

Abstract for Call for application to the grant of n. 1 scholarship in the framework of the EU funded project EU-IOSAC (EACEA) - Project: 101127624 – EACEA (EC)

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Since its inception, the European Union (EU) has played an increasingly influential role in shaping development cooperation with African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) countries. Initially framed by post-colonial logics, this relationship has evolved through different institutional and legal frameworks—most notably the Lomé Conventions (1975–2000) and the Cotonou Agreement (2000–2021). This dissertation examines the transformation of these relations from preferential, politically asymmetrical arrangements to more complex and multilateral frameworks, with a specific focus on the most emblematic and long-standing relationships is that between the EU and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

The study would begin with a historical analysis of the EU's external action toward African countries, exploring the foundational logic behind the Association Agreements and the political motivations of key member states.

One of the most pressing and politically sensitive dimensions of EU-DRC relations today concerns conflict minerals like coltan, tin, tungsten, and gold, whose extraction and trade have long been linked to armed violence, corruption, and human rights abuses. While the DRC remains one of the EU's main suppliers of critical raw materials for high-tech industries, these resources also finance armed groups and perpetuate instability, especially in the eastern provinces. The EU has attempted to regulate the import and supply chain of conflict minerals.

By tracing the evolution of EU-DRC relations—from the political economy of Lomé to the legalistic framework of Cotonou and the regulatory logic of conflict minerals legislation—this dissertation contributes to understanding how post-colonial cooperation has adapted to global norms of governance, trade, and sustainability. It also interrogates the broader implications of this evolution: can the EU be seen as a normative power in Africa, or does it still operate under neocolonial dynamics masked by technocratic language?

Research Methodology:

I would like to adopt a qualitative and interdisciplinary research approach, combining elements from international political economy, post-colonial studies, and development policy analysis. The primary method will be document-based research. This includes the EU treaties and official documents, Reports and communications from EU institutions (e.g., European Commission, European Parliament) and other publications.

Case Study Analysis:

The DRC will serve as a single case study, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the effects of EU policies over time.

The final dissertation will aim to provide a comprehensive and critical understanding of how the EU has navigated the tension between its normative aspirations and the material realities of resource extraction in fragile states, using the DRC as a lens through which to view broader dynamics in EU-ACP relations.