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## **POST-COTONOU AND EU-AFRICAN RELATIONSHIP. A GREEN LIGHT FOR A RENEWED COOPERATION?**

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### **Abstract**

The Cotonou Partnership Agreement, signed in 2000 and set to expire in 2020, is allegedly the most advanced collaboration between the EU and some of the lowest-income countries in the world. In practice, however, its achievements are meagre and contested. Nonetheless, the EU and ACP countries officially launched in 2018 the negotiation of the post-Cotonou agreement, which aims to deepen the Cotonou *acquis*. Most of the approaches on the future of EU-Africa relations focus on the sanction mechanism or on migration – the most blatant and best known examples of the ‘securitisation’ of the partnership. In contrast, environmental concerns often fall under the radar of scientific literature. This work aims to show how the prism of environmental and climate mainstreaming helps in explaining the declining relevance of the post-Cotonou framework. Even though a rhetoric of a ‘deepened partnership’ became the leitmotiv of post-Cotonou, ‘far reaching’ environmental provisions in the future agreement are impeded from the beginning by structural deficiencies. To a large extent, policy evolutions since the original Cotonou will most likely turn post-Cotonou into an obsolete framework, incapable of ‘greening’ the EU-African relationship. The negotiation in the Council of the European Union, embedded in path-dependency, shaped a ‘go-between’ architecture of the EU mandate – an umbrella framework and three geographic protocols – that privileges the past over the ongoing bilateral and regional trend of the EU-Africa cooperation. This inconsistency was in turn amplified on the African side by power struggles between the African Union and the ACP group. The negotiations are therefore caught between a rock and a hard place from the very start. This is reflected in the post-Cotonou draft, trying hard to push environmental ambitions but maintaining a ‘coherence’ between regional protocols that is detrimental to any real environmental mainstreaming progresses. An essential explanation is found in the progressive ‘externalisation’ of Cotonou’s original pillars: political dialogue, trade and development cooperation. A thorough study of each pillar shows that other agreements replaced Cotonou in each of the three policy areas. In other terms, a ‘greener’ post-Cotonou could only be achieved through references to other external policies, in which case the added-value of the future agreement would be minimal. In the end, what was presented as a ‘renewed partnership’ will probably be a ‘political agreement’, i.e. a lukewarm declaration of principles essentially restating the will to cooperate between partners, more than the far-reaching agreement that its binding nature could have allowed it to be.