

REVIEW ARTICLE



The European Union's Support to the Pan-African Parliament in Achieving Legislative Authority

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Abstract: This article investigates the significant role played by the European Union (EU) in supporting the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) as it strives to gain legislative powers in addition to the advisory role within the framework of the African Union (AU). Pan African Parliament founded in 2004, and has been designed to serve as a platform for representing the interests and voices of African citizens in the AU's governance processes, which not only fosters democratic engagement, but inclusive decision-making across the continent as well. Despite these aspirations, PAP has remained limited to an advisory role, without the legislative authority necessary to implement or enforce policies at a continental scale.

Keywords: Pan-African Parliament (PAP), Legislative authority, European Union (EU) support, African Governance Architecture (AGA), African Union (AU).

1. INTRODUCTION

Since its establishment in 2004, the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) as part of the African Union's strategy, it provided African citizens with a stronger voice in continental governance, marking a notable step forward for institutional representation in Africa. At first PAP was envisioned as a legislative body that would bridge the gap between African citizens and their governments, contributing to a more inclusive and participatory governance model across the continent. However, its initial mandate has been restricted to an advisory capacity, enabling PAP to offer policy recommendations but without the authority to enact legislation. This limited scope reflects the caution of AU member states, which have been hesitant to cede legislative power to PAP due to concerns over national sovereignty. Consequently, PAP has encountered obstacles in fully realizing its mission of integrating African voices into AU policy-making processes, as it lacks the power to enforce continent-wide decisions (African Union, 2023; Benyera, 2022).

Within its advisory role, PAP has engaged in discussions on key policy areas such as human rights, sustainable development, and economic integration. Nonetheless, this limited mandate has led to skepticism about its capacity to address Africa's complex challenges. Without the authority to legislate on essential issues like health, security, and economic policies, PAP's potential to contribute meaningfully to AU objectives—such as promoting unity, stability, and development—remains limited (Adebayo, 2021). Critics argue that PAP's current advisory-only role does not provide the level of influence needed to address the pressing issues facing the continent, which require coordinated and enforceable solutions. This restricted mandate has raised questions about whether PAP, without legislative powers, can effectively fulfill the ambitious goals set for it.

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In light of these limitations, the European Union (EU) has emerged as a prominent supporter of PAP's aspiration to gain legislative authority. Given its historical connections and shared interests with African nations, the EU recognizes the need for robust democratic institutions to help achieve peace, stability, and economic cohesion across Africa. Thus, the EU's backing of PAP aligns with its broader strategy to support effective governance structures in Africa. The EU's assistance is not only financial but also includes technical guidance and institutional partnerships to help PAP overcome its structural limitations and develop the capacity required for legislative functions (European Union External Action, 2023).

One major avenue through which the EU has supported PAP is the African Governance Architecture (AGA), an initiative dedicated to bolstering democratic governance throughout Africa. Through the AGA, the EU has contributed to PAP's capacity building by offering funding, facilitating training initiatives, and fostering exchanges between African and European parliamentary institutions. These collaborative efforts are aimed at equipping PAP with the resources and knowledge needed to strengthen its policy development and, potentially, its legislative capacities (European Commission, 2022). This funding is crucial for PAP's operational stability, given that it often faces financial constraints due to inconsistent contributions from AU member states. Additionally, the EU's support has given PAP access to specialized expertise to navigate complex legislative matters and strengthened its institutional connections, enhancing PAP's potential to operate effectively as a legislative body in the future (Murithi, 2020).

The EU's support for PAP's legislative ambitions is informed by its own experience as a supranational institution that seeks to balance national interests while advancing regional integration. The EU has advocated for similar frameworks for PAP, encouraging a balance between the sovereignty of AU member states and the advantages of a strong, unified African legislative body that could implement policies across borders. The EU's approach envisions PAP as a platform for democratic representation in African governance, which, if empowered with legislative authority, could more comprehensively address the continent's multifaceted challenges (Benyera, 2022). According to the European Commission, a legislative PAP could play a key role in addressing transnational issues such as public health, cross-border trade, and security concerns, helping to realize a vision of a more integrated and cohesive African continent (European Commission, 2022).

In conclusion, the EU's strategic partnership with PAP reflects a shared commitment to fostering a democratic and unified Africa. By backing PAP's legislative aspirations, the EU aims to support the establishment of a continent-wide institution with the authority to address key policy issues. Although challenges remain, particularly regarding AU member states' willingness to grant PAP legislative power, the EU's continued assistance provides PAP with a valuable opportunity to move toward this goal, thereby enhancing its role in African governance and integration. This partnership underscores the potential for PAP to transform from an advisory body into a legislative institution, positioning it to play a central role in promoting African unity, peace, and development across its member states (Adebayo, 2021; African Union, 2023).

2. OBJECTIVES

- To understand the historical and ongoing relationship between the EU and PAP.
- To identify and analyze the EU's contributions toward supporting PAP's legislative capacity.
- To investigate the political, institutional, and financial barriers PAP faces in achieving legislative authority.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Historical Context of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP)

The Pan-African Parliament (PAP) was established in 2004 as one of the African Union's (AU) key initiatives to enhance democratic governance, promote integration, and represent the interests of African citizens across the continent. It was envisioned as a forum to ensure that African citizens had a voice within AU decision-making processes. The concept for PAP, however, can be traced back to the formation of

the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. While the OAU focused on decolonization and sovereignty, the AU was intended to foster closer integration among African states, with PAP as an institution central to this vision (Murithi, 2020).

When PAP was formally launched in 2004, it was designed as an advisory and consultative body with the primary aim of deliberating on AU matters, representing African interests, and promoting shared values such as democracy, peace, and security. The decision to limit PAP's powers to advisory status reflects the cautious approach of African leaders toward a supranational body, largely due to concerns over national sovereignty and political autonomy. In particular, member states were apprehensive about giving PAP binding legislative powers that might challenge or interfere with their own national governance (Benyera, 2022; Adebayo, 2021).

Despite this restricted role, PAP was tasked with important responsibilities, such as promoting human rights, consolidating democratic institutions, and facilitating dialogue between African leaders and citizens. However, its advisory mandate has limited its effectiveness, sparking debates about the need to transform PAP into a fully legislative body. Proponents argue that legislative authority would allow PAP to enact and enforce policies on critical transnational issues, such as trade, health, and security, thereby contributing to a more cohesive and integrated Africa (African Union, 2023; European Commission, 2022).

The push for PAP's legislative powers has garnered international support, especially from the European Union (EU), which envisions PAP as a platform similar to the European Parliament in structure and function. The EU's commitment to this vision is rooted in its belief that a legislative PAP could significantly strengthen African governance institutions and enhance the continent's capacity to address complex challenges. This shared vision of a more unified Africa has fueled continued EU support, highlighting PAP's potential as a central body for regional legislation, provided that political and institutional barriers are addressed (European Union External Action, 2023; Murithi, 2020).

3.1.1 Governance and Structure of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP)

The Pan-African Parliament (PAP), established as part of the African Union (AU) in 2004, functions to represent African citizens, promote unity, and advance democratic governance across the continent. Although initially conceived as an advisory body, PAP's governance framework has gradually adapted to these roles. Recently, with support from the AU and European Union, there have been initiatives to broaden PAP's authority, positioning it toward becoming a legislative body in the future (African Union, 2023; Benyera, 2022), Sawyer, A. (2022).

3.1.2. Organizational Structure

PAP is structured to reflect a representative model, where each of the 55 AU member states is entitled to five representatives, totaling 275 members. These representatives are generally elected or nominated by the national parliaments of each member state, ensuring that the diversity of the African continent is reflected within PAP's governance (African Union, 2023; Murithi, 2020). PAP's organizational structure comprises several essential components, including:

3.1.2.1. The Bureau

This executive body consists of the President and four Vice Presidents, each representing a different region of Africa (North, South, East, West, and Central). The Bureau is responsible for steering PAP's strategic direction, overseeing parliamentary activities, and ensuring the execution of PAP's programs and initiatives (Benyera, 2022).

3.1.2.2. The Committees

PAP operates through specialized committees that address specific areas of interest, such as human rights, economic development, health, education, and peace and security. These committees review policies, conduct research, and make recommendations that align with AU goals. The committee structure al-

allows PAP to delve into specific policy areas, facilitating specialized debates and issue-focused legislative discussions (European Commission, 2022).

3.1.2.3. The Secretariat

PAP's administrative functions are managed by a Secretariat, which handles the daily operations, logistics, and coordination of parliamentary sessions. The Secretariat is crucial for maintaining the continuity and efficiency of PAP's activities and is funded primarily by the AU and supplemented by international partners like the EU (Murithi, 2020).

3.1.3. Governance Mechanisms and Roles

PAP's governance is defined by its rules of procedure, which outline its advisory role, operational protocols, and decision-making processes. As an advisory body, PAP currently lacks binding legislative authority, which limits its ability to enact enforceable laws. Instead, it issues recommendations and resolutions that are then passed to the AU Assembly for consideration. This consultative role reflects the ongoing hesitancy among some AU member states to cede legislative power to a regional body, largely due to concerns over national sovereignty (Adebayo, 2021; African Union, 2023).

The governance of PAP emphasizes inclusivity and representation, embodying AU principles that encourage democratic participation and unity among member states. PAP holds plenary sessions at least twice a year, providing a platform for members to debate, propose resolutions, and represent the interests of African citizens. These sessions are also a venue for member states to coordinate their views on continental issues, though they lack the binding authority to enforce decisions directly (European Union External Action, 2023).

3.2. Challenges and Efforts Toward Legislative Authority

The Pan-African Parliament (PAP) has faced substantial obstacles in its pursuit of legislative authority. Currently limited to an advisory role, PAP's inability to enact binding policies restricts its influence on key cross-border issues like health, security, and trade regulation. Proponents argue that legislative powers would enable PAP to effectively tackle such challenges, enhancing its role in promoting continental integration and governance (Benyera, 2022). Efforts from both the African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) have concentrated on bolstering PAP's institutional capabilities through targeted support, particularly under the African Governance Architecture (AGA). This support includes financial backing, capacity-building programs, and technical assistance, all intended to prepare PAP for a legislative mandate (European Union External Action, 2023; African Union, 2023).

Preliminary discussions within the AU regarding PAP's transition to legislative authority have been cautious but promising. The primary concern for many member states is balancing national sovereignty with regional legislative power. Consequently, these discussions have focused on granting PAP incremental legislative powers in specific policy areas, such as continental trade and health policy, where unified actions could yield tangible benefits. Preliminary discussions in recent AU summits have demonstrated a general willingness among member states to consider limited legislative authority for PAP, with trade agreements under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and public health policies being the most likely areas for initial legislative powers (Murithi, 2020; African Union, 2023).

However, the path forward requires a strong consensus among member states, which has not yet been fully achieved. The AU is also evaluating the possibility of granting PAP legislative power in a phased approach, allowing for a gradual shift that respects national sovereignty while promoting regional unity. This phased approach could involve PAP initially exercising legislative authority on less contentious, broadly beneficial issues before expanding to more complex areas of governance. Nonetheless, this proposal is still in its nascent stages, with a need for further negotiation and buy-in from AU member states (Benyera, 2022; European Union External Action, 2023).

3.3. European Union's Support to Pan Africa Parliament

The EU's support for PAP encompasses financial, technical, and strategic dimensions, reflecting its commitment to strengthening PAP's capacity to act as a central governance institution within the AU. This support aims not only to address PAP's immediate operational needs but also to facilitate its long-term ambition of legislative authority, which would allow PAP to enact policies on pressing issues affecting the continent. The EU's comprehensive support underscores its vision of PAP as a pillar of continental governance, capable of driving Africa's democratic and development agendas (European Commission, 2022; African Union, 2023).

The EU has provided substantial financial and technical resources to PAP, channeling support through programs like the African Governance Architecture (AGA). This strategic support is intended to bolster PAP's institutional framework, offering capacity-building initiatives, parliamentary training programs, and financial resources to strengthen PAP's operations and its pursuit of legislative authority (European Union External Action, 2023). The following sections break down the EU's support into key areas of impact.

3.3.1. Financial Support: Enabling Core Operations and Stability

The EU has provided consistent financial support to PAP, helping to fund its core operational needs and reduce its dependency on often-variable contributions from AU member states. This funding addresses crucial areas, such as administrative operations, parliamentary sessions, and the development of strategic programs that align with the AU's broader objectives. The funding provides a stable financial base for PAP, which otherwise faces challenges due to inconsistent contributions from member states, potentially limiting its effectiveness and sustainability (European Union External Action, 2023).

Through the European Development Fund (EDF) and other financial aid programs, the EU has also facilitated PAP's outreach programs, allowing it to engage more effectively with citizens across member states. These resources enable PAP to host forums, workshops, and sessions that foster dialogue between African leaders and their constituents, strengthening PAP's visibility and engagement on the continent (European Commission, 2022). The EU's financial support is integral to ensuring that PAP can consistently meet operational demands while pursuing its broader goals of obtaining legislative authority.

3.3.2. Technical Assistance: Building Institutional Capacity and Expertise

Beyond financial contributions, the EU has delivered comprehensive technical assistance aimed at building PAP's institutional capacity. This assistance includes advisory services, expert consultations, and strategic planning workshops designed to equip PAP with the necessary tools to function effectively within the AU framework. Through its partnership with the African Governance Architecture (AGA), the EU has implemented initiatives that provide in-depth training to PAP members on parliamentary practices, policy development, and the legislative process (European Union External Action, 2023).

Capacity-building programs funded by the EU have been instrumental in training PAP members on a range of governance issues, such as human rights, democratic processes, and the rule of law. These programs are designed to strengthen PAP's policy advisory role while preparing it for a potential transition to a legislative body. The EU's approach aligns with its own experience in parliamentary governance, emphasizing institutional stability, transparency, and accountability as core elements of a robust parliamentary system (Murithi, 2020).

3.3.3. Strategic Development Programs: Strengthening Parliamentary Functions

In addition to financial and technical support, the EU has promoted the development of strategic programs that aim to strengthen PAP's legislative and governance functions. These programs, often delivered through AGA and EU-African Union joint initiatives, focus on reinforcing PAP's role in regional governance and creating structures that facilitate policy implementation across AU member states. One key program has been the establishment of a policy development framework within PAP, allowing it to create more effective and coherent policy recommendations (European Commission, 2022; African Union, 2023).

The EU has also advocated for initiatives that enhance PAP's transparency and accessibility, making it more accountable to African citizens. Programs focused on open parliamentary sessions, digital transformation, and public outreach have been introduced to foster a more inclusive legislative process within PAP. These efforts aim to bring PAP closer to achieving legislative authority, as transparency and public engagement are considered crucial for its credibility and legitimacy as a continental institution (Benyera, 2022).

3.4. The Role of the EU-African Union Strategic Partnership

The EU's support for the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) forms a crucial part of its partnership with the African Union (AU), emphasizing sustainable governance, economic development, and peace across the continent. As part of this collaboration, the EU has encouraged closer ties between PAP and European legislative institutions, such as the European Parliament, to facilitate the exchange of legislative expertise and promote a shared vision of democratic governance and regional unity. Through joint parliamentary exchanges, training initiatives, and targeted support programs, the EU has actively supported PAP in enhancing its capacity to fulfill a potential legislative role. These exchanges allow PAP members to gain a deeper understanding of European legislative frameworks, including critical functions such as budget oversight, policy-making, and constituency engagement. Such exposure aims to equip PAP with the knowledge and skills needed to transition effectively into a legislative body (European Union External Action, 2023; Adebayo, 2021), Bah, A. B., & Aning, K. (2020).

3.4.1. Impact and Results of EU-PAP Partnerships

One significant outcome of this partnership has been PAP's improved operational capabilities, particularly in oversight functions and policy development. By learning about best practices in governance and legislative processes from their European counterparts, PAP members have been able to incorporate new methodologies for budgetary oversight and constituency representation. This transfer of knowledge has resulted in a more structured approach to oversight within PAP, allowing for more informed debates and policy recommendations (Benyera, 2022).

Furthermore, the EU's support has fostered PAP's understanding of cross-border legislation and integration, a core focus of European Parliament operations. PAP members now actively engage in discussions about harmonizing African policies on health, trade, and security, thereby aligning their approach more closely with the broader goals of the African Union. For instance, the EU's support through the African Governance Architecture (AGA) has helped PAP improve its engagement in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), setting the groundwork for PAP's legislative involvement in areas of economic integration and transnational policies (Murithi, 2020; European Union External Action, 2023).

3.4.2. Building Capacity for Legislative Authority

Capacity-building initiatives, including technical workshops and training programs, have also enhanced PAP's institutional readiness for a legislative role. By equipping PAP members with practical skills in legislative drafting, policy review, and parliamentary procedure, the EU has contributed to PAP's institutional framework, making it more resilient and capable of assuming increased responsibilities in governance. EU-backed workshops have helped PAP improve its decision-making processes, resulting in more cohesive and well-structured resolutions, which are critical for establishing PAP's credibility as a potential legislative authority (African Union, 2023).

3.4.3. Broader Implications for AU-EU Relations

These collaborations underscore the EU's long-term commitment to fostering democratic governance and integration within Africa. The EU envisions PAP as a pivotal player in promoting continental unity and democratic representation across Africa, in alignment with the values and operational structure of the European Union itself. The strengthened EU-PAP relationship has thus contributed to a more interconnected AU-EU partnership, with both unions working toward a vision of a unified and democratic Africa. This partnership continues to yield progress, with potential legislative powers for PAP seen as a key step

toward a more integrated and resilient African Union (European Union External Action, 2023; Adebayo, 2021).

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Approach

This research is conducted through a secondary data review. Sources include policy documents, annual reports from the AU and EU, and academic analyses of PAP's legislative progress.

4.2. Data Sources

This article draws from EU-Africa Partnership reports, PAP strategic documents, and academic articles discussing regional governance and parliamentary structures.

4.3. Data Analysis

A thematic approach is used to synthesize insights from the sources, focusing on EU intervention, PAP's development challenges, and its legislative aspirations.

5. FINDINGS

The findings of this article highlight the impactful role of the European Union (EU) in supporting the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) as it seeks to transition from an advisory to a legislative body. Here are the key findings:

5.1. Institutional Capacity-Building

The EU's support has been essential in strengthening PAP's institutional capabilities. Through initiatives like the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and other collaborative programs, the EU has helped equip PAP members with governance knowledge, legislative procedures, and oversight functions. This foundation is preparing PAP to operate effectively with legislative powers, should they be granted (European Union External Action, 2023; African Union, 2023).

5.2. Improved Governance and Structural Operations

EU-supported programs and parliamentary exchanges with European institutions have allowed PAP members to learn and adopt best practices in governance, budget oversight, and constituency representation. This influence has led to a more structured approach within PAP, enhancing its credibility and effectiveness in policy discussions (Benyera, 2022), Keetharuth, S. B. (2020).

5.3. Advancement Toward Legislative Authority

The EU's strategic alignment with the AU's vision of a democratic Africa supports PAP's ambitions for legislative authority. The EU advocates for PAP's potential legislative role in specific policy areas, such as trade, health, and security, to tackle continental challenges more effectively. This support aligns with the EU's objectives to foster a unified and resilient African governance structure (Murithi, 2020), Ekpo, M. (2021).

5.4. Challenges in Attaining Consensus

Despite these gains, challenges remain. PAP's legislative ambitions are met with caution by AU member states concerned with issues of national sovereignty. The article finds that further dialogue and consensus among AU members are necessary to allow PAP to realize its legislative authority without infringing on national powers (Adebayo, 2021), Adetula, V. A. O., & Nyuykonge, C. (2021).

5.5. Strengthened AU-EU Partnership

The findings also show that the EU's investment in PAP is part of a broader strategy to support African integration and democratic governance. This partnership reflects the EU's commitment to fostering stable and democratic institutions across Africa, with PAP seen as a pivotal institution for regional unity and representation (European Union External Action, 2023), Musa, D., & Gaye, A. (2022).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the European Union's support for the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) represents a significant step toward strengthening Africa's democratic governance and regional integration. Since its inception, PAP has faced challenges primarily due to its limited advisory role, which has restricted its ability to contribute meaningfully to policy-making and governance. The EU's involvement, embedded within its broader strategic partnership with the African Union (AU), has been instrumental in providing PAP with the resources and technical capacity needed to address these challenges and aspire to legislative authority.

Through initiatives like the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and joint parliamentary exchanges, the EU has facilitated capacity-building for PAP members, providing them with insights into legislative processes and cross-border governance. These collaborations have led to tangible improvements in PAP's operational effectiveness, oversight capabilities, and policy formulation, creating a stronger foundation for PAP to assume a legislative role in the future (Benyera, 2022; European Union External Action, 2023). Moreover, the EU's sustained financial and technical support has fostered closer ties between PAP and European legislative bodies, promoting the transfer of governance best practices.

This partnership not only strengthens PAP but also aligns with the broader EU-AU objectives of fostering continental unity, sustainable governance, and stability across Africa. As PAP continues its journey toward legislative authority, the EU's support remains critical in helping overcome political and institutional challenges. Achieving legislative power would empower PAP to address continental issues such as trade, health, and security with greater autonomy, contributing to a more cohesive African Union that aligns with democratic principles and regional stability (Murithi, 2020; African Union, 2023).

Ultimately, the EU's vision for a legislatively empowered PAP represents a significant investment in Africa's future governance structure and reflects a shared commitment to fostering an integrated, democratic, and resilient Africa. Further AU consensus on PAP's legislative role will be essential to realizing this vision, allowing PAP to emerge as a pivotal force for change across the continent.

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The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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