

THE IMPLICATIONS OF BREXIT ON THE EUROPEAN UNION-ZIMBABWE RELATIONS AND THE FUTURE OF ZIMBABWE'S DEVELOPMENT PARADOX

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ABSTRACT

Britain's emotive intent to exit the European Union (EU) and its concomitant challenges could result in political and economic structural and relational changes that may transcend the European continent. The changes have a likelihood of altering Britain and EU's power configurations in the international community. Even though the EU is an institution that operates on its own, at least in theory, it relies on member states for foreign policy direction and interests with regard to its relations with the outside world. Given such political reality, the two possible outcomes are that Britain's exit from the EU will either change the policy stance and interests of the bloc towards Zimbabwe or the institution will maintain its principles and stance on the country; depending on how autonomous it is from member states. The outcome will be determined by the magnitude of Britain's influence towards the current diplomatic hostility between EU and Zimbabwe. Against this background, the objective of this paper is to examine the likely implications of Brexit on the relations between Zimbabwe and the EU and its overall impact on achieving sustainable development in Zimbabwe. The paper posits that if Britain had an upper hand in the imposition of sanctions and the overall emergence of conflict between EU and Zimbabwe, the situation will see the remaining EU countries changing its stance that maybe in favor of Zimbabwe's economic and political relations. The improved relations could see the cancellation of sanctions and in turn boasts trade and political relations not only for Zimbabwe but for Africa as whole since the EU stance had affected the operation EU-ACP development cooperation. Secondary sources such as books, newspapers and journals were used to gather data for this paper.

Keywords: Brexit, Britain, European Union, Foreign Policy, Zimbabwe, Multilateral Foreign Policy, Sanctions

INTRODUCTION

The UK's intentions to withdraw its membership of the EU will undoubtedly have a bearing on the bloc's foreign policy including relations with Zimbabwe. Arguably, Britain's successful June 2016 referendum to withdraw from the EU may appear to raise prospects for reconciliatory relations between Zimbabwe and the latter. This is because the former was influential in EU's imposition of sanctions on and isolation of Zimbabwe following the land reform in Zimbabwe at the turn of the new millennium. The million dollar question from the Brexit developments of 23 June 2016 would be; could EU seek to normalise relations with Zimbabwe with Britain out of the political matrix? If so, how would that impact on sustainable development in Zimbabwe?

To answer these above paradoxical questions, this paper juxtaposes historical issue surrounding EU-Zimbabwe relations and current developments thereof. At first glance, one would be tempted to embrace the theoretical standpoint that the absence of Britain from the EU will make EU-Zimbabwe relations different. On the one hand, it suffices to pinpoint that the absence of Britain from the EU does not insinuate the alteration of the national interests of remaining members of the supranational organisation. Apart from the national interests of individual member states, the collective interests of these states under the EU parenthood vis-à-vis Zimbabwe cannot oscillate due to membership change or withdrawal. This is so given the fact that in international politics, friendship or enmity may change, but interests are permanent particularly when it comes to inter-state intercourse.

It therefore follows that, since Britain sits in the European Parliament and has considerable leverage in contributing to social, political and development policy direction concerning Zimbabwe as her former colony, its absence from the intergovernmental organisation could lead to normalisation of EU-Zimbabwe multilateral relations. However, as the paper espouses this is debatable and dependent on a number of factors including power configurations within the EU, particularly when it comes to multilateral institutions it still remains to be seen whether an influential country adopts a particular stance and then decides to leave the institution; could its absence still see the stance being maintained by the bloc. It also questions whether interests of states are independent from those of a bloc like the EU.

HISTORICISING EU-ZIMBABWE RELATIONS

The historical context of the relations between Zimbabwe and European Union can be conceived in two contextual phases; the era of cordial relations and the epoch of hostile diplomatic relations between the two entities. Prior to historicising EU-Zimbabwe relations, it is imperative to explain and describe the nature of the entities under scrutiny. Zimbabwe is state

located in the Southern part of Africa with a population of approximately sixteen million people (Country Meters Online, 2016; Worldometers, 2016; Tradingeconomics, 2016; Zimbabwe National Statistics, 2016). The European Union is a political-economic international institution comprising of twenty eight states from the European continent and operates on the basis of the 1993 Maastricht Treaty (Craig and De Burca, 2011). The institution's major objective is to foster the political and economic cooperation and integration of interested European states.

The current members of the EU are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Of these twenty eight EU member states, the United Kingdom held a referendum on 23 June 2016 to determine whether or not to exit the intergovernmental organisation. British citizens voted in favour of breaking away from the EU by 51, 9% (BBC News, 22 October 2016).

The era of cordial EU-Zimbabwe relations

Since 1980, relations between the bloc and Zimbabwe were cordial. Apart from EU-Zimbabwe relations, bilateral relations between Zimbabwe and individual European states were based on trade, cultural and mutual cooperation. In the context of EU-Africa Caribbean and Pacific (EU-ACP) cooperation, relations with Zimbabwe like with other ACP countries was based on partnership, equality, solidarity and mutual interest in accordance with the Lome IV Convention that outlines the cooperation between EU and ACP states. Arguably, this can be attributed to the nature of Anglo-Zimbabwe relations at that time. Between 1980 and 2000 relations between Zimbabwe and the United Kingdom were friendly partly because of the political economic trajectory influenced by the Lancaster House Agreement¹ concluded between Zimbabwe and Britain at the end of the Rhodesian war. The Agreement culminated in the adoption of the Lancaster House Constitution that was drafted by the British government.

Whether or not EU-Zimbabwe cooperation was largely influenced by Britain, it suffices to mention that the period experienced normalcy in relations between Zimbabwe and EU. According to Williams (2002: 9), by year 2000 cooperation programmes between the two was notably worth ninety million Euros excluding bilateral aid from individual European

¹Lancaster House Agreement was concluded in 1979 between the British government and nationalist movements in Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe National People's Unity (ZAPU) at the end of the liberation war in the country. The most sensitive provision of the Agreement had to do with land ownership in Zimbabwe. It was concluded that land was going to be redistributed on the basis of willing buyer willing seller, a position that the Zimbabwean government deviated from in the year 2000 when the government embarked on the fast track land reform programme that saw the deterioration of EU-Zimbabwe relations.

states. In terms of aid, the EU contributed approximately two thirds of aid flowing to Zimbabwe and accounted for more than 750 million Euros of the EU importation of Zimbabwe goods (European Parliament, 2003). Undoubtedly, the above figures illustrate the extent of the cooperative relationship between Zimbabwe and EU in the first two decades of independent Zimbabwe. Cooperation efforts changed from year 2000 when the Zimbabwean government embarked on the fast track land reform exercise which attracted international attention due to the gravity of human rights abuses that characterised it. The EU expressed disdain of the exercise and along with the Commonwealth and Britain individually imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe. This marked the beginning of diplomatic hostility between Zimbabwe and the EU.

The era of confrontational relations

Relations between Zimbabwe and the EU turned hostile at the turn of the new millennium. The bone of contention was the Zimbabwean government's land reform exercise which officially began in year 2000. The European community condemned the land reform exercise as authoritarian and that it resulted in the violation of the human rights of white farmers who lost their land and properties to the Zimbabwean government without compensation. At this juncture, it is imperative to give an overview of the land reform in Zimbabwe. Such a background highlights the roots of enmity between Zimbabwe and Britain and subsequently between the EU and the former.

The immediate background of the conflict between Zimbabwe and Britain emerged in 1997 when the Tony Blair administration in the latter rejected the responsibility for funding land reform in the former. This was contrary to the Lancaster House Agreement in which the British government had promised to provide funding for the land reform in Zimbabwe. In a sudden shift of position, the then Secretary of State for International Development Claire Short wrote an emotion wrecking letter to the then Zimbabwe's Minister of Agriculture and Land, Kumbirai Kangai, denying the responsibility of the Labour Party to fund land reform in Zimbabwe (Letter from Claire Short to Kumbirai Kangai). Claire Short's letter contradicted with what was agreed upon at the Lancaster House Negotiations (Chigora 2011).

The concomitant implications of the letter were the Zimbabwean government's launch of the fast track land reform programme which saw the compulsory acquisition without compensation of land belonging to white farmers. In short, disagreement over the funding of the land reform spilled over into the international arena when Zimbabwe began the compulsory acquisition of land that was alleged to be characterised by the intimidation and torture of white farmers. According to Chigora (2011), the intervention of the EU in the political economic feud between Britain and Zimbabwe was an attempt by the British government to "transform a bilateral issue into a multilateral one". To go by Chigora's argument, Britain has considerable influence on how the EU relates with Zimbabwe.

However, this should not be interpreted to imply that the EU does not have its own structural power configurations and principles to direct its interaction with other actors beyond the European continent. The institution operates on the basis of the European Council, European Parliament and European Commission with the Economic and Social Committee as the advisory arm of the institution (Maastricht Treaty: Article 4). Be that as it may, the EU does not operate independent of the recommendations and coordination of member states in their capacities as individual state actors. Hence, EU-Zimbabwe relations cannot be fully comprehended independent of the context of the Europeanisation of British foreign policy (Williams, 2002: 2).

Since Britain participates in the intergovernmental structures of the EU, there is little doubt that it has contributed immensely to the policy direction of EU-Zimbabwe interaction. Furthermore, the colonial umbilical cord that binds Zimbabwe and Britain seems to resonate in Anglo-Zimbabwe relations spilling over to EU-Zimbabwe interaction in the 21st century. Against such a background, this paper examines the likely implications of Brexit on EU-Zimbabwe relations.

Brexit: an overview

The phrase Brexit is a portmanteau of the terms Britain and exit. It illuminates Britain's intentions to leave the EU due to discontentment emanating from allegations of economic free riding by economically weak states within the institution. Britain raised concerns relating to being overburdened by the influx of refugees from other EU states into the United Kingdom as many European citizens prefer living and working in the country due to its economic prowess. A campaign poster developed by Vote Leave, an organisation that campaigned for leaving the EU, indicated that Britain was losing approximately 50 million Euros to the EU; money which could be used for social development in the country (Vote Leave Campaign). Hence, economic discontentment pressured Britain to express intentions to leave the EU. (www.voteleavetakecontrol.org)

However, it appears that Britain has never been wholeheartedly committed to be part of and participate in the EU. Furthermore, it can be argued that the country has always been skeptical about being a party to the regional organisation. Two arguments can be put forward to substantiate this claim. First, until 1973 the United Kingdom was not a member state to the European Economic Community (EEC) when it was established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. This is partly attributable to the country's skepticism about the European alliance systems. Such skepticism can be traced to the UK's historical isolationism policy code named 'splendid isolation' during the pre-World War 1 epoch. In accordance with splendid isolation, the UK maintained minimal involvement in European alliance systems and European affairs (Adams,

2005). Even though the policy was abandoned at the turn of the 20th century with the establishment of the Anglo-Japanese military alliance in 1902 (Nish, 1966: 63) and the ‘Special Relationship’ with the United States of America (Kupfer, 2012: 42), Britain has always maintained a considerable degree of aloofness from European affairs (Otte, 2007: 306). Given such an isolationistic background, it can be argued that the UK has always been pessimistic about cooperation.

Second, the UK’s preference to using its pound sterling as national currency instead of the adopting the Euro used by other EU member states speaks volumes of the UK’s cooperation phobia. According to Investopedia (2016), the British government has never wanted to relinquish control of its own interest rate policy which would occur under the Euro monetary system. It follows therefore that the UK has always valued her political and economic independence over abdicating her sovereignty to the EU in the name of cooperation. As clandestine cooperation could not be sustained, the UK’s disdain of cooperation in the EU political economic system culminated in Brexit. This illustrates challenges confronting multilateral cooperation as states are always in constant look out for their national interests.

On 23 June 2016, a Brexit referendum was held and approximately 52 % of the voters voted in favour of leaving the EU (BBC News, 22 October 2016). The referendum was held in accordance with Article 50 (1) of the Lisbon Treaty which permits EU member states to withdraw membership of the organisation in line with their own constitutional requirements (Treaty of Lisbon: Article 50). Hence, the June referendum fulfilled the constitutional procedures to exit the EU. What is left for the UK is to negotiate its exit intentions with other EU members in accordance with Article 50 (2) of the Lisbon Treaty. The country is expected to have completed the withdrawal procedures by March 2019 as Article 50 gives a state two years to go through withdrawal processes. As of now (October 2016), the UK remains a member of the institution. Given the strain of relations between the Britain and Zimbabwe and which was extended to the EU is there going to be a change in relations between the EU and Zimbabwe and to a lesser extent and the UK herself. That is the purpose of the next section.

Implications of Brexit on EU-Zimbabwe relations and Zimbabwe’s development paradox

Prior to exploring the implications of Brexit on EU-Zimbabwe relations, it is essential to examine the likely implications on Anglo-Zimbabwe relations. This is imperative in illuminating the likely influence the UK might have on EU decisions concerning Zimbabwe. Such decisions range from the flow of development aid to Zimbabwe, relaxation of trade restrictions and political isolation. The most obvious outcome of the Brexit phenomenon is that issues between Zimbabwe and Britain will become exclusively bilateral. Since the year 2000, the UK had developed a tendency of making her bilateral issues with Zimbabwe multilateral in efforts to isolate Zimbabwe politically and economically (Chigora 2011).

Even though other EU members had problems with Zimbabwe due to the internationally condemned land reform which deprived their nationals of their land rights, the UK was at the forefront of anti-Zimbabwe demonisation within the EU. This may sound farfetched, but it should be stressed that being the biggest loser in the land reform issue and as a result of Zimbabwe's suspension and overall withdrawal from the Commonwealth which is more of a club of former British colonies, the UK had high political stakes in punishing Zimbabwe using the EU. Having said that, if Anglo-Zimbabwe political and economic interaction is going to be exclusively bilateral, EU-Zimbabwe relations are likely to change for the better especially given the economic interests-induced soft spot some EU members like Portugal, France, Belgium have for Zimbabwe.

Furthermore, UK permanent interests in relation to Zimbabwe are less likely to change because of Brexit. It is apparent that the EU has not been influencing the way the UK relates with Zimbabwe the same way the latter has been influencing the latter. In fact, the latter has been benefiting from EU-Zimbabwe sour relations than the EU itself. There is no doubt that it has been the UK's interests to make all her former colonies depend on her and those that displayed dissident behavior such as Zimbabwe had been isolated. To make the isolation more punishing, the EU and its individual member states have also been roped in to deal with Zimbabwe politically and economically through limiting development assistance and propagating a negative picture about Zimbabwe. This was compounded by the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe by the EU as an organisation and by individual EU member states.

Be that as it may, with the UK out of EU, chances are high that the EU might change her stance towards Zimbabwe. Even though the UK might influence EU to treat Zimbabwe as a rogue state through the back door, there are high prospects that some EU members might hesitantly go by the UK's wishes. A case in point is Belgium's interests in trade with Zimbabwe. In the past, Belgium had been insisting against the UK on having diamonds from Zimbabwe passed through Antwerp, a demand that the latter agreed to in 2013 (Blair, 2013). Meanwhile, Britain has been campaigning for the renewal of a travel ban and asset freeze against Robert Mugabe (Ibid). If this example is anything to go by, the absence of the UK from the EU could witness the normalisation of EU-Zimbabwe relations which could resolve Zimbabwe's sustainable development dilemma. This might also be cemented by the moves by Portugal and France to violate the EU sanctions on Zimbabwe by inviting Zimbabwe to participate in various international fora including the France-Africa Summit since 2002, and Portugal's invitation of Zimbabwe to the 2007 EU-ACP meeting.

However, United States of America (USA) through its hegemonic influence might influence the EU to act against Zimbabwe even in the absence of the UK from the bloc. Although the USA is not an EU state, it has a special relationship

with UK and has high stakes in the operation of the EU. Consequently, the USA can influence prevention of the normalisation of EU-Zimbabwe relations. To substantiate this argument, it is imperative to examine EU-USA relations. To begin with, on 17 October 2016 the EU and USA concluded a research cooperation agreement to reinforce their ties (European Commission News, 17 October 2016). Furthermore, Ambrose Evans-Pritchard explains how EU operates as an America project to enhance the USA regional interests alongside the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) (Evans-Pritchard, 2016). According to Evans-Pritchard,

It was Washington that drove European integration in the late 1940s and funded it covertly under Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon administrations (Ibid).

Since there is no smoke without fire, it could be true that the EU is a tool for Anglo-Saxon power and what Evans-Pritchard calls “capitalism esauvage” (Evans-Pritchard, 2016). It should also be remembered that European integration was largely influenced by the Schuman Declaration² that sought Franco-German reconciliation. Hence, the USA could still influence EU decisions in the direction that favors the UK. Given such a scenario, Zimbabwe could be left in a quagmire is so far as sustainable development through development assistance is concerned. However, if indeed the EU is a tool for Anglo-Saxon power it does not follow that the UK decided to leave the same organisation that serves her power and capitalistic interests with the USA; unless if it no longer satisfies their interests as in the initial interval. Nevertheless, a considerable number of political elites including David Cameron had intended to remain in the EU. Be that as it may, the possibility of the USA manipulating the EU to maintain its stance in relation the intercourse between Zimbabwe and the bloc cannot be dismissed unless there are changes to the cooperation agreement between the USA and the EU.

It is apparent that normalising relations with Zimbabwe has always been on the agenda of the EU. In response to the conclusion of the Global Political Agreement that led to the formation of the Government of National Unity in Zimbabwe in 2009 and the adoption of the new constitution in 2013, the EU took measures to restore good relations with the country (European Union External Action Service, ND). As a result, the bloc did not renew the aid and trade embargoes at their expiry at the end of October 2014. More so, on 31 October 2014, the bloc announced lifting trade sanctions on Zimbabwe

²The Schuman Declaration is understood as the statement made by the then French foreign minister Robert Schuman on the 9th of May 1950. The declaration proposed economic integration with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community. The objective was to bind the common interests of European states which would culminate in gradual political integration as a way of pacifications of relations between member states. In the statement Schuman declared that; “Europe will not be made at all once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity. The coming together of the nations of Europe requires the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany” (Declaration of 9 May).

(Murwira, 2014). The bloc also lifted its twelve years suspension of direct aid to Zimbabwe with a view to normalise relations with the country and promote the development of the Southern African country (New Zimbabwe, 30 October 2014). Following the lifting of the suspension of direct financial aid in 2014, the EU honored its promises to resume development and finance cooperation with the Southern African state. Hence, in February 2014 Zimbabwe received USD270 million in development assistance from the bloc (The Source, 16 February 2015). Judging by this, there are positive prospects for reconciliation between Zimbabwe and the bloc. However, the EU indicated that it is willing to normalise relations with Zimbabwe if the latter respects human rights, promotes the rule of law and democratic governance which appears unlikely in domestic politics in Zimbabwe.

Since indications are that the EU has shown commitment to normalising relations with Zimbabwe, the million dollar question would be what could be the case without the UK in the picture? To adequately answer this question, it is essential to mention, from a Zimbabwean perspective, the latter's influence on EU-Zimbabwe ties. From a Zimbabwean perspective, the UK has been the major proponent of sanctions against Zimbabwe (The Herald, 24 June 2016) and the demonisation of the country. If this conception is anything to go by, there are prospects for the normalisation of ties between the bloc and Zimbabwe if the UK leaves the bloc. Once the relations normalise, Zimbabwe will likely qualify for development assistance from the EU.

However, it would be an analytical error to argue that the absence of the UK from the EU will change how the bloc relates with Zimbabwe. Such a simplified conception insinuates that the bloc does not have a clearly defined framework and guidelines regarding its multilateral foreign policy to the extent that the absence of a single state would alter its behavior as an international actor. It also implies that EU interests are dependent on the interests of individual member states. Whilst the bloc reflects the common interests and aspirations of member states, the regional organisation enjoys a considerable degree of autonomy since it has its own supranational organs and law. Bearing that in mind, it appears inapposite and farfetched to precisely and accurately conclude that the absence of Britain from the EU will alter EU-Zimbabwe relations. Nevertheless, ruling out the possibility of changes in EU policy towards Zimbabwe due to Brexit can also be dismissed as a misnomer.

At this juncture, it suffices to ascertain the expectations of both the EU and Zimbabwe prior to normalising their relations. This goes a long way in ascertaining the magnitude of the contributions of the UK in restoring normal ties between Zimbabwe and the bloc. Above all, having that background is essential in predicting the likely outcome of Brexit on EU-Zimbabwe political economic relations and subsequent influence on sustainable development in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe

has always illustrated willingness to engage the EU to normalise relations. In August 2016, the Zimbabwean Finance Minister, Patrick Chinamasa, visited the EU headquarters in Brussels in what can be viewed as efforts to normalise economic relations with the bloc. While this can be interpreted as an effort to mend economic relations with the bloc, the real motivation behind Chinamasa's visit was to beg for cash amid the cash crisis that hit the Southern African country since March 2016. The visit did not materialise because of the bad human rights and governance record the country has.

The bloc has the record of condemning political violence, human rights abuses, bad governance and corruption among others. At the expiry of development assistance suspension in October 2014, the bloc reiterated its objective to restore cordial relations with Zimbabwe in the achievement of the latter's aspirations including "democracy, peace and stability, prosperity and sustainable development" (European External Action Service, ND).

In conjunction with the above, most recently the EU Parliament passed a resolution to deter the bloc from lifting sanctions on the Zimbabwean government over poor human rights record in the country. The EU parliamentarians agreed that;

Lifting of the bulk of restrictive measures was premature and that the Council and Commission should consider re-imposing certain measures, while making clear that these will be removed and that a package of assistance will be made available once Zimbabwe is clearly on the path towards democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and specifying, in particular, that assistance will be provided to support a free and fair electoral process and policy reform (Mhlanga, 2016).

Judging from the position of the EU parliament, it is crystal clear that the bloc would normalise relations with Zimbabwe once the latter shows commitment to democracy, respect for human rights and adherence to the rule of law. To reinforce this view, it suffices reiterate the reasons for the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe by the EU. The EU imposed economic restrictive measures on Zimbabwe due to human rights abuses and lack of the rule of law that characterised the land reform in the country at the turn of the new millennium. Therefore, the reasons for maintaining sanctions on Zimbabwe and those for the imposition of the sanctions resonate. Hence, EU relations with Zimbabwe are conditioned by the latter's commitment to good governance, respect for human rights and rule of law.

Having said the above, it can be argued that the UK's withdrawal from the EU is no reason to celebrate in so far as EU relations with Zimbabwe are concerned. Since the bloc relies on the Council, Parliament, Commission and Economic and Social Committee for policy direction and advice, nothing will change on EU-Zimbabwe relations if Britain successfully leaves the EU. The mentioned organs of the bloc will remain with their mandates and influence unaltered even if the UK

leaves the bloc.

Perhaps, unraveling Zimbabwe's general political and economic relations with individual EU states would go a long way in examining the possible outcome of EU-Zimbabwe relations without the UK in the bloc. To begin with, Belgium seemed to have always had a soft spot for the Southern African nation. In 2014, the outgoing Belgian ambassador to Zimbabwe Mr Maricou Johan assured the Zimbabwean government that his country would utilise the EU Council meeting scheduled for November 2014 to advocate the removal of economic sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe. While this may be dismissed as mere political rhetoric, Belgium defied the EU odds when she successfully advocated the removal of Zimbabwean diamonds from the EU blacklist in 2014 (The Zimbabwean, 16 February 2013). This was against the backdrop of UK resistance (Ibid).

Judging by this, it can be argued that Belgium has always aspired to have close ties with Zimbabwe and to have cordial EU-Zimbabwe relations. However, it can be argued that Belgium was influenced more by her desire to have access to Zimbabwe diamonds without having to violate EU laws. Belgium made it clear that blacklisting Zimbabwe diamonds by the EU had been making the Zimbabwean government sell the precious stones on the black market which in the end had been "hurting trade" (The Zimbabwean, 16 February 2013). Be that as it may, it is crystal clear that Belgium has always valued the importance of normalising EU-Zimbabwe relations.

Since Belgium successfully convinced the EU to remove Zimbabwe diamonds from the bloc blacklist against the wishes of the UK, the same EU member can influence the full restoration of EU-Zimbabwe relations when the UK leaves the bloc in 2019. Even though Belgium seemed much more interested in pursuing her selfish economic interests relative to Zimbabwe, she can push her economic interests as EU interests the same way the UK has been making her problems with Zimbabwe EU concerns. In any case, state behavior be it cooperation, conflict or competition is driven national interests.

France has also illuminated on her desire to improve her bilateral relations with Zimbabwe. It has from the time since the imposition of sanctions been maintaining better relations with Zimbabwe which has seen her inviting Zimbabwe to the France-Africa Summits. In January 2015, France ambassador to Zimbabwe Mr Laurent Delahouse expressed concern over abnormal Franco-Zimbabwe as well as EU-Zimbabwe relations. In his words, the ambassador said, "We want to be part of normalisation of relations. When we have sanctions, it is an abnormal relationship" (The Zimbabwean, 16 February 2013). These statements are indicative of France's aspirations for the normalisation of Franco-Zimbabwe relations. However, this could be mere political rhetoric. Be that as it may, if France as an individual state favors the normalisation of her ties with Zimbabwe, she could push normalisation of EU relations with Zimbabwe when the UK leaves the EU.

The other twenty five members of the EU have maintained low profiles with regard to their relations with Zimbabwe. Unlike France, UK and Belgium, the other EU member states have preferred to act only within the auspices of the bloc when it comes to relations with Zimbabwe. They have neither publicly renounced nor praised the Southern African country. Since silence is argument carried out by other means (Che Guevara, nd), the preferred strategies of these nineteen states should not be ignored as worthless. Whether or not they prefer isolating Zimbabwe, it can be argued that in as far as EU-Zimbabwe relations are concerned these states have been diplomatic enough to rely on the bloc for the institution's foreign policy. Hence, with the UK out of the bloc only France, at a multilateral level, will be vocal against Zimbabwe.

Examining the objectives, conduct, formulation and implementation of EU foreign policy will perhaps provide useful insight in comprehending the likely implications of Britain's exit from the EU on the bloc's relations with Zimbabwe. According to the EU Global Strategy of 29 June 2016, "the EU global strategy is a result of open and transparent process" (EU Global Strategy) which results from "extensive consultations...with EU Member states, the European institutions including the European Commission, the European Parliament and European civil society at large including think tanks" (Ibid). Furthermore, the goals of the EU foreign policy include engaging states, regional and international institutions globally to address issues of conflict, poverty and the respect for human rights (EU Global Strategy). Moreover, the Council of Ministers that meets once a month has the powers to deliberate on political consensus and direction and each minister has the right to veto a proposed measure (Mix, 2013: 6).

From the above, it is apparent that the bloc's foreign policy is not influenced by a single state or a group of states within the regional organisation. Since a single state like the UK cannot singlehandedly influence the global and security strategy of the bloc, it would be analytically flawed to conclude that the country had been responsible for the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe. The UK might be the major proponent of the restrictive measures and the subsequent isolation of Zimbabwe, but claiming that she made her bilateral problems with Zimbabwe a multilateral issue does not follow. In any case, if the UK was at the forefront of political onslaught against Zimbabwe she did so promoting the foreign policy objectives of the bloc.

By criticising and sanctioning Zimbabwe for failure to promote fundamental human rights, the UK has been propagating the EU foreign policy. The promotion of human rights on a global scale is one of the defining pillars of EU global strategy, hence no red flag should be raised when the UK criticises Zimbabwe or if she urges the EU to maintain the sanction on the Southern African country.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn from this research is that EU relations with Zimbabwe are going to be determined by two things. First that, the EU as an intergovernmental institution operates on the basis of its supranational law, the EU law which clearly defined foreign policy goals and transparent and accountable organs. The absence of the UK from the bloc might less likely change the international relations policy of the EU towards Zimbabwe. This implies that the skeptic observers and scholars have had pertaining to the influence the UK has on EU-Zimbabwe relations are to some extent misplaced.

Secondly, the above does not out rightly eliminate the possibility of manipulation of rules and enforcement mechanisms by the hegemonic powers within the EU. It can be argued that there is no organisation without influential hegemonic centre or centres of power whose policy proposals and contributions rarely attract veto by other members. In the EU context Germany is the dominant state, but she cannot be on the lead of a bandwagon of EU member states that criticise Zimbabwe. This is so because Germany has bilateral trade agreements with Zimbabwe which arguably makes the former prefer more relaxed approach when it comes to publicly criticising the latter. Further, other countries like France, Portugal and Belgium have recently had a change of stance in relation with Zimbabwe despite the imposition of sanctions on Zimbabwe by the EU. This will lead to Zimbabwe benefiting from economic, political and diplomatic interaction some countries in the EU.

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