
“PAST FEARS – FUTURE HOPES”

AN EXAMPLE FOR REGIONAL CO-OPERATION OUTSIDE EUROPE: FROM THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY TO AN EAST AFRICAN FEDERATION

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INTRODUCTION

The paper first aims at taking an overview of the rise and fall of the East African Community (EAC) during the first decade of its existence since its establishment in the 1960s. Then, efforts to revitalise regional co-operation among the three East African states of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania since the 1990s will be introduced. The idea of the Community certainly reserves hopes and opportunities for all the three parties involved, but to be able to live up to them, a better understanding of bi- and trilateral relations, as well as the external aspirations of these states in the international arena need to be looked at. In addition, it is important to have a look at the potentials in a realistic way. In the final part of the analysis, some thoughts will be highlighted about the relations between the EAC and the European Union (EU), which is considered among the EAC members as well as across the entire African continent as an exemplary organisation of successful regional integration. Special attention will be devoted to the idea of an East African Federation, which was also stressed upon in the last communiqué of the 6th summit of the three heads of state of EAC issued in November 2004 in Arusha, Tanzania.

AFTER INDEPENDENCE: ASPIRATIONS FOR AND BENEFITS OF REGIONAL COHESION

There is no doubt about the high expectations that had been accumulated among African people on their road to freedom from colonial rule. In the course of preparing for a new type of life, i.e. one that is dependent on local needs and wants in light of free, national resources and supply, and independent from other external forces which had not gained sufficient knowledge about the necessary

cultural “localities” needed for proper power management – this cannot be proper anyhow when the given external force suppresses the local in one way or another – local oppositions had taken decisive steps towards achieving the status of independent nation-state by the early 1960s. In this respect, Tanzania’s first political party, the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) provided an example for other states across the region. It was Tanganyika that first proclaimed independence in December 1961, followed by Uganda in October 1962, then, Zanzibar and Kenya on the same day, 10 December 1963.

Among numerous factors, pan-African thinking and feelings for a regional community have always been endemic to local people and leaders on the ancient continent. In East Africa, for instance, “after Tanganyika became independent in 1961 tremendous enthusiasm was generated among the East African people for federation. In fact Tanganyika offered to postpone her independence for a year if Britain would grant independence to Kenya and Uganda at the same time” (Sebalu, 1972 #4: 347). Creating regional groupings mainly focussing on political unions had been on the minds of African politicians in the first years of independence, and even before, already in 1926, when for instance, the Conference of East African Governors was created, which later served as predecessor to the East African High Commission. As Tordoff argues, the establishment of such a regional collaboration is “understandable on several grounds ... [as] they were a possible means of reducing tensions between states divided by artificial, mostly colonially imposed boundaries ... [they would] therefore promote political stability ... [and because] African leaders favoured African unity in principle” (Tordoff, 2002: 241).

According to Sebalu, “co-operation in East Africa has evolved as a result of historical circumstances ... first Uganda and Kenya, and then Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania were under the one colonial power [which] led to the construction of a unified railway system, post office and, latter, an airline, in order to reduce the cost of the British Exchequer which was subsidising these services initially” (Sebalu, 1972: 345). These developments undoubtedly resulted in a network of closer ties and bigger mobility, in particular in the field of trade. “Nyerere saw Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania provided a unique opportunity for co-operation because the three states had a long history of co-operation dating back to the colonial period” (Msambichaka et al., 2002: 250).

The free movement of goods, capital and labour was in the heart of common efforts built upon the aforementioned historical legacy when the three parties prepared for finalising an agreement which was constructed to launch a common market for the three East African states. After both Uganda and Kenya became independent in the years following Tanganyika’s proclamation, “the enthusiasm for [political] federation, at least among the leaders, waned and the leaders began equivocate” (Sebalu, 1972 #4: 348), and as a compromise step all agreed to turn their attention to economic co-operation. In 1967 – coming into force on 1 December – the three heads of state, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Milton Obote of Uganda and Julius Kambarege Nyerere of Tanzania finally signed the Treaty for East African Co-operation that created the East African Community.

Analysing the unresolved issues the treaty left together with turning attention to the potential benefits East African people believed the formalised co-operation could bring to them, first, transportation can be mentioned. As Mead underlined, “an improvement in the railway system in Kenya generally helps Uganda (or at worst leaves Uganda’s welfare unchanged), and conversely” (Mead, 1969: 278-9). Other areas included the co-ordinated marketing of imports and exports and the devolution of power to national central banks in the field of financial services.

The Treaty, however, seemed to be weak in co-ordinating and controlling industrial co-operation. In this field, for instance, as Mead observed, “the East African Development Bank has an important role to play ... [but without real] legislative teeth; if it helps to finance a steel mill in Uganda, there is no law against Kenya’s setting up a second steel mill in competition with the first” (Mead, 1969: 284-5). In contrast to the hopes of many East Africans, this type of regional development could not result in the equity of distribution of benefits, thus the original aims of regional planning bringing maximum efficiency and full equity proved to be incompatible. Among the problems causing the disintegration and dismemberment of the EAC, the problem of rising inequalities should be mentioned first. “At the roots of its increasing difficulties was the fact that the benefits of membership went disproportionately to Kenya, which dominated the intra-regional trade in manufactured products” (Tordoff, 2002: 243). Other reasons for disintegration could be the different ideologies the three countries

had; with Tanzania “progressively ‘drifting’ southwards as the conflict in Southern Africa intensified ... Kenya [being] firmly committed to the capitalist path to development in an area dominated by socialist-oriented states ... [and] Uganda [not being able to] play the role of a moderating force” (Mugomba, 1978: 262-3). So in this respect, largely because of the lack of a common ideology, no political federation, no common economic strategy, no healthy and equal distribution of benefits meant a possible target any longer. And this led to a community becoming defunct only a decade after its establishment.

THE EAC TODAY: CHANGE OF REGIMES AND HOPES FOR RESTART

However, as long as “most African economies are too weak to stand up to global competition,” (Kwarteg, 1997 #12: 29), as is the case in the states of East Africa, regional co-operation and integration is key to development bearing in mind that it offers the possibility to the optimal utilisation of assets and natural resources, thus, it is “motivated by the need for mutual economic development” (Kwarteg, 1997 #12: 29). As the essential background for any common aspiration, “even without formal agreement the peoples of this region, especially those on the borders, are in constant contact with each other” (Msambichaka et al., 2002: 253), thus, common cultural factors have a say in the future of East Africa. Analysed from a global context, East African co-operation has come back “at a time when there is renewed interest in regional integration worldwide” (Msambichaka et al., 2002: 253).

With more modest objectives the East African Co-operation was re-established in the course of the 1990s. “By this time,” as Pinkney summarises, “the more polarising influences had gone. There was no military dictator in Uganda and no commitment to socialism in Tanzania. All three countries accepted competitive politics and a market economy, though with varying degrees of enthusiasm” (Pinkney, 2001: 202).

First, a new agreement was signed in 1993 with the aim of setting up the Tripartite Commission for East African Co-operation. Due to the different political and economic environments, the Commission was less concerned with defining control mechanisms for the industrial sector. The core objective was proven to be the creation of a free trade area among the three countries.

“The 1993 agreement set out such aims as equitable development, improving the quality of life, promoting the sustainable utilisation of the region’s natural resources, enhancing the role of women and promoting peace, security and good neighbourliness” (Pinkney, 2001: 203). The name of the co-ordinating body, i.e. East African Co-operation, between the years 1993 and 1999 also suggested that the three states did not want to define any central authority giving orders to anybody. Also, support from the international community, especially from the European Union, pushed the co-operation forward, toward a potentially tightly integrated community. After a treaty for the establishment of a community was drafted in 1998, decisions were taken about revitalising the East African region. Inter-state co-operation was formalised in this new treaty which was finally signed by the three heads of state in November 2000. The importance of greater regional co-operation is surely recognised by all signing parties, “especially when such a philosophy is in tune with that preached in Brussels. An integrated East Africa, comparable with the EU, is ... on the horizon” (Pinkney, 2001: 206).

THE EAC AND THE EU

As an introductory thought, a reference is made here to what is widely known, i.e. that the European Union is interested in and has been active in the promotion of regional co-operation and development in countries of the Third World, the so-called South. Nugent underlines that “the reasons for the EU’s active engagement in development policy are a mixture of the *historical*, the *moral*, and the *economic*: the historical – some EU countries, notably France and the UK, have long established ties with some parts of the Third World as a result of their colonial past; the moral – EU governments believe, although with different degrees of enthusiasm, that something should be done about world poverty and hunger; the economic – Third World countries account for around 30 per cent of EU exports, and the EU is highly dependent on the Third World for products such as rubber, copper and uranium” (Nugent, 1994: 405-6)¹. The Maastricht Treaty on European Union (TEU) – entering into force in November 1993 – “considerably strengthens the legal basis for the Community’s development policy. Articles 130u-y add to the EU Treaty a new title, ‘Development co-operation’, which lays down three goals: fostering economic and social

¹ Italics by István Tarrósy.

development, integration of developing countries into the world economy and the campaign against poverty” (Schmuck, 1997: 68).

After the Yaoundé Conventions of 1963 and 1969 were formalising co-operation between the EU and former French and Belgian colonies, with Britain’s joining the Community, “the process was taken further with the first Lomé Convention of 1975 and the creation of the ACP² group ... what had begun as a means of granting trade preferences evolved into a structure for channelling aid and investment, and for dialogue between the European and African countries” (Pinkney, 2001: 76).

In June 2000, the four Lomé Conventions (1975-2000) were followed by the Cotonou Agreement, according to which for another twenty years the EU will take great responsibility over combating poverty in underdeveloped regions by continuing channelling aids into countries in need, as well as encouraging and increasing trade with ACP countries.

Taking a close look at the interests in the development of East Africa, there is no doubt that the EU would also like to extend its influence on the global market and become more competitive with the US, Japan and other regional trading blocs, and therefore wants to increase trade, both in terms of exports and imports, with countries of the East African region-apart from other regions in the less developed world. This particular aspect of EU support should also be thought about when speaking about any co-operation among the countries referred to.

THE DREAM OF AN EAST AFRICAN FEDERATION – CONCLUDING REMARKS

A shift towards greater regional integration is inevitable in East Africa. As a result of the re-establishment of the East African Community by the end of the 1990s, the region unquestionably has been moving towards the realisation of a common market, a monetary union and a political federation. In this process, a Customs Union was also signed at the summit of the three heads of state at the beginning of March 2004, under which, as economist Peter Kiguta said in an interview with *The East African*, “the industrial sector would be forced to invest more and improve technology to produce better quality goods for the regional

² ACP stands for African, Caribbean and Pacific.

and international markets and adopt more aggressive marketing strategies.”³ The Customs Union is therefore an inevitable tool for boosting trade in the region and for increasing competitiveness both on the regional scale and at the global level.

As time is running out in terms of keeping power and their own fate in their hands, not allowing outside forces, especially Europe and the US to enter into the markets as well as to influence decision-making, or even dominate it, as observed by many East African people, “East Africans must act quickly to create their Republic of East Africa and move forward with determination to uplift their economy, living standards and political standing in an increasingly global state.”⁴ In good agreement with such feelings and expectations, the East African heads of state, i.e. President Kibaki of Kenya, President Museveni of Uganda and President Mkapa of Tanzania, at their summit on 27-29 August 2004 in Nairobi declared that they “undertook a broad review of the status of the East African Community integration process, and examined further ways and means of deepening and accelerating the process. ... [and] the Summit resolved to expedite and compress the process of integration so that the ultimate goal of a Political Federation is achieved through a fast track mechanism.”⁵ As a next step of reaffirming commitments, the three heads of state met at another summit in November 2004, and according to the communiqué of this 6th meeting, they underlined that “the signing of the Protocol on the Establishment of the East African Community Customs Union on 2 March 2004 marked a turning point in the evolution of East Africa towards deeper integration and faster development.” They also noted the “strong desire of the people of East Africa to be at the centre of the process towards establishing the [East African] Federation.”⁶

³ Reported by Chhatbar, S. & Kaiza, D. (2004). Protocol is Signed. Now the Real Work Begins. *The East African*. 8 March 2004.

⁴ Taken from the online version of *The East African*, 15 March 2004; opinion written by Ngemera, M.S. entitled: Why Only an Africa with Large States Will Catch the Big Fish.

⁵ Joint Communiqué for the East African Heads of State Summit, Nairobi, 27-29 August 2004.

⁶ Joint Communiqué of the 6th Summit of the East African Heads of State, Nairobi, 26 November 2004.

This latter again proves the very nature of any regional cohesion. Without cultural ties, common historical legacy and joint efforts in developing frameworks for lifting up the level of wealth for mutual and equitable benefits no regional grouping of countries can function well enough. As people are in the heart of all the dreams, they must be taken into account properly when planning for the future. An environment sufficiently stable and sustainable is needed for a well-functioning regional community. To achieve this in the near future, in the case of East Africa, in addition to simple political willingness, steps towards a political federation is surely desirable. And as long as interests can meet and mingle, European help and other international support can be taken with strong reservations of the necessary powers needed on the local and national levels.

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