

Avoiding Responsibility

The Politics and Discourse of European Development Policy

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For Armin

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1

Europe and Development Revisited

Madam Zachanassian: you forget, this is Europe.
You forget, we are not savages. In the name of all citizens
of Guellen, I reject your offer; and I reject it in the name
of humanity. We would rather have poverty than blood
on our hands.¹

Friedrich Dürrenmatt, *The Visit*

The above extract comes from the beginning of a play that concludes with 'the offer' being tragically accepted. The offer is made by Claire Zachanassian, a rich old lady who returns to her natal village to ask for justice. In her youth, she was wronged by a man whose murder will, she thinks, compensate for the damage done to her. To this end, she offers a great amount of money to the village of Guellen. Despite the initial resistance of the community, epitomised by this extract, the murder is committed and the community is paid, all in the name of humanity, whose location is Europe.

As an introduction to the following discussion of the ties woven between Europe and less economically developed countries, the above extract reminds us not only of the image that Europe may have of itself ('in the name of all citizens of Guellen' is the same as 'in the name of humanity') and how tragically erroneous this has been and can be, but also how Europe can relate itself to the caricature of the bloody and greedy savages, its purportedly absolute 'other'. The reference to a community (that of Guellen, Europe) and to the 'external' offer (but with inefaceable origins within it) made to this community also neatly fits the European discourse towards the African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, a discourse that has oscillated between a picture of development as a domestic matter and a depiction of development relations as ruled by unavoidable and irreversible external forces. Registering the full meaning of this oscillation is the task of what follows.

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL THEORY IN DEVELOPMENT

This book argues for introducing social and political theorising into studies of development, as well as for introducing development into an area of theorising where it has been neglected until now. Thus, avoiding both a strictly normative interrogation on development ethics and a political-scientific version of development studies, it attempts to imaginatively look at the question of development. This opens up the space for political discussion on these issues, issues that, to paraphrase Arendt, are too important to be exclusively left to development scientists and professional politicians. What *we, we Europeans*,² do with giving, responsibility, efficiency – among the most important issues in development – is largely a question of grasping other possibilities than the ones we thought were imposed on us; it is largely a question of choice.

A look at the writings in social and political theory that have included development (discourse) in their reflection reveals a capacity to challenge developmentalist clichés. Social and political theory alone have managed to contextualise ethical questions around development by inserting them into a broader interrogation on capitalism and modernity. Thinkers like Touraine, Castoriadis or Bauman have looked at two persistent questions in development, namely its ‘rationality’ and ‘the reason for helping/giving’, that is, the question of community.³

Concerning rationality, Castoriadis effectively challenges the premises of a rational path to economic growth and of the idea of unlimited progress, on which the idea of development is based.⁴ Development is defined by him as the achievement or actualisation of a virtual state, a process also implying the definition of a ‘maturity’, i.e. of a determined state that exists. Castoriadis shows that, by contrast, the present understanding of development is devoid of any definition of a ‘maturity’. Present-day ‘development’ expresses the injection of infinity into the social-historical world, and seeks exit from finite states in order to attain ever renewable states. Additionally, he denounces the idea of mastery over things as leading to absurd results when it purports to be total: thus, development is based on the fallacy that a constant acquisition of more is not subject to any limits. But as Castoriadis underlines, no technical improvement can avoid the risk of being used in a direction opposite to that originally planned. Consequently, not only is development less rational than is

usually thought because it strives for control that can annihilate it, but it is also absurd in the never-ending process that it creates.

Intellectually similar to the spirit of the Castoriadian critique, an impressive array of literature emerged in the mid-1990s which strongly insisted on looking at how development discourse works.⁵ The observation that, now, this literature has created its own *topoi* (or common places) of *anti*-development discourse, and thus that those that criticise a discourse produce a discourse in its own right does not seem to strike a lethal blow to this 'anti-development discourse'.⁶ Ultimately, in the realm of development studies, this literature attempts to ally empirical observation with socio- and politico-theoretical insights as well as explicit ethical questioning. These authors have uncovered that the social sciences are political philosophy applied,⁷ and they have attempted to both hang on to the possibilities proper to the social sciences and simultaneously re-discover political philosophy. It is the persistence and importance of this work, over a period of 30 years, that reveals how similar interrogations around development, modernity and capitalism remain: in this sense, there is a 'third spirit of capitalism' underlying the three decades that are considered separately in the following chapters.⁸

The second question that is posed through social and political theorising is that of *community*. We may indeed envisage development (discourse) as creating a community seeking to answer the profoundest uncertainty of a future world lived in unequal conditions, alarming for security reasons for some, intolerable because of poverty, oppression, sickness for others. This view does not presuppose a pre-existing closed 'space' but rather one that is self-instituted, also in the present. This means that what happens to this community is by no means predetermined; that its space is malleable and its inequality avoidable. Indeed, development cannot achieve some of the basic requirements of a common world, and this, while there already is one. The paradoxical situation of development discourse is that as long as it condones itself, in the view of achieving equality of conditions in this unequal community (in the form of interminable stages to be reached), it condemns the members of that community to perpetual inequality. The very words that we use to characterise members of this community are witnesses to this.⁹ This paradox is more than a mere witticism; it contains the seeds of tragedy. What are we¹⁰ to do with the less economically developed countries? Once their relation to the more economically developed countries is revealed to be bogus, should we send them home, so to speak? What would

that home be, in a world fashioned to a great extent by what we used to call 'the West'?

For the moment, we must place this question in brackets, not because it is unanswerable (it should be the central question because it is the only question that *must*, in the end, be answered) but because we should examine this community before looking at its dissolution. The Walzerian view of community, as a good to be distributed, provides us with two crucial insights in terms of the development community. The first concerns the element of mutual aid that Walzer identifies as constitutive of the community. Indeed, if we look at the development discourse of the European Union (EU) towards the ACP countries, mutuality of 'giving' (help, aid, debt, exchange) is present as a crucial justification of the very existence of the community. The second insight is that the distribution of community is decided from its inside, from within it.

The community is itself a good – conceivably the most important good – that gets distributed. But it is a good that can be distributed only by taking people in, where all the senses of that latter phrase are relevant: they must be physically admitted and politically received. Hence, membership cannot be handed out by some external agency; its *value depends upon an internal decision*.¹¹

This is crucial to an understanding of what is considered 'domestic' in this relation and what 'external';¹² to a critique of who decides who can enter the community;¹³ and to an interrogation of the imaginary sources of the duty to give in the community (vocations).¹⁴

Another way of looking at community is of Hegelian inspiration: the community of development discourse becomes one of 'interdependence'. Although the word is currently used in a distinct effort to depict equality in the relations between the more economically developed and less economically developed countries, it has roots in a conceptualisation of master–slave relationships. According to the Hegelian vision, the master is at least as dependent on the slave as the slave on the master. In fact, the master is deprived of the slave's satisfaction of being able to change reality through work.¹⁵ Thus, there is an interdependency between the powerful and the powerless. It is in Marx that we must locate the first use of this idea with regard to the relationship between colonisers and colonised.¹⁶ Later, the intellectual development movement that was most explicitly inspired by the idea of interdependence was the Latin American

'dependencia'. But in a twist, the 'dependentistas' insisted on Latin America's dependency situation *vis-à-vis* the capitalistic centre. Inheriting this understanding, the current development discourse emanating from the EU hastily adds 'inter' to 'dependency' without realising that it comes back to a formulation that was originally set up to denounce inequalities.

In the end, these are all questions that point an accusing finger to the vast majority of development relations. For indeed, who else than those who are 'developed' instigates, creates and chooses to continue or discontinue relationships of aid? And if this question is only rhetorical, then we must proceed to accomplish a 'double movement' – one towards the explicit acknowledgment of responsibility by the 'developed', a responsibility painted in the colours of solidarity – and one, seemingly opposite, that attempts to found this solidarity in the others of the 'developed'. The political aim of the first part of the movement is to insist anew on the necessity for the more economically developed countries to accept the responsibilities that are their own, both on historical grounds and because of the power they hold. The political aim of the second part of the movement is to acknowledge and strengthen the extraordinary potential that less economically developed countries present in the shaping of the world that unites them with, and separates them from, the more economically developed countries. One cannot go without the other.

DEVELOPMENT AS DISCOURSE

The origins of this book reside in various texts of European development policy; development is viewed as discourse.¹⁷ Most authors who included themselves, or were included, in the 'argumentative turn' of political science or in the 'discursive turn' in other social sciences shared an interest in going back to texts and in looking at what there was instead of what there wasn't. This did not mean relinquishing critical concern with possibilities that were not fully actualised, 'changing the world' or *changer la vie* as a poetically attuned '1968' had put it. Quite to the contrary, it very often meant uncovering openings that could lead to such change.

The variety of philosophical approaches informing these social-scientific 'turns' is great; we must clearly distinguish between Jürgen Habermas' and Karl-Otto Apel's discourse ethics, on the one hand, and the critical and post-structuralist current most stringently expressed by people like Jacques Derrida, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal

Mouffe, Judith Butler or Slavoj Žižek, on the other. The main point of contention concerns the common good. The first current is indeed devoted to an understanding of discourse as a medium for attaining a political consensus, the common good. The second current would, on the contrary, advocate a somewhat less instrumental place for discourse, and one that insists on the incessant play of difference that it produces; the 'common good' is better expressed in the plural, goods that are placed in different situations and are never quite as fixed as we think they are (nor should they, for that matter, be). If the second 'discursive' current is often too formalistic, its insistence on difference and non-fixity is theoretically valuable.¹⁸

This book is based on an understanding of discourse informed by the second current: development discourse is conceived as a whole whose ambiguities, richness and the critique it receives change it through time. Such change comes about through the changes in the relationships between the components of the discourse. Inspired by Laclau and Mouffe, the components of discourse that are stopped, as it were, in their movement, are called 'moments' and the relationship between them 'articulation'. Two such moments or instances of justification are responsibility and efficiency. The two concepts were chosen to be submitted to more detailed study because of their utmost significance and their frequency in the discourse, and their belonging to entirely different strands of justification. Indeed, responsibility pertains to the moral, political, reasonable fields, whereas efficiency is an amoral, economic, cognitive concept. Although this book departs from formalism, it is led by the ideas that talking generally about 'discourse' is self-defeating since this takes for granted a static bloc of 'discourse' without disentangling its changes through time, across actors and between ideas or concepts; that there is thus a need to locate precise discursive components; and that this must be done in a way that takes time into account. Such an approach clearly shows that, although it is these attempts at fixity that render a discourse recognisable as such, these attempts are always undermined.¹⁹

However, it must be noted that most authors who have used or studied 'development discourse' refer to a Foucaultian understanding: very often, it is rather a Foucaultian inspiration, because Foucault's own writings on discourse are varying and are seldom referred to. In many ways, the use of discourse here is also influenced by Foucault's work, particularly insofar as it interrogates the forms of moral and scientific knowledge that are used by the development institutions.²⁰

To identify the 'European development discourse' this book relies on three sorts of texts, the first two large, programmatic policy papers and articles of the *ACP-EU Courier* emanating from the European institutions; the third coming from think-tanks and publications that are close to the European Commission.²¹

A SHORT HISTORY OF EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Even though this book investigates 'European development discourse', it is one of its contentions that the dialogue between the ACP and the EU emerges implicitly and constantly through this discourse. Indeed, one of the main properties of discourse is justification; and this justification, the European justification, always addresses someone else: the designed 'partners'. Additionally, living in one of the ACP countries, Zimbabwe, during the writing of this text has necessarily influenced my view of the European discourse, and information on the 'ACP side' is inserted in endnotes to make clear the book's focus as well as the need to separate two (albeit hybrid) 'voices' in this dialogue. The term 'European' must thus evidently be problematised: reading through the text, one must always keep in mind that notwithstanding a wide political and literary thinking on 'Europe', such thoughtfulness is not often present in European development discourse, and this, despite a constant play with ambiguity which crucially demarcates it from American development discourse.

In the precise case of the EU-ACP relations, 'Europe' is more united, more 'one' than the ACP states; hence, more 'one' than a philosophical tradition that insists on its diversity would have it. It is represented, besides the member states of the EU, by the European Council and the European Commission; by contrast, the ACP countries are not legally represented by their Secretariat or any other institution that could somehow 'unite' them: this difference plays a significant role in the unitary perception that the ACP countries have of Europe. This is another instance, one may argue, of the distinction between European and non-European that has characterised nineteenth-century colonial culture and is still very present in countries like Zimbabwe. The concluding remarks return to this question; for now, the particularity of this 'European' development discourse must be stressed, if we deny it and equate this discourse to the other international discourses, we erase a (post-)colonial past that weighs heavily on both sides, a past that is, in a distinct way, European and neither American nor international.

Related to the brief historical overview that follows, we must briefly raise the issue of time, an issue that haunts development, starting from its very name that speaks of stages in time. A detailed critique of this name is out of place here, but we may cursorily point to the element of promise within it; the promise to develop. Hannah Arendt has seen promise as the invention that counters human action's unpredictability in the future, an island of stability in the ocean of uncertainty that the future is, as she says.²² It gives continuity and durability to people's relationships as it binds the one who makes a promise to the one to whom it is addressed. The relationship between the EU and the ACP countries can be seen as a constantly renewed promise of development, in fact, a constantly renewed promise to give. The multilateral contractual form that this promise takes is emblematic of a will to bind all parties. By contrast, the tendencies towards disengagement are a breach of a promise, very generally understood, and hence they provoke a mounting feeling of uncertainty; and of disaffection.

Forgiveness is the second crucial feature of development that relates to time and irreversibility (of action in time). It is a distinctly Christian remedy, another island of security situated this time in the midst of a sinful past. With regard to development discourse, forgiveness is first of all a crucial reminder of the religious roots of the duty to help; without this in mind we would be at pains to explain our current concept of responsibility, for instance. But the instrumentalisation of the power to forgive has also been very significant in terms of how relevant the colonial past of development has been understood to be. Finally, the currently 'mediatised' demands of less economically developed countries to more economically developed ones to erase the former's debts are as intimately linked with forgiveness as the very worldly community of development is linked to religion.

To revert to a more straightforward understanding of time for readers who are not familiar with the EU development policy: the chronological frame of the book starts a little earlier than 1975, the year of the signing of the first Lomé Convention between the EU (then European Economic Community, EEC) and the ACP countries. The end of the Lomé system is marked by the Cotonou 'Agreement' of the year 2000, and the change of the treaty's name is of symbolic importance rather than of legal significance, as it announces the gradual European disengagement and the liberalisation of the trade relations between the partners (or, in other words, the increasing openness of the ACP markets to European products). The Lomé

Conventions, that cover the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, arise out of various aspects of dissatisfaction with the previous systems of 'association' and of changes in the relative negotiating power between European, 'developed' countries and mainly African 'developing' ones. Briefly: the 1970s were characterised by the strongest position the ACP ever had in the past, which is related to the two oil crises and the OPEC position. Their demands and doubts are taken seriously: the colonial past is discussed, (Afro)Marxist influences are perceptible and there is a strong belief in the novelty of the Lomé formula. The 1980s saw hopes for the African continent decline. It was the decade of the emergence of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), and the Europeans searched for 'social' palliatives to the constraints imposed by the SAPs on the one hand; on the other, they praised the systematic search for efficiency. In the 1990s, the Europeans displayed ambiguity again: whilst they claimed an inability to resist 'globalisation' and thus started dismantling the Lomé system (to the great dismay of the ACP); whilst the (post-)colonial ties were deemed irrelevant; and whilst the ties between the EU and the ACP leaned towards the market exchange, the Europeans increasingly asserted their autonomy on the international scene, particularly *vis-à-vis* the US that lagged behind in terms of regional market arrangements.²³ However, throughout the years, the primary objective of the Convention on the European side remained to ensure the continuation of the economic patterns established under colonisation and the solution to the lack of primary resources and control over the region. And on the ACP side, the same objective also prevailed: exports and preferential market access. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the bigger former British colonies like South Africa and India (since the geographical scope of the ACP was understood ever more loosely) always posed a particular problem. Thus, India never became part of the Convention and South Africa still does not have preferential market access and is not part of the important protocols that accompany the current Agreement.

The decades examined in this book can be inserted in a broader chronological framework in which three main periods in the European development policy *vis-à-vis* the ACP states stand out: the period from 1957 (Treaty of Rome) to 1973 when Denmark, Ireland and the UK joined the Community, the period from 1973 to the Treaty of Maastricht (1992), and the period from 1992 to the year 2000. Part 4 of the Treaty of Rome established an Association between the EEC countries and non-European territories that maintained 'special relationships' with Belgium, France, Italy and the Netherlands²⁴ that

are marked by the successive African independences. Two types of divergences between EEC member states can be noted at this stage; a first divergence between, on the one hand, France and Belgium that insisted on the creation of a development policy concentrated on Africa, and, on the other hand, Germany and the Netherlands that promoted a worldwide policy; the second divergence concerned the already existing 'aid or trade' question, the first option being supported by France, Belgium and Italy and the other by Germany and the Netherlands.²⁵

Thus, the consensus needed to create this association launched by France was reached with difficulty, a situation that was to be repeated in every future negotiation involving the member states' different interests *vis-à-vis* their former European colonies. It must be noted that the Treaty of Rome stipulating the Association did not mention 'a development policy' because it was aimed at a very specific number of countries, which were naturally following their metropolises into the European Community. By contrast, the Treaty of Maastricht defines a European development policy which is, in principle, open to any country that wishes it.

Decolonisation and economic growth led to the first Yaoundé Convention being signed between the EEC and 18 independent states in 1963, the year of the failure of the first attempt of the UK to join the EEC. In 1973, four years after the signature of the second Yaoundé Convention, the UK (and Ireland and Denmark) eventually joined the Community, which produced a massive extension of the geographical scope of EEC development cooperation. After this enlargement, the Germans strengthened their positions on trade and 'globalisation' of policy whilst the Danish (along with the Italian) influence urged for increased generosity of aid.²⁶ The first Lomé Convention was signed in 1975 between the EEC and 46 ACP states. Its Preamble announced the establishment of 'a new model for relations between developed and developing states, compatible with the aspirations of the international community towards a more just and more balanced economic order (...)'.²⁷

EEC Commissioner Cheysson characterised the Convention as 'unique in the world and history'. Thus, although the Convention had strong similarities to its Yaoundé predecessors, it was presented as establishing a particular relationship between the North and South. Its major innovations were the introduction of a method to stabilise the export earnings of the ACP for selected products and the world market price for primary agricultural commodities (better known as

STABEX), and the provision for guaranteed access to the Community market of certain quantities of sugar from certain ACP countries. The big scale of the Convention was another reason why particularity was claimed to exist. As Lister shows, the borrowing of the terminology of the discourse on the New International Economic Order (NIEO) enhanced this impression of the Convention as being revolutionary: the term 'partnership' which was used from then on to describe the contract was chosen with difficulty after the terms 'Association' and 'Cooperation' were rejected because they explicitly referred to the previous contracts under the strong French influence.²⁸

Here, some brief remarks on the actors of the EU-ACP relationship are necessary. Although the expression EU is used more or less invariably throughout the book, it should be mentioned that it is the EEC that signed the first and second Conventions, the EC that signed the third and the fourth, and the EU that very recently signed the Cotonou Agreement. The Conventions were signed by the heads of the member states, the Council and the Commission, all of which play an important role in the formulation of the policy.

Within the European institutions, the division of labour in the institutional triangle (the Council, the Commission and the Parliament) is of interest. The formulation of the development policy can be traced along the line linking the Council to the Commission: as in almost all the other European policies, the Council mandates the Commission, which, in turn, proposes texts (including those authorising it to negotiate with the ACP countries) that are then amended by the Council.

More precisely, the Council reflects the inter-state *problématique*, namely the necessary considerations of who pays what and how. For instance, only three member states fulfil the UN objective, giving more than 0.7 per cent of their GNP to less economically developed countries: Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands. On the other hand, while Ireland makes 34 per cent of its aid transit through the EU, only 6.6 per cent of the Danish aid is likewise distributed. This consideration also involves the division between the 'trade-not-aid' group (Germany, UK, Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries) and the others (France, Belgium, Spain).

In the era of the Lomé Conventions, there were different dynamics within the European Commission that went from the opposition between DG (Directorate General) VIII (now DG Development) and the other DGs responsible for external affairs (DG I, DG IA, DG IB – now DG REL.EX.) to DG VIII's internal ideological/national

divisions.²⁹ It must also be noted that the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) is responsible for the EU's humanitarian aid and a strong competitor as far as public image and media are concerned. The fact that the European Development Fund (EDF) is outside the EU budget, and hence outside effective control of the European Parliament, considerably reduces the role of the latter.³⁰

On the other hand, the ACP group as such was created shortly after the signature of the first Convention; the primary aim of the group's constitution was to give its members bargaining power *vis-à-vis* the EU. In the long run, a more unitary interlocutor would also have facilitated the EU. But this group is not an example of regional integration: in no way should it be assumed that these countries correspond to a unity, be it cultural, economic, ethnic or political. On the contrary, their internal divisions are numerous, ranging from their relations with their previous colonial authorities to their political regimes. In such a context, the correspondence between an 'adequate' response to the EU policy and the effectiveness of the ACP institutions can be questioned, not least because of the acknowledged malfunctioning of the latter; but also because in the expression of the ACP demands, their peoples' needs are not necessarily accurately reflected.

Although the Lomé Convention was not the sole instrument of Community cooperation during the second half of the 1970s, the criticisms to European development aid that emerged then were focused on it. The major part of these criticisms concentrated on the 'neo-colonial' nature of the Convention. Neo-colonialism was detected because the parameters of the relationship between the ACP states and the Community were set by the latter; because the Convention fostered ties between the former metropolises and their former colonies instead of weakening them; because Lomé's provisions did little to change the economic weakness and dependency of the ACP; because the relationship did not involve the EEC and ACP populations but was only established on an elite to elite basis; and because by creating divisions between the ACP and other less economically developed countries, it regionalised selected countries.³¹ However, 'development policy continued to be supported in Europe at political and diplomatic levels'.³² This support was one of the elements guaranteeing the stability of the relation; the other was that of 'political neutrality'.

The second Lomé Convention was signed in 1980 and it did not make any important modifications to the previous one. The

major innovation was the institution of a system of project and programme aid in the ACP mining sector (SYSMIN). Apart from some improvements in the area of trade, the general impression was one of disappointment, especially on the side of the ACP as they were denied free and unhindered access to the Community market for all their agricultural products during the negotiations.³³ According to Lister,

[m]uch of the disappointment occasioned by Lomé II was the result of misunderstanding the nature of Lomé I. Lomé II was regarded as a disappointment because it did not radically differ from Lomé I and did not seem to promise any fundamental re-structuring of relations between developed and developing countries. However, Lomé I itself had not actually been the radical reform which some of its enthusiasts had claimed.³⁴

More significant changes occurred in 1985 when the third Lomé Convention was signed. First of all, the *acquis* Lomé appeared: this was constituted by a series of objectives and principles that characterised the relationship. Thus, equality of partners, respect for their sovereignty and the right of each state to determine its own policy options were part of this *acquis* which, in turn, guaranteed the security of the parties' relations. A second important innovation was the Joint Declaration of the parties on Article 4, which expressed the parties' 'deep attachment' to the protection of human rights. Thus, Lomé III initiated a tendency to insert political elements into the relationship, which was against the previous principle of neutrality.

At the European level, the period 1981–86 is characterised by southern enlargements of the Community (Greece 1981, Spain and Portugal 1986). From the viewpoint of trade, protectionism and agricultural exports, these new EC member states were rightly considered as competitors of the ACP.³⁵

The end of the 1980s was punctuated by events that influenced the negotiations of the fourth Lomé Convention. The end of the cold war, the generalisation of the use of the concept of globalisation, the explosion of the ACPs' long-term debt due to the energy crises, the growing gap between import expenses and export revenues and the demographic growth in the ACP countries certainly shaped the next Convention. In terms of development doctrine, modernisation

theories equating economic growth with poverty alleviation were severely challenged.

The particularities of the 1989 Convention included an increased emphasis on the human rights issues and support for structural adjustment. The Declaration annexed to Lomé III was transformed into an insertion in Article 5 of the Convention, and the parties reaffirmed their existing obligations and commitment to international law. Article 5 has been used by the Community to suspend its cooperation with some countries (Liberia, Sudan, Nigeria and Zaire) accused of non-respect of human rights or democratic rule. 'Of course, [the understanding of the Article] cannot be too broad (...) because the number of countries that would suffer from the restrictions would be too many.'³⁶ The new support for Structural Adjustment Programmes was presented as a pragmatic choice; instead of fighting the Bretton Woods institutions, of which the European states are a part, the Community would try to correct them. Let it be noted that, formally, the members of the EU and the ACP together could form the majority at the World Bank: however, 'in the mid-1990s, the ten richest industrial states controlled 52 per cent of the votes, and 45 African countries controlled just 4 per cent of the votes'.³⁷ Both of these steps – insistence on human rights issues and support for the SAPs – radically altered the previous conception of Lomé; the first meant definitely breaking with the tradition of neutrality whilst the second departed from the discourse of 'exceptionality' of the Convention, until then understood as the difference between EEC cooperation and that of the other international donors.

The scheduled revision of the fourth Lomé Convention took place in 1994, two years after the signature of the Treaty of Maastricht establishing the European Union. The basic principles of the European development policy such as sustainable development, poverty alleviation, consolidation of democracy and respect of human rights, good governance and rule of law, and the development of commerce instead of the system of preferences were for the first time laid down in this Treaty.

These changes that aimed at ending the EU's political neutrality led Commissioner Pinheiro to proclaim that 'this is the last of the Conventions as we have come to know them'. At the same time, the new northern enlargement of the EU accentuated the interest in eastern Europe; significantly too, it brought in countries (Finland and Sweden) that were critical of the colonial basis for development aid and favoured a policy based on poverty alleviation.³⁸

The announcement of the termination of Lomé was the starting point of a debate on the future relationships between the EU and the ACP countries launched by the Commission through the issuing of the Green Paper. This debate officially lasted a year, after which the Commission withdrew to begin the negotiations for the next Agreement. In this debate two main positions were clearly perceptible: one contended that the Lomé partnership had become an anachronism. The second one advocated for some transformation but supported the preservation of the Lomé Convention in the form it had had for the last 20 years. In both the first and the second argument, the general principle of change was admitted; what differed was judgement over the necessary degree of change.

The increased attention of the EU to the countries of central and eastern Europe as well as the renaissance characterising the EU's relations with the Mediterranean, Latin America and Asia constituted the change in the focus of the development policy. At that turning point, there were several interpretations of the way in which this change could take place. Some claimed that there would be a further 'Europeanisation' of the development policy towards the ACP states.³⁹ Others predicted that the development policy would shift from the first pillar of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) towards its second pillar.⁴⁰ Yet another interpretation suggested that the major change for Europe would be the emergence of a coherent external policy made up of the Common Commercial Policy, cooperation in the area of foreign policy and development cooperation policy.⁴¹ Finally, a different possibility was advanced, which considered that coherence between the various external policies or within the development policy could be achieved through a dichotomy between their components.

A distinction between the economic and political aspects of European development policy was indeed operated, on the occasion of the restructuring of the European Commission. The Lomé Convention had for a long time been presented as a predominantly legal and economic instrument, its political aspects allegedly non-existent. The EU's attachment to neutrality, stipulated for a long time in the Convention's text, had been the major justification of this approach. This position reveals one of the more ambiguous points of the European discourse during the Lomé era. On the one hand, the EU continuously stressed the historical ties linking it to the ACP countries and, on the other, it denied the political nature of the agreement. Interestingly, when the last Convention included