

CES Report on EU research visit to Brussels, May 2015

The Centre for European Studies funded my research visit to Brussels in May 2015 in order to undertake qualitative research for part of my doctoral thesis. My thesis is exploring the role of law in the emerging international framework governing Official Development Assistance (ODA). As the EU is one of the largest ODA donors, and has a sophisticated legal and governance framework governing its ODA, an analysis of the EU's approach to law in one aspect of its ODA (the implementation of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (2000 – 2020) is very revealing for understanding (i) the inter-relationship between the international ODA governance framework (the Aid Effectiveness Agenda), and the EU's ODA governance framework; (ii) the significance of and the approach to implementing the EU's own treaty and regulatory legal framework on ODA, and (iii) the role for law in EU ODA initiatives.

I chose to focus on one aspect of the EU's ODA policy and programmes – the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (2000-2020) – as this agreement has evolved continually from the Treaty of Rome; is a partnership agreement addressing aid, trade and international relations between the EU and nearly 80 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries (and thus involves engagement between different international legal regimes); is delivered regionally and nationally (and thus is revealing of a complex approach to regionalism) and contains several treaty references to international and regional law.

The purpose of my research visit was to interview officials from DGs Trade, DevCo and the EEAS, in addition to representatives from the ACP Secretariat; NGOs and representatives of think tanks/research bodies undertaking research in this area. Discussions on aspects of the following areas were held (i) the aid relationship processes between the EU and EAC regions and EAC member states, and (ii) specifics of the EU's approach to aid and (iii) the EU's approach to law in ODA.

Information gleaned from the interviews was very revealing on the markers and signposts that officials use in implementing the aid element of the CPA. It was also insightful towards understanding the inter-relationships between aid and trade policy, in particular, and especially at a crucial time in the negotiations of regional trade agreements with African regions (Economic Partnership Agreements). While not the purpose of my research, the interviews were also insightful on the subtle dynamics between the different EU institutions.

The information gleaned from the interviews undertaken thus far complicates recent legal scholarly research on ODA that has approached the law of ODA as a singular legal field; it also resonates strongly with insights from critical development studies that focuses on international aid as a form of global governmentality and, finally, it highlights the significance of the 'regional' as a key site for scholarly analysis.

The funding generously provided by the Centre for European Studies was critical to enabling me to undertake this research. It has provided me with information, insight and contacts with officials within the EU; with EU research institutes and others, but most importantly it has deepened my knowledge of EU policy to a level not affordable through exploration of literature alone.