

## *The United Kingdom over the Lomé Years: A Constructive Partner in Europe?*

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Not long after joining the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, Britain came to be regarded by other member states as ‘an awkward partner’ and ‘a semi-detached member of the Community’.<sup>1</sup> The British felt particularly aggrieved that their voices were not being heard on issues such as the British budget rebate and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). They complained in more measured tones about their lack of influence over the EEC’s ‘haphazard’ and ‘diffuse’ aid programmes.<sup>2</sup> Yet how justified were the British in harbouring such grievances in relation to European development assistance? Did Britain simply have to fall into line with the demands of its European aid partners or did it enjoy discreet but discernible influence over EEC assistance? This question of reciprocal influence has not been properly addressed in the literature. Only a handful of commentators touch upon Britain’s role in shaping European aid and most suggest that the United Kingdom had little or no influence. Cosgrove Twitchett argues that, during the negotiations on Lomé I (Europe’s first aid and trade agreement with former African, Caribbean and Pacific colonies), the United Kingdom was ‘temperamentally less interested in promoting an accommodation between her former colonies and the EEC than had been the case during the 1960s’, when Britain first applied to the EEC.<sup>3</sup> Hewitt also plays down British influence, suggesting that, despite a doubling of British aid through the EEC, Britain’s ‘levels of political clout were stagnating’ between 1979 and 1990.<sup>4</sup> A notable exception comes in the form of a thinkpiece by the then British Overseas Development Minister Lynda Chalker. Unsurprisingly perhaps, this offers a more positive assessment of the United Kingdom’s ability to shape European development policy.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen GEORGE, *An Awkward Partner: Britain in the European Community*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 1 and p. 244. For George, ‘awkward’ simply means ‘difficult to deal with’ whereas for Buller it refers to a deliberate ‘obstructive’ approach by UK negotiators; see Jim BULLER, ‘Britain as an Awkward Partner’, *Politics*, vol. 15, 1995, pp. 33-42.

<sup>2</sup> Comments by UK Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, cited in *The Independent*, 16 February 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Carol COSGROVE TWITCHETT, *Europe and Africa*, Farnborough: Saxon House, 1987, p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> Adrian HEWITT, ‘Britain and the European Development Fund’, in Anuradha BOSE & Peter BURNELL (eds.), *Britain’s Overseas Aid since 1979*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991, p. 86.

It also implicitly rules out the possibility that British aid policy was ever influenced by the European Commission.<sup>5</sup>

The issue of reciprocal influences is clearly pivotal, as it can provide an original perspective on why the United Kingdom has retained a reputation for awkwardness on some European issues and not others. It is central to this article which begins by showing how the United Kingdom was broadly receptive to European Commission influence on aid matters over the Lomé decades. Next, it evaluates British influence on European development assistance over three time periods: 1973-1979 (Lomé I and the negotiations preceding it), 1980-89 (Lomés II and III) and 1990-1999 (Lomé IV). Drawing on semi-structured interviews with key officials in the European Commission and the United Kingdom's former aid administration, the Overseas Development Administration (ODA), this study then highlights the factors which enabled and constrained British influence. Finally, it asks whether Britain's continued awkwardness in Europe might be traced back to its early experiences of European development assistance.

Before proceeding, it is worth noting the following caveats. First, the terms European Economic Community and European Union (EU) are used respectively to refer to the pre- and post-1992 periods. Second, the emphasis is on reciprocal influences involving the United Kingdom and European Commission rather than the United Kingdom and individual member states. Third, the focus is on European development assistance, as opposed to humanitarian aid or trade preferences. Finally, it should be noted that influence is hard to prove in the context of European aid where decisions are usually made behind closed doors.

### ***Winning over the British?***

Notwithstanding the above, it is possible to identify several ways in which UK aid was influenced by the European Commission in these years. First of all, the Commission helped pave the way for Britain and some of its Commonwealth partners to enter into the Lomé agreement. It did so through the work of key policy-makers and through policy memorandums. Two of the Commission's most influential figures were, as from 1973, the Development Commissioner, Claude Cheysson, and Deputy Director-General of the Development Directorate (DG VIII), Maurice Foley. Cheysson was a progressive and imaginative negotiator, who was instrumental in breaking the deadlock between francophone states, which sought to maintain reciprocal trade preferences, and the anglophone bloc, which wanted non-reciprocity.<sup>6</sup> For his role in facilitating Commonwealth accession to Lomé, this French politician was described by Hewitt and Whiteman

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<sup>5</sup> Lynda CHALKER, 'The UK's View of the Future of European Development Cooperation', in Marjorie LISTER (ed.), *European Union Development Policy*, Houndmills: Palgrave, 1998, pp. 1-4.

<sup>6</sup> Lotte DRIEGHE & Jan ORBIE, 'Revolution in Times of Eurosclerosis', *L'Europe en formation*, n° 353-354, 2009, p. 179.

as French President Pompidou's 'gift to the British'.<sup>7</sup> As for Foley, this former British Foreign Office Minister and trade unionist used his personal links with anglophone African leaders to allay both their suspicions of a francophone-led European Commission and their concerns over the loss of Commonwealth preferences. He also played a decisive role in bringing Caribbean and Pacific nations into Lomé and in ensuring they did not become 'the orphans of Britain's rush into Europe'.<sup>8</sup>

Turning to policy memorandums, the Commission used these documents to frame the debate over the content of Lomé I and the terms of Britain's accession to it. In its 1971 memorandum to the Council of Ministers,<sup>9</sup> the Commission stressed that the Yaoundé Convention no longer corresponded to the developmental ambitions of the EEC and that there was a need to extend the policy of association and trade cooperation to other developing countries. In so doing, the Commission prepared the ground for the October 1972 summit in Paris, which brought together member and accession states and which resolved much of the disagreement between those states, led by France, which favoured a regional approach, and those, such as Germany and Holland, which sought a global development policy.<sup>10</sup> In its 1972 memorandum, the Commission stressed that, while the advantages of association should be preserved,<sup>11</sup> European assistance should be extended beyond former colonies. Then, in 1973, the Commission produced a memorandum which recommended opening up the advantages of Yaoundé and undertaking negotiations with the 20 Commonwealth countries (subsequently extended to 22) listed on the protocol attached to the United Kingdom's Accession Treaty.<sup>12</sup>

In facilitating the United Kingdom's accession to Lomé, the Commission also helped to ensure that London accepted the implications of joining the European club. In particular, it secured the United Kingdom's acquiescence in the fact that the Commission was, *de facto* if not *de jure*, 'in the lead on initiatives'.<sup>13</sup> Over time, the Commission even persuaded the United Kingdom and other member states to go along with the need for 'a common policy framework which would be politically

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<sup>7</sup> Adrian HEWITT & Kaye WHITEMAN, 'The Commission and Development Policy' in Karin ARTS & Anna DICKSON (eds.), *EU Development Cooperation*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004, p. 140.

<sup>8</sup> *The Guardian*, 23 February 2002.

<sup>9</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 'Mémorandum de la Commission sur une politique communautaire de coopération au développement', *Bull. EC*, suppl. 4/71, Brussels, 1971.

<sup>10</sup> Dieter FRISCH, *La politique de développement de l'Union européenne*, Maastricht: ECPDM, 1998, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Mémorandum sur une politique communautaire de développement*, Brussels: DG Relations Extérieures, 1972.

<sup>12</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 'Memorandum of the Commission to the Council on the Future Relations between the Community, the Present AASM States', *Bull. EC*, 1/73, Brussels, 1973.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Dieter FRISCH, Director General of the European Commission's Directorate General VIII (1982-93), Brussels, 2011.

binding not only on the Commission but also on member countries'.<sup>14</sup> Importantly too, the Commission was able to ensure that Britain, right up to the mid-1990s, increased its contributions to successive European Development Funds (EDF) and hence to ACP countries under successive Lomé Conventions (see Table 1). The Commission also engineered, over many years major increases, in the EEC's aid budget as a whole and saw total British aid to the EEC increase from 6 per cent in 1978 to 12 per cent in 1979 and nearly 20 per cent in 1990.<sup>15</sup>

The Commission could equally claim to have had an impact on British development policy. Spurred on by Maurice Foley and with support from the EEC-ACP Parliamentary Association, the Commission pushed for the creation of a Southern African Development Community (SADC) and for a radicalisation of Europe's policy towards southern Africa.<sup>16</sup> In so doing, it kept up pressure, during the 1970s and 1980s, on British governments to take a robust stance towards the white minority regime in South Africa.<sup>17</sup> It also played a key role in the early 1990s in coordinating the positions of the United Kingdom and other member states on political conditionality, a controversial policy of linking aid to political reform in developing countries. The fact that Europe's humanitarian arm, ECHO, ruled out any suspension of emergency assistance, also facilitated the halting of development aid, as the United Kingdom and other bilateral donors knew that humanitarian assistance would continue to flow to those most in need.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, the Commission enjoyed influence through information exchanges. It had knowledge, expertise and contacts to offer, notably in parts of the world such as francophone Africa where Britain was under-represented and had little local knowledge. According to a former Acting Director of DGVIII, Peter Pooley, the British 'did accept they might have something to learn from the Commission outside their own sphere of influence'.<sup>19</sup> Michael Lake, former Head of the EEC Delegation in South Africa, echoed this view, noting how 'in francophone African countries, the UK Ambassador was the Commission's best friend', as he or she would be looking for ways of tapping into 'the EC's [European Community's] wide network of ministerial and other contacts'.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Idem*. This framework came into being with the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, which imposed a legal obligation on member states to harmonise aid policies, and the 2007 Lisbon Treaty, which called for greater complementarity at the European level.

<sup>15</sup> HEWITT, *op. cit.*, p. 86. This overall rise was, however, not a matter of choice as British contributions to the EEC budget for non-ACP countries were determined by the size of Britain's Gross National Product and voted on by the European Parliament.

<sup>16</sup> HEWITT & WHITEMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>17</sup> ARTS & DICKSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-43.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with M. LAKE, Brussels, 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with P. POOLEY, Aylesbury, 2011.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with M. LAKE, Brussels, 2011.

**Table 1: European Development Fund (EDF): Signatories and Key Contributors (1959-2000)**

	Signatories		France	FRG* / Germany	UK	EEC Total
	EEC	ACP				
EDF 1 1959-64 (Rome Treaty Association)	6	18	34.4%	34.4%	-	100 % (581 m ECU)
EDF 2 1964-70 (Yaoundé I)	6	18	33.8%	33.8%	-	100% (730 m ECU)
EDF 3 1970-75 (Yaoundé II)	6	19	33.2%	33.2%	-	100% (900 m ECU)
EDF 4 1975-80 (Lomé I)	9	46	26.0 %	26.0%	18.7%	100 % (3.1 bn ECU)
EDF 5 1980-85 (Lomé II)	10	57	25.6%	28.3 %	18.0%	100% (4.7 bn ECU)
EDF 6 1985-90 (Lomé III)	12	66	23.6%	26.1%	16.6%	100 % (7.4 bn ECU)
EDF 7 1990-95 (Lomé IV)	12	69	24.3%	25.9%	16.4%	100% (10.8 bn ECU)
EDF 8 1995-2000 (Lomé IV)	15	70	24.3%	23.4%	12.7%	100 (13.0 bn ECU)

Sources: C. COSGROVE TWITCHETT, *op. cit.*, p. 118, p. 143, p. 169; DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE, European Community, Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1998, p. 86; OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE (ODI), Lomé II, Briefing paper no. 1, February 1980, p. 6; Charlotte BRETHERTON & John VOGLER, *The European Union as a Global Actor*, London: Routledge, 2006, p. 116. Contributions are quoted in millions or billions of European Currency Units (ECU), the accounting units used for the Community's internal budget.

\* Federal Republic of Germany

To sum up, the Commission had influence where it had something to offer (such as information, networks), where Britain was in a weaker position (as at the moment of accession) or where the United Kingdom preferred not to go it alone (as with aid sanctions). In line with institutionalist and path-dependency thinking, the Commission's influence increased over time as it grew in self-confidence, became more resilient as a policy entrepreneur and refused to act as a repository for the aid policies of any one dominant member state.

Against this, some commentators question the degree of Commission influence. Lottie and Orbie argue that, in the case of Lomé I, France and the United Kingdom 'largely shaped the content and nature of the agreement through intergovernmental bargaining', while the Commission failed to pursue 'an agenda of its own' and only played 'a more important role in the subsequent Lomé

Conventions and in the recent Cotonou Agreement'.<sup>21</sup> In a similar inter-governmentalist vein, Crawford shows how, at the time of the 1995 Mid-Term Review (MTR) of Lomé, the United Kingdom drew a line in the sand regarding its aid contribution. Karin and Dickson likewise suggest that Britain, together with other member states, was instrumental in keeping the EDF outside of the rapidly expanding European Community budget, thereby ensuring that Lomé funding was the subject of inter-governmental bargaining every five years.<sup>22</sup>

Commission officials interviewed for this study were also wary of claiming influence. As Dieter Frisch admitted, 'it was certainly more the member countries that tried to influence what the Community did than the other way round'.<sup>23</sup> Peter Pooley was even more cautious, noting that where the British had 'unparalleled networks', in places like 'East Africa and in the Caribbean, they thought that they knew how to do things and nobody else did, not only the Commission but anyone else'.<sup>24</sup> It was certainly the case, moreover, that British politicians in parliamentary debates gave little indication that they were listening to the Commission. They criticised EEC aid for being slow, ineffective, poorly controlled and evaluated. They also viewed it as overly bureaucratic, formulaic and over-concentrated on contractual questions rather than substance. For British policy-makers, the Lomé Convention did not, as promised in its preamble, lay down 'a model of relations between developed and developing states'. Instead, the United Kingdom looked for ideas on overseas development to the US-led World Bank and the OECD.<sup>25</sup>

### *Britain's influence on the Commission*

#### *First Phase: 1973-79*

The first period (1973-79) corresponds to the negotiating phase through to the end of the first Lomé Convention, signed by nine European member states and 46 ACP countries. Claude Cheysson was Development Commissioner (1973–1981) and a Labour government (Harold Wilson 1974-76, James Callaghan, 1976-79) was in power. The crucial way in which the United Kingdom exerted influence was in providing the opportunity for the expansion of the Yaoundé Convention into a much broader framework. Prior to Lomé I, Europe was divided over the future of Yaoundé. France, with francophone African backing, was pushing for the continuation of a regional policy of association, whereas 'the view of a number of key member states, notably Germany and Holland was that Yaoundé could not be continued in its existing form and should be replaced' by a global approach.<sup>26</sup> Though wary of a diffuse approach that would spread Europe's then limited aid budget too thinly, the Commission did want a convention that was commensurate with Europe's growing size and ambitions. It was seeking a new approach, and the United Kingdom's entry opened the door to a more dynamic partnership. According

<sup>21</sup> DRIEGHE & ORBIE, *op. cit.*, pp. 173, 179.

<sup>22</sup> ARTS & DICKSON, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with D. FRISCH.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with P. POOLEY.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Tom GLASER, ex-Head of EU Representation in Budapest, Cardiff, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with D. FRISCH.

to Dieter Frisch, the trebling of the size of the financial envelope between Yaoundé II and Lomé I (see Table 1) would

*not have been possible without Britain's entry. With all the push we could have produced, with the support of the Germans, the Dutch [...] it would not have sufficed. So the fact that Britain joined [...] certainly helped us enormously to open up to Lomé. I don't think that Lomé would have been what it became without British entry.*<sup>27</sup>

It was also thanks to the United Kingdom's accession to the EEC that so many Commonwealth countries were able to sign up to Lomé. In so doing, they changed permanently the dynamics of ACP-EEC negotiations. Anglophone African countries brought a 'more forthright [...] political outlook', with Nigeria in particular contributing 'political and technical skill as well as impetus for united action'.<sup>28</sup> The six Caribbean Commonwealth countries provided a 'dynamic [...] team of experienced negotiators [whose] [...] tactics proved to be an eye-opener, especially for the more deferential francophone Africans'.<sup>29</sup> The new members built upon the Yaoundé Associates' familiarity with EEC bureaucracy and helped forge united positions, particularly after the ACP formally constituted itself via the Georgetown Agreement of June 1975.

Crucially too, the United Kingdom's application to the EEC paved the way for substantive changes to the original Yaoundé Convention. One such shift was the move away from reciprocal to non-reciprocal preferences, as Commonwealth countries, with the backing of Britain, Ireland, the Netherlands and eventually Germany, rejected the francophone bloc's demand that reciprocal preferences be maintained. Another innovation was the introduction by the Commission of STABEX, a European system for stabilising export earnings from agricultural commodities, which was introduced largely in response to the concerns of Commonwealth sugar producers. At the operational level too, the United Kingdom enjoyed some influence over European development assistance. This was particularly true in the field in former colonies where British officials were 'present in greater numbers' and where the United Kingdom was often 'the lead country', as in Kenya.<sup>30</sup>

Overall, however, it would be wrong to overstate Britain's role in shaping Lomé I. As Hewitt suggests, the improvement in the terms of Lomé over Yaoundé 'was at least as much a result of hard bargaining by ACP countries—notably Jamaica, Guyana and Nigeria, supported by the power which they derived from temporary world commodity shortages (petroleum and sugar particularly)—as of British patronage and far sightedness'.<sup>31</sup> Cosgrove Twitchett notes, moreover, that 'the Lomé negotiations took place while the United Kingdom was in the throes of

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<sup>27</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>28</sup> Isebill GRUHN, 'The Lomé Convention: Inching Towards Interdependence', *International Organization*, vol. 30, n° 2, 1976, p. 254.

<sup>29</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>30</sup> Interview with P. POOLEY.

<sup>31</sup> HEWITT, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

renegotiation and the ensuing referendum debate on whether she should herself remain a member of the EC'. It was against this backdrop and in a context of domestic economic woes that the United Kingdom argued only half-heartedly for the inclusion in Lomé of the Asian Commonwealth, adopted a confused negotiating stance on sugar import prices and failed to match the French or German contribution to the Convention.<sup>32</sup> Britain could not even claim to have held sway over the thinking behind the new Convention. Its real architect was Cheysson, a skilled statesman and former French diplomat with a background on African issues, who moved Europe away from its earlier 'benevolent paternalism' and encouraged greater ownership, telling the ACP 'It's your money. [...] We are here to provide technical advice if you need it'.<sup>33</sup> It follows that upon signing up to Lomé, 'Britain found a set of policies, established positions and sitting tenants in positions of power (at both the delivering and receiving ends of the aid process) with which it had little sympathy'.<sup>34</sup>

*Second Phase: 1980-89*

This second period focuses on Lomé II (1980-85) and Lomé III (1985-90). It also corresponds roughly to the time in office of Development Commissioners Edgar Pisani (1981-85) and Lorenzo Natali (1985-91) as well as the premiership of the British Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979-90).

Despite their anti-Brussels rhetoric, successive Thatcher governments played a broadly positive role towards the Lomé Convention. As Dieter Frisch told the author, 'the choice the British made [...] was that if they had to accept that Brussels now managed more and more money, the best thing was to influence that as much as possible in a positive sense. They were not slowing it down or blocking it or creating problems'.<sup>35</sup> In line with this logic, the United Kingdom went along with a further significant rise in the EDF financial envelope: from 3.1 billion ECU for Lomé I to 7.4 billion ECU for Lomé III (see Table 1). The British remained engaged and began planting ideas that would later come to fruition. To illustrate, the United Kingdom's Labour Foreign Secretary, David Owen, suggested during the Lomé II negotiations that the benefits of this Convention be conditional upon respect for human rights in recipient countries.<sup>36</sup> Another issue on which the United Kingdom began voicing concern was the need to improve the effectiveness of European aid by making it less project-focused and more tied to World Bank structural adjustment reforms. Britain also pushed for tighter controls to ensure that STABEX should be used for its intended purpose, namely compensating peasant farmers for commodity price drops. A United Kingdom White Paper even concluded that the EEC should disband

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<sup>32</sup> In the interest of British consumers, Britain called for lower sugar prices while proclaiming its commitment to the Commonwealth's development.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in FRISCH, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> HEWITT, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with D. FRISCH.

<sup>36</sup> David WALL, 'Britain, the EEC and the Third World', in Roy JENKINS (ed.), *Britain and the EEC*, Houndmills: Macmillan, 1983, p. 190.



STABEX and contribute instead to the global compensatory scheme run by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).<sup>37</sup>

The above ideas did not, however, bear fruit in the early 1980s. While the United Kingdom enjoyed support from the Dutch and, as from 1983, the European Parliament, for human rights conditionality, this idea was sidelined in Lomé II due to determined protests by the ACP and opposition from some EEC member states which wanted the Convention to remain ‘politically neutral’.<sup>38</sup> Britain’s demands for greater aid effectiveness also made little headway. Indeed, Lomé II continued to focus almost entirely on projects, eschewed World-Bank style economic programmes, extended STABEX to more than ten new products and actually set up a parallel scheme for mineral price support, SYSMIN.<sup>39</sup>

It was not until Lomé III that a number of these British-backed ideas found their way into the EEC’s approach to aid. Lomé III picked up on British demands on human rights and wrote this concept into the texts that formed ‘part of the Lomé contract’ and that might ‘therefore be invoked in the most flagrant cases in which elementary human rights are abused’.<sup>40</sup> Lomé III also reflected Britain’s growing concern over aid effectiveness. Thus, ‘policy dialogue’ was introduced as a way of moving away from a project-oriented to a programme-based approach involving mutual commitments by the EEC and the ACP in sectors where ACP countries had already agreed a structural or sectoral adjustment loan with the World Bank.

The United Kingdom’s efforts to improve the efficiency of EEC aid were not of course confined to the EDF framework. Thus, Britain in the mid-1980s lobbied for reform of EEC emergency food aid and British Development Minister Chris Patten was quick to claim the credit for ‘pushing the Commission away from classic short-term emergency aid towards making emergency aid a developmental instrument’.<sup>41</sup>

It would, however, be mistaken to overstate the United Kingdom’s influence on Lomé III. The fact is that the shift towards policy dialogue was largely the brainchild of French Development Commissioner, Edgar Pisani, whose 1982 memorandum stressed the need to move away from Cheysson’s earlier logic and introduce a mature approach to EEC-ACP discussions.<sup>42</sup> The United Kingdom had little input here. Indeed, ‘the British, in the Council of Ministers, found it difficult to know why the Commission was attaching so much importance to it. It wasn’t part of Lomé which was cut and dried’.<sup>43</sup> In addition, Britain’s success in pushing for closer

<sup>37</sup> Christopher ERSWELL, *UK Aid Policy and Practice 1974-90*, Florida: Universal-Publishers, 2001, p. 66.

<sup>38</sup> D. FRISCH, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> Hassan SELIM, *Development Assistance Policies and the Performance of Aid Agencies*, Houndmills: Macmillan, 1983, p. 178; HEWITT, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>40</sup> Baroness YOUNG, House of Lords Debate, 1 July 1985, vol. 465, col. 1008.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with ex-official, Aid Policy Department, ODA, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, ‘Memorandum on the Community’s Development Policy’, 15 *Bull. EC* suppl. 5, 1982.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with M. LAKE.

linkages between EEC aid and World Bank neoliberal programmes was at best partial. Thus, while the Commission did eventually sign up to the adjustment process and set up a structural adjustment facility (SAF) in 1987, it also sought to remain the *compagnon de route* of the developing world and rejected the hard-line stance on economic reform pushed by the United Kingdom. Finally, even the British government's claims that it brought about changes to European food aid policies have to be qualified, given that the Commission had already begun work on these reforms before Chris Patten spoke out on this issue.<sup>44</sup>

*Third Phase: 1990-2000*

This phase covers Lomé IV, the first ten-year Convention. During the first tranche and the MTR for the second, Manuel Marin was European Development Commissioner (1989-95) and John Major was UK Prime Minister (1990-97). In the early 1990s, the United Kingdom remained constructive, approving an overall increase in the EDF budget of 12 million ECU (two million more than the British government had wanted)<sup>45</sup> and accepting a rise in STABEX funding (to ECU 1.5 billion), despite 'British distaste for a fund that stabilises export earnings without encouraging diversification'.<sup>46</sup> The United Kingdom also adopted a 'helpful' approach in the field, where they 'tried to get things to work efficiently', providing instant funding for feasibility studies and thereby 'giving the Commission time to get its paperwork in order'.<sup>47</sup> In Brussels too, Britain acted in 'a positive fashion' by seconding specialists on education and forestry, where the Commission lacked expertise.<sup>48</sup> The British, equally, offered advice to the Commission on aid evaluation and planning methods, thereby facilitating the introduction of an integrated approach to project cycle management (which uses the logical framework), a project information control system, an expansion of the Commission's Evaluation Department, and the launch of joint evaluations of EEC aid programmes to ACP and non-ACP countries.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, the United Kingdom continued pushing for tighter aid coordination in the field and led the way by sponsoring the Horizon 2000 pilot scheme during its 1992 Presidency of Europe.<sup>50</sup>

By adopting a positive approach, the United Kingdom was better able to push one of its longstanding concerns, human rights conditionality, which was approved by the European Council in a Resolution in May 1991. The British government also managed to move the EEC a step closer to accepting World Bank programmes. As Hewitt makes clear:

*It was only [...] with [...] the fourth Lomé Convention [...], that the EEC conceded that structural adjustment policy reform obligations were a reality. The Commission belatedly recognised that it could not*

<sup>44</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>45</sup> Ann CLYWD, House of Commons Debate, 26 February 1991, vol. 186, col. 937.

<sup>46</sup> *European Report*, 13 June 1990.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Ian BOAG, Former Head of four Commission delegations, Brussels, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with D. FRISCH.

<sup>49</sup> Baroness CHALKER, House of Lords Debate, 13 December 1993, vol. 550, col. 1169.

<sup>50</sup> Lynda CHALKER, 'The UK's View ...', *op. cit.*, p. 1.

*continue to operate a project aid system which allowed governments to bypass reform conditions which were being imposed by the EEC member states' own governments.*<sup>51</sup>

The United Kingdom encouraged the Commission down this road by seconding an economist to DG VIII to advise on structural adjustment. Britain also welcomed the Commission's decision to increase staff in the unit dealing with the SAF to 12 economists and to expand the value of this quick disbursing facility from 2.8 per cent of programmable aid in 1991 to over 25 per cent in 1994.<sup>52</sup>

Again, however, it would be misleading to exaggerate British influence. Thus, while the United Kingdom's provision of specialist expertise did give it a voice 'on the inside', any actual influence on the Commission was curtailed by the frequency of complaints from other member states about the irregularity of such secondments. Furthermore, the United Kingdom never fully persuaded the Commission of the merits of structural adjustment. Thus, while the British had called for a major shift towards SAF funding, they ended up accepting a compromise whereby a special fund was set aside for recipients pursuing structural adjustment programmes whilst other ACP states continued to benefit from pre-allocated programmable aid under National Indicative Plans. In other words, the Commission refused 'to go the way that the British wanted, which was to be in the forefront of conditionality'.<sup>53</sup>

The United Kingdom's negotiating position began hardening as early as the 1992 Edinburgh summit when the EEC pledged to increase by 60 per cent over the next seven years its spending on external action, particularly in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean.<sup>54</sup> Given the decline in the United Kingdom's own aid budget, the British became alarmed at the squeeze that EEC contributions were imposing on bilateral assistance. They complained that the EEC was 'being given resources [...] by the European Parliament' which outran 'the Commission's own capacity for effective administration'.<sup>55</sup> They demanded to know 'whether the Commission was spending the money efficiently or not'.<sup>56</sup> They felt this particularly strongly in the early 1990s since 'the exchange rate of the pound was going down and the contributions that had to be made [...] in terms of pounds sterling [...] [were] costing the ODA more'.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the ODA was 'not in a strong position domestically, as it was not a Department. Lynda Chalker was not a member of the Cabinet but a Foreign Office minister, and the developers [...] were not well funded and were looked down on by the diplomats'.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> HEWITT, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>52</sup> Antonique KONING, 'The European Commission' in Aidan COX, John HEALEY & Antonique KONING (eds.), *How European Aid Works*, London: ODI, pp. 131-36.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with M. LAKE.

<sup>54</sup> ODI, *EU Aid Post-Maastricht*, London: ODI, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Lynda CHALKER, 'Britain's Role in the Multilateral Aid Agencies', speech to the ODI, 16 May 1990.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with P. POOLEY.

<sup>57</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>58</sup> *Idem.*

Against this backdrop, the United Kingdom argued for a 30 per cent reduction in its EDF contribution. In fact, '[t]he British Government was the most intransigent during the deadlock and succeeded in reducing its contribution in real and nominal terms'.<sup>59</sup> The United Kingdom emphasised its preference for bilateral assistance and for trade over aid.<sup>60</sup> It secured some backing from Holland, Italy and Germany, itself under pressure from the cost of reunification.<sup>61</sup> The impact of this United Kingdom stand (which led to a fall in its contribution by 8 per cent) was to reinforce the sentiment within the Commission that there would be no future Lomé-style Convention.<sup>62</sup> The adoption of a two-tranche system for payments after the MTR signalled the shift away from equal partnership towards greater control by European member states. The Green Paper, initiated in 1996 under Development Commissioner João de Deus Pinheiro (1995-99), also paved the way for negotiations (1998-2000) on a new convention, the Cotonou Agreement, that was supposed to address Lomé's shortcomings.

All the same, it should not be thought that the United Kingdom's growing inflexibility in these years bought it greater influence over European aid. Needless to say, member states such as France, which held the presidency during crucial phase of the MTR, and Germany, as the economic powerhouse of the EEC/EU, played a crucial role. The Commission was also influential, particularly through the 'personality and thinking' of Commissioner Marin, who framed discussions by widely circulating in 1993 a draft negotiating brief that included proposals on the 'democracy clause' and aid suspension mechanisms, the introduction of performance-related tranching of aid, and the reservation of special allocations for financing Europe's priority programmes.<sup>63</sup>

### *Enabling factors*

So what were the factors that facilitated British influence over EEC aid? Contextual factors were clearly important, not least the opportune timing of the United Kingdom's accession to the EEC, just as the Yaoundé Convention was running out of steam. The end of the Cold War also opened up opportunities for fresh donor thinking on emerging themes such as the environment, where the United Kingdom was relatively advanced in its thinking. The end of apartheid and the resignation of Margaret Thatcher in 1990 also untied the hands of British policy-makers, hitherto forced to soft-pedal on sanctions against Pretoria, and allowed them to press more vociferously for a stronger linkage in Lomé IV between aid and respect for human rights.

Another enabling factor was the quality of Britain's foreign policy administration. Despite the Eurosceptic rhetoric of many British Ministers, FCO

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<sup>59</sup> Gordon CRAWFORD, 'Whither Lomé? The Mid-Term Review', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 34, n° 3, pp. 503-514.

<sup>60</sup> *La Lettre Afrique Expansion*, n° 392, 27 February 1995.

<sup>61</sup> *Agri Service International Newsletter*, 13 April 1995.

<sup>62</sup> Karin ARTS & Jessica BYRON, 'The mid-term review of the Lomé IV Convention', *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 18, n° 1, 1997, p. 83.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

officials in London and Brussels were always professional in Lomé negotiations, while the ODA was frequently interested in cooperation at the operational level.<sup>64</sup> The United Kingdom's foreign policy machinery contained gifted individuals, such as Charles Powell, a Counsellor to UKREP Brussels (1980-83), and Tim Lankester, ODA Permanent Secretary in London (1989-94). Britain's apparatus was more coherent than the hydra-headed French administration, whose influence declined partly as a result over the Lomé years.<sup>65</sup> Within the Commission too, there were figures who helped the UK cause, not least Maurice Foley and Kaye Whiteman, who were said by the latter to have been 'charged—unofficially—with selling British influence in a relationship with Africa that had been French-dominated'.<sup>66</sup> British Development Ministers such as Timothy Raison and Chris Patten also enjoyed 'a really positive partnership' with Dieter Frisch as DG VIII Director, while Lynda Chalker got on well both with Frisch and Acting DG VIII Director, Peter Pooley.<sup>67</sup> It was in fact thanks to these good relations that Frisch was twice invited to address the United Kingdom Foreign Policy Select Committee, an opportunity for an exchange of views that was not afforded by other member states.

Historical linkages also facilitated British influence, not least the fact that Britain had prior experience of, and an ongoing relationship with, a large proportion of the membership of the ACP. The United Kingdom, thanks to its 'decentralised management system', was 'better represented' in the field than most other member states.<sup>68</sup> The British were as such better placed to shape and coordinate donor activities. Other factors that enhanced UK influence were more coincidental. Thus, the British were swift to take advantage of the opportunity afforded by British presidencies of Europe to push agendas such as food aid regulation and donor coordination. British officials were also quick to build temporary alliances, lobbying with the Dutch on the need to link EEC aid to respect for human rights, and with the Germans on the size of the Lomé IV budget for 1995-2000. Britain benefited, moreover, from the fact that EEC development assistance was not dominated by the Franco-German tandem or any other cluster of member states.

### *Constraints on influence*

Given the above, it is perhaps surprising that the United Kingdom did not hold more sway over the direction of European aid. The reality was, however, that there were also major constraints on British influence. The first was structural. The United Kingdom was late in joining 'a club that was already working' and where the approach (e.g., *dirigiste* planning and price support mechanisms) was not of the United Kingdom's choosing.<sup>69</sup> As Peter Pooley pointed out, '[t]hat was the structure and it was very difficult to change'.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Interview with M. LAKE.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with D. FRISCH.

<sup>66</sup> *The Guardian*, 22 February 2002.

<sup>67</sup> As EEC External Affairs Commissioner (1999-2004), Patten was instrumental in pushing DGVIII to work more closely with DG Trade; interview with M. LAKE.

<sup>68</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with T. GLASER.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with P. POOLEY.

A related constraint was the fact that the United Kingdom was not a particularly big hitter on overseas development issues over the Lomé years. Indeed, for most of this period, the British aid programme was run by an ‘administration’ rather than a Ministry and its budget was shrinking. The United Kingdom was, moreover, only ever one of between 9 and 15 EEC member states, each of which could ‘push its own priorities in the Council of Development Ministers if they really felt strongly about something’.<sup>71</sup> Britain was moreover never sure of winning the Commission over to its cause, given that the latter was much ‘less bewitched by the Foreign Office than UK Ministers’.<sup>72</sup> In fact, the Commission had grown in self-confidence from the time of its leadership in the 1973 UNCTAD negotiations to become ‘a substantial institutional presence on the development scene’.<sup>73</sup> According to Dieter Frisch, by the mid-1970s, the Commission was ‘very much in the driving seat [...] and the member countries could not push us around. We were now as professional as the others. We knew what to propose and we succeeded in pushing member states towards higher and higher levels of aid’. Against this backdrop, European Commissioners did not need British advice. This was particularly true of Cheysson, a gifted negotiator with an African diplomatic background, and Pisani, the *grand penseur* of the French Socialist Party.

Lack of popularity further constrained British influence. The United Kingdom was seen to be a semi-detached member of the Community and was deemed to be ‘taking a high profile on the Brussels aid scene only when national commercial interests were at stake’. This perception limited Britain’s capacity ‘to persuade its EEC partners of the very real need to reform the EDF’.<sup>74</sup> The absence of any long-term alliances with other member states further hampered the United Kingdom’s ability to harness the *méthode communautaire* to its own ends. So too did poor relations with the Commonwealth, particularly in the 1980s when Margaret Thatcher’s government balked at imposing meaningful sanctions on apartheid South Africa and helped keep ‘political questions over southern Africa’ off ‘the official Lomé ministerial dialogue’.<sup>75</sup>

Ideological differences were also important. Hewitt has argued that the United Kingdom was often ‘out of sync’ with the EEC, proposing ideas,<sup>76</sup> such as aid evaluation and an equal distribution of aid between ACP and non-ACP states, that were only adopted years later.<sup>77</sup> This lack of synchronicity should not, however, disguise deep-seated ideological differences between the United Kingdom and much of the EEC, particularly in the 1980s when Britain signed up to World Bank structural adjustment programmes. As one former Commission official put it: ‘We were deeply at odds with the World Bank in these years because we were

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with T. GLASER.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with senior Commission official, Brussels, 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with M. LAKE.

<sup>74</sup> HEWITT, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>75</sup> COSGROVE TWITCHETT, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>76</sup> HEWITT, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

<sup>77</sup> In the mid-1970s, the British Labour Minister Judith Hart was the first to suggest this aid split between ACP and non-ACP states; interview with D. Frisch.

francophone'.<sup>78</sup> Hewitt makes a similar point, noting that '[i]n the aid field there was nothing more likely to annoy the dominant French interests in EEC development policy than to side with the Washington-based [...] World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, on matters concerning Africa [...]'.<sup>79</sup>

Ultimately, the explanation for the United Kingdom's relative lack of influence lies in its own choices and priorities within Europe. To illustrate, the British did not lobby for key positions within DG VIII. Instead, they 'pretended this did not matter as long as aid programmes were being run effectively' and, in so doing, they lost control of the 'commanding heights'.<sup>80</sup> This 'lack of influence at the top' was later compounded when the United Kingdom halted, albeit temporarily, recruitment via the European fast stream.<sup>81</sup> This latter decision inevitably reduced the flow of British nationals working their way up to the top of (rather than being teleported into senior positions within) the Commission's hierarchy.

As regards the United Kingdom's priorities, these did not lie with DG VIII, the EDF or overseas development but with DG Trade, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the single European market.<sup>82</sup> In the early 1990s, a key focus was on the commercial opportunities opening up in Eastern Europe, and the UK attached 'more importance to starting the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (which [...] [would] [...] be sited in London) on a businesslike footing than overhauling the EDF'.<sup>83</sup> The British were ultimately being pragmatic. They knew that they could not overhaul the EDF so they became 'diffident as a new member'.<sup>84</sup> They also foresaw the upward trend in EEC assistance and 'instead of slowing it down, they decided to join the movement and influence it'.<sup>85</sup> With their residual responsibility for the Commonwealth, a stagnant development assistance budget and a huge EEC aid envelope on offer to many of their former colonies, the British recognised that it was not in their interests to rock the boat. They also realised that Britain stood to benefit from lucrative EEC aid contracts.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, the United Kingdom's overall share of these contracts rose from 10.5 per cent in 1975 to 15.3 per cent (higher than any other member state) in 1988, with the United Kingdom performing particularly well on supplies and technical assistance (see Table 2).

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with M. LAKE.

<sup>79</sup> HEWITT, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>80</sup> Interview with T. GLASER.

<sup>81</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>82</sup> HEWITT & WHITEMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>83</sup> HEWITT, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>84</sup> Geoffrey HOWE, 'The Future of the European Community', *International Affairs*, vol. 60, n° 2, 1984, p. 187.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with D. FRISCH.

<sup>86</sup> When the UK began competing successfully for contracts in Eastern Europe, the Commission imposed a quota preventing it 'from exceeding in contracts awarded the proportionate value of the EDF contributions'; see HEWITT, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

**Table 2 EDF contracts by nationality of firm as at 31 December 1988  
(millions of ECU)**

<b>EDF 4</b>								
Nationality of Firms	Works	%	Supplies	%	Technical Assistance	%	Total	%
FRG	91.7	7.2	101.7	18.6	87.4	21.4	280.7	12.6
France	287.3	22.6	129.7	23.7	75.8	18.5	492.8	22.1
Italy	140.7	11.1	76.1	13.9	49.6	12.1	266.4	12.0
UK	56.0	4.4	112.6	20.6	63.6	15.6	232.3	10.5
EEC Total	1270.2	100	547.6	100	409.0	100	226.8	100
<b>EDF 5</b>								
FRG	86.6	7.9	121.3	18.8	103.3	22.2	311.1	14.1
France	248.3	22.6	128.0	19.8	93.2	20.0	469.5	21.2
Italy	102.1	9.3	66.2	10.2	45.2	9.7	213.5	9.7
UK	84.7	7.7	155.9	24.1	74.7	16.1	315.3	14.3
EEC Total	1099.5	100	646.3	100	465.6	100	2211.3	100
<b>EDF 6</b>								
FRG	14.8	10.1	2.6	3.9	22.5	12.8	39.9	10.2
France	2.0	1.4	14.1	20.9	24.8	14.1	40.8	10.5
Italy	38.2	26.1	2.3	3.5	17.9	10.2	58.4	15.0
UK	12.5	8.5	13.8	20.6	33.4	19.0	59.7	15.3
EEC Total	146.6	100	67.2	100	175.2	100	389.1	100

Source: DG VIII, Lomé III: Mid-Term Review 1986-88, SEC (89) 1539, Brussels, 1989, p. 33.

### *Conclusion*

This article has asked whether the United Kingdom was a constructive and influential player on the European aid scene over the Lomé years. It has shown how the United Kingdom was broadly receptive to the influence of the European Commission, particularly where the latter enjoyed some comparative advantage, whether through its operational networks or its role as a policy coordinator. The Commission's influence undoubtedly increased over time as it grew in self-confidence and began pushing for greater policy coherence, most notably via the Maastricht Treaty. The United Kingdom for its part was influential in helping to frame the first Lomé Convention, in pushing new aid evaluation procedures and in lobbying for human rights conditionality. As a rule, Britain enjoyed more influence where it had other member states on board and where it was 'on the same page as the Commission'.<sup>87</sup> The British were less persuasive where their arguments were not believed (the mantra 'trade not aid' was viewed as an excuse to give less aid) and where they were ideologically isolated (as with structural adjustment).<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Interview with M. LAKE.

<sup>88</sup> HEWITT, *op. cit.*, p. 92.



So clearly there were reciprocal influences at work, and the UK was a ‘pragmatic player’, engaging constructively with the European Commission in these years.<sup>89</sup> While the British did sometimes have to shout long and hard in order to be heard, they were not losing out on the European aid scene, as their rhetoric on the ‘stitching up’ of contracts and the Commission’s lack of responsiveness sometimes suggested. As Dieter Frisch put it, ‘We should distinguish [foreign policy] from an area like development cooperation [where] [...] the British had an interest in playing the game’.<sup>90</sup> It follows that the United Kingdom’s status as an awkward partner cannot be traced back to its early experiences of European aid. The roots of Britain’s semi-detached attitude towards Europe must lie elsewhere, probably in trade, agriculture and socio-judicial questions that infringe British sovereignty.

The election of a Labour government in 1997 did not lead to any dramatic change in the United Kingdom’s broadly constructive stance on European aid. Thus, while Clare Short as Secretary of State for International Development was scathing about the wastefulness and lack of poverty focus of much European assistance, she remained engaged and was soon seeking to increase British influence over EEC, or rather EU, aid policy by forging an alliance with three other European Development Ministers (from Germany, Holland and Norway).<sup>91</sup> The Labour administration also established the Department for International Development (DFID) as a separate Ministry and charged it with drawing up an institutional strategy paper for maximising British influence within the EU and other international organisations. The DFID explicitly recognised the value of working through such bodies, stressing in its first White Paper on international development that ‘[w]e must not overstate what we can do by ourselves. We must not understate what we can do with others. In no area is this more true than in development’.<sup>92</sup> The DFID has maintained this constructive approach under the current Conservative-led coalition government. It has, for example, recently undertaken a Multilateral Aid Review and found the European Development Fund to be one of only 9 multilateral organisations which offer ‘very good value for money for UK aid’. It has promised to ‘provide funding’ through these organisations ‘at levels that are appropriate to their objectives and our [Britain’s] ambitions’.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Clara O’DONNELL & Richard WHITMAN, ‘European policy under Gordon Brown’, *International Affairs*, vol. 83, n° 1, 2007, p. 272.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with D. FRISCH.

<sup>91</sup> The so-called Utstein Group later evolved into the Nordic Plus group of like-minded donors.

<sup>92</sup> DFID, *Eliminating World Poverty*, London: DFID, 1997, p. 20.

<sup>93</sup> DFID, *Multilateral Aid Review*, London: DFID, 2011, p. 3.

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