

Development Policy and European Union Politics

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Summary and Keywords

Development cooperation is one of the traditional policy domains of the European Union (EU). Over the years it advanced from an instrument used in colonial times to one of modern partnership, although European self-interest remains a driving force. Jointly, the EU and its member states are the largest development donor in the world and also provide sizable market access and investment to developing countries. Their overall performance record has been assessed fairly positively by internal and external parties, although many possible improvements have been identified. The various enlargements of the EU traceably supported a widening of the geographic and substantive scope of EU development policies and practice. In addition, EU development cooperation was reinforced by the fact that it gradually received a firmer basis in the constituent EU treaties.

The “European Consensus on Development” document, as revised in 2017, laid out the main direction of and emphases in EU development cooperation until the year 2030. The European Consensus prescribed a rights-based approach, and squarely placed the United Nations “Agenda 2030” and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contained in it, as the main framework and objectives for EU development cooperation.

A wide range of actors is involved in EU development cooperation, in part because this is an area of shared competence among the EU member states that pursue their own national policies as well as those specified by the EU. Thus, EU actors such as the European Commission, Council, and Parliament feature in this policy field along with EU member states and individual or collective developing country actors. The most prominent example of this is the African, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) Group of States, which consists of 79 countries. Civil society organizations, including non-governmental development organizations, both from the North and the South, also seek to influence or otherwise engage with the policies and practices of EU development cooperation.

While EU development cooperation is an established policy field, it is also still very much a work in progress, and major challenges lay ahead for action in the period up to 2030, the year in which the SDGs are to be realized. These major challenges include funding, strengthening the EU’s political clout in the world by using development cooperation more strategically for forging and influencing global decision-making on relevant topics,

renewing and innovating the relations between the EU and ACP countries, handling the consequences of Brexit, and improving on the delivery of EU development cooperation.

Keywords: Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP), Agenda 2030, Brexit, European Union development cooperation, European Neighbourhood Policy, European Union (EU), migration, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), European Union politics

Introduction: The Evolution of EU Development Policy

Development cooperation is a long-standing and relatively prominent policy domain of the European Union, provided for since the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957. At first, the EEC's development policy was mainly driven by the interests of European colonial powers (especially France) in "Europeanizing" the aid and trade relations with their "overseas countries and territories" (Fraser, 2007, p. 158; see also, Broberg, 2011; Claes, 2004; Cosgrove Twitchett, 1978; Grilli, 1993; Lister, 1988; Long, 1980; McMahon, 1998; Ravenhill, 1985). Over time, the constituency for and outlook on EU development policy changed fairly drastically. Rather than being based on unilaterally imposed reciprocal arrangements, as was originally the case, since the 1960s European development cooperation became rooted in separate, unreciprocal, and negotiated inter-regional treaties (Arts, 1996, 2018; Holland, 2002; Mold, 2007; Van Reisen, 2009; Zartman, 1993). In addition, at least on paper, EU development cooperation has been increasingly based on notions of mutually respected sovereignty, rights, joint decision-making, and partnership (Arts, 2018; Kast-Aigner, 2010). In the 21st century, partly under pressure of requirements imposed by the World Trade Organization regime, reciprocity returned in EU trade arrangements with certain developing countries. This applies especially to the African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States (ACP), when reciprocal economic partnership agreements pursuing free trade came to replace the largely nonreciprocal and selectively preferential trade arrangements of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (e.g., Arts, 2018; Busse, 2010; Faber & Orbie, 2009; Heron, 2014).

Several factors have influenced the evolution of EU development policy over time, including the enlargement of the European Union, the elaboration of EU treaty bases for external development policy, and the adoption of the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy in 2016 and the European Consensus on Development in 2017. This article explores the aspect of self-interest as a driver for EU development cooperation; the activities, record and actors involved in EU development cooperation; and provides a review of some of the main challenges ahead for EU development cooperation until 2030, the year in which the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are to be fully realized. The article also reviews the main challenges that EU development cooperation will face in the coming years. These challenges include: funding for development cooperation; the political standing of the European Union in the world; the renewal of

arrangements for ACP-EU relations; addressing the consequences of Brexit; and improving the delivery of EU development cooperation.

The Impact of the Enlargement of the European Union

The various enlargements of the European Union, which grew from 6 members in 1958 to 28 members in 2013 (European Union, 2020), vastly broadened the circle of traditional partners and interests involved in EU development cooperation. This helped to create space for EU development policy and practice to gradually reach out to all developing countries in the world, instead of focusing more or less exclusively on former European colonies (Lightfoot, 2008). The accession of the United Kingdom in 1973 was particularly impactful in this regard, because it opened up contacts with Commonwealth countries and brought in a new member state with a clear vision and relevant expertise on development matters. The accession of Greece in 1981 and of Spain and Portugal in 1986 led to increased attention for Latin America and the non-European Mediterranean (Fraser, 2007, p. 168). According to Broberg (2011, p. 542): “Hence, the Union concluded broad development agreements with these countries, as well as with India, Pakistan and the then five ASEAN states of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand” .

Gradually, since the late 1980s, the non-European Mediterranean became designated as “the Neighbourhood,” comprising both southern and eastern neighbors of the European Union. Fueled by new insights into both the strategic importance of investing in the relations with Europe’s close neighbors and the distinctive development needs of the countries involved, relations with the Neighbourhood grew into a major new focal point for EU development policy, alongside the traditionally strong relation with the ACP countries. This culminated in the European Neighbourhood Policy, which was launched in 2004 and reviewed in 2015 (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2015). The policy extends to 16 countries—Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Syria, Palestine, Tunisia, and Ukraine— and “aims at the stabilization of neighbouring countries and strengthening resilience, particularly by boosting economic development.” It focuses on:

four priority areas: good governance, democracy, the rule of law and human rights, with a particular focus in engaging further with civil society; economic development; security; migration and mobility, including tackling the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement.

(European Commission, 2018B, p. 20)

While not usually labeled as development cooperation, it is relevant to note here that the relations between the European Union and Russia—the EU’s largest neighbor—have always been handled separately. Since 1997 they have been subject to a designated Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. This agreement was in place for 10 years, but because of disagreements on revisions of the trade and investment paragraph, the negotiations on a long-term new agreement failed. Since March 2014, political complications

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concerning the “illegal annexation of Crimea and the deliberate destabilization of Ukraine” (European Union Delegation to the Russian Federation, 2020, p. 1) further complicated EU-Russia relations. Thus, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement has been renewed annually since 2007.

In 1995 Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the EU. A totally new situation for EU development cooperation only emerged in 2004, when a large number of member states joined who lacked established development policies. Many of the eight Central and Eastern European States involved (Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia) “had to build their development capacity from scratch, and in part, at the behest of the EU. They have also had to re-orientate themselves from being recipients of EU aid to becoming donors” (Lightfoot, 2008, p. 128; see also, Fraser, 2007). This made EU development policy an even more contested terrain than before.

EU Treaty Bases for External Development Policy

In addition to the impact of the enlargement of the European Union on EU development policy, the constituent EU treaties gradually started to elaborate the EU’s general competence and substantive priorities in this field (Arts, 2000, pp. 137–166; Broberg, 2011). In 1992, when the Maastricht Treaty on European Union was adopted, a development cooperation title finally became part of the formal EU mandate (see “The Maastricht Treaty: Creating the European Union”). According to the treaty, EU development cooperation should foster “the sustainable economic and social development of the developing countries, and more particularly the most disadvantaged among them ... the smooth and gradual integration of the developing countries into the world economy” and “the campaign against poverty in the developing countries” (European Union, 2002, pp. 109–110). It also clarified that EU policy in this realm “shall contribute to the general objective of developing and consolidating democracy and the rule of law, and to that of respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms.” In doing so, EU commitments made (and EU approved objectives set) in the United Nations or other “competent international organisations” shall be honored (European Union, 2002, p. 110).

In December 2005, Development Commissioner Louis Michel stated that: “for the first time in fifty years of development cooperation” the European Consensus on Development defined “at the Union level the common values, principles, objectives and means in favour of poverty eradication” (Michel, 2006, p. 3). In 2007, the Lisbon Treaty positioned development cooperation yet more firmly as a foreign policy instrument by providing that “Union policy in the field of development cooperation shall be conducted within the framework of the principles and objectives of the Union’s external action” (European Union, 2007, p. 93). More generally, the Lisbon Treaty meant to stimulate greater coherence and to strengthen procedures and institutions in the realm of EU external affairs. In this spirit, the role of the preexisting High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (sometimes referred to as the EU Minister of Foreign Affairs) was reinforced with the establishment of the European External Action Service (sometimes re-

ferred to as the “diplomatic service” of the EU) to assist the High Representative (European Union, 2007, p. 27; see also, Furness, 2010).

The Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy (2016)

The 2016 Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy continued the trend of integrating development policy more deeply into the European Union’s foreign policy. This can be inferred from statements like: a “stronger Union requires investing in all dimensions of foreign policy, from research and climate to infrastructure and mobility, from trade and sanctions to diplomacy and development” (European Union, 2016, p. 44); “development policy will become more flexible and aligned with our strategic priorities”; and “development funds must be stable, but lengthy programming cycles limit the timely use of EU support, and can reduce our visibility and impact” (p. 48). The Global Strategy posited the worldwide fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed among United Nations member states as a key requirement for development and prosperity, and as a cross-cutting objective for EU external policies. The SDGs have since then become the leading framework for EU development cooperation, as reflected for example in the revised European Consensus on Development that came about in 2017 (European Union, 2017).

The European Consensus on Development (2017)

The first European Consensus on Development was adopted in 2005 (Michel, 2006) and was updated in 2017. The 2017 document, subtitled “Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future” (European Union, 2017), sets out the European Union’s policy priorities for development cooperation. Following the spirit of its predecessor, which contained a prominent focus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that had been agreed in September 2000 in the United Nations, the 2017 version fully sets the successors of the MDGs— Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations General Assembly, 2015)— as the main framework and goals to pursue. Thus, the 2017 European Consensus is structured along the lines of People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership, or the “key themes of the 2030 Agenda” (UN General Assembly, 2015). A periodic review of EU development policies and programs conducted by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), confirmed that the 2017 European Consensus is “fully aligned” with Agenda 2030 (OECD, 2018, p. 18; see also, European Commission, 2019F).

Overall, the 2017 European Consensus provides “the framework for a common approach to development policy that will be applied by the EU institutions and the Member States while fully respecting each other’s distinct roles and competences” (European Commission, 2019F, p. 3). Similar to earlier EU development cooperation policies and instruments, in the 2017 European Consensus “development” is conceptualized as a phenomenon with economic, social, environmental, and political dimensions. The reduction and ultimately the eradication of poverty remain the primary aims of EU development policy. In

a section devoted to “Principles and Values guiding development action” (European Commission, 2019F, p. 6), the consensus recalls Article 21(1) of the Treaty on European Union as laying out the following principles of EU external action: “democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law” (p. 6). Gender equality features as another substantive value, and some general means to pursue and achieve these values are specified. They include good governance, political dialogue, a rights-based approach to development cooperation, and participation of civil society organizations in development. The European Union also committed to allocating “at least 20% of its official development assistance (ODA) to social inclusion and development” (p. 8) and “0.7% of its Gross National Income ... as ODA within the timeframe of the 2030 Agenda” (p. 49).

The Consensus specifically clarifies that it also extends to EU development actions in its neighboring regions “in coherence and consistency with the European Neighbourhood Policy” (European Commission, 2019F, p. 46). A final significant aspect is that the 2017 European Consensus introduced a system of progress reporting (starting in 2019 and to be repeated every four years thereafter). Accordingly, in 2019 the Commission published the first progress report on “how the EU and its Member States are supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in developing countries through development cooperation” (p. 7).

Self-Interest as a Driver for EU Development Cooperation

The developments sketched thus far resulted in an expansion of the geographical and substantive scope and orientation of EU development cooperation and embedded it more firmly as an instrument of both development and foreign policy. The European Union is rather explicit on its self-interest in development cooperation, but in a rather different way than was the case in the colonial and decolonization eras (Farrell, 2005). A first example is represented in the joint foreword to the *Annual Report on the Implementation of the European Union’s Instruments for Financing External Actions* of 2017 (European Commission, 2019A, p. 5), written by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy —Federica Mogherini— and the three commissioners most involved in development policy:¹

Investing in peace, security and development outside our borders is not charity: it has a direct impact on peace, security and development for Europeans. For this reason, the EU and its Member States remain the largest global development donor: collectively we provided more than EUR 76 billion in Official Development Assistance, with more than EUR 1.3 billion coming from EU institutions. Over EUR 2 billion went to humanitarian support in more than 90 countries.

(European Commission, 2019A, p. 5)

This statement should be taken with a good pinch of salt, as it is clear that the European Union has other substantial (both real and perceived) self-interests at stake as well, for example in relation to commodities or food security. For example, this was manifested in the fact that the Union kept this policy in place for a long time without fundamental changes, despite widespread evidence of the detrimental impact of the Common Agricultural Policy on developing countries (particularly before the 2014 reforms) Hurt, 2010; see also, Blanco, 2018; Boysen, Grinsted Jensen, & Matthews, 2016).

A second example of self-interest influencing development policy is the emphasis the European Union places on migration issues. While the 2017 European Consensus on Development acknowledged that migration is “a complex, global, long-lasting phenomenon requiring a carefully-designed, balanced, evidence-based and sustainable policy response” and that “well managed migration and mobility can make positive contributions to inclusive growth and sustainable development” (European Union, 2017, p. 39), the EU hardly revealed its crude self-interest when it immediately coupled these remarks to references to “the right of Member States under Article 79(5) TFEU to determine volumes of admission of third-country nationals coming from third countries to their territory in order to seek work” and to the “major challenges” and negative impact that irregular migration can have “on the countries of origin, transit and destination” (European Union, 2017, p. 39). The EU generally became more interested in —implicitly or explicitly— tying development assistance and trade arrangements to agreements on how to handle so-called irregular or illegal migration, at times by insisting on blanket clauses obliging developing countries to agree to the return and readmission of their nationals who were “illegally” present in the European Union. For example, the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) of 2000 when laying out the objectives, terms, and procedures for EU-ACP development cooperation, determined in Article 13 that migration “shall be the subject of in depth dialogue” in the framework of the ACP-EU partnership and tied development cooperation to the aim of “normalizing migration flows.” At both ends, “legal” migrants are to be treated fairly and may not be discriminated against. According to Article 13(5): “in the framework of the political dialogue the [ACP-EU] Council of Ministers shall examine issues arising from illegal immigration with a view to establishing, where appropriate, the means for a prevention policy” (European Union, 2000, p. 10). However, two other elements are even more controversial. Firstly, the ACP and the EU states each “accept the return of and readmission of any of its nationals who are illegally present” on the territory of a state in the other regional group “at that state’s request and without further formalities.” For making this work in practice, the ACP and EU states also committed to providing “their nationals with appropriate identity documents for such purposes” (p. 11). Secondly, and this time only in relation to ACP states, Article 13 contains a potentially far-reaching clause on negotiating bilateral agreements that imposes specific obligations on ACP states “for the readmission and return of their nationals” (p. 11). If any of the parties to the CPA deem this necessary, the bilateral agreements “shall also cover ... arrangements for the readmission of third country nationals and stateless persons” (p. 11).

Since the conclusion of the CPA in 2000, migration issues have become an increasingly prominent bone of contention, both between the EU and its development cooperation partner countries such as the ACP states and among EU member states. Internal EU divisions over this subject have even been reported as one of the reasons for the delay in the conclusion of the EU mandate for negotiations on a successor arrangement for ACP-EU development cooperation after the expiration of the CPA in February 2020 (Barbière, 2018).

EU Development Cooperation: Activities, Record, and Actors

This section presents some of the main activities of EU development cooperation, makes a rough assessment of its performance record, and introduces some of the main actors.

Activities

EU development cooperation covers a vast range of activities, including structural development assistance (financial, technical, and other), preferential trade and trade-related development assistance, humanitarian or emergency assistance, environmental policies, structural and ad-hoc political dialogue, including on human rights and anti-corruption policies, and cultural exchange and cooperation. In terms of possible subjects to be addressed in EU development cooperation, most frameworks and relationships have a wide scope. The Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) is a prime example. According to the first part of Article 1, the CPA is intended to “expedite the economic, cultural and social development of the ACP States, with a view to contributing to peace and security and to promoting a stable and democratic political environment,” to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty “consistent with the objectives of sustainable development,” and to gradually integrate the ACP countries into the world economy (European Union, 2000, p. 1). In addition:

Sustained economic growth, developing the private sector, increasing employment and improving access to productive resources shall all be part of this framework. Support shall be given to the respect of the rights of the individual and meeting basic needs, the promotion of social development and the conditions for an equitable distribution of the fruits of growth. Regional and sub-regional integration processes which foster the integration of the ACP countries into the world economy in terms of trade and private investment shall be encouraged and supported. Building the capacity of the actors in development and improving the institutional framework necessary for social cohesion, for the functioning of a democratic society and market economy, and for the emergence of an active and organised civil society shall be integral to the approach. Systematic account shall be taken of the situation of women and gender issues in all areas — political, economic and social. The principles of sustainable management of natural resources and the environ-

ment, including climate change, shall be applied and integrated at every level of the partnership.

(European Union, 2000, p. 1).

Many more foci and substantive areas for cooperation are added throughout the CPA. On the one hand this is a consequence of the multifaceted nature of the development process, and the reality that developing countries in different circumstances and situations will need to strengthen different elements of their economies, governance structures, or societies to realize their path to sustainable human development. On the other hand, such a wide-ranging scope may lead to a lack of focus in ACP-EU development cooperation and might become unwieldy in implementing and managing the CPA.

Record

In sheer volume alone, the European Union is a sizable actor in global development cooperation. Up to 2020, the EU and its member states jointly have provided more than half of the worldwide volume of official development assistance (ODA; European Union, 2017, p. 39, 2018b, p. 6; OECD, 2018, p. 17). For the period 2014–2020 the external action budget of the European Union amounted to 96.5 billion euros. This included 30.5 billion euros to fund ACP-EU cooperation through the designated European Development Fund (European Commission, 2018A, p. 5). The European Union and its member states are also the largest donors of humanitarian aid, and a major provider of foreign investment. In addition, the European Union is also the largest and most open market for goods from developing countries (European Commission, 2019B; Fraser, 2007). However, this positive record is sobered by the fact that, in absolute terms, EU aid has dropped every year since 2016 (European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development [CONCORD], 2019, p. 9).

In addition to its volume, EU development cooperation has a comparatively good record in content and quality as well. Throughout the European integration process, both the EU and its member states have been actively searching for innovative modalities of international development cooperation (Farrell, 2005). An old example of the latter is the Stabex mechanism that was introduced in the first Lomé Convention, concluded between the EEC and the ACP states in 1975. Stabex was a scheme designed to compensate ACP countries nearly automatically for losses they incurred due to the instability of export earnings from commodities. Likewise, the very fact that EU development cooperation gradually became based on negotiated treaties (that is, legally binding texts) laying down benefits and obligations for all parties, and that partly were implemented through jointly managed mechanisms, was revolutionary (Arts, 2018). The European Union and the ACP states have also been forerunners in the realm of integrating human rights concerns into development cooperation. Examples are the formulation of treaty clauses on the role of human rights in their relations and the design of procedural mechanisms for addressing human rights concerns (Arts, 2000; Bartels, 2005; Oestreich, 1999; Williams, 2004).

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Overall, the performance record of the European Union in development cooperation has been assessed reasonably positive. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has praised the European Union for having:

shown leadership in its efforts towards reaching global agreements on sustainable development and climate change, as well as in shaping the international humanitarian landscape. Its extensive use of budget support and variety of delivery instruments are enhancing ownership and inclusiveness in partner countries. The EU is also working closely with member states, civil society organisations ... local authorities and their associations in building global citizenship across Europe.

(OECD, 2018, p. 17; see also, Bossuyt, Caputo, & Schwarz, 2017; European Commission, 2019A)

A broad mid-term review of 10 of the European Union's external financing instruments, based on independent evaluations and staff working documents and published in December 2017, concluded that the instruments were "overall fit for purpose" and that "positive trends were emerging in relation to the achievement of objectives" (European Commission, 2018A, p. 7).

Nevertheless, there also is well-founded criticism on EU development cooperation, such as its focus on middle-income developing countries and the lack of tangible results. A vast array of suggestions for improvement is available as well (see, e.g., CONCORD, 2017, 2018, 2019; Faia, 2013; OECD, 2018; Santiso, 2002). These suggestions target a diverse range of matters, including the need to focus more on the most marginalized, excluded, and discriminated people; invest in data disaggregation and other ways to identify those people better (CONCORD, 2019); strengthen efforts to address gender issues; further environment and climate change objectives more decisively; systematically "follow up on the EU member states' records in promoting policy coherence for development" (OECD, 2018, p. 19); and "regularly review and adjust" the European Union's "human resource policies to ensure that its system has staff with appropriate skills and knowledge in the right places" (p. 24).

However, a major problem for coming to any significant positive or negative assessments of EU development policy and practice is the lack of data (including baselines that record the starting position in relation to a particular problem or deficiency in a certain location) and defective monitoring and reporting (CONCORD, 2019; OECD, 2018). In addition, it is not straightforward to establish the particular impact of EU policies and practice on matters that are addressed by other actors too (European Commission, 2018A). This applies particularly when working through a human rights-based approach (Arts, 2014).

Actors Involved

EU development cooperation is an activity in which there is "shared" or "mixed" competence. This means that this policy area is within the mandate of both the European Union and its member states. While all EU member states participate in EU development coop-

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eration policy and fund it, most individual EU member states have extensive records of separate involvement in this policy domain. However, there are significant differences among EU member states in terms of length of experience and level of involvement (see, e.g., “Country Cards” in CONCORD, 2019).

While in an ideal world it would most probably be desirable to have full coherence between the development cooperation policies and practices of the European Union and those of its member states, and the Treaty on European Union requires such coherence, in practice this has not been achievable (Carbone, 2008; European Commission, 2019C). It is problematic for member states’ policies or practices to contradict those of the European Union. However, the other side of the coin is that individual member states’ policies and practices are also potential spaces for pursuing useful development cooperation goals that still lack sufficient backing at the level of the European Union.

Beginning with the Maastricht Treaty on European Union, which was adopted in 1992 and took effect in November 1993, development cooperation has been a formal European Community/Union policy. At the level of the European Union, in rough strokes, the following main actors are involved in the making and the execution of this policy. The Council of Ministers sets the main policy priorities and makes all policy decisions. The European Commission prepares the decision-making of the Council of Ministers, for example by proposing new legislation or providing underlying documents that weigh various policy options. In addition it implements the decisions of the Council and the European Parliament, manages EU policies, draws up budget proposals and supervises them once approved. The most relevant directorates-general of the European Commission are: International Cooperation and Development; European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations; Trade; the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations; and Economic and Financial Affairs. In addition, the European External Action Service, also referred to as the diplomatic service of the European Union, provides important direction and support for development policy. The Service for Foreign Policy Instruments may render support as well. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy chairs the Foreign Affairs Council and is one of the vicepresidents of the European Commission. The High Representative is charged with conducting the Union’s common foreign and security policy, including representing the Union in this realm, and with securing the consistency of the European Union’s external actions. The latter is much needed, primarily because of the complicated institutional set-up and the sheer number of actors involved on behalf of the European Union (see, e.g., Hill, Smith, & Vandenhooacker, 2017; Market, 2012; Smith, 2013).

The European Parliament (EP) has a long history of scrutinizing the EU development cooperation record. Over time, as a result of the strengthened mandate and procedures for development cooperation provided in the constituent EU treaties, the Parliament’s clout in this field has increased, for example as a result of its role of a co-legislator. If the proposal to integrate the currently scattered budget lines for development cooperation into a single entity, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, the parliament will be even better placed to perform its budgetary and inspection

roles (Cadilhac & Jones, 2018; European Commission, 2018B). There is room for further improvement, such as “the (complete and timely) information of the European Parliament (to allow a proper democratic scrutiny) and the degree of implication of the EP when deciding the political steering and programming ... assistance” (Cadilhac & Jones, 2018, p. 16). In addition, better implementation and clarification of the existing mechanisms, an adequate reporting system, and performance indicators are required. Attention has also been drawn to the largely untapped learning ground that the EP’s own international diplomacy efforts provide:

indeed, through its parliamentary diplomacy (interparliamentary cooperation, committee missions, activities in support for democracy in third countries), the European Parliament has acquired its own expertise regarding the situation in third countries which could be a real asset when it comes to assess the need for EU assistance in partner countries, to target beneficiary countries, to programme the assistance, or to implement the EU’s action in the field. (p. 17)

Additional European actors who are actively involved in EU development cooperation activities include the European Investment Bank and various global or all-European civil society and private sector actors who seek to influence EU development policy and practice or to take part in certain implementation activities. Global multilateral organizations might engage as well, such as the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children’s Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

At the level of the member states, primarily national governments, national parliaments, national level private sector actors, and national or local civil society actors may engage with EU development cooperation.

This line-up of actors is mirrored, often in bits and pieces, on the side of the developing country partners of the European Union. The ACP-EU relationship has the most advanced joint institutional set-up with, for example, a joint ACP-EU Council of Ministers, a joint Parliamentary Assembly, and the ACP developing countries organized in the ACP Group (Secretariat ACP, N.D.).² Relevant regional organizations, such as the African Union, and regional trade organizations, such as Mercosur, also reach out to the European Union or are approached for collaboration. In addition to central, regional, and local governments of developing countries, private sector and civil society actors from those countries might engage as well. This is explicitly provided for in the ACP-EU Cotonou Partnership Agreement (e.g., art. 6. 8 and 10).

Challenges Ahead for EU Development Cooperation Until 2030

Over time, the European Union has built up an extensive, prominent, and solid record in development cooperation. Agenda 2030 serves as the key framework for EU development

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cooperation. Thus, the period up to 2030 (the year by which the Sustainable Development Goals are to be realized) is also an adequate timeframe for reflecting on the prospects for a (further) strengthening or weakening of EU development cooperation and its impact. In random order, some of the main challenges are funding for development cooperation, the political standing of the European Union in the world, the renewal of arrangements for ACP-EU relations, addressing the consequences of Brexit, and improving the delivery of EU development cooperation.

Funding Development Cooperation

The European Union must step up its financial performance record, even though jointly the European Union and its member states currently are the world's largest donor of development assistance already and they provide comparatively sizable trade and investment opportunities for developing countries. Nevertheless, in 2018, only four EU member states actually realized their commitment to allocating 0.7% of their gross national income (GNI) to ODA: Denmark, Luxembourg, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. No fewer than 12 EU member states reduced their ODA/GNI ratio (that is the percentage of the GNI devoted to ODA) in 2018 (CONCORD, 2019). This declining trend is problematic, especially since meeting the requirements of Agenda 2030 for realizing the SDGs requires a major additional investment that is far from being available. The OECD has calculated that in 2016 less than half of the funding required to cover the estimated global needs for realizing the SDGs (between approximately 333 to 466 billion US dollars per year) were actually available (European Commission, 2018A).

The European Union's Political Standing in the World

A second major challenge comes from the foreign policy realm. It is about whether the European Union and its member states actually capitalize enough on the energy and resources spent on development cooperation, and external relations at large, in terms of their global political standing in the world. Geopolitical changes are in the process of triggering changes in traditional power balances. The changing position of the United States in this political landscape, the different-style leadership in the United States under Trump, and more assertive voices and practices relating to development issues from countries like China, India, Russia, and Brazil, have made the leadership role that the European Union aspires to much less obvious than in the past. Different ideas about the role of human rights or sustainability concerns in development, and thus in development cooperation, have come up and have created a situation in which, for instance, some developing country governments who do not wish to subject themselves to certain standards or conditions in EU development cooperation may prefer to collaborate with China instead of their traditional development cooperation partner the European Union (García-Herrero & Xu, 2019; Osondu-Oti, 2016; Taylor, 2011).

The issue of political returns, in a broad meaning, has also come up in relation to ACP-EU relations. The 79 ACP and 27 (after Brexit) EU states together make up more than half of the states in the world and govern more than 1.5 billion people. The long-standing collab-

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orative bond between them brings potential for influencing global decision-making and pursuing joint goals. According to the European Commission (2019D):

By setting up a powerful political alliance, the EU and its partners will be in a position to develop solutions to the challenges faced in each region. These include growth and job creation, human development and peace, migration and security issues. Many of today's challenges of a global dimension require a concerted, multilateral approach, in order to achieve tangible results. In 2015 we set up a successful coalition that ultimately led to the conclusion of the Paris Agreement on climate change. This shows that the ACP-EU partnership has the power to provide valuable responses to global challenges. If we join forces, we can form a majority worldwide, as the EU and ACP countries represent more than half of the UN membership. Together, we can make a difference and set a global agenda in international forums. (p. 1)

Obviously, this does not refer to (and would not work if it did entail) "buying" token support for EU positions in international fora through development assistance. Rather, the matter extends to genuine joint identification of mutual interests and shared positions and finding strategic support for pursuing them. Thus far, this potential asset has not been realized. Changing this would be a major breakthrough and would both increase the political clout of all states involved and contribute to the constituency for EU development cooperation. It is an element that has often been mentioned in discussions about arrangements for post-Cotonou ACP-EU relations.

Renewing ACP-EU Relations

The third major challenge is that of reinventing the purpose and terms of the special development cooperation relations with the ACP states. For a long time, ACP-EU relations were the uncontested mainstay of EU development cooperation and the ACP (which includes a large number of former European colonies) benefited from the highest level of preferential treatment and development assistance available. Gradually this situation changed and non-ACP developing countries became beneficiaries of, and participants in, EU development cooperation. Special trade preferences for ACP countries, at first more or less exclusively reserved for them, were increasingly extended to non-ACP developing countries. This erosion of the (added) value of ACP trade preferences (Arts, 2003; Gibb, 2000; Stevens, 2006) among others came about as a result of increasing pressure in the World Trade Organization and elsewhere to justify the nonreciprocal or exclusive nature of the special trade preferences granted by the European Union to the ACP, for example over other least-developed countries or small island developing states. This culminated in the conclusion of a series of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the European Union and various (sub)regional groups of ACP states. The EPAs have been controversial from the start because of doubts about the necessity of concluding them in the first place, and about the extent to which they would serve the development needs of the ACP states involved (Arts, 2018). Negotiations proceeded slowly, but in November 2019 31 ACP states were implementing seven EPAs. Since the EPAs concluded and implement-

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ed by then mainly cover trade in goods, in the same month the European Commission announced its interest in starting new negotiations on “deepening” the EPAs. This meant that the Commission aimed to extend EPAs to covering “services, investment, trade and sustainable development, intellectual property rights, competition policy and public procurement, among other issues” as well (European Commission, 2019E, p. 1). In December 2019 the Council of Ministers endorsed this Commission proposal (Council of the European Union, 2019B) by adopting revised negotiation directives.

The trend of erosion of ACP trade preferences is illustrated in the fact that, with the conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement between the European Union and Mercosur in June 2019, the Union had signed association, free trade, or political and cooperation agreements with 31 of the 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), which comprises all except Bolivia and Venezuela. The European Union is the third largest trade partner, the first investor, and the largest provider of development assistance to the LAC (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2019) and seeks to further strengthen the relations involved, by going “beyond a traditional donor-recipient logic and in the spirit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (p. 2). The EU-Mercosur Free Trade Agreement adopted in 2019, among other measures, extended tariff-free access to the European market for sugar from Brazil and Paraguay. Especially in light of the importance of sugar for certain Caribbean ACP producers, the ACP Group published a strong statement on this matter in which it communicated that it deeply regretted “that it was not consulted fully on the context and content of this Free Trade Agreement as per Article 12 of the Cotonou Agreement” (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States, 2019A). In addition, the ACP states found it “deeply regrettable that agreements such as the new EU/Mercosur agreement manifestly ignore[d] the collateral damage done to the EU’s commitments under the Economic Partnership Agreements signed in good faith by many ACP countries” (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States, 2019A). The tone of this statement was likely the result of ongoing tensions in ACP-EU relations about the significance, purpose, and future modalities of ACP-EU development cooperation.

The Cotonou Partnership Agreement, which is the main framework for ACP-EU relations, was scheduled to expire on 29 February 2020. Negotiations on successor arrangements started in September 2018 but progressed slowly and in a difficult political climate with deeply diverging expectations between the ACP, the European Union, the EU member states and other interested parties (Advisory Council on International Affairs, 2015; Bossuyt, Keijzer, Medinilla, Sherriff, Laporte, & de Tollenaere, 2017). By February 2020 the negotiations were far from finished. In order to avoid a gap in the formal framework for EU-ACP relations, the ACP-EU Council of Ministers decided to adopt transitional measures until a new ACP-EU Partnership Agreement came into force (Council of the European Union, 2019A). Ultimately this entailed extending the application of the CPA until December 2020 (European Commission, 2020).

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In due course, given the prominent place of ACP-EU cooperation in the past and the development challenges that many ACP states continue to face (with 39 of the 79 ACP nations qualifying as least-developed states: Arts, 2018), the states involved are duty-bound to bring the process to a positive outcome. A subsequent challenge will be to find ways to increase and deepen the results of ACP-EU economic, technical, and political cooperation.

Brexit

The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, widely referred to as Brexit, became a fact on February 1, 2020. Although the United Kingdom is no longer a member of the European Union, the exact terms and details of its withdrawal and of the new relationship between the two remain unclear. Besides the enormous impact that the Brexit will have on EU affairs in general, and on economic and other arrangements in place in the United Kingdom, this event is likely to have a major bearing on EU development cooperation. Therefore, it is presented here as a fifth major challenge ahead.

Brexit will likely end, or lead to a drastically lower level of, involvement of the United Kingdom in EU development cooperation. The United Kingdom's engagement with this policy domain and the conceptual and operational contributions of its Department for International Development will be missed among the member states who are interested in strengthening and innovating the EU record. The loss of the United Kingdom's constructive and strategic vision, its expertise, and financial contributions very likely will have a negative effect on EU development cooperation. On the financial aspect, according to the OECD, in "2016 the United Kingdom channeled approximately 12% of its total ODA through the EU budget and European Development Fund. In turn, this represented approximately 12% of the European Union's total external action finance" (OECD, 2018, p. 13). Thus, Brexit will make it yet more difficult for the European Union to meet the target of spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA, and an additional effort will be required from the remaining EU member states to make it up. Most probably triggered, at least in part, by the Brexit scenario, the European Commission's proposal for reorganizing the financial instruments for the European Union's development and broader international cooperation allows for third-party collaboration and (financial) contributions to some activities, subject to approval by the European Commission (European Commission, 2018B, p. 12). The (revised) Joint Political Declaration published on behalf of the European Union and United Kingdom in October 2019 also expressed the intention to facilitate participation of the United Kingdom in EU programs on "overseas development and external action," both financially and substantively (European Commission, 2019G, p. 5). Another financial implication of Brexit may be the related fluctuation in currencies (of the pound and the euro), which might take a toll on all parties involved.

The UK withdrawal may also result in a loss of free market access arrangements for developing countries. Besides the possible consequences for the United Kingdom, this might have devastating effects for developing countries that in effect rely (nearly) completely on the UK market, such as small Caribbean producers of bananas or sugar cane. In 2017, 100% of Saint Lucia's banana exports, 69% of Belize's banana exports, and 81% of

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Guyana's sugar cane exports went to the United Kingdom (UK Department for International Trade, 2019B; see also, Goodison, 2019). In order to minimize or avoid negative trade effects of Brexit, the United Kingdom has signed a range of so-called trade continuity agreements, allowing for the pre-Brexit terms of trade to stay in place. Such agreements have been signed with both developing and developed trade partners, including, respectively, the Caribbean countries and Switzerland (UK Department for International Trade, 2019A, 2019B).

Since the Brexit scenario is unprecedented, the exact consequences and impact of the UK withdrawal from the European Union remain to be seen, both as regards the specific policy domain of development cooperation, for the European integration process and for economic and political developments in the United Kingdom.

Improving the Delivery of EU Development Cooperation

A last set of major challenges is located in the sphere of further improving the arrangements and instruments for EU development cooperation. The widespread scope of the development aspects covered by the Cotonou Partnership Agreement is (potentially) problematically unfocused. In the revised European Neighbourhood Policy, a decision was made to focus on fewer priorities than before (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2015). The task will be to reconcile the requirement of having sufficient breadth and flexibility to be able to address the needs of a diverse range of development cooperation partners with the requirement of having sufficient focus to allow for concentration of efforts and critical mass. Another complicated job will be to keep a good balance between working on traditionally agreed subjects and activities and adding new, unavoidable, but perhaps initially controversial, subjects and activities. Examples of the latter could be migration and climate change.

In addition, there is still considerable space for simplifying procedures for EU development cooperation. For example, new budgetary arrangements were proposed by the European Commission in June 2018 (European Commission, 2018B). The Commission's main stated objectives in this regard were: the simplification of regulatory arrangements; the rationalization of management and oversight systems to reduce "the administrative burden for EU institutions and Member States"; and optimization of the impact of EU development cooperation through efficient use of available resources (European Commission, 2018B, pp. 10, 20). The Commission's proposal entails the creation of a new comprehensive Multiannual Financial Framework (2021–2027) that would merge several existing separate budget lines into one comprehensive Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NCIDI) worth 89.2 billion euros. The proposed new instrument would contain geographic and complementary thematic programs and a rapid response component. The geographic coverage would be comprehensive, instead of the scattered earlier arrangements, since the proposed NCIDI arrangements involve countries from all regions, including "the Neighbourhood," sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and the Americas and the Caribbean). The budget available for these regions is 22, 32, 10, and 4 billion euros (European Commission, 2018B and Annex I). The themes

involved are streamlined and include the following: human rights and democracy; civil society organizations; stability and peace; and “global challenges.” However, the latter unavoidably involves the rather broad array of “matters such as health, education and training, women and children, decent work and social protection, culture, migration, environment and climate change, sustainable energy, sustainable and inclusive growth, private sector and local authorities” (European Commission, 2018B, p. 13 and Annex 3). The Commission proposed a budget of 7 billion euros for the thematic programs. The rapid response component, with a proposed budget of 4 billion euros, is complementary to the geographic and thematic programs and involves contributions to “stability and conflict prevention in situations of urgency, emerging crisis, crisis and post-crisis ... strengthening resilience of states, societies, communities and individuals and to linking humanitarian aid and development action ... foreign policy needs and priorities” (pp. 28–29 and Annex 4). Overall, 20% of the ODA funded under the proposed NCIDI should contribute to “social inclusion and human development, including gender equality and women’s empowerment” (p. 19). Another 25% is expected to be spent on climate action and objectives, and 10% on “addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement and to supporting migration management and governance including the protection of refugees and migrants’ rights” (pp. 21–22). Support for investments and for other forms of financing are available under the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus and the External Action Guarantee (pp. 46–51).

Greater and more effective participation by civil society organizations in EU development cooperation is another long-standing objective that requires more attention and action (Arts, 2003, 2018; Lister & Carbone, 2006), particularly in light of the overarching objective of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs (the leading framework for EU development cooperation), which is to “leave no one behind.”

Concluding Remarks

Although EU development cooperation has improved and increased since 1957, it is still very much a work in progress and a dynamic domain, influenced by many internal and external factors, processes, and actors. Through the years, the various enlargements of the European Union clearly broadened the circle of partners and interests involved in EU development policy and practice. In addition, the European Union has gradually embedded its development cooperation in its foreign policy. Throughout these developments, self-interest has always been and remains an important driver for the European Union’s involvement.

The long-standing record of EU development cooperation certainly stands out for its volume (with the European Union and its member states jointly generating more than half of global ODA) and for the efforts made to search for innovative modalities of international development cooperation. Examples of the latter include the Stabex mechanism introduced in 1975 to nearly automatically compensate ACP countries for losses due to the instability of their export earnings from commodities. The gradual development of binding

legal instruments as a framework for EU development cooperation (both internally and externally with developing country partners) also fits this category. Another example relates to political dialogue and integrating human rights into development cooperation, a field in which the European Union and the ACP states have been forerunners by developing and applying treaty clauses and procedures for addressing human rights concerns.

At the same time, it is clear that the European Union cannot afford to rest on its laurels in the development policy realm. To the contrary, a wide range of challenges will require it to act decisively in the 2020s to help achieve the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Stepping up financial allocations and the performance record of EU development cooperation is essential, and finding a mutually agreeable and productive new arrangement for ACP-EU relations in the post-Cotonou era and handling the consequences of Brexit for EU development cooperation will be important additional ingredients.

Once the European Union manages to fully realize its commitment to inclusive development through integrating Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals into its development cooperation activities (as expressed in the revised 2017 European Consensus on Development), this likely will contribute positively to the European Union's economic and political clout in the world. It will not be easy to achieve this, if only because of the internal divisions among EU member states on how and where to move and how much funding to make available, the skepticism about development cooperation prevailing in certain layers of European societies, and the ongoing geopolitical changes in the world that seem to lead to a less central place for Europe than has historically been the case. However, the strength of the past performance record of the European Union in development cooperation still provides confidence in the possibility of a strong and productive record in the future. This will require all actors involved — from the European Union and its member states to their developing country counterparts — to do their utmost to make this happen, and preferably in co-creation.

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Notes:

(1.) Commissioners Hahn (in charge of European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations), Mimica (in charge of International Cooperation and Development), and Stylianides (in charge of Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management).

(2.) In December 2019 the ACP Group adopted revisions to its original constituent document, the Georgetown Agreement. With the signature of Angola on 5 March 2020, the requirements for entry into force (signatures by one third of the total number of ACP Member States) was achieved and materialized 30 days later. Since then, preparations started for implementing the changes laid down in the revised Georgetown Agreement including the name change from ACP Group to Organisation of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, 2019b, and 2020).

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