

## The Afro-European Energy Diplomacy, a Historical Reconstruction from 1973 to 2007<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract:

The history of international relations has as its main source diplomatic documents, among them treaties and international agreements. As Mario Toscano stated, (Mario Toscano, 1963) diplomatic documents are written statements of facts (actions or simple expressions of thought) coming from institutional bodies acting in inter-state relations. Inside the framework of diplomacy, recently emerged a new branch: energy diplomacy. This latter is a complex topic in the broad framework of the Afro-European diplomatic relations and, over the years, has continuously evolved due to endogenous and exogenous factors.

Since up to now, there's no historical rebuilding of how Afro-European diplomatic representors have acted to build their energy diplomacy and to start analyzing it, the time-space considered in this research is the following: from the 1973 oil crisis to the 2007 Lisbon Treaty (Joint Africa-EU Strategy).

The relevance of this research consists of filling the historical gaps that we have about this topic between the area studies and those in the European Integration, trying to have a more *super partes* and complete vision as possible.

This research even if now in its first stage, will contribute to providing a logical combination of sources to rebuild and understand the evolution of Afro-European energy diplomatic relations. For this purpose, the literary review indicated may help to define the broad framework in which Africa and Europe started to cooperate in scientific terms.

### Keywords:

Africa, energy diplomacy, Europe, oil crises.

<sup>1</sup> DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59569/jceas.2023.3.1.137>

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## *Introduction*

The oil crisis happened in a delicate and unbalanced period worldwide characterized by the polarization of the two superpowers. At that time, Europe was fully experiencing some crucial processes in the formation of the European Community, while in those years, Africa was still facing the end of European colonialism which reached its peak in 1994.

In that delicate sociopolitical framework, the debate about the 1970s crisis was cautiously initiated between the late 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium. Scholars started to wonder about many things related to the oil crisis and, marginally, how Europe has approached Africa in scientific and technical terms, but only a few of them questioned themselves on the following issue: how has started and evolved energy diplomacy between Africa and Europe in the aftermath of the first the oil crises? Most analyses have, in part, only dwelt on how these relations began, simply to get an idea of the effects of that crisis in the Global South and to investigate the roots of that, apparently, a new international order that was being experienced at the end of the last millennium. However, the literature gap on the evolution of these relationships is still quite wide. Today is fundamental to consider what the position of the various international actors was in the aftermath of the first oil crisis because it helps to understand the current dialogue between energy producers and consumers.

The years of the second post-war period are well known to be a radical economic shift for Western countries. In particular, the latter can be observed by analyzing the rise of energetic demands such as the one concerning the oil usage. The aforementioned boosted energy imports and, consequently dependence (Clark, 1990). According to Ennio Di Nolfo (2001), to trace the path of raw materials in shaping international relations, in the long run, moral considerations are to be left to the sidelines. In placing raw materials in the international context, the author sees: if international trade and finance is understood to mean the methods by which national borders are crossed to guide political action, then the conclusion is that the link between raw materials and international relations is a mere matter of trade and finance.

Based on Giuliano Garavini (2013) analyses, oil historiography reached its peak touching the issue related to the effects of the oil crises, even if since the end of the 19th century, scholars have attempted to describe the society in terms of energy usage. The various actors' positions are to be considered in the aftermath of the 1973 oil crisis because the knowledge of this could help understanding the current dialogue between producers and consumers. With the increase of general worldwide interdependence, summit diplomacy arose in the 1970s along with the failure of the Bretton Woods system and the emergence of oil crises (Melissen, 2006). The most interesting thing about this is that this new wave of studies does not have a single perspective, but different ones that have in common the aim to describe how energy has shaped inter-state relations between energy producers and consumers. From this point of view, when scholars talk

about energy issues, they no longer consider only the clash between private and public powers, but also other fundamental actors, such as environmentalists, rural societies, etc. Hence, so far, this literature is very heterogeneous, and it contributes to give multiple perspectives which are to be applied and implemented to the different areas of the world (North- South, East- West). Furthermore, Giuliano Garavini (2013) stated that the historical research method is one of the most avant-garde, but however, new sources should be added to have a more complete narration.

### ***Definition of Diplomacy and Energy Diplomacy***

Diplomacy is the technique for implementing foreign policy, but also the overall organizational structure with its members who manage foreign policy (de Leonardis, 2015). Each diplomatic document has several meanings and can give different answers depending on the issues raised. In this case, the historical approach has its reference in the written documents. Therefore, cross-referencing sources is crucial.

Energy diplomacy is a broad topic and, to make a more in-depth and detailed analysis, it is fundamental to narrow it down to a blind side not sufficiently still explored. Today, this topic is one of the most relevant in the field of applied international relations research because it involves a compulsory interdisciplinary approach to history, political-economic theories, international law, energy law, diplomacy theory, etc. That is why nowadays there is no common scientific space in the field of energy diplomacy research (Reinhardt and Pronichkin, 2018). Scholars tended to focus on oil because its history has always been intertwined with the history of the environment, international relations, and the history of consumer society.

Ennio Di Nolfo (2006), used to clarify what foreign policy is before going into deep about what is the meaning of diplomacy. In him, foreign policy is the way in which every single country project itself outwards, in international life; while international politics is the moment when the different foreign policies, of the different countries, meet, and interact, raising conflicts, wars, and peace situations. Even if the diplomatic activity is ancestral, the word “diplomacy”, in the modern sense of administrating international relations and influence them, appeared only at the end of the 18th century.

One of the most representative definitions of diplomacy is given by Carlo Laroche and is the following: “Diplomacy is the art of representing the government and the interests of one’s country to foreign governments and countries: of ensuring that the rights, interests and dignity of one’s country are not overlooked abroad; of administrating international affairs, and either directing or following diplomatic negotiations in accordance with instructions received” (Laroche, 1945).

Before trying to define what energy diplomacy is, it is important to briefly introduce what Science and Technological Studies (STS) are. According to Ottinger



(2018), scientific facts are not discovered but constructed, so STS examines how political and economic factors shape the directions and products of science (Holifield et al., 2020). In some way, this branch of the science of environmental studies supports the construction of the concept of science diplomacy.

Energy has come into the sphere of diplomacy and foreign policy due to its growing importance in terms of national and economic security. Over time then, energy diplomacy became separated from foreign and public policy (Henrikson, 2005). It has come to look upon the 20th century as the primordial age of energy diplomacy that, at the beginning was mainly dominated by corporations producing and distributing fuel; with the oil shock then, problems connected to security increased, therefore were urgent to make diplomatic efforts in the energy sphere. The diplomatic route was therefore the best solution because, as the realist paradigm affirms, in the world of state relationships there's no space for moral considerations (Reinhardt and Pronichkin, 2018).

Also due to the difficulty in identifying precisely the actors involved, some analyses state that so far there's still no precise definition of energy diplomacy (Yu, 2015, Zao, 2019), which, implicitly, for the above reasons, contributes in ensuring "energy security". This latter has different meanings based on the endogenous and exogenous factors of the single states (Yergin, 2012). Among those who tried to define "energy diplomacy", Steven Griffiths (2019) carried out that diplomacy is an important instrument of energy transition and is very useful to sustain countries in managing the geopolitical consequences of the energy transition. In this regard, multilateral diplomacy is in place, and it gives the opportunity to align the energy transition interests of multiple stakeholders. During the Cold War, the period in which most of these researches are focused, energy diplomacy acted as a glue between states to ensure cooperation even during the various crises that emerged during those years (Bösch, 2014).

In contributing to define what energy diplomacy is, Giuli (2015) remarks that diplomatic relations in the energy field belong to niche diplomacy and are mainly based on the activities that fosters access to energy sources and markets. Therefore, doing energy diplomacy means influencing policies and adopting resolutions, through diplomatic dialogue, negotiations, and other soft power methods. The self-centered promotion of competitiveness or internal positions are counterproductive to the dialogue promoted by the diplomatic approach. However, the definition of energy diplomacy is problematic (Chaban and Knot, 2015).

In 2011, Youngs defined energy intergovernmental agreements as an effective tool showing that energy relations it is a matter for private companies rather than governments, but at the same time, international energy infrastructural projects require state intervention via intergovernmental agreements. In 2005, in an article written by Sheila Jasanoff and Sang-Hyun Kim, was introduced for the first time the concept of 'socio-technical imaginary'. This latter aims to represent forms of social life and order

that describe future prospects that States believe should be achieved (Jasanoff and Kim, 2005).

But scientific imaginaries have caused uncertainty in the international community, especially in the Global South. With scientific diplomacy thus comes to the development of future projections that implicitly are influenced by past transgressions (Robinson, 2021). It is possible to state that in procedural terms, energy diplomacy concerns the practice of influence through negotiations to manage international energy relations.

### ***Previous Studies on Afro-European Energy Diplomacy from the 1973 Oil Crisis***

From some perspectives, it is possible to affirm that, even if not directly in terms of time and actors, the genesis of Afro-European Energy Diplomacy can be found in 1938 when the first oil deposits were discovered in Saudi Arabia. That event was the biggest shift in the global center of gravity of oil production as it switched from the Caribbean to the Middle East (Priest, 2012).

One of the earliest analyses of African-European relations in diplomatic terms, in which the subject of energy began to be touched upon, was made by Lorenzo Pacifici (2003) in 'La conférence parlementaire euroafricaine.' His contribution described the pathway to the preparatory diplomatic work that led to the first Euro-African parliamentary conference in 1961. The aim of that event was above all to strengthen cooperation between the two players also through the provision of technical assistance. During the Conference of 19-24 June 1961, among the various items on the agenda, the development of energy resources was a hot topic as it also highlighted the role of the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) and helped in highlighting a new energy source: the nuclear one. The goal of EURATOM, in that precise framework, was to assist the Associated States in terms of expertise and ability. The 1961 Euro-African parliamentary conference is of great importance in determining the future of Euro-African relations, for many reasons, but the most important is that it became an unprecedented forum for confrontation.

Giuliana Laschi (2017) asserted that since the 1970s Europe decided to approach Africa differently than before through agreements that were to include economic, financial, technological, and environmental protection policies, including oil cooperation. The 1973 oil crisis enforced the necessity to strengthen relations with Mediterranean countries mainly to allow Europe to have a reliable energy supply. Regarding Africa, according to Lapo Pistelli (2020), it is important to say that there are two ways to compare this international actor to the rest of the world: the first is extreme poverty and the other is energy poverty. Despite this, Europe's role in that situation was underlined by the European Fund for Sustainable Development Guarantee which offers loans, guarantees, and other credit enhancement offered by development banks, state institutions, and private actors. In deepening the analyses of the beginning of Afro-



European Energy Diplomacy is crucial to have an insight into this critical landscape in which it began to develop, and there are some authors that gave their essential contribution in this.

One of the cornerstones of the scientific literature on energy issues of the latest centuries is “Carbon Democracy”, written by Timothy Mitchell. In his analyses, based mainly on American and British sources, the author considers a model in which the State has a spectator role with respect to the energy model. Furthermore, Mitchell developed a thesis according to which oil contributed to the evolution of the concept of economics because growth without unemployment, thanks to oil, would last indefinitely (Mitchell, 2013). Giuliano Garavini (2011), emphasized how since the end of the second World War, the Western World saw continuous growth and, at the same time he investigated the different perspectives of the historical analyses of the 1973 oil crises. Carr (1961) affirmed that the description of that crisis is weakened by the fact that it is purely a Western perspective, hence there is a lack of a more complete overview. In defining the two decades after the 1973, Erik Hobsbawm (1994) affirmed that the world had slipped into a kind of instability and crisis, losing its orientation.

Anthony Sampson (1975) began to trace the origins of scientific literature on oil in a differentiated set of problems, and one of these was the one mostly ignored, but at the same time, one of the crucial: the issue of strengthening or weakening ties between countries. He stated that in those years oil-producing countries and the rest of the Global South strengthened their bonds. From this is possible to assume that oil producer’s countries showed their cohesion and courage but at the same time the North was strongly exposed to weakness and fears in many areas.

In those years, many scholars agreed that the Cold War was about to be replaced by an era of conflicts over resources between an industrialized but resource-poor North and a scarcely industrialized but resource-rich South. In defining the relations and positions, not only in energy relations terms, among different countries on the international stage, Bösch and Graf (2014) carried out that between the two World Wars and up to the 1970s, energy experts met regularly at the World Conferences of Powers, but in the end, States always dealt with these issues separately. From this, emerged the necessity and the urgency to have a unified perspective on energy balances, nationals, and global.

The two authors continue their analyses by stating that energy crises saw growing international cooperation attempts and the persistence of energy security in national policies. Since the beginning of the 1970s, developing countries, have tried to use the United Nations forums to review the basic structures of the international economy that were to their disadvantage. Those countries were organized into the Group of 77 with the aim to acquire permanent sovereignty over their natural resources through negotiations with industrialized countries within the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). From the frequent use of international forums

used by countries to declare their positions, it is implicitly possible to understand the orientation and the action of African countries from diplomatic documents of international forums, e.g., the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

In August 1974, the Economic Commission for Africa and the Association of African Central Banks met at the United Nations Economic and Social Council. That meeting was about the impact of energy crises on trade and development of African countries and the measures that African Central Banks had to take to control or mitigate the unfavorable effects of the situation.

During that meeting, the so-called “African paradox” was clearly put in evidence, whereby although the most affected countries by the oil crises were the African ones, at the same time they were, and are, those who produce five times more than they consume (ECOSOC, 1974). In the meanwhile, European governments, independently, developed new diplomatic strategies consisting of making bilateral agreements with producer countries (Graf, 2012), but in doing so, they clearly demonstrated a lack of cohesion in developing a common energy strategy.

On the African perspective, according to Rajhi, Benabdellah and Hmissi, despite the lively debate on the importance of oil shocks on African economies, there is still little empirical research that directly addresses this issue (Rajhi, Benabdellah and Hmissi, ADB). A more in-depth review of the literature reveals that the studies that have been done are more concerned with the effects of oil prices on African macroeconomic dynamics. Basically, what has been stated is that the vulnerability of oil-importing developing countries has also been exacerbated by the limited ability to switch to alternative fuels.

The G77 countries saw the oil embargo as an opportunity to establish a New International Economic Order and a paradigmatic case for the Global South raw materials activism. Other authors, in the industrialized world, have used the oil embargo to legitimize domestic policy changes:

- Environmentalists used to say that the oil crisis was a warning anticipating the peak of the fossil fuel era to convince people to use alternative energies or lead a less energy-intensive life.
- Capitalists opposed environmentalists because, in their view, the energy crisis left no room for ecological considerations.

### ***New Developments between the Twentieth and the Twenty-first Century***

As primary sources housed in the archives of the European Union in Fiesole (Florence) and those of the African Union in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) also confirm, from the very beginning of the energy diplomacy between the European Economic Community and



the Organization of Africa Unity, built their relationship on science, technology, and innovative (STI) collaboration and implicitly, energy issues were part of all these areas. (e.g., Historical Archives of European Union, ADLE-234). The above paragraphs emphasize on the building of cooperative partnerships in various security and development fields that emerged principally since the beginning of the decolonization process. At the bi-regional level Africa and Europe have developed several collaborative initiatives in the field of STI over the last two decades. In addition, between the two centuries have also changed the sources object of this new branch of scientific diplomacy.

European dependence on African oil was still strong in the 1980s despite the oil shocks of the previous years and the need for Europe to switch to a diversified energy supply. Countries as Algeria, Gabon, Libya, and Nigeria were among the main oil suppliers for Europe leading to greater interaction and cooperation in the energy sector between the two regions. (African Petroleum Producers' Organization, 2022).

When considering the new developments in African-European energy diplomacy between the last two centuries, is crucial to mention that since the 1980s, new developments have arisen in terms of energy sources covered by bilateral diplomacy, but also in the field of scientific and technological cooperation at the bi-regional level.

Looking at the energy sources subject to cooperation, it is possible to assume that, over the time, exogenous factors have contributed to changing their meaning. While in the 20th century the main sources subject to this form of scientific diplomacy were mainly, coal, oil, gas and nuclear, at the end of the century, solar, wind, geothermal and hydroelectric energies also began to emerge. In the African perspective is fundamental stating that between the 1990 and 2004, although more consideration had begun to be given to renewable energy sources, the oil production in Africa increased by 40%: from 7 million to 10 million barrels per day (m b/d) (AAVV, 2004).

A crucial aspect to be considered in reconstructing the framework in which Europe and Africa have built their bi-regional energy diplomacy over the years, is that in recent times there has also been an important role played by international institutions and multilateral diplomacy mechanisms. As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, entities like the European Union, the United Nations, and the World Bank have assumed significant roles in facilitating discussions and fostering collaboration and cooperation between Europe and Africa in the realm of energy and, more in general in the STI.

Programs offering technical and financial assistance have been actively promoted to bolster the development of energy infrastructure in Africa and enhance governance within the energy sector. Before starting to analyze energy diplomacy between the last and the current century, one of the recent documents about this, is the conclusions of the European Council on climate and energy diplomacy approved by the Council in 2023. This document states that climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution are a real global threat that, by affecting the most vulnerable populations, increases poverty



and inequality undermining the global stability. At the 44 point of the document is highlighted the cooperation and collaboration with countries of northern Africa and the role of the Conferences of the Parties (General Secretariat of the Council, 2023).

Regarding the Conference of the Parties, this diplomatic forum played a distinctive role in contributing to the development of a Euro-African energy diplomacy. The first Conference of the Parties (COP) was held in 1995 in Berlin, and it is relevant in the framework of the summit diplomacy because stems from the official recognition of climate change problem. That COP highlighted a major awareness of climate change and all the problems arising from it, thus implicitly related to energy issues. In that occasion Africa was represented by Zimbabwe, while Europe by Germany which also held the presidency that year (UNFCCC, 1995). It is obvious that on a bi-regional level, that COP proved to be an important arena of dialogue for both Africa and Europe to discuss these issues, not only among them (bilaterally and multilaterally) but also with different international actors; COPs also represent a new tool of summit diplomacy with a specific focus on global climate issue.

Since the 2000s and the Cotonou Agreements, bi-regional Euro-African energy diplomacy has increasingly focused on cooperation and the development of joint energy projects. Cooperation agreements were favored to foster the development of African energy resources and their export to Europe. Investment projects in the energy infrastructure industry sector (oil and gas pipelines) were also initiated to increase the transport of energy between the two continents (European Union-ACP, 2000). These years saw a growth of focus on climate change and sustainability in the context of Afro-European energy diplomacy. Europe has begun to promote more sustainable energy policies, aiming to reduce energy dependence on fossil fuels and encouraging the use of renewable energy sources.

This change has influenced and contributed to the objectives of energy cooperation with Africa, leading to a major attention on clean energy sources and support for the development of renewable energy projects on the African continent. With the Lisbon Treaty (European Union, 2007), a new path for cooperation and collaboration between Africa and Europe began. In that occasion was launched the Joint Africa-EU strategy (JAES). Its aim was to enhance and enforce their continent-wide connection focused on development in a new mutual partnership based on shared responsibilities and common interests the main issues raised, energy has been crucial (Haastrup et al., 2020). In this regard was created the Africa European Energy Partnership (AEEP) which is the political platform used by the two actors, at continental level, to collaborate and cooperate in energy field. The aim of this partnership is to allow and facilitate universal energy access, the support to modern energy services everywhere in Africa; all this would allow a fair development for Africa and for its inhabitants. The focus of the AEEP is mainly on renewable sources and the universal energy access. The main energy sources mentioned or promoted in it include:



- Wind energy.
- Geothermal energy: in several regions of Africa, this energy source, which recycles heat from the subsoil, can be a potential source of energy.
- Hydroelectric energy: since Africa has numerous water resources that can be exploited for hydropower generation, thus contributing to energy diversification.
- Solar energy: given the abundance of solar sources in many regions of Africa, solar energy is a key source that can be used to generate electricity with photovoltaic panels.
- Biomasses: it includes agricultural residues, firewood and organic materials can be exploited to produce thermal and electrical energy.

To sum up, this partnership framework allows to foster energy supply sources diversification of energy supply sources and to encourage sustainable policies and actions with a low environmental impact (Mangala, 2012). The aim is to improve energy efficiency, contribute to universal energy access and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by adopting cleaner and more sustainable technologies.

## **Conclusion**

During the time range explored by this study, energy sources that were traded between Africa and Europe at bi-regional and multilateral level have undergone several changes. A general landscape of this shows that oil has been one of the main sources traded between these two actors for long time.

The 1970s crisis shattered into many different changes and the EEC policy towards the Southern shore was an expression of a general phase of a crisis, mutation, and transition. The oil issue is directly related to energy security. Moreover, for this reason, the relationship between energy diplomacy, foreign policy, and national security still appears complex. Energy came into the sphere of diplomacy and foreign policy because of the increased impact on national and economic security. This kind of niche diplomacy has two main perspectives: economic and security policy. Hence, sources as natural gas started to become some of the main pillars of Afro-European relations in the 1990s, and Algeria and Nigeria became important exporters of natural gas in Europe. As for coal, in the 1980s and 1990s it was still an important energy source in trade between Africa and Europe. About hydropower, African countries such as DRC and Ethiopia developed important energy projects and they signed agreements with Europe aimed to export it to the cited Continent. Energy sources traded between Africa and Europe may vary depending on the periods examined and on the phases of the global energy market. Furthermore, technological changes, shifting geopolitical balances,

energy policies and economic factors can influence the mix of energy sources traded between the regions over time.

The aforementioned demonstrates that foreign policies do not only establish trade relations, but it affects political goals and strategies. In the light of this understanding, energy diplomacy becomes one of the mechanisms to achieve these goals. The available scientific literature on the topic showed that too often the meaning of the word ‘crisis’ is taken for granted. Therefore, a generic weakness could be highlighted in terms of broadness of the subject. As the analysis of the mentioned above authors points out, crises not only lead enmity between the parties involved (in the event their interests diverge during crises) but they also potentially lead to the strengthening of ties between the actors.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

### **Notes on Contributor**

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