

The [report](#) of the EU Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Implementation and Enforcement of EU Trade Policy gives an overview of the trade policy of the EU towards third countries and territories, including developing countries. It is interesting to analyse the general lines of the document to learn lessons that can be useful for shaping the trade policy of other regional and sub-regional actors in Africa.

For what concerns the trade policy towards Africa, the EU Commission has focused its main activities on the support to the EU companies in understanding and seizing the opportunities offered by the trade agreements concluded with other third countries or trade blocks. This is based on the assumption that trade agreements are not self-executing, and that once concluded, they must be accompanied by capacity building activities addressed to traders to ensure their practical application.

The report explains that helping businesses to learn about trade agreements is essential in particular for SMEs and that the EU Commission is continuing efforts to raise awareness of EU trade agreements and advantages for EU companies to support their competitiveness in third-country markets, also via the launch of dedicated assistance projects. A lesson that also the supporters of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement should keep in mind.

Moreover, additional activities have been carried out by the EU Commission to monitor trading partners' compliance and ensure that they respect the commitments set out in these agreements. This is another lesson to keep in mind: trade agreements need monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to be respected by signatories. Examples are two disputes, [against SACU](#) (due to the application of a safeguard measure on imports of frozen bone-in chicken cuts from the EU) and Algeria (for the introduction several trade-restrictive measures against EU imports). The EU initiated them because they were deemed in contrast, respectively, with the SADC-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the EU-Algeria Association Agreement (Association Agreements are agreements homologue to the EPAs that the EU has concluded with Northern African countries, among others).

Lastly, a series of programmes have been launched by the EU to maximise the benefits of some agreements, promoting their knowledge and understanding not only by EU businesses, but also by companies and government officials in the counterparts' territory. An example described

in the report is the 'Compete Ghana' project, which benefits of a financial envelope of EUR 4.1 million for the period 2020-2024 and has led to the development of many communication materials and training and capacity building sessions for local stakeholders from both the public and private sector to promote awareness of the EU-Ghana EPA

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Interestingly, the report mentions a project launched by the EU in close cooperation with all its partners within the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean (PEM) area, for the development of a common platform dedicated to the use of electronic proofs of origin and electronic means of administrative cooperation called 'e-PoC initiative'. The initiative falls within the [PEM Convention](#), i.e. the Regional Convention on pan-Euro-Mediterranean preferential rules of origin (which provides for identical rules of origin allowing for diagonal cumulation between the countries of the PEM cumulation zone). It entails the full digitalisation of proofs of origin at the scale of the PEM zone, in the view of the forthcoming adoption of the revised PEM Convention. An idea this, to which also the African RECs could inspire, considering the possibility of including in their rules of origin a diagonal cumulation scheme that would allow their member states to source inputs from African countries belonging to other African FTAs, without losing preferential treatment once exported to another REC. This option would be an alternative to the other - which although preferable, is difficult to achieve - namely, the AfCFTA rules of origin to completely replace the rules of origin established by each REC.