

**BRIEFING NOTE No. 149**

## **Half-time analysis: How is Team Europe doing?**

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In this brief, we look at the state of play of the Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) and how the EU is addressing some of the key conceptual and operational aspects. The Team Europe approach and initiatives have undeniably gained traction and political buy-in. In an era of increased geopolitical competition, from the start, there has been a strong consensus on the need for the EU's development cooperation to be more visible and have more impact. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and beyond the positive dynamic created by Team Europe and TEIs there is now the need to move from words to deeds, especially as TEIs will also be the main channel for delivering on the promises of the Global Gateway.

Stakes are high and a number of conceptual and operational issues still need to be clarified as the TEIs move from design to implementation. The EU needs to solve open questions linked to the coordination, monitoring and governance of the TEIs. This requires balancing between a light and flexible approach and the need for common structures to ensure that the collective momentum is maintained and that TEIs deliver on their high political ambition and transformational impact. This implies solving not only the internal procedural matters and coordination challenges, but also ensuring that TEIs deliver concrete results for partner countries as well as contribute to enhancing the EU's political and geopolitical impact.

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## 1. Introduction

Geopolitical stakes for Europe are higher than they have ever been. The war in Ukraine has forced the European Union (EU) to take a stronger geopolitical role and tested the collective resolve of the EU and its member states to ramp up all the instruments at their disposal, from diplomacy to sanctions, from military assistance to humanitarian support. Yet, in an era of increased geopolitical competition, Europe's visibility and influence in world affairs is waning and being challenged by China, Russia, and other regional powers. Against this background, the EU's response has been that of trying to develop new and better types of partnerships, notably with Africa, while seeking to establish a leading role on the global stage and protecting its interests and promoting its values.

The Team Europe (TE) approach that emerged in the context of the EU's collective response to COVID-19 is an expression of this EU collective ambition as it seeks to increase the visibility and impact of Europe in support of partner countries. Team Europe has gained momentum over the last two years and gathered a lot of interest and buy-in, both at field and headquarter (HQ) levels. The Team Europe approach and the TEIs, which are their main concrete embodiment, are being championed politically and bureaucratically as a game changer for the EU's international cooperation. Stakes are high to make it work and this goes well beyond bureaucratic purposes or even EU processes, but is also about the EU's offer and place in the world.

In this brief, we look at the state of play of the TEIs as

the process moves towards implementation. In doing so, we highlight a number of operational challenges that are being addressed and need to be further elaborated to ensure that the collective momentum is maintained and that TEIs deliver on their high political ambition and transformational impact. Beyond the momentum and traction that the Team Europe approach and Initiatives have created, the success will ultimately be judged on 'results'.

## 2. Update and state of play

Team Europe consists of the EU institutions, the EU Member States — including their implementing agencies and public development banks —, as well as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). By pulling together the resources and expertise of all these actors, and acting in a more coordinated manner, the EU aims to scale up its collective heft for better geopolitical standing and greater development impact. The creation of the €79.5 billion Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-GE) and the Team Europe approach that emerged as part of the EU's global response to COVID-19 were key milestones in this endeavour (Jones et al. 2020; Sergejeff et al. 2022). The TEIs were the main innovation and embodiment of the TE approach (Jones, A. and Teevan, C. 2021). TEIs can be viewed as the EU's response to increasingly challenging geopolitical contexts, aimed at supporting transformational impact and placing Europe as a partner of reference in partner countries.

### Box 1: Key features and elements of the TEIs

TEIs are meant to be easily recognisable flagship initiatives in areas where the TE actors can have collective impact. They are the sum of several coordinated, but mostly independent actions/interventions implemented by individual TE actors under an agreed Joint Intervention Logic, and to take part, a financial contribution is needed. The key features of TEIs are:

- Europeanness: Inclusive approach to mobilise all EU member states' (MS) expertise and resources.
- Modalities: There are a wide range of modalities available, and they should be used flexibly to achieve the best possible impact.
- Policy priorities: TEIs are expected to contribute to the EU's strategic interests and policy priorities, namely Green Deal; Science Technology and Innovation (STI) and digital; Human development; Growth and Jobs; Migration and Governance; and peace and security.
- Transformational impact: The core aim of the TEIs is pulling together resources and expertise at scale to have transformational impact.

TEIs were an integral part of the EU’s NDICI-GE programming exercise for the period 2021-2027 and are embedded in the country and regional Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) where they represent a large share of the total EU funding for partner countries. TEIs also reflect the general spirit of the NDICI-GE which is more policy-driven, ambitions to focus more on country level programmes, and makes use of a wider variety of cooperation modalities and tools.

It is foreseen that the TEIs will be the main channel for delivering on the Global Gateway, which is the EU’s new infrastructure and connectivity strategy (Teevan et al. 2022). While TEIs and the Global Gateway share some similar priority areas (with migration being a notable exception not being part of the Global Gateway), it is still unclear how these two initiatives link to each other in practice, even if the intention on paper is clearly there. Similarly, it is still unclear how the so-called flagship initiatives agreed and published at the AU-EU Summit in February 2022 link to TEIs. While most of these flagships will likely be TEIs, involving the EU and several MS, some might be EU-funded projects only, but it is still unclear how they will be governed.

## 2.1. A snapshot analysis of TEIs

To date, 158 TEIs have been agreed and are moving into the next phase of design and implementation. While some TEIs are still being discussed and some new ones may be proposed, the number has reached a plateau, and not many more are expected. The TEIs take place at the country, regional, and global/thematic levels, with an explicit intention that these different levels complement one another. The vast majority (128) of the TEIs take place at country level, 27 at the regional level and 3 at the global level. As a general rule, there are two TEIs per partner country, however, some countries (Mali, Madagascar, Togo and Morocco) have now three TEIs accepted while others have just one (for example, Senegal, Cameroon and Gabon) or none (for example, Central African Republic and Yemen).

### Geographic and thematic distribution

When looking at the geographical spread (Table 1), TEIs are essentially focused on the African region. Over half of the country TEIs (52.4%) and most regional TEIs (48%) are in sub-Saharan Africa, demonstrating both the priority Africa has been given, and the existence of a more extensive European development cooperation engagement in the continent.

**Table 1: The geographical spread of TEIs**

Country-level TEIs by region			Regional TEIs by region	
Region	Number	Share of all country TEIs	Number	Share of all regional TEIs
Sub-Saharan Africa	67	52%	13	48%
Middle East, Asia and Pacific	17	13%	6	22%
Latin America and the Caribbean	27	21%	5	18%
Neighbourhood East	7	6%	3	11%
Neighbourhood South	10	8%		

Source: Table reproduced by ECDPM based on [TEI tracker data](#) (consulted on 12 September 2022). For regional TEIs only a collective figure on Neighbourhood was available

Table 2 shows the spread of TEIs depending on the income category and fragility of a country. There is a fairly significant focus on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) that host 41% of TEIs, but the larger share remains on middle-income countries. Given LDCs often

face multiple overlapping challenges (including fragility, climate change related shocks and the knock-on effects of the Russian attack on Ukraine) and given that these countries, in general, have a weaker capacity to respond to exogenous crises, the focus of TEIs on LDCs is needed (Jones et al. 2022).

**Table 2: TEIs by fragility and country income status**

TEIs by country type		
Type	Number of Country-TEIs	Share of TEIs
Least Developed Country (LDC)	53	41%
Low Income	42	33%
Lower-Middle Income	54	42%
Upper-Middle Income	21	16%
Fragile State (OECD)	63	49%
Non-Fragile State (OECD)	54	42%

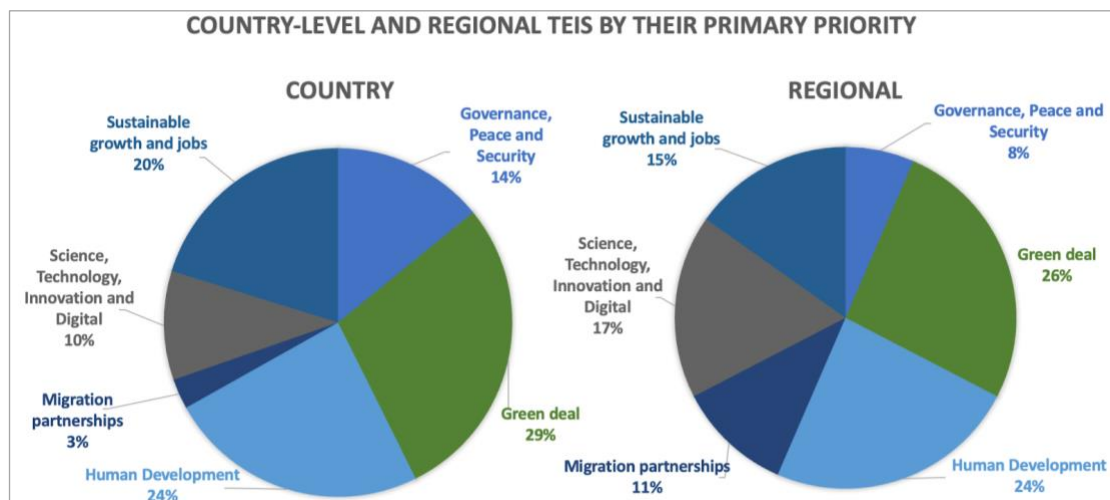
Source: Table reproduced by ECDPM based on JP/TEI tracker data

Thematically, TEIs cover all the EU geopolitical priorities. The Green Deal represents the primary priority and features in 28.5% of TEIs, followed by human development (24%) and sustainable growth and jobs (20.2%). However, TEIs are meant to be multidimensional and address several priorities at once. Indeed, 72.7% of the TEIs touch upon Green transition, while it may not always be their primary sector of intervention. At the same time, migration and digital are far less often priorities in country TEIs, with the share of 10% and 3% respectively. When it comes to digital, the Commission seems to have initially faced difficulties in mustering commitment on topics like digital infrastructure (Chadwick 2022). Migration, on the other hand, is mainly addressed on a regional level, where its share is 11% of the regional TEIs.

While the figures show that TEIs are very much in line with the EU’s strategic priorities, there is very limited information or analysis available on the more cross-

cutting topics. The TEIs should indeed contribute to the EU’s gender commitments including the implementation of the Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) and systematically apply a Human Rights-Based Approach (Di Ciommo 2021; Teevan et al. 2021). However, it is unclear to what extent and in which ways gender and GAP III priorities are reflected in the TEIs and there is no data on the share of TEIs considering gender equality as a primary or significant objective. While there are several TEIs that explicitly focus on gender (for example, TEI on gender equality in Zimbabwe and one on demography and social inclusion in Uganda), it is still an open question how it will be ensured that the TEIs reach the goal of having gender as a significant or principal objective in 85% of new projects and programmes and how the EU will ensure that gender is mainstreamed across the different components of the TEI.

**Figure 1: Primary intervention areas of the country and regional level TEIs**



Source: Figure reproduced by ECDPM based on the TEI tracker data

### Team Europe members' participation in TEIs

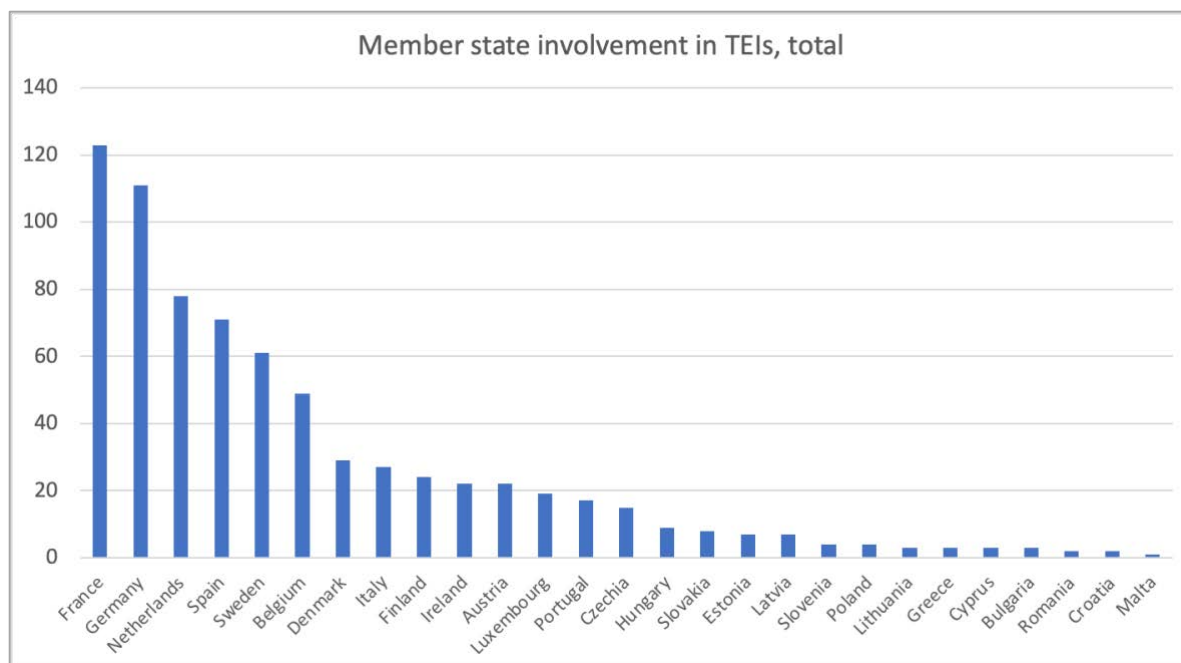
Inclusiveness is a core principle of Team Europe (Jones 2021) and co-creation has become the new 'mantra'. Overall, the TEI process has been quite inclusive so far as all member states - including the smaller ones - are involved in at least one TEI, be it at the national, regional or thematic level.

TEIs were discussed with MS alongside the MIPs, although their presentation and adoption in several large batches at HQ level was expeditious and left them little time to comment on the TEIs proposals. Furthermore, many member states with smaller administrations and limited presence in partner countries were not able to engage in the design of TEIs at country level. As a result, country TEIs were mainly designed by the EU and a limited number of member states. As regards the smaller member states that do not have a wide geographical presence and are non-resident in partner countries, their engagement is, however, facilitated through their participation in regional and global/thematic TEIs. For instance, Romania and Slovenia, which traditionally didn't have development cooperation

programmes with Latin America, are now participating in a TEI on [EU - Latin America and the Caribbean Digital Alliance](#). In addition, the wider toolbox of modalities that can be used in TEIs, such as twinning/TAIEX or public sector expertise, should allow for more member states and agencies to get involved (Di Ciommo, M. and Sergejeff, K. 2021).

Unsurprisingly, the EU and the European Investment Bank (EIB) as well as a few larger member states with longstanding development cooperation programmes (like France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Italy) remain by far the most active and participating in the majority of country and regional TEIs (CONCORD 2021; EU n.d.). In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, France and Germany are by far the most active countries, with France participating in 54 TEIs, and Germany in 49 out of the 67 in sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, in Latin America and the Caribbean, Spain has taken the most active role, participating in 26 out of 27 TEIs. This confirms that member states remain mostly engaged in countries and regions where they have interests or previous affiliations.

**Figure 2: Member state involvement in TEIs**



Source: Graph reproduced by ECDPM based on data provided by European Commission (EC)

### Involvement of development finance institutions

The involvement of banks and development finance

institutions (DFIs) is also crucial for the success of TEIs, especially to leverage the needed resources and live up to the promises made under the Global

Gateway to reach €300 billion worth of investments by 2027. It is notably through the development finance institutions and public development banks (PDBs) that TEIs will also be able to reach out to private sector actors and tap into their financial resources. Until now, financial institutions have expressed great interest in getting involved in TEIs and in the Global Gateway strategy, but have their own incentives and modus operandi. The interest of PDBs and DFIs is more complex to identify and is directly linked to the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) and strategic orientation provided by their respective national governments. A screening of existing TEIs is currently being undertaken by the European Development Finance

Institutions (EDFIs) in order to gauge their interest and contributions, including with their own/market resources.

Overall, the participation of European PDBs and DFIs is still limited to a few organisations and broadly mirrors the level of engagement of the member states. The most active bank is the EIB (participating in over two thirds of TEIs). Unsurprisingly, it is the DFIs of the most active MS that are also the most active in TEIs, notably the French AFD and Proparco, the German KfW and Dutch FMO. There is thus some room to scale up the cooperation with DFIs to involve them more where possible.

**Table 3: Banks and DFIs involvement in TEIs**

DFI involvement in TEIs		
DFI	Number of TEIs	Share of total TEIs
EIB	104	67.1%
AFD (FR)	73	47.1%
KfW (DE)	47	30.3%
FMO (NL)	44	28.4%
Proparco (FR)	32	20.6%
EBRD	20	12.9%
CDP (IT)	15	9.7%
Bio (BE)	6	3.9%
Finnfund (FI)	5	3.2%
OeEB (AT)	2	1.3%
DEG (DE)	1	0.6%
COFIDES (ES)	1	0.6%

*Source: Table reproduced by ECDPM based on data provided by the EC*

## 2.2. Update on process

After a period of design which lasted several months, the focus is now on the transition to implementation. This implies several conceptual and process challenges and opportunities for all stakeholders. The EC and European External Action Service (EEAS) have thus issued a number of methodological notes - notably on the design, coordination, monitoring, and governance of TEIs -

with a view to providing more guidance to EU delegations and member states. These guidelines are presented as non-binding. The EU is indeed compelled to ensure a balancing act between the need to preserve the light and flexible approach that made the success of Team Europe so far, and the need for management structures to ensure coherent implementation of the TEIs.

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### State of play: transition from the design phase to the implementation phase and what comes next

There is a great variety in the level of advancement of TEIs to date. Some TEIs are already starting to move from a conceptualisation, planning and agreement stage to being operationalised, while others are still being finalised and lagging behind. Overall, close to half of TEIs are now at a stage where implementation can begin (in other words, TEIs are sufficiently advanced and detailed, including in terms of envisaged activities and contributions from participating members).

Designing TEIs takes time, and there are many reasons why some TEIs are moving on faster than others. For instance, many country TEIs build on pre-existing or ongoing programmes of the EU and member states and are therefore quicker to operationalise. However, in certain fragile or conflict-affected regions like the Sahel, starting implementation of TEIs on the ground can be more difficult, and some delays can already be observed. Regional level TEIs discussed at the HQ level are more complex to set up because they are mostly new and tend to be more top-down. Delays can also be due to the actors involved in the field who can also either push TEIs forward or hinder their progress, for example, by their reluctance to share insight or connections. In general, it appears that when one or more member states demonstrated leadership and were actively involved, this was a positive factor in facilitating and speeding up the design of TEIs. Similarly, a pre-existing network in-country and good personal relationships as well as prior experience of dialogue and coordination among EU players, for example, under joint programming, are also usually driving factors.

Since the beginning of the year, TEIs have been presented and approved in several 'batches' by the EU Director-Generals (EUDGS) responsible for the Development Cooperation of the EU member states and the EC. In the initial design phase, TEIs have been formulated in broad terms as concept notes. Once approved, they are being further developed with more details on their respective pillars and components as well as on the contributions of participating TE members. TEIs are indeed built on various pillars covering several areas or sectors and are made up of different components that are each

funded by one or more TE actors. One of the main challenges is to ensure that these various pillars and components are brought together in a coherent and complementary manner in order to have maximum impact.

### The starting point: a joint intervention logic

The elaboration of a so-called Joint Intervention Logic (JIL) has been a major endeavour to bring together the various actors and components of a TEI. It provides the overall frame for each TEI and seeks to make the whole greater than the sum of its parts. The JIL identifies the various pillars and components of the TEI, its envisioned overall impact and specific objectives, as well as high-level results and indicators. The JIL also identifies the expected contributions and their associated modalities for each participating TE member. JILs are presented in the form of a table and can be updated when and as required over time. Each component of the TEI will also have their own intervention logic, where more granular results and indicators are agreed on. To date, roughly half of the TEIs have come up with a JIL, country-level TEIs being more advanced compared to the regional ones.

### Identifying TEI financial contributions

All TEIs must have financial value to them, and all participants need to give a financial contribution to be a participant in the TEI. A financial contribution consists of any contribution (including in-kind) for which a financial value can be estimated. It can either be a new/fresh contribution or a contribution from pre-existing activities (projects or programmes) that fits into the TEI. In any case, the financial contribution must come from the national budget or the balance sheet of the participating TE member state (for instance, are excluded contributions from MS agencies that are in reality EU funds managed through delegated cooperation or contributions funded through core funding of multilateral organisations). However, there are no demands for the size of that contribution, allowing member states with smaller development budgets to come in. For instance, the expected contributions of TE members to the TEI on human-centred digitalisation in Kenya amounts to €432 million, with indicative contributions varying between Netherlands' €132 million and Slovakia's €0.05 million (AAP Kenya 2022).

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Another key dimension in the design of TEIs is the financial tracking and reporting, which the EU proposes to be as transparent and realistic as possible. An important aspect of financial tracking concerns the extent to which the contributions consist of fresh resources or are mainly ‘repackaged’ programmes and projects brought together under the TEI flag. It is worth noting that the EU institutions are expecting TE members to bring in additional fresh contributions to boost the EU-budget financed operations, whereas the MS are mainly looking to boost their respective projects by benefiting from EU-budget/NDICI finance. The EU institutions-funded contributions consist of ‘fresh’ money resulting from the NDICI-GE programming exercise, while most of the MS contributions consist of pre-planned or ongoing activities. There are few fresh resources committed at this stage from the MS. Yet, the expectation is that MS and DFIs will bring in new resources and decide on new activities that contribute to TEIs in the near future, as their respective development planning and programming cycles unfold. Significant resources and investments are expected in particular from development banks and DFIs, and their engagement in the TEIs will be crucial to leverage at scale the needed resources, including the €300 billion promised under the Global Gateway of which €150 billion for Africa.

In order to track the disbursement of financial contributions, a joint mechanism for monitoring and reporting is being established for all TE actors. TE members can use existing reporting mechanisms for reporting and monitoring - such as the OECD credit reporting system, the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) reporting, and the Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD) framework - all of which will include a TEI keyword to identify TEI contributions. A number of technical questions and discussions have taken place regarding the eligibility of certain financial contributions. For instance, how to avoid double-counting for disbursements that might cover several TEIs (the choice is left to report the full amount either under the most relevant TEI or to split between the various TEIs concerned; or whenever a financial contribution)? How to report funds that are channelled through multilateral organisations or NGOs (the distinction is to be made between earmarked funding, which can be counted as a TEI

contribution, and core funding, which cannot because it is not specifically targeted at a TEI)? Or how to report on guarantees (funds being set aside but not actually disbursed or transferred can still be recorded manually as a TEI contribution)? In addition, manual reporting can be envisaged in specific cases.

Reporting and communicating the financial value of TEIs, including the extent to which they managed to leverage fresh resources, will be the first test case of their success. It is expected that the first general financial reporting on TEIs will be available in 2023, with an indicative total figure including contributions for 2021 and 2022.

### Monitoring, reporting and evaluation of TEIs

One of the main challenges in terms of monitoring and reporting on TEIs is linked to various components and respective monitoring and reporting practices in the member states, which often differ in terms of levels of detail and ambition. The monitoring and reporting on TEIs should build on common methodologies and mechanisms to harmonise processes and find homogenous criteria to track contributions, monitor and measure results, and communicate them. The EU and member states have hence worked towards setting up a common Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation framework (MORE framework) for the TEIs. The purpose is to help TEI members jointly monitor and report on their experience, results and lessons learned.

The MORE framework has been designed in a flexible and light way allowing the EU and MS to build on and make use of their usual standards and practices. According to the MORE framework, the monitoring of TEIs should take place at two levels: at the level of individual TEIs, and across TEIs (including reporting on regional and thematic TEIs):

- **At the individual TEI level**, the monitoring and reporting of the various components will be done as per the usual standards and practices of the TE members concerning their respective individual activities within the TEI which they should communicate to each other. In addition, 2-5 broad indicators agreed in the JIL aim to provide an indication of the overall direction of a TEI focusing on higher-level results of the TEI. Mostly, these



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high-level indicators do not focus on results that are directly attributable to TEI but rather on higher-level changes that the TEI aims to contribute to with other initiatives and donors working in the field.

- **Monitoring and reporting across the TEIs** will be done at the HQ level and concern more aggregate results using high-level figures and a limited number of indicators linked to the SDGs and broader EU strategic objectives. This reporting will be used mainly for institutional reporting as well as public information and communication purposes.

It is not expected that TEIs including new activities will produce any visible results overall in the short-term. Results reported in the near future will therefore be mainly attributable to already ongoing programmes. A strategic evaluation on Team Europe and Working Better Together as well as an evaluation of the NDICI-GE in view of its mid-term review are foreseen in the next year or so and should, in principle, look at the TEIs first results and learnings.

#### Governance of TEIs

In setting up the governance of the TEIs, there was from the start a general consensus on the need to keep the governance structures light and flexible, as well as non-binding meaning that if a TEI has already come into its own coordination and governing structure, there is no obligation to change it.

A number of principles have been proposed to ensure that TEIs governance structure remains light and flexible. While TEIs essentially require enhanced coordination and cooperation between TE members, the actors involved have stressed that there is no interest in changing the decision-making processes or competences of the EU institutions or member states. Secondly, the basic set-up of TEIs should be kept as simple as possible, for instance, to cater for the possibility of members joining a TEI at a later stage, which would keep the TE as inclusive as possible. Thirdly, the implementation of TEIs should, wherever possible, use the existing processes and mechanisms of coordination at the country level, to avoid duplication of efforts and to seek synergies between TEIs and joint programming. Here, the EU Delegations have an important coordination role,

bringing together different member states and DFIs. Finally, the complementarity between country- and regional-level TEIs, as well as TEIs in different regions, should also be ensured for maximum impact. Ensuring linkages and synergies among TEIs (notably national and regional) is essential to prevent each TEI from functioning in a vacuum and becoming a 'universe' of its own.

Overall, the governance of TEIs is shaping up to be a balancing act between flexibility and the desire for common guidance and framework. The EU has been careful in stressing that all guidance is non-binding and TEIs are flexible. This ad-hoc and bottom-up design has also been a key factor in the success and good reception of TEIs among member states as well as the buy-in of DFIs. Yet, in order to make sure that the TEIs are implemented in a coordinated manner, there is a need for "a minimum common frame that keeps the TEI together" (EC and EEAS 2021), and mechanisms that bring together the different actors and components of TEIs in a coordinated and impactful manner, notably by building into it ground rules and practices under a joint framework. However, there is a risk and concern among many TE members that this may lead to over bureaucratization of the TEIs and a certain 'institutionalisation' of processes which might curb the dynamic.

The proposed governance structure should involve all participating TE members (for instance, those contributing financially to the TEI) and is meant to take place at 2 levels:

- The overall policy and political steer is to be done through the **steering group**, constituted at the country level by the EU Head of Delegation and MS Heads of Mission (HOMs) (for example, Ambassadors) as well as non-resident MS and DFIs where relevant. The steering group should provide the long-term vision as well as the political narrative and communication about the TEI, and ensure dialogue with partner countries/regions and the links with broad EU strategic objectives and ambitions.
- The overall coordination and implementation of activities are done through the **management group** composed of the head of cooperation of the EU Delegation and MS

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HOCs + agencies - as well as non-resident MS and DFIs. The management group is also in charge of monitoring the impact of the TEI.

A 'secretariat' or support function might be necessary to support the management group in its tasks logistically (for example, organising meetings, sharing notes, etc.) and to ensure the linkages between steering and management groups. This support role can be ensured (and/or funded) by any one of the participating TE members, but the EC also underlines that it does not replace the *collective responsibility* for coordination. This would imply that, while the Commission and EU Delegation have the legal mandate to facilitate coordination, the onus of coordination of the TEI does not lie exclusively on them. The Team Europe approach also seeks to involve and empower all TE members and underlines each member's responsibility in taking the process forward.

While each TEI is meant to have its own 'light and flexible' governance structure, a key question is how will these link with the other relevant governance structures and decision-making processes and how to ensure the overall coherence of TEIs and draw on cross-learning and synergy opportunities? In particular, the Global Gateway and the EFSD+ have their own governance structure (notably a Global Governance Board and Business Advisory group for the Global Gateway, and strategic and operational boards for the EFSD+). It is essential that the governance of TEIs and of the Global Gateway are perfectly aligned and synchronised, including at the Council level between CODEV-PI in charge of the TEI horizontal issues, and RELEX, in charge of the Global Gateway horizontal issues.

The transition phase from design to implementation has shed light on certain issues that are currently being addressed at the operational level. As we have mentioned above, the setting up of mechanisms and structures are meant to clarify roles and activities in the coordination, monitoring and steering of TEIs. As the process moves further into the implementation in the course of the coming years, a number of key challenges will need to be addressed in order to ensure that the TEIs deliver on their ambitions and promises.

### 3. Challenges ahead

There are still a number of outstanding questions that need to be addressed as TEIs move forward. These include the coordination challenges, briefly mentioned above, but also challenges of setting up a proper monitoring framework and communication of results. Furthermore, thus far TEIs have been largely a European project, with little attention paid to ownership and involvement of actors outside the TE (for example, civil society). Below we sketch out some of the outstanding questions and challenges ahead that need to be addressed to ensure real and sustainable impact.

#### 3.1. Team Europe needs more team-building and collaboration at all levels

When the Team Europe approach was launched in 2020, the main aim was to enhance the coordination among the European actors - institutions and Member States - to be able to respond quickly to the COVID-19 outbreak. This approach was supposed to allow more reactivity compared to the joint programming exercise, often perceived as a heavy mechanism to implement. In that perspective, the Team Europe approach succeeded in encouraging the EU stakeholders to join forces more efficiently at partner country level.

##### Strengthening the links between Team Europe and the 'working better together' agenda

One of the main operational challenges brought about with Team Europe and the TEIs is to deepen collaboration and strengthen coordination with an increasing number and variety of players (Fattibene et al. 2022). Bringing together more players to the table in a coordinated and complementary manner so as to maximise the diversity and richness of its members was one of the main ambitions of the Team Europe approach, and also one of its main strengths. Yet, it is also one of the main difficulties in practice as all are now supposed to talk to each other, work together and coordinate themselves. While all agree on the need and value of joining forces and working better together, there are many practical difficulties when it comes to how to do so, both at field level and at HQ level.

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In many countries, the Team Europe traction has arguably outgrown the so-called ‘working better together’ agenda which was more structured. The latter, built around joint programming and joint implementation of development interventions between the EU and the member states, was suffering from a certain fatigue over the past few years due essentially to bureaucratic and lengthy administrative processes. Yet, there is now a much greater geopolitical rationale and stronger political buy-in for joint work. Team Europe builds on a wealth of experience of joint work and collaboration between the EU and member states in the area of development cooperation. Coordination mechanisms and structures are in place in most countries and they could be used and improved through the Team Europe impetus.

The EU underlines that both processes should be seen as mutually reinforcing as they seek to address complementary aspects of EU cooperation with partner countries. The light/flexible and inclusive Team Europe approach, which has a strong political and visibility dimension, can be complementary to the more lengthy and institutionalised joint programming process which aims to establish a longer-term and more comprehensive framework for EU and MS cooperation in partner countries. There is scope to clarify linkages and synergies between both processes and dynamics. This will, however, depend very much from one country to the other, based on country circumstances and the status of ongoing processes. In some countries, TEIs and joint programming have worked in conjunction (for example, Kenya, Colombia).

#### Enhancing dialogue and collaboration between different (and new) TE members

Enhanced coordination among EU donors and development agencies is a long-standing challenge with numerous well-known hurdles. Team Europe now also requires enhanced collaboration and coordination with new players such as development banks and DFIs.

When it comes to engaging with DFIs, a major challenge is to ensure that they are informed in a timely manner, incentivised, and included from the early stages. Another major challenge for the EU

remains to provide the adequate strategic policy steer to investment operations and ensuring that their activities are also driven by and support the EU’s strategic objectives in partner countries and have sustainable development impact.

Outreach and communication channels with and among DFIs are important to enhance strategic collaboration on TEIs and financial leverage. At headquarters level, closer exchanges and dialogues and strategic exchanges are taking place between the EC, the EIB, the Practitioners' Network for European Development Cooperation, which represents operational implementing agencies, the Association of European Development Finance Institutions (EDFI) and the Joint European Financiers for International Cooperation (JEFIC) as the network of European bilateral banks and financial institutions (comprising Spain AECID, France AFD, Italian CDP and German KfW). This has led to the adoption of joint declarations and statements in recent months<sup>1</sup> and constitutes a good basis for better collaboration among these players. As a next step, these initiatives and dialogues also need to take place at the operational level for enhanced coordination in the field.

Unlike traditional development actors, many DFIs are not so used to working together with donors and development agencies and have different approaches when it comes to decision-making cycles and timelines of operations, funding instruments and modus operandi, as well as interlocutors (Bilal and Karaki 2022). As a matter of fact, very few DFIs have offices in countries where they operate and seldom engage with EU Delegations in the framework of their operations. This partly explains why their involvement so far has essentially been towards the regional TEIs, which are designed at the HQ level. Yet, DFIs have stronger connections with private sector actors and moving forward; it will be essential for the success of TEIs and the Global Gateway that regular and closer collaboration and coordination takes place between them and ‘traditional’ development actors. One way of doing so is to identify focal points in EU Delegations for engaging with the private sector and DFIs in order to further support their inclusion in TEIs and Global Gateway implementation.

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Strengthening dialogue and coordination among the various EU actors and those of its member states is crucial. Similar efforts should also be made at the member states' level, as they also seek to strengthen internal coordination among their various domestic actors and promote 'whole-of-government' approaches. In that sense, MS also have their homework to do to level up and ensure that the right communication and collaboration channels are established between the multiple actors within their own structures (such as Ministries and administrations, development agencies, development finance institutions, local authorities, private sector representatives, etc). In many cases there are still gaps and actors are not talking to each other enough (for example, some disconnects exist between Ministries, development agencies and DFIs). In other cases, some member states can also share useful experiences and good practices, for instance regarding engagement with the private sector.

### 3.2. Team Europe isn't alone: Ensuring country ownership and involving other partners

Overall, the design and elaboration of Team Europe Initiatives have mostly been an EU driven - and arguably Eurocentric - process until now. The inward EU focus may have been necessary for the initial stages to sell and explain to the EU member states and domestic constituencies what Team Europe and TEIs were about and to ensure buy-in and high-level support. This seems to have been quite successful until now judging by the interest and involvement of all European actors in the TEI process. Yet, the Team Europe approach and TEIs must now go beyond this and actively involve other actors, in the first instance partner countries and local stakeholders, as well as other cooperation partners.

#### Promoting country ownership

Promoting country ownership is not only an EU development effectiveness commitment; it is also a sine qua non for the success and impact of TEIs and for the EU's own projection and reputation as a trusted and respectful development partner. TEIs should therefore be demand-driven and aligned to the partners' needs and priorities.

Country TEIs were mainly designed as part of the

NDICI-GE programming exercise and are thus broadly in line with partner country strategies and priorities. The design of TEIs should have in principle been the result of an inclusive process with the consultation of relevant stakeholders (notably national and local authorities, CSOs and private sector actors, as well as non-EU donors and multilateral partners). Yet, there were no clear instructions or guidance given to EU Delegations on how to conduct consultations. These varied greatly in quality from one country to another and in most cases information on TEIs was only shared with national stakeholders at a very late stage in the process before approval. As a result, TEIs have generally been discussed and designed primarily and essentially among European actors, with little explicit consultation with and outreach to partner governments and other local stakeholders. This is a major shortcoming which should be corrected in the implementation phase.

In the implementation of TEIs, partner countries and local stakeholders will be involved in the different components of the TEIs according to the respective standard participatory and consultative practices of the EU, member states and their agencies. However, more is needed to ensure that partner countries take ownership of the TEI process and that local actors (including local DFIs and banks, as well as private sector, civil society and local authorities) take the lead in implementation also. It is not foreseen at this stage that partner countries or other local stakeholders would be represented or have a role in the overall governance mechanisms of TEIs (such as steering and management) which remain essentially a European structure. TEIs should ensure that the principle of ownership is not sidelined or diluted in the myriad of European processes and ensure that partner countries and local stakeholders remain actively engaged throughout the process.

Moving forward, more significant and explicit efforts should be made to involve partner countries and other local stakeholders more systematically and ensure that they have a say and an active role throughout the TEI process. Some suggest a need to move from Team Europe to 'Team Europe-Africa' or 'Team Europe-Latin America', as a way to explicitly involve partner countries and regions in the TEI process and promote ownership (Bilal 2021). This is especially relevant for regional TEIs, which are

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‘programmed’ from Brussels and EU MS capitals rather than in the partner countries/regions.

#### Involving other partners and like-minded countries

In order to demonstrate and translate the EU’s openness and commitment to multilateral approaches, more efforts are needed to reach out to and involve other actors, in particular non-EU like-minded countries that are already active in partner countries and with whom synergies could be sought around TEIs. To date, there are very few TEIs that involve non-EU partners, but there is scope and interest to identify synergies and bring on board like-minded countries (such as Switzerland, Norway, the UK, Japan, the US) and multilateral organisations such as the UN and the World Bank Group.

Another idea is to reach out to other important like-minded countries (such as Japan) and emerging players (such as India) and seek to carry out joint communication activities on very specific issues where there are joint interests and to relabel certain activities as ‘Team Europe - Japan’ or ‘Team Europe-India’.

## 4. Conclusions and ways forward

Team Europe Initiatives have benefitted from strong communication efforts and support at political level. There has been from the start a strong consensus in Europe on the rationale of Team Europe approach and the need to be more visible and more geopolitical in the approach to EU development cooperation. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and beyond the high visibility given to Team Europe and TEIs, there is now huge pressure for the EU institutions and member states to deliver and be able to communicate rapidly on first results. This is particularly important in light of the Global Gateway promises and ahead of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) which will provide a first indication of the extent to which Team Europe and TEIs have been able to deliver and have transformational impact. Announcements and commitments made in the past few months and couple of years need to be followed by deeds and concrete deliverables, or else there is a real risk that this will backfire as the EU (and Team Europe) can’t afford to fall short of their promises.

The success of TEIs also depends on the MS doing their part to make it work, and it is each the responsibility of each TE member to take the process forward. In doing so, there is a need for continued political support and institutional buy-in, which seems to have borne fruit until now. Yet, this ought to be followed by and translated into changed approaches and new ways of working, both within and among the various TE members. There is homework for everyone. In doing so, continuing to enhance inclusiveness is essential so as to avoid that the TEIs *de facto* are just a ‘club’ composed of the EC, EIB and a few big MS and their agencies, PDBs/DFIs.

Beyond the internal procedural matters and coordination challenges brought about by TEIs, the success of TEIs will also depend on the extent to which the EU manages to build (or rebuild) trust with its partners. In a geopolitical era where Europe’s global visibility and influence are waning, the focus on visibility and communication are essential elements of the Team Europe approach and the TEIs, but they shouldn’t come at the expense of impact and delivering results for partner countries.

The ambition of Team Europe and Team Europe initiative was always beyond development, it was always geopolitical, and it was in response to those geopolitical challenges. While TEI may offer some hope for Europe to be more visible to deliver at a ‘larger scale’, a good story on the political dynamic and traction created by Team Europe is important but will not be enough.

Any evaluation of TEIs will have to take into account their wider contribution to political and geopolitical impact. The stakes in a more competitive global environment aren’t just whether TEIs are living up to development cooperation principles, and not placing an undue administrative burden on officials, they are much wider than that. The important technical factors and bureaucratic processes outlined in this brief are not inconsequential or irrelevant for whether this success will be achieved. The hard reality in these more geopolitical times is that ultimately it is irrelevant if the EU judges that the TEIs are a success, if partners, societies and local actors feel the opposite.

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## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> For example, the Joint Declaration on a European Strategic Cooperation Framework (AFD 2021) between AECID, AFD, CDP and KfW which led to the establishment of the enhanced partnership or JEFIC; or

the Joint statement on the coordination of European development and finance institutions on the African continent (AFD 2022).

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