

Regional Economic Communities, or “RECs” are a peculiarity and a feature of the African economic integration model. Some of them were existing already before the establishment of the Organization for the African Unity (OAU), the predecessor of the African Union, like in the case of [SACU](#) , a customs union that is considered the ancient in the world, or the Council of Understanding ([Conseil de l’Entente](#)), a West African regional co-operation forum created in May 1959 by Cote d’Ivoire, Niger, Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso) and Dahomey (now Benin), and subsequently joined by Togo in 1966. The Treaty of Abuja (1991) at art. 2.a introduced the principle of the strengthening of existing RECs and of their creation in the various sub-regions where they did not exist, defining them as foundation (“building blocks”) of the future African Economic Community (article 88). The role of RECs as building blocks of the African integration process is also reiterated in the last recital of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) [agreement](#) and by art. 5, which defines them as building blocks of the AfCFTA.

Already before the Abuja Treaty was adopted, Africa has witnessed a continuous proliferation of RECs, with the birth of a wide number of Communities whose mandates cover the most disparate areas, from trade, peace and security, food security, transport, energy, and water, just to quote a few ones. To put a brake to such proliferation, in July 2006, the AU Assembly adopted a “ [Decision on the Moratorium on the Recognition of RECs](#) ”, where it decided to suspend, until further notice, the recognition of new RECs, except for eight ones:

1. The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU),
2. The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA),
3. The Community of Sahel–Saharan States (CEN–SAD),
4. The East African Community (EAC),
5. The Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS),
6. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS),
7. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and
8. The Southern African Development Community (SADC).

After the recent exit, on 20 January 2024 of three of ECOWAS States (Mali, Burkina Faso and

Niger), from this Community and the [suspension by Sudan of its membership to IGAD](#) , now it seems to be the turn of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), whose survival is threatened by a possible new Community that is slowly taking its shape. During the 7th Summit of gas exporting countries in Algiers held on 3 March 2024 in Algiers, the presidents of Libya, Algeria and Tunisia

[announced](#)

their intention to organise periodic tripartite meetings at presidential level (every 3 months), to discuss solutions for improving their partnership and cooperation ties, complaining a lack of advancement in the AMU agenda, a Community that seems to be entered into a lethargic state, caused by the historical tensions among its member States (particularly, Morocco and Algeria), and serious institutional challenges, due to a Secretariat that strives to carry out its functions (being understaffed and underfunded), and the main political organ, the Summit of AMU Heads of States, that has not met since 1994. From a trade integration point of view, it has been observed that intra-Maghreb trade is the lowest among all the RECs in Africa, equal to a meager

[3 percent](#)

. This, despite all of them are members of a wider Free Trade Area: the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA), a trade agreement entered into force in 1998 to which a total of 18 Arab countries participate.

Today, 22 April 2024, the first consultative meeting is having place in Tunis, where the presidents of Algeria, Libya and Tunisia will discuss the future steps for revitalizing the Maghreb economic integration process. So far, there is no clarity regarding the options to be discussed, but according to what is being circulated by media, the possible solutions are two: to revive the AMU, or to establish a new, [alternative, regional organization in the Maghreb region](#) . In the meantime, the lack of participation of Morocco to these presidential meetings seems to be an indicator of a new block where Algeria, Libya and Tunisia will be opposed to Morocco and Mauritania on the other hand. Even though recent statements from Libya authorities

[deny](#)

their support for creation of a new entity alternative to AMU which does include Morocco, some observers believe that this initiative is just a reaction of Algeria to the recent

[Atlantic Initiative launched by Morocco](#)

to facilitate the access of the three Sahelian countries that recently exited from ECOWAS to the Atlantic Ocean.

Even if it is too early to draw conclusions, what it is certain is that these new dynamics in the African integration processes raise doubts about the stability of continental integration processes, including the AfCFTA and the African Economic Community. In fact, both these contructions put at their basis RECs such as ECOWAS and AMU as building blocks, as explained above. The questions is: how stable will be the AfCFTA and the African Economic Community construction projects if some of their weak building blocks are so weak? It is therefore urgent to find ways to reinforce them, or the continental integration processes will risk

to collapse.