Norms, self-interest and effectiveness:
Explaining double standards in the EU’s reaction to violations of democratic principles in sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

The EU is often accused of double standards in its reaction to violations of democratic principles in third countries. While self-interest seems to be the most common explanation for these double standards, the question is whether this also applies to sub-Saharan Africa, where the self-interest of EU member states is rather low. This paper therefore focuses on four sub-Saharan African countries: Ethiopia, Rwanda, Guinea and Niger. There are clear indications that double standards are at play in the EU’s reaction to violations of democratic principles in these countries: although there were similar violations of democratic principles (flawed elections, non-respect for political rights) in these four countries, the EU imposed negative measures in Niger and Guinea, while it was reluctant to do so in Ethiopia and Rwanda. While the self-interest of EU member states goes some way in explaining these double standards, the paper advances two other factors that should be taken into account. First of all, the reluctance to impose negative measures in Ethiopia and Rwanda can be explained by the much better performance of these governments regarding internal stability, socio-economic governance and administrative good governance. Secondly, the paper argues that the EU also takes into account the expected effectiveness of negative measures in a given context.

Introduction

As a result of the EU’s growing political role and the importance of norms and values in EU foreign policy, there has been substantial attention for EU democracy promotion in academic literature. The emergence of political conditionality in the EU’s aid policies in the 1990s is generally seen as an example of the EU’s ‘normative power’ in foreign policies (Manners 2002; Bonaglia et al. 2005). However, it has been argued that there have been double standards in the application of the conditionality clause, which has mostly focused on weak, aid dependent countries in sub-Saharan
Africa (Youngs 2001; Smith 2001). In contrast, the EU has been reluctant to use negative measures vis-à-vis important trade and diplomatic partners of the EU (Russia, China) (Panebianco 2005; Fischer 2007; Algieri 2007) and countries that are important energy suppliers and partners in the war on terrorism, such as in Central Asia and the Mediterranean (Crawford 2008; Warkotsch 2006; Balfour 2005; Youngs 2009). Hence, the idea is that, rather than as a normative power, the EU acts as a self-interested actor in the implementation of its instruments to promote democratisation.

Nonetheless, there are reasons to believe that conclusions may be different for sub-Saharan Africa.\(^1\) Although security has become an important aspect of EU-African relations since the 1990s and particularly since 9/11 (Hadfield 2007), the EU perceives African instability mainly as a humanitarian issue, given Africa's geographical distance from the EU. Indeed, the European Security Strategy (2003) only briefly mentions Africa, namely in the context of the spread of AIDS and state fragility. Moreover, EU security policies in Africa have focused on conflict prevention via capacity-building of African regional organisations, training of African peacekeepers and occasional humanitarian interventions based on a UN mandate. From this perspective, promoting internal and regional stability in sub-Saharan Africa is – just as democracy or human rights promotion – equally a way for the EU to appear as a ‘normative power’ (Sicurelli 2010). Moreover, the EU’s relations with sub-Saharan Africa could be inspired much more by a ‘developmental’ view, focused on norms adopted from the development sphere including poverty reduction, good governance and ownership. Also here, the EU may use its development policy to strengthen its image of a normative power (Smith and Steffenson 2005; Birchfield 2011). Furthermore, in most sub-Saharan African countries, the EU’s commercial interests are only minor. Despite its vast richness in raw materials, the group of African, Caribbean and Pacific states (excluding South-Africa) only accounted for 3,1% of the EU’s imports and 3,5% of exports in 2010.\(^2\)

Research on EU democracy promotion has been scarce, and available studies have reached inconclusive results. On the one hand, there are indications that the EU has refrained from negative conditionality for self-interested reasons, namely in countries that are important energy producers – including Niger (Olsen 2000) or are important partners in the war on terrorism – such as Ethiopia (Brüne 2007). Moreover, Hazelzet (2005) found that the EU sanctioned ACP countries regardless of their economic or strategic importance.

\(^1\) Note that in the paper, ‘Africa’ and ‘sub-Saharan Africa’ are used interchangeably in the paper, but always refer to sub-Saharan Africa.

However, these studies have either been limited to one case (Brüne 2007) or have focused on the 1990s (Olsen 2000; Hazelzet 2005). Yet compared to the 1990s, EU-Africa relations have evolved substantially. Firstly, security has become more and more important after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Indeed, the 2005 revision of the Cotonou Agreement added provisions on the non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and cooperation in the fight against terrorism (Hadfield 2007). In this context, security considerations may become a reason to avoid negative measures. Secondly, the EU’s influence in Africa is diminishing as other international actors have found their way to the continent. The US has increasingly engaged with African governments, on counterterrorism operations and to secure its energy supplies (Volman 2010). Moreover, newly emerging powers including Brazil, Russia, India, China, several Arab Gulf states and Turkey have engaged with African countries in a search for primary resources, markets and diplomatic partners. This has made the EU re-engage with the African continent, as could be witnessed in the EU-Africa summits and the 2007 Africa-EU Strategic Partnership (Pirozzi 2010: 90-91). In this situation, one could expect the EU to focus less strongly on democratisation, since this could mean losing terrain vis-à-vis the emerging powers. Thirdly, the EU’s development agenda has changed significantly since the late 1990s. There has been a shift from donor-imposed conditionalities to local ownership and alignment with national development strategies, reflected in the 2005 Paris Declaration of which the EU is one of the staunchest promoters (Whitfield and Fraser 2009). Increased political conditionalities could undermine the EU’s achievements in the development sphere as suspending aid runs counter the New Aid Agenda.

Against this background, this paper aims to find out which considerations are taken into account in the (non-)application of negative measures in four sub-Saharan African countries: Ethiopia, Rwanda, Guinea and Niger. The paper starts from the observation that the EU has applied double standards in its reaction to violations of democratic principles in these countries: while these four countries have experienced similar democratic deficiencies since 2000, the EU has reacted with negative measures in Niger and Guinea, while it has been more reluctant to do so in Ethiopia and Rwanda.

It is argued that self-interest alone cannot explain these double standards. Rather, two additional factors should be taken into account: First of all, double standards may be based on the trade-off between democracy and development on the one hand, and democracy and stability on the other. While the Ethiopian and Rwandan governments managed to achieve relative internal stability, economic development and good administrative governance, Guinea and Niger faced growing instability, economic downturn and bad administrative governance. Secondly, considerations of effectiveness may also have played a role. From this perspective, EU double standards are not necessarily contradictory with the EU’s normative self-image. Indeed, part of the EU’s normative agenda is to promote sustainable peace, development, inclusive equality, social solidarity and good
governance in third countries (Manners 2008). Moreover, the EU has proclaimed to use negative measures only as a ‘last resort’ and to focus on dialogue and soft power, in order not to invoke hardship on the population (Youngs 2001).

**The instruments at the EU’s disposal: from political dialogue to negative measures**

Political conditionality was introduced in 1995 with the introduction of human rights, democracy and the rule of law as ‘essential elements’ of the Lomé IV Agreement. A suspension clause provided that, if one of these essential elements is violated by one of the Parties, the other Party can call for consultations, with the possibility of taking appropriate measures in case these consultations do not lead to a satisfactory result. The Cotonou Agreement (2000) maintains the essential elements (Article 9) and suspension clause (Article 96). However, because of the cumbersome procedure of Article 96 and the rather negative reactions from the ACP side, the application of the suspension clause has been limited to a small number of cases where the EU expects clear benefits from conditionality, namely after a *coup d’état* or seriously flawed elections.

In most cases, the EU therefore prefers instruments of democracy promotion with a low political and economic cost to the sender and target. Via the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the EU adopts public declarations and demarches (Voncina 2011). These instruments used to be the responsibility of the Council Presidency, but now fall under the responsibilities of the High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy and the European External Action Service and its delegations. Besides these instruments, which are *ad hoc* measures as they are used to react to certain events, a structured and frequent political dialogue was introduced under Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement. In the context of the 2005 revision of the Agreement, the role of political dialogue was even strengthened with the idea that enhanced political dialogue could prevent a recourse to the Article 96 procedure. Secondly, the Governance Initiative entails that recipient countries present a Governance Action Plan with strategies to cope with the difficulties identified by the EU. These plans are assessed by the EU, which decides on the allocation of the Governance Incentive Tranche that involves between 10% and 35% additional aid, on top of the initial amount (Molenaers and Nijs 2011; Carbone 2010).

This does not mean that negative measures are necessarily off the table. Rather, there has been a shift from the application of the suspension clause to other negative measures. Firstly, the EU has increasingly resorted to smart sanctions that are designed to target those personalities responsible for the violation of democratic principles, while keeping humanitarian consequences to a minimum. Compared to the suspension of development assistance, which can in principle be adopted by Qualified Majority of Voting, smart sanctions are an instrument of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, for which the unanimity rule applies (Portela 2010). For this reason, they are limited to cases
where human rights violations are so mass-scale and mediatised that a beyond-rhetoric response is needed (Brummer 2009: 200). Secondly, while the New Aid Agenda has been translated in more reluctance to use negative conditionality, it has equally brought about a new dilemma in the provision of development assistance in nondemocratic countries. Indeed, to respond to the development mantra that more ownership is needed, the EU has increasingly resorted to budget support as an aid modality, especially in the ACP region. However, budget support seems controversial in a nondemocratic countries, since it is often perceived as giving legitimacy to a government (Unwin 2004; Hayman 2011).

**The EU’s holistic normative agenda in sub-Saharan Africa**

EU-African relations have been described as holistic and all-encompassing. Gibert (2011) uses the term ‘structural foreign policy’ (coined by Keukeleire) to describe the EU’s democracy, development and security policies in Africa. Structural foreign policy means that the EU tries to transfer various ideological and governing principles that characterize the political, social, economic and interstate system of the EU, including human rights, democracy, the various principles of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (such as the peaceful solution of conflicts), regional integration, free market principles, etc.

This holistic agenda has been reflected in the recent focus on ‘democratic governance’. The latter concept, which was presented in a 2006 Commission Communication on Governance and Development, encompasses the democracy promotion agenda, while adding provisions on economic and social governance (effective institutions, access to basic social services, sustainable management of natural and energy resources, promotion of economic growth and social cohesion) as well as security related issues. Although the addition of self-interested security objectives has been criticised (e.g. Carbone 2010: 23), the focus on ‘human security’ also suggests a people-centred approach to security, including freedom from fear and freedom from want (UNDP 1994). Furthermore, the holistic agenda is further exemplified in the European Commission’s conflict prevention agenda, which proposes to enhance ‘structural stability’ by focusing on the root causes of conflict. Structural stability entails ‘sustainable economic development, democracy and respect for human rights, viable political structures and healthy environmental and social conditions, with the capacity to manage change without resort to conflict’ (European Commission 2001: 10).

However, the different aspects of the EU’s normative agenda may collide in a concrete situation (Sjursen 2006). Youngs (2008) has criticised the EU’s security-development-democracy triangle, which he argues is based on the rather ill-conceived assumption that ‘all good things go together’, while there is no clear vision on the exact causality or potential conflict between these three goals. For
example, while it is often assumed that democracy leads to stability, there are many examples of situations that prove exactly the contrary, especially in Africa where elections often lead to violent conflict (Rapoport and Weinberg 2000). For this reason, Grindle (2007) suggests to focus on ‘good enough governance’, which entails choosing those interventions within the wide list of good governance items that are most appropriate and feasible in a given situation. Similarly, White (1998: 25) makes the argument for an ‘effective developmental state’, that is not necessarily democratic, but focuses on good governance and state capacity.

**Double standards in the EU’s reaction to violations of democratic principles**

While there are many ACP countries where democratic principles are violated, the EU has only in a limited number of countries resorted to negative measures that go beyond mere rhetoric, including the conditionality clause\(^3\), smart sanctions\(^4\) or the suspension of budget support\(^5\). In the following, I will search for explanations for these double standards by analyzing EU policies in four cases: Ethiopia, Rwanda, Guinea and Niger. I will explain that, while there have been similar violations of democratic principles in these four countries since the early 2000s, the EU has been reluctant to impose negative measures in Ethiopia and Rwanda, while in Niger and Guinea this was not the case. The EU’s reaction was mostly drawn from official sources, including declarations of the Presidency and High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy, Council Conclusions, Council Decisions and European Commission Communications.

In all four countries, though multi-party elections have been organised since 2000, these have been marred by irregularities, intimidation of voters and a lack of level playing field. These instances have been observed by the EU-Election Observation teams (EU-EOM) in the parliamentary elections in Ethiopia (2005, 2010) and the presidential and parliamentary elections in Rwanda (2003, 2008). In Guinea, Conté changed the constitution to allow him to run for a third term in 2001. The referendum, as well as subsequent parliamentary (2002) and presidential (2003) elections, were boycotted by the opposition and were believed to be widely flawed (Bertelsmann Foundation 2007; Center for Systemic Peace 2008). Although an attempt was made in 2005 to reform the electoral process and relatively fair municipal elections were held, legislative elections were repeatedly postponed over 2006-2007 and President Conté was hesitant to cede powers to the Prime Minister (International Crisis Group 2008).

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4 For democracy and human rights purposes, smart sanctions were imposed in three sub-Saharan African countries: Zimbabwe (2002), Guinea (2009), Côte d’Ivoire (2011).

5 To my knowledge this has only happened in Ethiopia (2005) and Niger (2009), but has been on the table in a number of other countries including Uganda, Kenya and Mozambique as well.
Conté died in office in 2008, after which a military junta took power under the leadership of Dadis Camara. In June-October 2010, Guinea returned to constitutional rule after elections won by Alpha Condé were deemed legitimate by most observers, including the EU-Election Observation Mission (Freedom House 2011; Arief 2011: 8-10). In Niger, President Tandja, who had won two relatively fair elections in 1999 and 2004, proposed in May 2009 to change the constitution to abolish term limits, while making the President the sole holder of power. When the National Assembly and Constitutional Court opposed the plan, Tandja dissolved the parliament and courts and went ahead with the referendum in August 2009. The proposal passed with 92 per cent of the vote and legislative elections were held in October 2009 amidst a boycott of the opposition (Freedom House 2011; US State Department 2011). In February 2010, Tandja was ousted in a military coup led by Salou Djibo. Elections in January 2011 were relatively positively assessed by the EU-EOM and resulted in the appointment of Mahamadou Issoufou (EU-EOM Niger 2011).

Nonetheless, the EU has been reluctant to openly criticize the elections in Ethiopia and Rwanda, while it has not spared its criticism about the democratic process in Guinea and Niger and even resorted to negative measures in these cases. Indeed, the 2005 and 2010 parliamentary elections in Ethiopia and the 2003 presidential elections in Rwanda were referred to as an ‘important moment’ in the democratic process of these countries, while the irregularities noted by the observers were only briefly mentioned. Similarly, after the 2008 parliamentary elections in Rwanda, Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner and for Development Louis Michel put special emphasis on the progress made compared to the previous elections.

In contrast, the EU expressed itself very critical about the November 2001 referendum in Guinea. Electoral assistance for the 2003 presidential elections was denied (Laakso et al. 2007: 83). In May 2004, the Council decided to open consultations under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement. The consultations were concluded in 2005 with the commitment of the Guinean authorities to organise local elections in 2005, liberalize airwaves and organize legislative elections in 2007. After the first two commitments were fulfilled, the EU decided in December 2006 to partially release aid. After the December 2008 coup d’état, consultations under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement were re-opened and the EU prolonged the measures taken in 2005. These measures remain in place until legislative elections have been organised. Regarding the situation in Niger, the Presidency strongly condemned President Tandja’s decision to dissolve the constitutional court and to declare the state of emergency. A letter was sent to the President, in which the Commission called for increased dialogue on the situation and raised the possibility of Article 96 consultations. In the meanwhile, a request by Tandja’s government for the disbursement of a tranche of budget support was denied. In October 2009, it was decided to open consultations under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement. Consultations were held in December 2010, but before they were completed, a military coup ousted Tandja and consultations
were pursued with the military junta. Development cooperation was suspended, but resumed in 2011 after President Issoufou was invested as a President in April 2011.

Similarly, while political rights have been violated in all four countries, the EU has been more reluctant to react with beyond-rhetoric negative measures in Ethiopia and Rwanda, when compared to Niger and Guinea. In Ethiopia, after the parliamentary elections in May 2005, students, opposition and supporters challenging a ban on demonstrations were severely harassed by security forces, leading to the death of over 200 civilians and arrest of several thousands more in June-November 2005 (Harbeson 2005: 148-154; Abbink 2006: 192). In the following years, there were frequent arrests of civilians at peaceful demonstrations or journalists and newspaper editors after publishing articles critical of the government. Moreover, legislation on the media (2008), civil society (2009) and anti-terrorism (2009) made it easier for the government to arrest opposition members and journalists and prohibited civil society organisations receiving more than 10% of their funding from foreign sources to work on governance issues (Human Rights Watch 2010a). In Rwanda, legislation on genocidal ideology has been used to stifle human rights organisations, opposition parties and the independent media. The largest opposition party Mouvement Démocratique Républicain was declared illegal in 2003 and members of the human rights organisation Liprodhor and independent newspapers Umuseso and Umuvugizzi frequently faced arrests and threats of suspension (Silva-Leander 2008; Reyntjens 2006; Reyntjens 2010). In the context of the 2010 presidential elections, there were numerous indications of intimidation of the opposition and independent journalists (Reyntjens 2010: 12).

In Guinea, the situation of political rights severely deteriorated in 2006-2007, leading to the death of more than 130 people in 2007 (Freedom House 2011). Moreover, during the transition period under Dadis Camara, about 160 people were killed and many women raped by security forces in a mass opposition rally in September 2009 (International Crisis Group 2009). In Niger, respect for political rights deteriorated after the referendum, as journalists and opposition members were arrested when protesting against the referendum (US State Department 2011).

Although the EU has been somewhat more vocal in its condemnation of violations of political rights, when compared to electoral democracy, engagement remained the preferred instrument in Ethiopia and Rwanda. In contrast, in Guinea and Niger, these violations of political rights were amongst the reasons for adopting negative measures. In Ethiopia, after the crackdown on opposition supporters in November 2005, a joint statement by EU and US called for an end to the violence. In December 2005, the EU – jointly with other donors – decided to suspend sectoral and general budget support. However, sectoral budget support for the road sector was already resumed in 2006, although there had not been any clear concessions from the Ethiopian authorities on the release of political prisoners. Moreover, in early 2007, the EU joined the Protection of Basic Services Programme, set up by the World Bank and
the Ethiopian Ministry of Finance and Economic Development to compensate for the loss of general budget support (Human Rights Watch 2010b). In the case of Rwanda, although some public statements were made as a reaction to violations of political rights, namely in 2004 and more recently in the context of the 2010 elections, this has not prevented Rwanda from getting more and more development assistance, including in the form of direct budget support.

In contrast to these examples, the EU has not shied away from condemning violations of political rights in Guinea. As a reaction to the September 2009 massacre, the Council adopted a wide range of negative measures including a weapons embargo, targeted sanctions against those responsible for the violence and the suspension of the application of the fisheries agreement. Although the 2010 presidential elections, which were supported by EU electoral assistance, were welcomed by Commissioner Piebalgs and High Representative Catherine Ashton, the EU did not immediately resume full cooperation. Instead, aid was partially resumed and it was indicated that a new Country Strategy Paper and National Indicative Programme could be signed once legislative elections were held.

The different treatment of these two groups of countries has also been reflected in the amounts of official development assistance committed by the European Community. Despite the 2005 budget support suspension in Ethiopia, the European Community’s ODA has increased between 2005-2006 and 2007-2008. Similarly, Rwanda’s aid has increased significantly since 2001-2001. In contrast, aid levels in Guinea and Niger have been volatile. In Guinea, ODA fell from 67 to 14 USD million after the aid suspension in 2005. In Niger, the suspension of budget support led to a decrease from 320 USD million to USD 93 million in 2009-2010.

**EC ODA evolution 2000-2010, USD million (commitments)**

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Source: OECD creditor reporting system

**Self-interest as an explanation**

While the above made clear that there have been double standards in the EU’s reaction to violations of democratic principles, the question then raises how these double standards can be explained? As has
been noted *supra*, the literature would suggest that the self-interest of member states conflicts with the EU’s democracy promotion aims.

Applied to the four case studies, self-interested motivations only provide an answer in the case of Ethiopia, while it largely falls short in explaining the other three cases. Ethiopia is seen as an important ally in the fight against terrorism as the main backer of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Somalia, which is favoured by the EU and the US (International Crisis Group 2006: 23). The international community fears that, should civil war erupt in Ethiopia, regional instability would lead to the rise of Islamist fundamentalism in the Horn (Borchgrevink 2008: 214) or increased piracy in the Gulf of Aden.

On the other hand, if self-interest would be the main driver of the EU, it could be expected that the member states were less favourable to negative measures than the European Commission, especially before the set-up of the European External Action Service (2010), when EU-Ethiopian relations were primarily the responsibility of the Commission’s DG Development. It is reasonable to assume that DG Development was less receptive to counter-terrorism concerns than the member states. However, rather the contrary is the case. The UK’s public statement after the 2010 parliamentary elections was much more critical than Ashton’s statement, noting concerns about a narrowing of the political space and an uneven playing field for parties (UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office 2010). This is surprising, given that the UK is generally seen as an important ally of the US on counterterrorism in the Horn. Moreover, the European Commission is favourable to a resumption of General Budget Support, in contrast to its member states. After a study ordered by the EU delegation in 2010 concluded that technically, all the conditions were fulfilled for a return to general budget support, it were the member states that halted this (Interviews EU diplomats and aid officials, Addis Ababa, January 2011). Moreover, purely self-interested explanations fail to explain the EU’s reluctance to impose negative measures against the government in Rwanda. As Hayman (2009a: 162) notes: ‘As a small country in the centre of Africa with few natural resources of note, Rwanda is of limited geo-strategic interest to donors, with the exception of Belgium’. Moreover, the Rwandan government has been at odds with Belgium and France, due to the close relations of these member states with the former Habyarimana regime (Hayman 2010).

Furthermore, if EU policies were merely informed by self-interest, negative measures against Niger are somewhat surprising. Firstly, France has strong uranium interests in Niger. Nigerien uranium supplies the fuel of 58 nuclear reactors in France. Although some may argue that President Tandja somehow challenged these interests by opening up the market to international competition, the French uranium company Areva was granted a new agreement on mining concessions after the visit of Sarkozy in March 2009, only few months before Tandja announced his bid for a third term. It has been
suggested that France’s relatively low-profile approach vis-à-vis Tandja’s plans to stay in power were a trade-off for the uranium deal with Areva (Grégoire 2011: 219-220). Moreover, the negative measures put in place by the international community affected Niger’s counterterrorism activities with the US, which had become more important given the rise of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb in the Sahel (Bourgeot 2011; US embassy Niger 2009a).

**The search for success stories: the trade-off between democracy, development and security**

It has been argued *supra* that the EU strives for democracy, security and development in Africa. In this sense, the continued support for the current governments in Ethiopia and Rwanda can also be interpreted as a trade-off between (1) democracy and security and (2) democracy and development. Regarding the first, the international community seems impressed by the relative internal stability Ethiopia has enjoyed under the current system of ethnic federalism, especially in the light of the country’s history of civil war and its ethnic diversity (Clapham 2009: 182-188). Moreover, it is believed Ethiopia has a stabilising influence on its neighbours. Indeed, Ethiopia receives many refugees from neighbouring countries, including Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea and other African countries (100,000 in 2006) (European Community and Ethiopia 2007: 4). Moreover, the Ethiopian government has attempted to appear as a contributor to regional stability by supporting peacekeeping groups in Darfur and Liberia (US Embassy Ethiopia 2008). Similarly, Kagame’s policies of national unity, based on the suppression of ethnic identities, have brought relative peace amongst the Hutu and Tutsi after the violent genocide which led to the death of over 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in 1994 (Silva-Leander 2008). Although Rwanda’s interventions in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been criticised by EU member states, more recently Rwanda has presented itself as a peacemaking force.

Rwanda forms the backbone of the African Union Mission in Sudan and put an end to the Tutsi insurgency in Eastern Congo by jointly arresting Laurent Nkunda with the Congolese authorities in December 2008 (Zorbas 2011: 112; Beswick 2010). The recent insurgency of Bosco Ntaganda in the DRC, in which Rwanda is believed to have a hand, could again tarnish this image.

Furthermore, there seems to be a trade-off between democracy and development. Ethiopia and Rwanda are counted amongst the 17 economic success stories Radelet describes in his book *Emerging Africa* (Radelet 2010). Both countries are seen as ‘developmental’ states, with forward-looking governments with ambitious growth plans, a capable administration and a ‘benign’ authoritarianism, enabling these governments to present development as a hegemonic project.  

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7 See Asche and Fleischer 2011; Hayman 2009b on Rwanda, a similar perception was reflected in many interviews with aid officials in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, January 2011
governments is reflected in their national development plans: both Rwanda’s *Vision 2020* and Ethiopia’s *Growth and Transformation Plan* aim for middle-income status by 2020. Ethiopia was the fastest growing non-oil exporting country in Africa over the period 2001-2010, with a real GDP growth of 11.8 percent on average between 2004 and 2008 (IMF 2010: 73). Despite its relatively low GDP per capita, Ethiopia is likely to meet most Millennium Development Goals and has made the second largest improvement in the Human Development Index over the period 2000-2010 (United Nations Development Programme 2010: 3). Corruption is relatively low in Ethiopia and service delivery systems usually work much better than in other sub-Saharan African countries (Furtado and Smith 2009: 132). Similarly, Rwanda’s economy has grown at a pace of 8 per cent on average since 2000 (IMF 2010). President Kagame’s government has focused extensively on improving the investment climate, which has led to an increase of foreign direct investments from 14% of GDP in 1995 to 23% in 2010 (IMF 2010). In 2010, Rwanda was recognized as the world’s top performer in the World Bank’s *Doing Business* ranking. In the 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index, Transparency International placed Rwanda as the least corrupt country in East Africa and amongst the ten top performers in Africa. Although Rwanda’s progress regarding the MDGs has been less impressive than that of Ethiopia (especially regarding the eradication of extreme poverty), there has still been substantial progress on the MDGs and Rwanda’s Human Development Index has doubled between 1995 and 2010.

In contrast, instability was not so much an issue in Guinea in the early 2000s, while Niger was becoming more and more unstable under President Tandja. In Niger, the Tuareg rebellion in the North was worsening after the *Mouvement Nigerien pour la Justice* took up arms in 2007 (Keenan 2008: 454). Moreover, Niger and Guinea are resource-rich countries with relatively low economic growth and little to no progress on socio-economic indicators. Although Niger’s economy grew at about 5 percent on average between 2001 and 2009, it remains one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of GDP per capita and the Human Development Index. Moreover, according to a 2007 report, Niger made little progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals; the proportion of people living in extreme poverty even increased between 1993 and 2005. Although corruption improved under President Tandja, corruption was still rife under his rule, and revenues from the extractive industry mainly stayed within Tandja’s inner circle (Interview EU official and expert on Niger, January-February 2012). Similarly, Guinea’s economic performance was poor under President Conté. Economic growth was less than 3 per cent on average in 2000-2009, despite the country’s abundance in raw materials, including bauxite, aluminium and diamonds. Under Conté, Guinea’s inflation rate was one of the highest in Africa, reaching over 40 per cent in 2006 (IMF 2010). Guinea will not meet

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8 175 out of 181 countries (IMF 2011).

9 Niger was ranked second-last in the 2011 Human Development Index (UNDP 2011). In the 2007 HDI (which was the last we could find under Tandja’s rule, Niger scored last at place 182.)
most MDGs by 2015. While corruption was relatively low in the early 2000s, by 2006 Transparency International ranked Guinea as the most corrupt African country in the world according to its Corruption Perceptions Index. President Conté has been quoted saying all his Ministers were corrupt.

Moreover, there were serious difficulties in the administration of aid money in Guinea and Niger. Guinea was on bad terms with the donor community by the time the EU decided to invoke Article 96 consultations. Donors had already suspended several aid disbursements as the government did not comply with the conditions of the Structural Adjustment Programme and administered aid in a poor manner due to problems in public finance management and good governance (Laakso et al. 2007: 25-28; European Community and Guinea 2007: 20). President Conté was openly hostile towards foreign aid, at one point he was quoted saying that he did ‘not need the white man’s money’ (quoted in Laakso et al. 2007: 28). In Niger, direct budget support, which represented a large part of the EU’s aid package under the 10th EDF in Niger (€95 million), had earlier been halted as Niger was not respecting conditions on performance in the education sector that were foreseen in the Financing Agreement and because of problems in public finance management (Interview EU official February 2012).

Despite the perception in the donor community of Ethiopia and Rwanda as success stories, academics have pointed to several factors threatening instability in the long term. In Ethiopia, the concentration of power in the hands of the Tigray elite has been criticised. Especially the Oromo, the largest ethnic group, have been marginalised by the government. Political protests of the Oromo are aggressively suppressed, which is legitimised by linking them with the guerrilla group Oromo Liberation Front (Clapham 2009: 188). Similarly, national reconciliation has been used as a pretext for President Kagame to suppress political freedoms. It has been noted that the ethnic favouritism that Kagame’s policies have entailed may aggravate grievances amongst the Hutu population (Silva-Leander 2008: 1609-1610; Reyntjens 2004). However, despite these remarks, the international community seems to perceive Ethiopia and Rwanda as African success stories, in contrast to Niger and Guinea. It should be added that the Ethiopian and Rwandan governments have not been passive bystanders in this process, but have actively sought to present themselves as such via strategies of ‘image management’ (Fisher 2012). For example, during the 2005 elections, the ruling party accused the opposition parties Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) of wanting to abolish the federal system and ‘initiate a Rwandan Interahamwe in Ethiopia, carrying out ethnic cleansing and genocide’ (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009: 195). The same strategies have also been used by both governments to appear as a crucial ally in the war on terrorism (especially in the case of Ethiopia) and a regional peacemaker (Fisher 2012). In comparison, nor Guinea nor Niger seem to have applied these strategies, or at least not successfully. Hence, although Guinean president Conté could in a way also be seen as contributing to regional stability, namely by participating in the ECOMOG
mission in Liberia and by receiving refugees from neighbouring conflicts (Youngs 2006: 337-341; Yabi 2010: 37), Conté hardly travelled abroad (Bertelsmann Foundation 2007).

**Negative measures as a measure of last resort: expectations about effectiveness**

Apart from EU self-interest and conflicting normative objectives, double standards may also be motivated by the belief that negative measures would not work in a given context. This may be surprising in the cases of Ethiopia, Rwanda, Niger and Guinea, as Ethiopia and Rwanda are more aid dependent than Guinea and Niger. However, because of their status as aid darlings, there are many other donors in these countries, notably the UK’s DfID and US, but also the World Bank and the African Development Bank. In Ethiopia, it is unlikely the US would agree to the suspension of aid given Ethiopia’s role as a partner in the war on terrorism. Moreover, the World Bank does not have a political agenda (Hout 2007). The UK has also been noted to be reluctant to suspend aid in well-performing undemocratic countries (Porteous 2008). Furthermore, Ethiopia and Rwanda are well integrated in regional organisations. Ethiopia is the leading country in the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development and hosts the headquarters of the African Union. Rwanda was recently even accepted as a Commonwealth country, despite concerns about its democratic record (Reyntjens 2010). Moreover, the governments of Rwanda and Ethiopia have seemed successful in creating the idea that suspension of development assistance would not have any effect. At the same time, they have continued to engage with the EU in political dialogue. For example, after the suspension of budget support in 2005, Ethiopian Prime Minister Zenawi told the donors they could go home if they were not interested in supporting the development of the country (Aalen and Tronvoll 2009: 204). Moreover, Rwanda has repeatedly dismissed criticism about its human rights record from European countries by playing off its genocide credit, resulting from the feeling of guilt in the international community of not having stopped the genocide (Reyntjens 2010). Both countries have also supported the African Peer Review Mechanism, by which African countries review each other’s record of good governance and democracy. Rwanda was the first to participate in the initiative (Jordaan 2006).

In contrast, while the 2003 aid suspension in Guinea was a relatively isolated act, the sanctions in 2009 were supported by ECOWAS (Yabi 2009: 46-47), as well as the AU and UN. Similarly, in Niger, there was a relative consensus amongst most of the donors that Tandja’s coup was unacceptable. France was initially unconvinced, but later aligned with this position. Moreover, from early on ECOWAS warned about possible sanctions should Tandja go ahead with his plans (US Embassy Niger 2009b). Furthermore, there was also substantial pressure from within the country, as a *Front Uni pour la Sauvagarde des Acquis Démocratiques* had formed to protest the prolongation of Tandja’s Presidency (Bertelsmann Foundation 2009). Moreover, in the Nigerien case, the EU had been
frustrated about Tandja’s reluctance to engage in an Article 8 dialogue with the EU (Interview EU official, February 2012; European Commission 2009).

**Conclusion**

This paper has analyzed the reasons for double standards in the EU’s reaction to violations of democratic principles in four sub-Saharan African countries: Ethiopia, Rwanda, Niger and Guinea. The paper started from the observation that, although there were similar violations of democratic principles in these four countries, the EU has been reluctant to impose negative measures in Ethiopia and Rwanda, while this was not the case in Niger and Guinea. It was argued that pure self-interest falls short in explaining EU policies. Instead, two alternative explanations were advanced: (1) the EU’s conflicting normative agenda and the subsequent need for trade-offs, and (2) concerns about effectiveness of negative measures. In this regard, it was concluded that Ethiopia and Rwanda have been able to present themselves as models for development and stability, while Guinea and Niger have not. Moreover, it is believed that the governments of Ethiopia and Rwanda are not receptive to aid pressure, while they are open to discuss with the EU in political dialogue. In contrast, the EU’s decision to impose negative measures against Guinea (2009) and Niger was a coordinated act, supported by most of the main donors and ECOWAS.
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