The Enigma of African Economic Integration

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to a critical examination of the aims set out in the Constitutive Act of the African Union (2000) and the Abuja Treaty of 1991 creating the African Economic Community within the general context of the proliferation in African economic integration schemes and the espousal by Africa of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). Although the paper is sympathetic with the aims and aspirations set out in these documents and asks for more, it argues that they are not carefully thought out since the drafters seem to have been more impressed by the mere enumeration of items rather than their consistency. Hence, it fears that all indications suggest that Robson (1997) may prove correct when he states that ‘reculer pour mieux sauter is not a dictum that seems to carry much weight among African governments involved in regional integration. On the contrary, if a certain level of integration cannot be made to work, the reaction of policy makers has typically been to embark on something more elaborate, more advanced and more demanding in terms of administrative requirements and political commitment’.

- JEL Classifications: F1, O1
- Key words: African Union, African economic community, Economic integration, MAP, NEPAD, OMEGA

I. Introduction

With the exception of Morocco, all African nations agreed to create an African...
Union (AU) and announced this in their Libyan Sirte Declaration of 9 September 1999 at the Extraordinary Summit of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). Later, in Lomé, Togo, on 11 July 2000, they endorsed the declaration by adopting The Constitutive Act of the African Union (hereafter, simply Constitutive Act), Article 33(1) of which allowed for a transition period of a minimum of one year before the Constitutive Act replaces the OAU Charter. The AU was officially launched, hence the OAU met its demise, on 9 July 2002 in Durban, South Africa, during the summit of the Heads of State and Government and President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa was made its first Chairman.

Also, again with the exception of Morocco and another two nations, which were not in existence then, all African nations, had already established the African Economic Community (AEC), on 3 June 1991, upon their signing of the Abuja Treat in Nigeria. The AEC itself encompasses all the existing African economic integration schemes; indeed, the AEC not only endorses these schemes, it actually encourages the creation of more of their ilk. What is pertinent is that the Constitutive Act clearly states that the AEC, hence also all existing African economic integration schemes, forms an integral part of the AU (see next section).

Moreover, since July 2001, all the mentioned African nations have been following the New African Initiative, agreed in Pretoria in South Africa. The Initiative was the culmination of a process driven by Presidents Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Abdelaziz Boutefika of Algeria and Olusengun Obasanjo of Nigeria. It began with the drafting of the Millennium African Renaissance Plan (MAP) or the Millennium African Recovery Programme and OMEGA Plan. The New African Initiative has now been formalized into the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), with an Implementation Committee comprising 15 African Heads of State and Government and presided over by President Olusengun Obasanjo of Nigeria, and was endorsed by the world leading nations, the Group of 8 (G8), at their Canadian summit, held during 26-27 June 2002.

The purpose of this article is to evaluate Africa’s economic integration efforts both in their own right as well as within the context of the objectives set out in NEPAD. Thus, in section II, the paper commences with the aspirations of the AU and AEC. African economic integration schemes are then discussed in section III and the aims and aspirations of NEPAD in section IV. Since it is vital to consider how Africa can meet the financial demands it has set itself by endorsing the AU, AEC and NEPAD, section V addresses this issue as well as its institutional implications. The final section offers pertinent conclusions.