The Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), through the Trade Policy Staff Committee (TPSC), publishes every year a National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers (NTE Report) to describe the most significant foreign barriers affecting U.S. exports of goods and services in the main markets abroad. Prepared on the basis of the input of US companies engaged in international trade in response to a notice published in the Federal Register, the NTE Report gives an overview of the main trade barriers in key destination markets of US exports, including in some African countries. The 2024 edition of the report describes trade barriers in countries such as Algeria, Angola, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa and Tunisia.
The most frequent barriers that US companies indicate when exporting to these States can be summarized as follows:

1) widespread bribery and corruption practices (Angola, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and Nigeria). Corruption is a problem that particularly affects Customs, but in some countries – like Kenya – this phenomenon is indicated as affecting all the governmental apparatus, as US companies report that, basically, is not possible to win a public tender without bribing government officials.

2) long clearing time for import of goods. A case in point are the Algeria and Tunisia Customs. In particular, in the first country, customs procedures are reported to cause delays that take weeks or months, in many cases without any explanation, or Nigeria, where customs procedures are reported to cause major obstacles to trade, with inconsistent application of customs regulations; lengthy clearance procedures, and corruption.

3) mandatory pre-shipment inspection programmes that raise the cost of imports (ex. Cote d'Ivoire and Kenya),

4) mandatory permits that are required to import products in their territories that sometime take several months to be issued (ex. bank permits in Ethiopia, which are equivalent to an import license),

5) mandatory (100%) inspections of goods on arrival despite the use by Customs of risk management systems that should direct controls only on high risk shipments (ex. Ghana),

6) long lists of products banned for import or subject to import licenses (in this area, the continental champion is Nigeria, which bans the import of 45 different product categories, followed by Ghana). Tunisia and South Africa are also affected by this problem, but to a lesser extent.

Moreover, Egypt and Ghana Customs are accused of misusing reference pricing when assessing duties, i.e. of using tools like customs valuation databases in a way that not allowed by the WTO Customs Valuation Agreement. Indeed, the guidelines to this agreement clearly explain that Customs cannot reject the value declared by importers merely on the basis of a difference with the reference values, which instead seems to be the case in these two countries, according to the report.

To conclude, it seems that trade barriers are similar in countries belonging to the same geographical context over the continent, which probably means that in each African region there is a tendency for the various nations to replicate the barriers that one of the States in such agglomerates (which is usually the largest, 'hegemon', economy) has imposed. Reading the NTE Report, one wonders if Africa can be ready to implement the AfCFTA. In fact, most of the obstacles indicated in the report impact not only on American companies, but also on those established in other African states that trade with these countries. It is not a matter of being skeptical… Africa has certainly embarked on the right path, but with all these chains that still obstruct trade relations of african countries with other States in and outside the continent, the distance to travel for the achievement of a ‘single African market’ still seems very long.