

Editorial

A quarter of a century ago, when Kofi Annan, the first African Secretary-General of the United Nations, attempted to reform the composition of the Security Council, and with it a cornerstone of the overall architecture of an organisation founded in 1944, he started from two basic convictions that were shared by many at the time.

The Cold War was over and with it the strange foundations of an international order that rested on a balance of deterrence between the two great victorious powers of the Second World War had come to an end. It seemed that Pax Americana would be suitable for the long-lasting guarantee of a new world order. Thereupon, adjustments to the changes triggered by the massive decolonisation of the 1940s to the 1970s, by the ever-widening interdependence of all parts of the world and by the growing awareness of the global challenges that could only be overcome together, finally seemed possible.

The second assumption was that such a new global governance would have to be based on the participation and representation of all continents. And these continents could be represented much more democratically by regional organisations in which all countries would have a seat and a voice than by individual powers whose national interests did not necessarily coincide with those of their neighbours. Through such a democratisation of the international order, all humanity could actively participate in the shaping of world affairs and would no longer have to feel both represented and excluded by a cartel of the powerful. Annan's vision, which was soon to be shattered by the interests of the powerful, was obviously inspired by the hopes that Africa's political elites placed in a regional organisation that had just transformed the old Organisation of African Unity, which had been founded in 1963 shortly after the independence of many African states, into the new African Union that was supposed to be a reinterpretation of the pan-African tradition, pooling the continent's strengths and giving it more weight on the international stage. It was to take some time before the African Union found the self-confident slogan "African solutions for African problems" for its ambitions in the second decade of the new millennium. But the path seemed to have been found on which an integration programme could be implemented.

The contributions in this thematic issue report first-hand on the successes and stumbling blocks on this path – specialists link internal and sympathetic external perspectives and

provide the African Union with a birthday greeting that does not get lost in the symbolic actions of earlier anniversaries, which Ulf Engel reports on in his introduction, but instead asks with an analytical perspective what the state of the idea of global governance based on regional organisations is.

While some researchers, both inside and outside Africa, take the European Union as the blueprint of such new regionalisms, one should not necessarily expect copies or clones of the European Union to emerge everywhere. European regionalism is one among many, albeit one that has already come a long way in allocating resources to common goals. If one compares it with others, similarities and differences alike come to light. They range from the historical rationale for regional integration and path dependencies based on it that are accepted in the respective region, via resource endowments and institutionalisation, to the position in the power imbalance of international politics. A world that controls its cooperation and competition via the sub-controls of the new regionalisms should by no means be imagined symmetrically.

Against this background, the anniversary of the African Union is less an occasion to measure it normatively against the functioning of other regionalisms than to decipher its own logic in order to be able to assess the future interplay of a multilateral order worthy of the name. To this end, this issue makes an important contribution by assessing where the African Union stands in achieving the ambitious goals expressed in its Vision 2063. In the process, sceptical judgements are juxtaposed with optimistic objectives. In 2017, for example, the so-called Kagame Report had lamented that “the unfortunate truth is that Africa today is ill-prepared to adequately respond to current events, because the African Union still has to be made fit for purpose”. At the same time, various bodies of the organisation keep setting goals that seem overly ambitious and for which it is unclear whether they can be achieved without external donorship. However, the attitude is increasingly spreading that it is more appropriate to formulate integration goals that can be achieved with the resources of the member states. This brings the question of the ownership of African institutions to the fore – undoubtedly the prerequisite for a self-confident contribution to a global governance that actually arises from the interaction of different actors on an equal footing and is not geared solely to the security needs and economic interests of the major powers. With this goal in mind, the African Union’s Agenda 2063 also formulates the connection between cultural decolonisation and further development of Pan-Africanism on the one hand and people-driven and peaceful development on the continent on the other. Overcoming Eurocentrism thus becomes a prerequisite for a whole series of essential goals that can only be achieved if the African Union creates space for economic integration, political unity, and cultural autonomy of the continent and the testing of different social models in the member countries.

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