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## **Post-Brexit UK-Africa relations: Inevitability of competition between the UK, the EU, and China?**

**María del Pilar Cazali**

International Relations student, University of Navarra; senior research assistant, Center for Global Affairs & Strategic Studies

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Brexit deal has led to a shift in the UK's relationship not only with the European Union but also with other countries around the world. Africa is key in the new relationships the UK is trying to build outside from the EU due to their historical past, the current Commonwealth link, and the important potential trade deals. This article looks to answer how hard the UK will struggle with competition in the African country as an individual state, no longer member of the EU. These struggles will be especially focused on trading aspects, as they are the most important factors currently for the UK in the post-Brexit era, and it's also the strongest focus of the EU in Africa.

# **POST-BREXIT UK-AFRICA RELATIONS: INEVITABILITY OF COMPETITION BETWEEN UK, EU, AND CHINA?**

## **Introduction**

The relationship between the United Kingdom and the African continent has been one mainly defined by the era of colonialism. This imperialist legacy continues being quite striking in Africa, despite the UK's efforts to include ex-colonies in the Commonwealth group and providing them with preferential trade relations in the European Union. This relationship with the European Union has been important for African states, mainly because it has facilitated trade. For Africa, the EU has also been key to development aid.

Apart from the European Union, the African state is engaged in several relationships internationally and it will be quite interesting to see how the UK navigates around these to establish itself at the pinnacle of the African-UK relations. To begin with, the African Union is Africa's representation in the international system and it consists of 54 states with different leanings, perceptions, and interests in regards to the UK. Yet, the UK is faced with more assertive sub-regional organizations, which have shown to be more capable than the AU in articulating the needs of the African states on the international and regional levels. Despite the efforts put into these organizations, they still present challenges especially due to overlapping memberships and lack of internal cohesion. Continuing the pursuit of a stronger continent, in 2018 a new African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) also started being developed as one of the largest free-trade areas in the world. How the UK defines its role in this regard will determine how the relationship with African states will be shaped.

The BRICS countries have also become key actors in the last few years, as they are providing huge benefits and aid to African countries without the conditions or restrictions offered by Western countries or organizations. Especially China is willing to support African states that are authoritarian. African countries are more willing to collaborate with states such as China because they see it as a more reciprocal relationship, where there isn't a double intention to take advantage of the weaknesses of Africa.

The aforementioned web of actors represents the context in which the United Kingdom will start working on starting new relationships in Africa, as it leaves the European Union. The UK has various challenges to tackle: decreasing trust in British capabilities, strong challengers in the region, and lack of strategy on how to develop new relationships (either with Africa as a whole, with sub-regional organizations or states individually). Based on what is known, this paper presents the hypothesis that the UK is going to find hard to compete in Africa with the European Union and other strong powers such as China in the post-Brexit era, and that its key strategy should be to work through partnerships.

In proving the above hypothesis the study will be based on historical factors that might influence the UK's position in Africa and trends that have been followed by other countries in Africa in the last few years, that can pose tough challenges. Adding to that,

a comparison of trade and economic elements of the EU that could affect the future of the UK for trading in Africa. The key timeframe to take into account is mainly the last decade because new strong actors as China and India have emerged in Africa. However, a timeframe of colonial and post-colonial times in Africa is also important, due to the changing relationships between the UK and its ex-colonies. It is also relevant to consider that other African states didn't have the UK as their colonial master, which means they've had a different relationship with the UK.

Realism is a proper international relations theory that could offer a perspective of how Africa will act towards the UK in a post-Brexit world. Realism "emphasizes the role of state, national interest, and military power focused on the perennial role of power and self-interest in determining state behavior" (Bell, 2018). A realist perception will be taken into account to show a side of how Africa might act in a post-Brexit world: African governments aren't going to be loyal to international organizations as long as they can get what they want from the UK. This position will be explored briefly. Africa is looking to finally break free from dependence and become a more relevant actor in the international system, that is why the continent is looking at its own interest when developing new relationships. And this won't be different when striking deals with the UK, despite the historical relationship they've had. To gauge African state reaction to the EU it is crucial to explore a case study involving EU agreements with Africa to decipher key aspects of African states' negotiation strategies and interests and how other players have managed to utilize them.

### **Development of Afro-Europa relations**

Soon after the European Economic Community (EEC) treaty was signed in 1957, there was a trade and aid agreement between the EEC and Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP group) called the Lomé Convention presented as a "development-assistance package and preferential-trade agreement" (Gabel, 2020). This was the first main formal agreement that included collaboration between the European Union and African states. The Convention also "granted non-reciprocal trade preferences and a series of lucrative commodity protocols for bananas, beef, rum and sugar to the ACP as well as expanding the European Development Fund" (Clegg, 2018).

The changes that occurred in the international environment after the Lomé Convention such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the reconciliation doctrines of international institutions and the expansion of Europe eventually made the previous agreements "lose much of their legitimacy" (M'hamdi, 2015). The EU shaped its agreements by following WTO rules by gradually disengaging from principles of non-reciprocity and discrimination contained in the Lomé Convention. This meant that Europe wanted Africa to have more of a say on the terms of the relationship to have a balanced partnership.

Therefore, the strengthening of what had been originally proposed in the Lomé Convention was transferred to the Cotonou Agreement of 2000 which continued defining the relationship between the EU and the countries of the ACP group. This agreement highlights "the mutual commitment and responsibility and emphasizes political dialogue, human rights and democracy, and good governance" (European Parliament, n.d.). This agreement would replace the Lomé Convention with free trade agreements (known as

EPAs) between the EU and parts of the ACP. It is important to mention that the Cotonou Agreement expires in 2020, and there is a question on how the framework will continue.

The strategy the European Union has used to tackle the relationship particularly just with the African continent, without the whole ACP group has been the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES). It was adopted in the second EU-Africa Summit in the Lisbon Declaration in December 2007. A key subject that was tackled in this Lisbon Declaration was the shift in the Afro-Europa relations, by stating “we are resolved to build a new strategic political partnership for the future, overcoming the traditional donor-recipient relationship and building on common values and goals in our pursuit of peace and stability, democracy and rule of law, progress and development” (European Parliament, n.d.). The area that has been reinforced the most through the JAES has been the development cooperation, given that it is the cooperation channel through which Africa can most benefit from. With this, the European Development fund “remains the main channel for EU development cooperation in Africa” (European Parliament, n.d.). Another area that has been developed is through trade relations, which has benefited the EU the most due to the cheap imports of primary resources coming from Africa.

After the Lomé Convention, there have been many discussions on the further development of these relationships and currently the relationship is based on the Cotonou Agreement and the Joint Africa-EU Strategy previously mentioned. The EU is working to promote peace and security in Africa and also is substantially engaged in developments of the African Union (AU) in different topics such as human rights. Recently, migration has also come up as a very relevant topic for the Africa-EU relationship. The EU has been key for Africa, especially regarding development aid and other long-term development projects.

For various African stakeholders, they have reservations on several issues starting with the lack of clarity in the objectives and the unbalanced partnership. There are also questions about the actual status of the European strategy "given that the only legal framework governing trade between Africa and Europe is shaped by the Cotonou Agreement" (M'hamdi, 2015).

### **UK-Africa relations**

The most relevant connection between the United Kingdom and African states was in the African colonial era, starting in the last half of the 19th century. During that time, the UK imposed its rule in many African countries. “Of the ten most populous states in sub-Saharan Africa, no fewer than seven were British” (Clapham, 2014). Colonialism was crucial to the development of African states as they are today on elements such as language and the structure of the states politically. And also, on the high level of dependence, they have to international aid, due to the instability colonial rulers left on their ex-colonies after independence.

After the African independences, the British didn't maintain a close relationship with Africa. “By the late 1980s, by which time only just over 3% of British exports went to Africa, and less than 2% of the United Kingdom's imports came from it” (Clapham, 2014), even though many African ex-British colonies were part of the Commonwealth. The new relationship emerged due to the increasing global consciousness of Africa as a

humanitarian concern. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 was key to create this new relationship to help Africa. Aid became the key link between the United Kingdom and Africa. There were also certain diplomatic actions, such as working as a mediator to solve tensions between Uganda and Rwanda. As of 2018, “the UK’s Foreign Direct Investment in Africa stood at approximately £39 billion” (Whitehouse, 2020). Trade is important in the Africa-UK relationship, especially with South Africa which is one of the UK's largest trading partners in Africa "with bilateral trade reaching almost £10 billion in 2017" (Mthembu, 2018).

Due to the membership to the European Union that the United Kingdom held since joining the original European Communities in 1957 until leaving the EU officially after Brexit in January 2020, it has worked inside the Africa-EU Partnership launched in 2000 in which “the EU and the African continent work together, engage in political and policy dialogues and define their cooperative relationship” (African Union, n.d.).

There is also the “special” consideration the UK has towards certain specific African states that used to be British colonies in the Commonwealth. Parshotam (2018), notes that the Commonwealth's current relevance in Africa is because "it is an important trade partner, investor, and development partner in many African countries it is known for bearing Africa's interests within the EU and specifically from the agriculture context" (Parshotam in Eyssen, 2018). However, this role has been going on for a long time and the UK hasn't been able to increase or upgrade the relation with the African Commonwealth member countries. This also means that the resentment from Africa towards the UK of the colonial era still exists, as the UK hasn't really proved it is trustworthy or that it really cares about helping African states. The UK “is no longer the only player vested interests in Africa. It might have to give and take in ways that it might not be able to anticipate just yet. Britain should be cautious and aware of the narrative of certain political factions of advancing the Commonwealth on the premise of imperial nostalgia and the desire to return to the good old days” (Parshotam in Eyssen, 2018).

It's also important to mention that Africa has been collaborating with the European Union since the beginning of the European Economic Community (EEC), partly due to the UK's membership. The Commonwealth countries were incorporated into the EEC's system of preferential trade relations through the creation of the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) group. As a result, the UK's trade relations with Commonwealth countries in Africa “have become intricately intertwined with the EU's own system of external economic relations” (Clegg, 2018). However, it is considered that by entering the EEC in 1973, the British betrayed their relationship with the Commonwealth, because the UK turned the back on the world especially with historic partners, such as the African ex-colonies. The incorporation of Africa into the European project via existing colonial linkages “was envisaged as a way in which Europe could both construct a viable geopolitical power bloc and secure access to vital raw materials” (Murray-Evans, 2018).

### **Continental free trade area and regional partnerships**

The African Union has been the continental organization that since its creation has promoted some way of pan-Africanism. However, the AU hasn't been able to be capable of managing the issues of the whole continent on its own. It has considered

“considerable outsourcing of responsibilities to the various sub-regional organizations” (Moller, 2009). There are 5 major regional organizations in the African continent: Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). However, these organizations aren’t considered internally harmonious due to different interests, ideologies, and overlapping memberships.

The European Union has pursued relationships better with each sub-regional organization, instead of with the African Union as a whole because of differences in interests. Since the previously mentioned Lomé Convention, the creation of the EPAs (Economic Partnership Agreements) has been ongoing. Nevertheless, there is also an issue of internal disagreements within the sub-regional organizations, as many African countries have objected to the proposed content of the EPAs either because they seem like a way of neo-imperialism or they simply don't benefit them enough for their economic growth they so desperately need. Due to this inconformity with EPAs with Europe, African countries have also preferred to have a broader view on possible investors in the African future that don't impose as many conditions for their bilateral relationship, such as China and India.

Even though the work of the sub-regional organizations is the most relevant for countries outside Africa to create trade relationships with, since 2018 there is also in play the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It currently has been completely ratified by 30 countries in the continent and is considered the largest free-trade area in the world in the terms of the number of participating members since the creation of the WTO (Crabtree, 2018). However, the deal was signed by 54 of the 55 African states, with the idea to reunite the whole continent, with a basis of a modification of pan-Africanism. The AfCFTA is looking towards “accelerating intra-African trade and boosting Africa’s trading position in the global market by strengthening Africa’s common voice and policy space in global trade negotiations” (African Union, 2018). Also, that "previous trade agreements between the UK and Africa were part of a larger settlement negotiated through the EU, meaning renegotiation is necessary to retain current trade flows" (Suess, 2019) which means that the UK has to start the process all over again, and can’t expect African states to maintain the same relationships or trade conditions they have previously to Brexit with the EU.

Considering the opportunities and challenges of negotiating with Africa, the UK would have to consider which way it would find an appropriate window to build relationships in the continent outside the European Union after Brexit. The first situation is the convenience of entering straight into the AU with the continent as a whole (considering the AfCFTA), with sub-regional organizations or with individual countries that might have more affinity with the UK, such as Commonwealth member states. It could be difficult, if not impossible, to deal with the 54 countries that make up the continent. That is why the UK has to have a solid strategy.

In this strategy, it would also be important to consider the challenges that sub-regional bodies bring along, especially the overlapping memberships which will be a huge problem for the UK despite certain member states being old “friends” or Commonwealth members. For example, ECOWAS itself is in the pocket of France due to the CFA French

currency. In these scenarios, the question is posed as to what is missing there for the UK, so that it can receive a deal.

### **Relations post-Brexit**

A perception that Brexit has created in the African continent is of the UK as a country that is “unsure of itself and its future direction” (Mthembu, 2018). Many African countries feel political neglect and commercial retreat. “British prime ministers have visited rarely, at least compared with those from China, France, Germany, and the US. Their perception is that British Airways has pulled out of a number of African routes, the British Council has shrunk from culture into just English language teaching and British brands have disappeared with Land Rovers being replaced by Toyotas. Meanwhile, visas to visit the UK are ever more expensive and harder to get.” (Westcott, 2020). Adding to this issue, many African states, especially former English colonies, still feel the consequences of colonialism which leads them to have a lack of trust in the UK. This is related to the North-South axis dilemma that the realist perspective presents, as it seems that the Western states work by imposing themselves and their power on developing states. This way, African states are reluctant to strengthen the UK’s presence in their territory.

Adding to this lack of trust is the Internal Market Bill from the UK Parliament, which looks to set up trading agreements between UK countries after Brexit. However, it is concerning as it would break rules of international law because “the bill would give ministers powers to make regulations about state aid and customs procedures for trade from Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and would allow ministers to make regulations inconsistent with the UK’s obligations under the Withdrawal Agreement” (Hogarth, 2020). The UK has always been an enforcer of international law, so this bill changes how the UK will be viewed in the international system. Therefore, the UK will have trouble striking new agreements with African countries because the UK's intentions and integrity will be questioned to a greater degree and states will be skeptical to accept certain conditions.

Due to these kinds of issues, the UK has tried to assure African partners that Brexit will have a positive outcome in their relationship, with more opportunities, especially in trade and development partnerships. Being trade the most important part of the Africa-UK relation, the UK has assured African partners the continued free access to the British market “and there is hope that the UK will adopt looser rules of origin than those of the EU” (Mthembu, 2018). The UK has to prove itself more than when it was in the EU. Prime Minister Boris Johnson has made efforts to do this, however internationally he isn’t a reliable figure either. Recently in the 2020 UK-Africa Investment Summit, he said: “we in the UK have a vital job in continuing to convince people across the continent that we’re not just a great friend and ally, a reliable ally, but also the people you should be doing business with” (Jonhson in Salaudeen, 2020).

The United Kingdom needs Africa, as well as Commonwealth nations around the world, to continue having a successful role globally, “as they are a significant market with an estimated population of 2.4 billion people” (Mthembu, 2018). However, African Commonwealth nations would benefit more from trade relations with the EU market than

with the stand-alone British market. The UK is going to lose influence by not being part of the European Union. This is also true especially in francophone countries where, besides the EU, France has filled many areas in strong partnerships and it would be difficult to enter their markets. On the other hand, with anglophone African states, it still won't be easy to enter their markets, despite the language or some Commonwealth members, because strong countries are competing such as China that put far fewer restrictions in the relationships with African countries than what the UK is looking to propose.

When the UK exited the EU in January 2020, nothing changed because the UK still is a member of the EU Customs Union and Single Market until the end of 2020. Starting in 2021, the UK's strategy has to be truly solidified and ready to run. After 2020, the relationships might remain the same under continuity agreements, if African states agree to it. These agreements "say that the trade conditions remain the same as they are currently between a number of African countries and trading blocs and the EU" (BBC Editors, 2020). However, the trading relationships between African countries and the EU will continue to be more beneficial than these continuity agreements between African states and the UK.

By the UK looking where it can find a window in African needs and interests, it can be considered that the UK is underestimating the importance of including the challenges it will face in its strategy. There are plenty of reasons why Brexit won't benefit Africa, and that is where the UK has to act before developing strategies to benefit the UK. If Africa won't be benefited from the new relationship, they won't be willing to benefit the UK either. "The default for African countries that currently access the UK market through either an EPA or one of the EU's other preference schemes is that they will lose their preferential access to the UK market once the UK leaves the EU" (Clegg, 2018). Commonwealth nations would benefit more from trading with the EU market than with the stand-alone British market. Knowing this, the UK's first step has to be to assure the African states they had preferential relations with when they were part of the EU, that this kind of relationship will continue or even that it will be more beneficial than the one they currently have with the EU and its members. The UK has first to tackle the challenge the EU imposes in Africa because it is where the current challenge for the UK's legitimacy is focused on. If the UK manages to surpass the benefits the European Union provides, African states will be more willing to expand their relationship with the UK instead of with the EU or other challenging actors.

Adding to what has been said, the new trade relationship with the Commonwealth countries in Africa will be different from how it was when the UK was inside the EU. It will be "more complex and challenging for the UK than the narrative put forward by prominent leave campaigners" (Clegg, 2018). That is why it is also important for the UK to determine the African states in which they could have better relationships, especially with former colonies that have less resentment and that have maintained stronger ties, such as South Africa. The Commonwealth alone is not the most viable trading partner, "there are several reasons such as distance and trading interests of the countries involved" (Suess, 2019).

The previously mentioned economic relationship between Africa and the EU also has to be considered by the UK. The EU's EPAs have been concluded in West Africa,



Southern Africa, and the East African Community. However, they were only possible when the EU dropped certain conditions imposed as well to soften its stance on a range of controversial issues. The trade arrangements that have been left by the EPA negotiations in Africa have been unsatisfactory for both the EU and African sub-regional organizations especially because "it could have disruptive implications for African regional integration" (Clegg, 2018).

Besides, because there are interim EPAs that are being applied only by individual countries and not by regions as a whole. The problems that have emerged from the economic relationship between the EU and Africa show the resistance to agendas that seem as they are developed from a North-South point of view and that proves the current perspective in the international system is a barrier to the realization of liberalization of Africa. Considering the partial failure that the EPAs have been for the EU, as they haven't managed a fully successful relationship with the regions, the UK could find a path here to modify the idea of the EPAs to present an alternative from what the EU proposed for the African states. It is in the interest of the UK to roll over continuity agreements, which remain a high priority for the government because if these are successful, "this would mean business as usual for both parties involved" (Suess, 2019). However, this case doesn't seem likely in the current environment.

As this scenario seen from a realist perspective, Africa's pre-determined general interest is being able to grow enough to become independent from the aid of other states and have leverage in relationships and the continent could take advantage of this in the post-Brexit scenario where the UK is looking for new opportunities away from the EU. It could mean that African governments aren't going to be loyal to international organizations as long as they can get what they want from the UK, for example. If the UK manages to promise African states or sub-regional organizations preferential trade agreements that have way better conditions than the current troublesome EPAs with the EU, African states will tilt towards a relationship with the post-Brexit UK. Even, if this relationship becomes truly beneficial, African states that haven't ratified the AfCFTA, won't sign it as long as they are getting their trade and economic needs from their agreement with the UK.

The relations post-Brexit with Africa will also be determined by the power-play shift that has been developing in the continent during the 21<sup>st</sup> century. China has shifted the power-play in African states especially in certain individual countries such as Zimbabwe and Zambia (Wenar, 2016). China has become Africa's largest trading partner. Mainly because it is not only developing trade relations, but has also "invested billions of dollars in various sectors including film, infrastructure, and education across the continent" (Salaudeen, 2020). The difference of trade numbers between China and the UK in Africa is evident: "The UK hopes to reverse its dwindling trade with Africa, which fell from 4.2% of its total trade in 2012 to just 2.0% or \$46 billion in 2018. To put that in perspective, China's 2018 trade with Africa was \$204 billion, according to the country's Ministry of Commerce." (Hale, 2020).

Africa's main focus from a realist perspective will always be in its own self-interest for growth in the international system. That is why it will be hard for the UK to be the preferred option. It would very well be more possible that African governments aren't going to be loyal to international organizations as long as they get what they want

from alternative actors, especially from BRICS countries. These states are the ones that have been offering the most towards African development, especially for infrastructure, with few conditions and those are the kind of deals that currently are the most beneficial for Africa. It is also a positive mark that since in 2011 South Africa was included in the BRICS group, the relationship of aid towards African countries is greater. And it adds the element that BRICS states, not being part of the West, will provide that liberation that Africa has always been looking for.

However, the UK is aware of its limitations since it can't compete with certain super economies such as China and the EU, and that is why in the post-Brexit scenario it is more open to creating new partnerships either bilaterally or multilaterally. The UK's focus in Africa differs from China's because the Chinese are focusing on the development of local infrastructure, while the UK is leaning towards funding education and health programs as one of their first post-Brexit strategies in the African continent. Together with the idea of developing greater partnerships, that includes partnering with China in certain projects; "cooperation between China and the UK includes a mining investment program worth £10 million. As part of this effort, the UK managed to persuade the Chinese government to impose an ivory ban" (Suess, 2019). Partnering with China on the continent could provide more legitimacy for the UK. As previously stated, China provides deals with more freedom for African states and a China-UK partnership could be seen as the UK leaning towards projects that could offer more flexibility and options.

And the economic post-Brexit scenario would not only affect Africa's trade. Internal economical struggles in the UK could hit hard all the way back to African partners and the continent as a whole. Especially, hitting South Africa. "The UN calculates that the UK is South Africa's eight-largest import and export market in global terms" (BBC Editors, 2020). If the UK entered a recession, South Africa would be hit hard. And taking this into account, it could easily mean that other African economies would be hit even harder through a domino effect because South Africa is the second biggest economy on the continent (Naidoo, 2020).

The UK has clear challenges to make a breakthrough in Africa. Still, Africa is the one facing greater challenges in accepting a new relationship that comes with new conditions from the UK without the EU. There are important barriers to trade to consider, as, with new tariffs and other conditions, some countries won't be able to export as many goods to the UK because they won't meet certain standards. As well, the probable change in the value of currencies complicates the relationship. For example, "Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo have experienced exchange rate problems" (Salaudeen, 2020), combining it with the most likely crisis the pound will face due to leaving the common market at the end of 2020 and the economic crisis due to COVID-19, it won't benefit exports for African countries and it could cause more economic instability in the continent.

An economic partnership between the UK and African states is also seen as limited "due to the mismatch of their economies (with the exception of South Africa), given that the UK is a service-based economy" (Suess, 2019). This mainly means that the UK isn't a priority trading partner because its economy focuses on the service sector, which means there is no immediate need for most African states to strike a deal too soon. The exception is countries that rely on the UK as a destination for exports "such as the

17% of Kenyan flower exports to the EU and Botswana's exports, 50% of which end up in the UK" (Suess, 2019).

Leaver politicians in the UK had campaigned with the assurance that trade deal negotiations would be easy. However, by May 2020 there was only one confirmed trade deal between the UK and African states that is similar to the Eastern and Southern Africa – European Union Economic Partnership Agreement (ESA-EU EPA) that covers Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Zimbabwe. The African states also feel less urgency to negotiate trade deals with the United Kingdom because the trading arrangements Africa had with the EU pre-Brexit with the European Union won't be affected while the UK will become a competitor with the EU trading bloc. For example, in 2015 the trade between the EU and Africa "stood at \$305 billion, compared to \$36 billion provided by the UK" (Madowo, 2018). Also, currently, EU member states have the capacity to provide manufacturing opportunities. This has been seen in several cases, "Germany has signed memorandums of understanding for new manufacturing plants in Ghana and Nigeria, on top of its already existing Volkswagen plants in Rwanda, South Africa, and Kenya, the Volkswagen investment shows that Germany is able and willing to bring projects into the continent that provide jobs and opportunities for growth" (Suess, 2019). Taking these factors into account, it becomes evident why African states would prefer to focus on strengthening and continuing to develop their economic relationship with the EU rather than start a new risky one with the UK.

A strategic approach that could be the most efficient for the UK is a strategic partnership with a provision of specialized skills and services. This partnership would follow the effort started by former Prime Minister Theresa May in 2019 in Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria where she announced new economic commitments such as a skill-sharing program for British legal "services to share their expertise with the Nigerian sector, sharing financial crime expertise for the recover of money illegally acquired and new innovation partnerships to strengthen business ties in the African continent with the UK" (Suess, 2019).

An alternative that has been proposed to the UK to offer a certain advantage for trade deals is dropping quotas that especially agricultural products currently have. The UK could allow greater access to its market than what it offers in its current continuity agreements, "which, for example, South African wine makers could take advantage of" (BBC Editors, 2020). But removing quotas it's not a given for success, as over-arching trade negotiations are impossible to predict. And EU member states could also push Brussels to get their goods exported into the UK under more preferential terms than those established with, for example, South Africa.

In this situation, both the UK and Africa could see the benefits of a solid relationship that could lead to strong investment from private companies, as UK companies are looking to increase their investment in Africa. In the UK-Africa Investment Summit at the beginning of 2020, "the UK announced commercial deals worth £6.5 billion (\$8.6 billion) during the summit, including one signed by engineering company Rolls-Royce" (Salaudeen, 2020). If the UK government manages to enter into a preferential trade deal with the AfCFTA, this large free trade zone could benefit not only the government but UK companies that could expand markets and make it easier to make business. Even, "some of the UK's large aid budget could support the creation of

the AfCFTA which could promote economic growth and offer more opportunities for UK exporters” (Lowe in Salaudeen, 2020).

COVID-19 could also be exploited by the UK as an opportunity to get closer to Africa, as the economic impact of the virus on the continent will give the continent's leaders no choice but to accept external help even if it comes with certain unfavorable conditions. The health impact on Africa has been limited, but the economic impact has been dramatic. "Export prices have fallen off a cliff and some exports stopped completely. Tourists have disappeared. Remittances have fallen" (Westcott, 2020). The way the UK must approach this situation is as an equal partner and friend providing humanitarian aid and financial support. However, African states could be reluctant to accept help from the UK given how much the pandemic has hit the United Kingdom. It could create uncertainty as to how much the UK will be able to help economically internationally given that the UK's economy has been negatively impacted.

Trade is the area that the UK has to focus on when it comes to strengthening its relationship with Africa in the post-Brexit era because trade deals are what can make the UK a valuable economic player independently from the European Union. However, competing with the EU in trade volumes in the African continent won't be easy. That is why the UK also has to take other possible areas of rapprochement towards Africa into account. In the area of development, the UK has made a commitment that includes "the promise to become the biggest G7 investor in the continent by 2022" (Suess, 2019). New measures cover five priorities set by the UK government such as climate change and natural resource management, including a “£22 millions of new UK aid funding which will support the development of innovating energy solutions in Zambia” (UK Gov Press, 2018). These kinds of efforts would be reciprocally beneficial because investments would also generate opportunities for British companies.

Another strategic area that the UK has to consider is the greater influence that France has in francophone African countries. The UK could lean towards taking advantage of the importance of the English language in areas that countries could improve their international image with another widely recognized language. There are efforts in the form of military training in francophone countries in English, especially West African countries. This would eventually lead to stronger military cooperation between the UK and other African countries, which would be especially beneficial for African countries that face any kind of internal or neighboring conflict. The UK has never deployed an abundance of troops for the CSDP of the European Union “with the exception of the maritime mission EUCAP Somalia” (Suess, 2019). However, the UK's diplomatic efforts have been much stronger in missions. This will be important as the UK will continue to partner in strategic objectives in Africa with the EU but at the same time, it will be able to pursue its own objectives when they don't align with Europe. Also, the Sahel, being a zone of great importance for the UK, will see continued and increasing UK presence.

## **Conclusion**

With the evidence that has been provided throughout this paper, the hypothesis initially proposed: “the UK is going to find hard to compete in Africa with the European Union and other strong powers such as China in the post-Brexit era, and that its key

strategy should be to work through partnerships” has turned out to be true. The UK is inevitably going to find it hard to compete both with the European Union and with alternative actors after Brexit. The European Union has key factors that the UK doesn't possess which are trust and stability in its relationship with Africa. The EU might not have the most successful relationship with Africa, but it has managed to enter into deals through EPAs that benefit trade with EU member states, and African countries aren't willing to let go of that for a risky trade deal with just one unstable state, such as the UK. And if African states start turning their heads away from the EU, they will inevitably look towards BRICS countries and not the UK. Starting with the huge advantage of lack of conditions based on Western values that states such as China offer.

Regarding trade, the UK has a clear commitment to continue trading with African states and has as a priority to sign some kind of continuity agreements to prevent trade disruptions. However, trading with the UK isn't, for a lot of African states, a top priority because the EU trade deals offer greater benefits for local economies. This shows that the UK has to make different trade agreements that could seem more attractive for African countries to prioritize signing trade deals with the UK. An important part of what the UK is doing post-Brexit is developing projects in West Africa, as it's an area where they have lacked engagement and could be a key area to promote their influence.

The hypothesis has been considered to be true, however, it doesn't mean that the UK won't be able to find its own window in the continent. There has to be a consideration that African states won't take the UK as the top consideration on new deals, as they already are getting their needs met through the EPAs with the EU and the very favorable relationships with BRICS states, as previously mentioned through the realist point of view. However, the UK continues being a strong state in the international community and that makes it inevitable for African countries to have some kind of relationship, even if it isn't major, with the UK.

With every situation, there are always benefits and disadvantages. With the post-Brexit scenario in Africa-UK relations, this is no exception. Even though it might not be as obvious, there might be some benefits for Africa. UK businesses expanding in Africa could bring skills and technology that isn't as widely known in the continent that could be helpful for more local businesses. It could also mean foreign direct investment which is important for developing countries. Still, these are benefits that relationships with many other countries could also provide to Africa. That is why the UK, besides looking towards developing new preferential trade agreements better than the current continuity agreements, must have a strategy to help in the area that is needed the most: development aid. Relationships involving aid are ones that can hardly be refused due to the huge problem that poverty, lack of infrastructure, etc. African states are still dealing with it. Another strategy that the UK can find a way to enter into deals in Africa is border security, which is a problem with ongoing intra-state conflicts that usually transfer into other countries due to the amount of non-state actors involved.

For doing this, the UK has to know how Africa operates and consider the magnitude the continent has. As for how the processes are currently developing, the UK could find a better way to fortify deals and relationships by getting first closer to individual states. Sub-regional organizations are troubling because of internal disagreements, which would put the UK at a disadvantage of slow deals that might not

ever come into fruition. And dealing with Africa as a whole would be almost impossible for a single state as the UK is, as it is too large. When the UK is beginning its solo work outside the European Union, it seems best to have solid trustful relationships with a few African states, than weak relationships with a lot of states or organizations. The first few years of post-Brexit for the UK have to be taken as an experiment, and not go full-on since the beginning.

It would also be important for the United Kingdom to show that it has a different approach to trading and other strategic partnerships than the EU. For example, the image it might present to African states through certain deals with China would be of more openness and flexibility. This would open a window for trade deals with the UK to become more of a priority because the UK would be seen as willing to have a dialogue that fits better the situation and interests of individual African states instead of imposing certain conditions as European EPA's have done in the past.

It's important to take into consideration that this analysis of the future of UK-Africa relationships has the limitation that there are no current public strategies, as the UK's membership in the EU's Customs Union and Single Market will continue until the end of 2020. In this paper, the most important issues of the current and future deals, mainly trade, were the ones focused on. However, the UK might find an issue where they might fit better due to the non-involvement of the EU or BRICS states that weren't analyzed in this case.

Overall, the relationship post-Brexit of the UK with African states seems to be a difficult one that will take hard planning and the efforts will have to be long-term for them to reach some level of success and relevance in the continent. The post-Brexit future is very hard to predict, and this relationship isn't any different. The greatest consideration for the future is that Africa will definitely be looking at its own interest in the future, and other actors might provide greater benefits for its interests than what the UK can offer. The UK can't forget that there are stronger countries and entities, like the EU, in the international system. That is why it will need strategic partnerships to pave its own way in the African country to gain trust as an independent actor outside of the EU's sphere.

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