

## *Debate on the future of European development policy*

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**On 28 October, ECDPM organised a public debate on the future of European development policy with European Commissioner Neven Mimica and representatives of the Dutch development sector. The event took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands in The Hague.**

During the event, the European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development spelled out his plans for EU development policy and asked representatives of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NGOs, universities, think tanks and the private sector how they see the future of European development cooperation.

A panel debate, led by former member of the European Parliament Kathalijne Buitenweg, addressed the revision of the European Consensus on Development of 2005, the policy document setting the course for development cooperation in the European Commission and EU member states. Kathalijne Buitenweg also asked panelists and participants about the role of the Netherlands – and specifically the role of the Dutch private sector – in European development cooperation.

The debate was the last of a series of five, organised in different cities in Europe; a result of a discussion between the four directors of the European Think Tanks Group and Commissioner Mimica last July.

### **A REVISED EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON DEVELOPMENT**

The proposed new European Consensus on Development, expected to be published in late November this year, will be the overall framework document for EU development cooperation in the decade to come. The timing for this revision of the Consensus is critical. With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, the global context for international cooperation has radically changed. In June, the EU adopted a new EU Global Strategy. The European Commission will also soon publish an overarching communication on the implementation of the SDGs, under the leadership of Vice-President Timmermans. Together with the new Consensus on Development, these three documents will outline how the EU intends to support the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, both internally and internationally.

At the same time Europe is facing multiple crises, and financial support for international cooperation is increasingly under threat. On the horizon the EU also needs to negotiate a new partnership agreement with the countries of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group of States, as the 20-year Cotonou Partnership Agreement between the ACP and the EU will reach its end in 2020. A new European Consensus on Development is thus a key building block for Europe's international role over the next decade.



European Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development Neven Mimica and ECDPM Director Ewald Wermuth. Credits: ECDPM.



Giovanni Mastrogiacomo from the European Commission and Daniëlle Hirsch from Both ENDS. Credits: ECDPM.

Concern was voiced from the outset about the decreasing attention given by many EU member states to official development assistance (ODA), especially with the rechanneling of ODA funds to internal costs on refugees and asylum-seeker management. On the other hand, hope can be drawn from the polls showing that European citizens continue to support massively the idea of helping people in developing countries.

### COMMISSIONER MIMICA'S SPEECH

In his keynote speech, Commissioner Mimica emphasised a number of points, among which:

- The EU is and must remain the strongest global actor in the international development agenda. To this end, it will keep promoting the 0.7% target of ODA/GNI (gross national income) ratio, even though the current EU-collective figure is 0.47%. Each member state has its own role to play, as there is no single European development programme. The EU's role is to coordinate approaches and to promote joint planning and implementation. The revised Consensus is a key framework document in a series of policy documents pursuing this objective.
- The overall EU ownership of the revised Consensus is crucial for its success. This is the reason why it has been drafted on the basis of a wide consultation, to which this event also contributes.
- The EU's agenda is above all about human dignity. The social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable development unfold in several cross-cutting priorities: green

and affordable energy, climate change, and equality in opportunities.

- These priorities are multifaceted, which means it is also crucial to promote policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD), as spelt out in SDG 17. Security and development for example are very much interrelated and should be addressed through integrated approaches.
- Drawing on its experience and knowledge structures, the EU should differentiate among its relations with third countries. Least-developed countries and fragile states remain a top priority, which a significant part of EU ODA should target. Middle-income countries must gradually define a relationship with the EU based more on knowledge exchanges than on grants. Yet, because 70% of the world's poor live in these countries, ODA may still be relevant in some of these countries.
- In line with the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action, the EU must show leadership in smart uses of ODA. Achieving the SDGs will require huge amounts of money; therefore public funding should act as a catalyst, aiming to leverage tenfold amounts in private funding. External investment plans will be a privileged tool to incentivise investment in less reliable business environments.

### DEBATE BETWEEN THE PANELISTS AND AUDIENCE

Commissioner Mimica's keynote speech was followed by a debate between five panelists:

- **Aart Jan de Geus**, Chairman of the board and CEO of the Bertelsmann Stiftung;



Former MEP Kathalijne Buitenweg, Christiaan Rebergen from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mirjam van Reisen from Tilburg University and Aart Jan de Geus from the Bertelsmann Stiftung. Credits: ECDPM.

- **Mirjam van Reisen**, Professor in International Relations, Innovation and Care at Tilburg University and Professor in Computing for Society at the Leiden Centre for Data Science;
- **Daniëlle Hirsch**, Director of Both ENDS and specialist in environmental economy and water management;
- **Christiaan Rebergen**, Director General for International Cooperation at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- **Giovanni Mastrogiacomo**, Policy Coordinator in the Unit for Policy and Coherence at the European Commission's DG DEVCO and coordinator of the revision of the Consensus.

for EU member states, this drain on ODA takes money away from development work on the ground, where the root causes of migration can be addressed.

In addressing migration and other global issues, the EU accepts the need to differentiate its approach. Fragile states are of specific concern, whereas middle-income countries may not be the most important recipients of ODA anymore. An incremental, iterative definition of post-aid partnerships with these countries is needed.

Their discussion extended to a dialogue with the audience, which included some 80 participants from Dutch NGOs, universities and think tanks, the private sector and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The discussion is summarised under a number of main headings below:

### Partnerships for development

#### Commitment to development cooperation

The EU is a champion of development aid and ODA is seen as a privileged tool to help realise the SDGs and promote human dignity worldwide. It will strive to achieve the target of 0.7% of collective ODA as a proportion of gross national income. The Netherlands was praised as a traditionally committed member state, despite the alarming prospects of a decrease of ODA/GNI ratio (from 0.8% in 2010 to possibly under 0.5% in 2018). The Dutch are also no exception to the serious trend of a growing proportion of ODA being used at home to fund asylum and migration management. While this is allowed under the ODA definition and it is clear that migration is at the top of the agenda

The important role of the private sector in encouraging development was acknowledged. ODA can be used to leverage much higher sums from private investors. However, concern was also voiced that this requires clear and enforced rules of the game. While the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations (UN) provide guidelines for sustainable business, many major European companies still do not abide by these standards, although they receive support from public authorities.

The EU and its member states have different but complementary roles to play in international development. National identities and histories mean that some bilateral relations are particularly meaningful. The EU does not aim to homogenise development efforts, but rather it provides a broad framework for coordinated action and a set of values within which customised national policies generate more ownership. The EU's added value rests in its values-based approach and in its potential for leadership.

The 2005 Consensus on Development was described as a late-but-necessary milestone towards the EU assuming this leadership. It was noted with regret that the Consensus was never reviewed in a systematic manner, even though its general appraisal is positive. The process leading to the upcoming revised Consensus included the consultation of actors ranging from academics to practitioners, the private sector, CSOs and think tanks such as ECDPM. In the same spirit, the new Consensus should promote a vision of development relying heavily on a European wide joint programming and implementation. Like the first Consensus, the new one should be adopted by the three EU institutions (the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission). Perhaps, however, it should also be endorsed by other key actors in European international cooperation, such as civil society and the private sector.

## Policy coherence

The diversity of actors involved in development means that particular attention should be addressed to policy coherence. Policy coherence, a legal obligation since the Maastricht Treaty, aims at reconciling the interests, capabilities and efforts of the EU and its member states, and of their different ministries. Examples of coherence mechanisms in the Netherlands include joint task forces (on migration among other things), inter-ministerial consultation committees and focal points for cross-cutting issues and SDGs. This Dutch experience sheds light on how to bridge the existing gap between commitments to coherence and their implementation.

The principle of policy coherence for sustainable development does not replace previously existing principles, but rather it aims to address all trade-offs that arise in the pursuit of the SDGs. It calls for specific attention to mutual influences between and among social, economic and environmental aspects of development, as well as with security. In a narrower understanding, it can consist in mainstreaming specific SDG concerns, such as environmental and development impact or gender equality, into all policies.

## OUTCOMES OF THE DEBATE

The event was successful in providing all participants with more information on the revision of the Consensus and in offering them an opportunity to contribute to the revision, by raising specific concerns and suggestions. It also allowed the European Commission to ‘feel the temperature’ of the likely reception of the new Consensus in the Netherlands. Various participants commented favourably on the quality of the debate, the choice of the panel and of the moderator, as well as the frankness of exchanges between Commissioner Mimica and his Dutch interlocutors. Commissioner Mimica himself commended the panel and the audience as exceptionally interesting and useful.

*Photos and a full video of the debate are available at <http://ecdpm.org/MimicaDebateNL>.*



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