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## **Global Structural Policy for Africa's Development? The European Union's strategy on Africa examined**

The European Union is redefining its policy approach towards African countries. In November 2005 the EU Council adopted a new and comprehensive Africa Strategy redefining the relations of both the EU25 and the Commission towards our neighbouring continent. Whether this entails a new quality or merely blends old wines in a new bottle is part of intensive debate on the future of the co-operation between Europe and Africa. **Klaus Schilder** reports from an international conference in Berlin that brought together politicians, academics and civil society representatives.

Does the new EU strategy for co-operation with the countries in Africa (entitled >>> **The EU and Africa: Towards a Strategic Partnership**) mark what Commissioner for Development Louis Michel claims to be a "turning point" in EU-Africa relations or is it merely a bundling together of existing strategies and instruments? Adopted by the EU Council on 22 November 2005, the strategy is first and foremost a handy re-packaging of current EU strategies and policies towards African countries.

### **\* Only the beginning of a process**

The strategy centres on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa, and it calls for greater policy coherence without subjecting one external policy to the rationale of another. On the occasion of an international conference hosted by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, terre des hommes and WEED (World Economy, Ecology & Development) on 5 April 2006 in Berlin, a public debate that brought together policy makers, academics and civil society representatives from Europe concluded that the strategy merely marks the beginning of a lengthy process to achieve greater coherence towards Africa.

For the first time, an EU strategy aims at joining the fragmented and insufficiently co-ordinated development co-operation in African countries, carried out by the EU and its 25 Member States and their implementing agencies, into a coherent policy. But most of what is included in the package is far from being brand-new, and it is far from being implemented either. This holds true in particular for the promised increase in EU aid flows to Africa of an additional € 23 billion per year by 2010.

Even more important, since the adoption of the European Security Strategy (ESS) in December 2003 a broadened security concept, which includes facets of development co-operation,


humanitarian assistance, trade and migration policies, has increasingly set the frame of reference for the Union's external actions towards Africa. This approach is echoed in the concept of "difficult partnerships" described in the revised EU development policy statement published in July last year which acknowledges the importance of regional conflicts in Africa as a main impediment to development.

The Africa Strategy consequently emphasises peace and security, accompanied by good governance, development assistance, economic development and investing in people, as the central precondition for sustainable development in Africa. In geopolitical terms it clearly reflects Europe's growing ambition as global player in Africa vis-à-vis US foreign policy but increasingly so towards new actors such as China, India, Japan and Russia for a mix of self-interested geo-strategic, economic and development-oriented objectives. But it fails to honestly and frankly discuss European interests in the different areas of intervention thus preventing stronger ownership and involvement by African governments.

#### **\* Shopping-list and patchwork approach**

Discussions underlined that the added value of the new strategy is far from clear compared to older strategies since the principles for co-operation with the ACP group, amongst them all Sub-Saharan African countries, are laid down in the Cotonou Agreement, while co-operation with countries around the Mediterranean will be covered by the new EU neighbourhood and partnership policy. Further deficits identified include the lack of nationally or regionally differentiated strategies. The one size fits all approach fails to acknowledge African realities and the strategy's shopping-list character makes it difficult to see where and how priorities will be set. Finally, while the strategy focuses more on EU's needs the success of the strategy depends to a large extent on functioning and effective African institutions, particularly the African Union.

The consensus of conference participants with regard to security co-operation is that the strategy merely restates what the EU is doing already but fails to offer a more comprehensive vision of the future EU security policy towards Africa. Since EU military missions have never been seen as "politically innocent" in the past—least of all by the African partners—this is considered a major drawback. Another financial challenge is the risk that the 2007 to 2013 development envelopes will be diverted to expanding security priorities, for example the follow-up financing of the African Peace Facility.

Economic relations with Africa is another area where EU's economic self-interest collides with endeavours to create a fairer development partnership – in theory and in practice. In what was characterised as a "patchwork approach to Africa" the EU is negotiating free trade agreements (Economic Partnership Agreements, EPAs) with four African regional groupings that challenge the integration trajectory of African regional organisations such as SADC or the EAC. The call for African ownership echoed throughout the strategy is certainly laudable but infused with contradictions as the recent E  negotiations highlight the lack of African ownership in terms of process and content of future trade agreements. To foster coherence of EU's external trade policy in Africa, regional markets will need to be built in reality and not on paper including the time-sensitive support for necessary restructuring of African economies by aligning additional transformation funds with the EPA process.

#### **\* Migration and development**

Coherence was also regarded as the main principle and solution underlying the migration and development nexus. While current EU thinking – still overshadowed by the most recent events in Ceuta and Melilla – is dominated by demands for more effective migration control to contain migration rather than amelioration of some of the root causes of migration, the Africa Strategy remains weak in offering a positive vision for a pro-development migration agenda. Clearly a lot of time and resources will be needed to enhance the impact of migration on development processes, involve migrants as development actors and implement a labour policy for different labour skills. Coherence with other areas where the EU has clearly defined competencies such as trade policy is of utmost importance. Other bilateral EU initiatives, such as the neighbourhood strategy, that are far more restrictive in their approach to migration, exacerbate this already problematic issue.

Towards the end of the conference a consensus emerged that a joint EU strategy towards African countries is clearly a huge step forward. It marks the beginning of a process to achieve greater coherence and harmonisation, restates main challenges and aims to increase the efficiency of the EU Africa policy. Moreover it puts the Commission in the lead. Still: good intentions are fair enough, but playing strategic development objectives off against other external actions of the EU is a questionable course of action.

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