

European Union seeks more unified foreign policy on Africa

EU Foreign Policy: The View from Africa will be the penultimate roundtable in the series of ten on ***EU Foreign Policy after Lisbon*** to be held at LSE in the 2011/2012 academic year. This event will be chaired by Dr Tine Van Criekinge on Thursday 10 May from 18.30-20.00 at St Clement's House, STC S75.

Eight years in the making, the Lisbon Treaty came into law on 1 December 2009 after all 27 EU member countries ratified it. The goal of the Treaty is to streamline EU institutions, particularly in the area of foreign policy, in order for the enlarged bloc of 27 nations to function better.



The European Parliament in Brussels

The EU has traditionally been represented in Africa by EC delegations and its Member States. However, links have generally been dominated by some of the more influential EU members particularly those with historical links with various African states. As a result, the EU has, at times, been perceived as lacking credibility and consistency, even though it is Africa's largest trade and aid partner.

Dr Tine Van Criekinge is a Fellow in LSE's department of International Relations and has spent a number of years researching EU-Africa relations.

"Whereas the EU diplomatic service used to have delegations in the countries where they try to establish links in terms of aid, trade and political issues, now they have EU embassies, so the service that used to deal with African issues has now become the European External Action Service (EEAS)," Van Criekinge explained.

"This means that there will be a more common foreign policy towards Africa and any other country and region with whom they have a relationship."

With the likes of Britain and France maintaining strong links with many of their former African colonies, Dr Van Criekinge acknowledged that this streamlining of foreign policy is set to create new challenges.

"The member states should try to communicate among themselves first and present a more common approach to regions and countries within Africa, certainly in times of crisis," she said.

“Traditionally, nations either employed a bilateral approach and didn’t consult the EU or they pushed their own perspective onto the EU which then became EU policy.

“With regards to Africa, you can see that France and the UK are mostly the ones who run the policy. Lisbon is supposed to change that, but there is no way to enforce this. So it depends on each member state’s willingness to streamline its foreign policy.”

Just over two years after the Lisbon Treaty became law, the changes are already beginning to take effect and reap benefits.

“With regards to the African Union, the delegation is now an embassy and the perception from AU officials is that it has been much more effective. It has been much easier just to talk to EU officials and have a straight answer rather than going to Brussels first and having a really bureaucratic long-term approach.” Dr Van Criekinge concluded.

***EU Foreign Policy: The View from Africa* will take place at LSE on Thursday 10 May from 1830-2000 at St Clement’s House, STC75. Dr Tine Van Criekinge will chair a roundtable with Professor Gerrit Olivier, Dr Marie Gibert and Dr Daniella Sicurelli.**

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