards the former colonial centres in the North Atlantic region. There is thus political will to strengthen South-South ties and to emphasise differences towards the North. This did however not entail a particularly developed sense of commonality with South America, which was – despite geographical closeness – still perceived as distant or unknown. Asia was often seen as being more dynamic and of growing relevance, mainly on the economic side but increasingly in other sectors as well.

Despite this orientation towards the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the traditional linkages with Europe and North America – however unequal they might be perceived – were still acknowledged to be paramount, in particular in economics, development aid and security. The main attitude towards an Atlantic space seems to be cautious or passive. If other actors such as the EU would take the lead in terms of trying to promote and institutionalise integration in the Atlantic space, this could indeed trigger some followership. This would particularly be the case if material gains were attainable without being accompanied by a sense of marginal positioning. However, since an Atlantic identity was nothing to be sensed during the interviews, is remains very doubtful whether West Africa, Cameroon and South Africa would shift their current zones of interest towards the Atlantic and take a leading position in the process of forming a coherent Atlantic space. The regional organisations in West, Central and Southern Africa, which could in principle be the agents of such a vision, remain very inward-looking. As such, it seems that the immediate territory as well as the Asian ascendance dominates the imagination of the interviewees, leaving little space for thinking outside of the box, i.e. in terms of the Atlantic being the theme of a common project and not a dividing wall.