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## **Team Europe: UP TO THE CHALLENGE?**

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This brief presents how the Team Europe approach has been applied to date, and explores the prospects, added value and challenges in terms of the EU and member states working better together, enhanced visibility and the possibility of a stronger voice in multilateral fora.

The Team Europe approach was born in the context of COVID-19 and was initially conceived as a way to brand European collective support to partner countries in response to the pandemic. Yet, it also responds to longer-term political trends and to a growing sense that the European Union (EU) and its member states are not visible enough – particularly in contrast to China and other external powers.

As part of the EU global response to the pandemic, Team Europe mobilised over €38.5 billion to support partner countries in responding to COVID-19. The European Commission is now working with member states to broaden the scope of Team Europe beyond the global COVID-19 response and to apply it to the programming exercise of EU external cooperation for the period 2021-2027. This notably includes the conception of ‘Team Europe Initiatives’, large-scale projects which are meant to position Europe as the partner of preference in selected areas of cooperation in each partner country and to build visibility. More broadly, the aim is to encourage the use of Team Europe as a brand for combined EU and member state cooperation in partner countries, and for a growing number of EU-led multilateral initiatives.



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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In an already profoundly transformed and contested world, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing global economic crisis are posing immense challenges for the entire world. For the EU and its member states, the pandemic increased the already growing need to be more united and strategic about how the EU approaches its foreign and development policy. The pandemic made it clear that the EU must now begin to make longer-term changes or risk becoming increasingly inconsequential in international affairs.

Even before the pandemic, European foreign and development policies were in the process of being overhauled to make them fit for major global challenges and shifts. Ursula von der Leyen's "Geopolitical Commission" sought to reaffirm the EU's role as a global player, reinforcing its strategic autonomy in key industries, leading reforms on multilateralism and seeking to re-establish partnerships - such as that with Africa - on new bases. The new EU long-term budget, including the new Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), also illustrates the EU's ambition to be more strategic about the instruments and policies that it uses to reach its goals.

After an initially slow and disorganised response, the pandemic has only accelerated the EU's drive towards reinforcing its own economic autonomy in key industries and its desire to reinforce and reform the multilateral system (von der Leyen 2020; Michel 2020; Teevan 2020). The EU's initial difficulties in responding to the virus, the aggressive mask diplomacy of different actors during the pandemic and competing narratives around the virus all drove a sense of geopolitical competition. On the external front, this led to the realisation of the need for a stronger, more united and more visible response to the economic and health impact of the virus in partner countries. The question of equitable access to vaccines is the latest focus in the global fight against COVID-19, and the EU's actions in this area will have important repercussions for its credibility in the years to come.

It is against this background that "Team Europe" emerged, namely in the EU global response to COVID-19 which was announced in Spring 2020 (European Commission 2020a). The Team Europe approach was endorsed by development ministers at the EU Foreign Affairs Council with the Council Conclusions of 8 June (Council of the European Union 2020). New Council Conclusions on Team Europe should be adopted in the coming weeks.<sup>2</sup> The fact that successive Council Conclusions are being prepared on the same topic within such a short time-frame confirms the high political relevance and sense of urgency around the Team Europe approach for the Commission and member states.

On the basis of documents consulted and interviews to date,<sup>3</sup> our sense is that Team Europe is essentially about:

1. Building European unity on the global stage and sending a strong message of European solidarity to partner countries
2. Being more strategic about international partnerships and development cooperation, including by building areas of clear European added-value, thereby allowing the EU to present a unified European development model
3. Enhancing coordination and coherence and leveraging the collective resources for sustainable impact
4. Branding EU and member states' interventions and creating more visibility and recognition for a collective EU identity.

Against this background, this paper unpacks the Team Europe concept and approach. It briefly presents how the Team Europe approach was applied to date, and examines what prospects, added value and challenges it carries in terms of enhanced visibility, EU and member state joint programming and implementation, and the possibility of a stronger voice in multilateral fora.

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## Context: An urgency to act together in the wake of growing geopolitical competition and COVID-19

Team Europe was born in the context of COVID-19, but responds to longer term political trends and to a growing sense of acute unease that the EU and member states were not visible enough - particularly in contrast to the recognition gained by China, but also the US, Russia, India, Turkey and the Gulf powers. EU and member state diplomats regularly point to the fact that they are collectively the biggest donor to many multilateral institutions. The EU and its member states are collectively also the main donor to most African countries, and the biggest trade partner and investor in the Balkans, the majority of Mediterranean countries and Africa as a whole. While relations with Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia-Pacific may be more varied, EU members continue to be important investors and trade partners with each of these regions.

This desire to communicate the EU's real weight in international affairs is evident in the EU's Joint Communication, Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa, which notes: "The EU and its member states are Africa's biggest partner on all accounts, be it in terms of investment, trade, official development assistance, or security" (European Commission 2020b). Given the growing importance of Chinese investments and the high level of visibility that these projects have generated for China, the EU has tried to draw attention to the much larger volume of EU investments in Africa: "With a foreign direct investment stock reaching EUR 222 billion, the EU is the largest investor in Africa, well ahead of the United States (EUR 42 billion) or China (EUR 38 billion)" (European Commission 2020b). African officials counter that it is not simply about quantity, but also about quality of investments, and also point out that Africa is equally important to the EU, given it is the EU's third trade partner after the US and China (ISS 2020).

EU policymakers often argue that the EU is not sufficiently appreciated in spite of its collective development, trade and investment activities. One reason for this is that most analyses compare states, and thus often rank China and the US higher than individual European member states, the largest of which are still small compared to these great powers. One example is Afrobarometer, which conducts analysis on public opinion in Africa. Preliminary data for the latest survey on Africans' perceptions about China, conducted just before Covid-19, demonstrated that 23% of those surveyed saw China as the best development model, second to the US, while the EU was not included in the survey, although "Former colonial power" was (Afrobarometer 2020).

In the context of COVID-19, the scale of the initial crisis in Europe and the US Trump administration's abdication of global leadership left the field open for an already increasingly confident China to engage in well publicised mask diplomacy, to contrast its own crisis management with the apparent weakness of the Western democracies, and even to question the origins of the virus. This approach combining diplomacy and engagement on the one hand and intense communications and media strategy on the other hand, made China the most visible global actor in the early weeks of the crisis (Tadesse 2020; Swaine 2020). The need for the EU to respond decisively was clear not only from a humanitarian and development perspective, but also from a geopolitical one, while at the same time the EU continues to try to find ways to work with China where possible.

Team Europe was initially conceived as a way to brand the European collective support to partner countries in response to the pandemic, and put Europe back on the map in countries and regions where it was losing ground. In the first phase, the Team Europe approach led to joint efforts to redirect resources and raise funds for the global COVID-19 response (Jones et al. 2020). The EU's global response focused on three priority areas: responding to the immediate health crisis and humanitarian needs, strengthening health, water and sanitation systems, and mitigating the immediate socio-economic consequences of the crisis. In doing so, the Team Europe approach also sought to promote a coordinated multilateral response.

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The Team Europe approach aims to consolidate the collective means and resources of the whole European family by pooling together contributions of EU institutions, EU member states and their implementing agencies, development finance institutions (DFIs), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). According to the latest available figures (up until Oct 2020), the Team Europe package allowed the mobilisation of circa €38.5 billion to support partner countries in COVID-19 actions - including almost €10.5 billion for the Neighbourhood (including North Africa), €5 billion for Turkey and the Balkans and €6.2 billion for sub-Saharan Africa (European Commission 2020c). However, it appears that the money is mostly reassigned and does not stem from new funds (Bilal and Di Ciommo 2020).

In the next section, we will explore the evolution of the Team Europe approach from the immediate Covid-19 response through to ongoing conversations about joint programming and the development of Team Europe initiatives.

## Team Europe and the working better together agenda

Team Europe created a new political impetus, highlighting the urgency for the EU and member states to work better together through enhanced coordination and complementarity in their development cooperation, but the concept is not new. There is a longstanding policy commitment and institutional framework in place (cf. EU Global Strategy, 2016 EU Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on Stepping up Joint Programming, New European Consensus on Development 2017).

Under the current legal framework, the EU institutions have limited competence in the area of foreign policy, while the parallel competence in the area of development cooperation is shared with member states. This means that the EU institutions cannot compel member states to work closer together. Further, even when the EU institutions and member states sign up to work together, they often jealously guard their autonomy of action, separate identities

and own visibility. Therefore, more creative workarounds were necessary to respond to the greater pressure for recognition of a collective European approach.

### A strong political buy-in at HQ level and swift *ad-hoc* operationalisation at country level

At HQ level, and particularly in Brussels, the scale and swiftness with which the Team Europe response package was mobilised was unprecedented for the EU, and so was the willingness of member states to package over €12 billion in contributions. Spearheaded by the European Commission (Director-General (DG) Koen Doens from DEVCO, with the patronage of Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen), the Team Europe approach was rapidly agreed by member states. This was largely due to the urgency posed by the crisis, but also because Team Europe was presented and elaborated in swifter, less formal and less bureaucratic decision-making processes than is usually the case in the area of development cooperation. This included meetings of EU director-generals of development cooperation with member states, while official Council working parties (especially the Council working party on Development Cooperation - CODEV) were somewhat bypassed. This raised some concerns over the governance and legitimacy of the Team Europe approach, as political but also formal bureaucratic buy-in of member states is crucial for its sustainability.

A wide range of actors were engaged in mounting the Team Europe response packages, and many informal exchanges and consultations took place in Brussels. For the first time, it brought together the EU institutions, the member states, including their respective financial institutions and implementing agencies, as well as the EIB and EBRD. The EIB and the EBRD, which took part in recent meetings of EU member states' development ministers and directors generals responsible for development, strongly endorsed the Team Europe approach<sup>4</sup> and announced billions of Euros as part of the Team Europe COVID-19 response envelope. The inclusion of these new actors

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must now be accompanied by close dialogue and coordination mechanisms at Council working group levels in Brussels and at headquarters level.

Many seized this opportunity to profile themselves as key partners of a collective and coordinated European action. For instance, the Practitioners' Network for European Development Cooperation (PN), which brings together the implementing organisations of the member states, also fully subscribed to the Team Europe approach, perhaps with an eye to accessing future EU managed resources under the NDICI programming 2021-2027. The PN set up a Team Europe taskforce to stimulate exchange among its members and to elaborate a portfolio of actions to be carried out by consortia of agencies under the Team Europe banner, and issued a joint declaration on synergies with public development banks at the Finance in Common Summit (Practitioners' Network 2020).

Due to the urgency of the crisis situation and in the absence of clear guidelines from HQ, the Team Europe approach was applied in an *ad hoc* manner at country level, and differently from country to country. At country level, the Team Europe approach initially consisted essentially of repackaging activities and showcasing the EU collective support to partner countries in dealing with the immediate consequences of COVID-19. This bottom-up and flexible approach seems to have been generally welcomed by European actors on the ground as it left them a large margin of manoeuvre.<sup>5</sup>

The EU delegations (EUD) (mainly through cooperation sections), played a key role in coordinating the EU country response packages, with the active participation of member states' embassies and their agencies and development finance institutions. This coordination included the exchange of information, mapping and repackaging of activities and joint communication campaigns. For example, in Niger where the EU and member states are by far the main donor of UN agencies, the EUD and several MS raised the profile and visibility of the European contribution, while also reinforcing the role of the UN country coordinator and UN agencies in the COVID-19 response.<sup>6</sup> In South Africa, Team Europe was also used

to develop a Team Europe Compact together with the EIB and member states' DFIs in the context of the negotiation of policy based loans with the government authorities.<sup>7</sup>

The extent to which the Team Europe approach stimulated coherence and coordination was largely determined by the country context and the pre-existing relationship between the EU Delegations and the member states present in the field. It is too early to say whether Team Europe effectively acted as a strong convener for the EU and member States and improved the way they work together, including with the EIB and other DFIs. A fast-track external assessment of the EU response to COVID-19 overseen by the European Commission is underway and will look at the coherence, efficiency and coordination brought by the Team Europe approach in partner countries/regions.

## Humanitarian action and the Team Europe Approach

Tackling immediate needs - both in the humanitarian and health care fields - was a major strand of the Team Europe COVID response packages from the beginning, and was given high visibility in press releases and social media. The April Council Conclusions stated that the EU would continue to promote and uphold humanitarian principles, and that the focus should be on countries most in need around the world (Council of the European Union 2020).

The EU's collective humanitarian response implies constant liaison between the European Commission's DG ECHO and humanitarian DGs in member states, and also entailed strong coordination with multilateral actors in the field. In the context of Team Europe's humanitarian response to COVID-19, the operationalisation of the triple nexus (humanitarian-development-peace (HDP)) is also a key aspect to address in partner countries that face different levels of vulnerability and conflict situations. The triple nexus ultimately has a similar rationale to Team Europe in terms of pooling resources, coordination and coherence. It is a process to shift the work culture towards more systematic coordination between EU,

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MS, multilateral and other relevant HDP actors at headquarters and on the ground (all of which have a role to play in the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts).

There will be an even greater push for collaboration, coordination and coherence to deal with the humanitarian consequences of COVID-19 in the months/years to come. In its work programme for 2021, the Commission announced it will publish a 'Communication on the EU's humanitarian aid in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond', which will focus in particular on new ways of working with partners and other donors, the use of digital tools and innovative approaches to financing and aid delivery modalities, including on the Commission's own rapid response capacity and ways to enhance work on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (European Commission 2020h). Under the next MFF, the humanitarian instrument will remain separate from the NDICI and will continue to be provided exclusively based on needs with a strong focus on the HDP nexus. Yet progress on the triple nexus (and cooperation between EU institutions towards it) has so far been limited and poorly documented. Meanwhile, fears from the humanitarian community that humanitarian principles might be compromised by more political objectives are likely to stay as tensions could arise between humanitarian needs and other EU priorities (Friesen et al. 2020).

### Team Europe Initiatives as an integral part of the NDICI (joint) programming

Building on the strong momentum at HQ and at field level, the Team Europe approach is being applied beyond the immediate response to COVID-19, with a view to promoting a coordinated approach in other key cooperation areas, in particular in the framework of the global recovery efforts to "build back better and greener" and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Team Europe approach is an essential part of the NDICI programming exercise which has now been formally launched, after having been delayed several months because of the pandemic.<sup>8</sup> The broadening of the Team Europe approach seeks to enhance European collective

leverage and visibility in partner countries and at multilateral level, in line with EU priorities.

A major novelty in the NDICI programming process this time round is the fact that there will be, for each partner country, a maximum of two so-called "Team Europe Initiatives" (TEI) in the country Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs). Team Europe Initiatives are thus an integral part of the programming exercise. They are meant to be "ambitious and easily recognisable European flagship initiatives" that seek to place Europe as the partner of reference in a specific country context where they can collectively have the biggest transformative impact and visibility. As a matter of fact, the idea of such flagship initiatives was already floating before the COVID-19 pandemic, and thus preceded the Team Europe approach. They have essentially been rebranded as Team Europe Initiatives, but the real novelty is about showcasing visible, large-scale and impactful European actions and getting the EU, member states and DFIs on board. TEIs should be underpinned by the EU political and policy strategic priorities that were jointly identified with the member states during the pre-programming phase, and also take into account the impact of COVID-19 in partner countries.

Designing TEIs is an iterative process with member states and European DFIs, and all actors are learning by doing. TEIs are a joint endeavour at country level and should be inclusive and lead to enhanced coordination and coherence between the EU and the member states. To have maximum transformational impact, they should notably draw on the full range of modalities, tools, expertise, resources (financial and non-financial) of all European partners. While they are primarily being prepared by the EU delegations at country level, their further design and finetuning should also allow regular dialogue and information-sharing at HQ level so as to allow all interested parties to be equally involved (including those not geographically present on the ground in partner countries). Yet, so far the level of involvement and coordination with member states varies greatly from one partner country to another. In some countries, where the EUDs show leadership and vision the design of TEIs worked well, such as in Kenya for instance. Recently, regional seminars on programming were

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organised by virtual conferences to which all member states could participate. They provided an opportunity for the Commission and EEAS to present TEIs under consideration and to gauge interest of member states in participating in their further design and implementation.

While TEI are based on informal processes, they should nonetheless build on - and even strengthen - the European coordination processes and mechanisms that exist at country level, in particular those in place for joint programming. Joint programming is now the “preferred approach” for country programming (article 12 draft NDICI regulation). The ambition is to promote joint programming processes in as many countries as possible and in that context, build on and maintain the momentum created by Team Europe. In an updated version of the guidelines on “Working Better Together as Team Europe (through joint programming and joint implementation)” (European Commission 2020d), the Commission indicates that there is a mutually reinforcing link between Team Europe Initiatives and joint programming, but does not provide much more information. It is not quite clear yet how the two approaches/processes will coexist and feed into each other in partner countries.

Joint programming is a longstanding, formalised and bureaucratic process mainly focused on planning the development cooperation of the EU and mMember sStates. On the other hand, the Team Europe approach is still not well defined or grounded, and is mainly characterised by its political and communication dimension. TEIs are focused on targeted transformative initiatives, while Joint Programming is a wider endeavour that covers the array of the European cooperation in a forward-looking way. Team Europe could certainly add value to joint programming, notably by enhancing collective leverage of the EU and MS on joint policy/political dialogue, joint visibility, as well as joint implementation (with explicit inclusion of mMember sStates implementation and financing institutions). In particular, the Team Europe approach could give a stronger impetus for the EU and mMember sStates to have a political consensus and a shared vision at country level, and to establish common strategic priorities with partner countries. The coordination

channels established at headquarters and in the field for the Team Europe package should continue to be used for the active preparation of joint programming.

Moving forwards, it will be crucial that the Team Europe Initiatives are *co-created* with the member states and other European partners (DFIs, implementing agencies, EIB/EBRD) to further promote the Team Europe approach at country level. The lead for the time being is clearly in the hands of the EU (Commission and EU delegations) when it comes to the identification of potential TEIs, and these are fully in line with EU priorities. Yet, it will be important that the member states and the DFIs contribute to the co-creation of TEIs, including their design and implementation, and the question will be what opportunities and incentives will exist for them to remain engaged moving forward. Furthermore, while largely donor-driven, Team Europe Initiatives should not weaken country ownership and also involve local stakeholders.

## Team Europe and EU (or European) visibility

Given the geopolitical context, the need to promote and enhance the visibility of the EU’s global COVID-19 response was one of the main initial motives of the Team Europe approach. This was particularly true following the high-profile mask diplomacy engaged in by countries including China, Russia, Turkey and the Gulf states in March 2020 (and disinformation by some actors), when the EU was still coming to terms with the extent of the crisis within its borders.

EU visibility can be defined as: “The awareness and perception of the image of EU external action among EU and non-EU stakeholders resulting from EU communication activities or from other actions that have an impact on this image” (PARTICIP 2012). The visibility guidelines for international partnerships from 2018 specified that communication efforts should raise awareness of the EU policies and actions outside its borders whilst ensuring transparency and accountability for EU taxpayers’ money spent outside the EU (European Commission 2018). There is a growing sense from EU member states, big and small,



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that building stronger European visibility is a desirable outcome. The EU institutions and member state officials share a sense that the EU does not get enough visibility and political return given its economic and financial weight, notably in Africa. The need for increased visibility of European external action and an overall branding and narrative for the EU global development strategy was also emphasised in the report of the High-Level Group of Wise Persons on the European financial architecture for development (High-Level Group of Wise Persons 2019).

With the growing visibility of China and other actors in Africa, the EU and its member states have an interest in showing that the EU collectively is Africa's major trade and investment partner, as well as the primary donor to African countries.<sup>9</sup> The growing importance that member state leaders attribute to the visibility of international cooperation was also apparent in the Council Conclusions on the Recovery Fund and MFF in July 2020, where the language on Heading 6: Neighbourhood and the World, which encompasses most of the EU's external action budget, states: "A modernised external policy will demonstrate EU added value by increasing effectiveness and visibility and making the Union better equipped to pursue its goals and values globally, in strong coordination with member states" (EUCO 2020).

In this context, Team Europe could be seen as a common brand that aims to market the combined impact of the EU and member states. In marketing terms, a brand is a logo or a message that is used to identify and distinguish a company from others. The brand is more than a name and carries a meaning, it is associated with a purpose or mission, with the aim to build a relationship with the customer/client. The question of what the purpose or mission of Team Europe is remains somewhat unclear, although it is inextricably linked to the vision of the EU's own place in the world that has evolved greatly over the past ten years. Recent speeches and policy documents by EU institutional leadership, project a vision of a resilient EU leading global recovery post-COVID-19 with a growth model based on a green transition and technological innovation, accompanied by leadership at multilateral cooperation and the increasing externalisation of EU regulatory standards (von der

Leyen 2020; Michel 2020; Urpilainen 2020; Borrell 2020; Teevan 2020).

The need to strengthen visibility was also part of the Commission's June proposals to fight against global disinformation around the coronavirus pandemic (European Commission 2020e). They highlighted the need to strengthen visibility through strategic communication within and outside the EU. In particular, the Communication suggested to use the Team Europe approach to counter narratives on the lack of EU assistance to third countries by giving "maximum visibility of the delivery of EU's COVID-19 assistance and its positive impact on the ground, including through Team Europe". This would be undertaken notably through "promoting the access to reliable information, fighting disinformation, working with journalists and media and supporting initiatives to address disinformation and misinformation in third countries through EU delegations and member states diplomatic missions on the ground" (European Commission 2020d).

At this stage it is difficult to evaluate what the impact of the reinforced efforts on visibility are. There were no dedicated strategic communication guidelines when the concept was first rolled out, and as a result the concept took on its own life depending on how the EU delegation and member state embassies responded to the concept from one partner country to another. Yet, a coherent approach is needed to communicate to partner-country audiences. In some countries, EU and member states' actions were showcased, thereby allowing the EU Delegations to demonstrate the collective European contribution and support.<sup>10</sup> Some EU delegations and member state embassies referenced Team Europe in press releases, including those on joint EU-UN deliveries (EEAS 2020a; EEAS 2020b).<sup>11</sup> For example, the delivery of medical supplies to the Africa CDC was largely promoted and featured on the CDC website (Africa CDC 2020). There was also some press coverage, although it is difficult to measure the extent of this in a limited study. The Commission recently developed a new visual identity for Team Europe and guidelines on communicating jointly under the Team Europe banner with a view to build the strategic visibility of Team Europe and to brand EU and member states' joint activities. The

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recent Council Conclusions support this new visual identity, which also confirms the strategic and political relevance of adopting a common approach to joint communication and visibility effort.

In terms of social media, the #TeamEurope hashtag (including its translation in different languages) was used to post about deliveries of European aid. The hashtag is used very regularly by European Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen and by @europeaid in particular. However, it is less apparent that the communication of Team Europe was mainstreamed across the Commission. For example, on Twitter the @EU\_Commission account did not use the #TeamEurope hashtag at all, and the hashtag #StrongerTogether is much more widely used by EU institutional accounts, notably for posts on the EU's role in the world.<sup>12</sup> From the authors' own preliminary scanning of social media (Twitter, Facebook), it appears that several member states and their embassies (e.g. FR, DE, BE, ES, FI) and agencies (e.g. AFD, GIZ, Enabel), notably in western and southern Africa and in Latin and central America, also embraced the #TeamEurope hashtag, both for the COVID-19 response as well as for other bilateral cooperation projects unrelated to COVID.<sup>13</sup>

Communication varies from country to country, and some EU delegations are using Team Europe to brand all EU led events and activities. This is clear for example in South Africa, where the Team Europe branding and hashtag have been widely used for activities coordinated by the EU delegation together with the member states in recent months. For example, the Team Europe branding was used for the EU's programme of activities as part of South Africa Women's Month (EEAS 2020c) and for Climate Diplomacy week (European Union 2020a) in September 2020, and the EU Chamber of Commerce of Southern Africa ran a series of events in November under the Team Europe banner on the theme of EU investment for Transformation (European Union Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Southern Africa 2020). Member states embraced the #TeamEurope branding in South Africa, including for the COVID-19 response,<sup>14</sup> as well as for other bilateral cooperation projects unrelated to COVID, and even sometimes in communicating about investments.<sup>15</sup>

In the area of development cooperation, there has always been a tradeoff between increasing the visibility of the EU and of joint initiatives with member states, and ensuring that the member states maintain the visibility of their own bilateral cooperation programmes - especially at field level (Galeazzi et al. 2013). Not all member states want to promote what they do under a common banner, and some continue profiling themselves on certain issues/sectors, especially where they are lead donors. Some member states have indeed expressed concern over losing visibility of their own bilateral activities and initiatives in bigger Team Europe packages, while one official in an EU delegation also questioned the pertinence of presenting Team Europe as a different entity than the EU institutions and the risk that the *Team Europe* branding ultimately dilutes the *European Union* branding.

### Visibility is about more than #hashtags, logos and flags

Efforts to enhance visibility should not be based on top-down and unidirectional communication streams. The image of the EU is determined not only by how it communicates about itself, but above all by how it is perceived by others. The EU's image varies depending on geography and history, and thus visibility efforts must be targeted to local circumstances. Beyond logos and hashtags, the EU image is also - if not more so - influenced by actions and results achieved, and thus visibility cannot be separated from the question of impact. Moving forward, the branding of Team Europe should go beyond showcasing what Europe *pays for* and be increasingly linked to what Europe *stands for*, what it achieves in partner countries and how it distinguishes itself from other big players.

The 2012 thematic evaluation of the visibility of EU External Action (Particip 2012) - in which ECDPM participated - which focused on a number of developing countries, concluded that communication is best achieved by communicating actual impact. It also recommended that the EU should focus more on publicising actual results and avoid raising unrealistic expectations. The evaluation also raised the issue of competition for visibility between the EU and member

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states, divergences in policy positions between them, or lack of policy coherence. Furthermore, a past evaluation of EU joint working concluded that while Joint Programming generally increased EU and MS visibility, this visibility was not necessarily used for increased leverage (European Commission 2017).

A 2015 Analysis of the Perception of the EU and EU's Policies Abroad (PPMI et al. 2015) (currently being updated at request of the Foreign Policy Instrument Service at the Commission), albeit focused on ten strategic partners that were largely advanced economies or large emerging economies (including India, Brazil, South Africa), found that the EU was not highly visible and rarely seen as a norm-setter. The study also found that the major determinant of how the EU was viewed was global factors, such as economic context and economic interdependence with Europe, followed by country characteristics, including political system, and historical and cultural ties to Europe, and finally characteristics of individuals, such as age, gender, education, income and contacts of Europe. It is these determinants rather than an exposure to Team Europe, however well articulated, that are likely to continue to influence how the EU is perceived. Expectations around Team Europe should therefore be realistic.

The analysis referred to above recommended developing an EU Public Diplomacy strategy focusing specifically on youth, with 'a special focus on potential future decision-makers.' Public diplomacy is an essential part of any lasting visibility strategy. Its objective with regard to the EU is "to build trust and mutual understanding with our target audiences beyond governmental relations, and improve the understanding and perception of the EU, its policies and principles, in order to facilitate future cooperation across policy areas and support the achievement of our policy priorities" (European Parliament 2017). It is a key foreign policy tool and both the draft Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) regulation and programming guidelines refer to it explicitly, with a view to promoting long-term planning and adequate resources for public diplomacy activities. The EEAS in particular sees better and more strategic public diplomacy as a wider urgent priority for Europe.

If Team Europe is to become a new brand for what the EU stands for, more needs to be done to develop and communicate what Team Europe's mission/purpose is, and how it distinguishes itself from other players. The beginning of such a conception is certainly present in many recent policy documents and speeches by EU leaders, but this must now be developed into a clearer and more consistent message that can be easily communicated at the country level. This will certainly be a gradual process that will need to be rolled out step by step, and will need to be tailored to the country context. This will require both more clarity about what Team Europe covers, and will need a locally rooted communication strategy that covers everything from branding and hashtags through to a comprehensive approach to public diplomacy. In doing so, improving communication with local actors and promoting country ownership will remain essential to get the buy-in of local actors, public and private (Bilal 2020).

## Team Europe in multilateral fora

To date, the spirit of greater unity that the EU and member states collectively demonstrated at multilateral fora in 2020 certainly fits with the Team Europe agenda, although the Team Europe label was not applied to all EU-led initiatives (eg. EU-led World Health Assembly resolution in 2020). In many cases, this may ultimately be more strategic as it avoids alienating other partners across the world who might wish to be involved. Moving forward, it will be important to maintain unity and visibility, together with strategic thinking about what the EU and member states want to achieve collectively at multilateral fora and with multilateral actors in partner countries. The EU and its member states together are the largest donor at many multilateral institutions, and wish to steer some conversations at the headquarters of these institutions. The norm setting power of multilateral institutions is important (e.g. World Bank, UNEP on environment, OECD Development Assistance Committee on aid) and it is thus crucial for the EU and member states to unite around which agencies they hope to influence and how.<sup>16</sup>

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## A limited use and application of Team Europe approach in multilateral fora

In the context of COVID-19, the Team Europe approach played a role in increasing the coordination of EU member states in terms of the immediate humanitarian and health response. The most high-level use of the Team Europe concept was undoubtedly the global pledging events to raise funds in support of universal access to an affordable coronavirus vaccination, treatment and testing. Beginning with a pledging event on 4 May, continuing with the 'Global Goal: Unite For Our Future' campaign launched on 28 May and culminating in a global pledging summit and concert on 27 June, these efforts raised €15.9 billion to date. European Commission President von der Leyen used "Team Europe" as the EU's banner for involvement in these events and for announcing the combined European Commission and EIB pledges to the Covax Facility (European Union 2020b; European Commission 2020f). In December 2020, Team Europe announced €500 million of new European financial support to COVAX, through €400 million EIB loan and €100 million grant to GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance.

In other areas, the spirit of Team Europe was present even when the label was not necessarily used, as one official interviewed confirmed: "The practices are there even if the label is not necessarily there yet."<sup>17</sup> While the EU and member states were well-coordinated and highly involved in the debt moratorium agreed by finance ministers at the G20 in April 2020, and in the World Health Assembly resolution in July, neither of these efforts was actually labelled as "Team Europe." For example, EU leaders and a number of member state leaders joined African leaders to draft an op-ed on the debt question in the Financial Times in April 2020, a move that was very much in the spirit of Team Europe.<sup>18</sup> Von der Leyen's speech to the World Health Assembly hinted at the Team Europe approach, but also at a wider global team when she said: "You can count on Europe to always play for the team" (European Commission 2020g).

## Overcoming long-standing challenges to strengthen the EU voice in multilateral organisations

Moving forward, the EU institutions wish to build out the concept across more areas of EU external action in the multilateral sphere. Doing this effectively, will depend on the willingness and ability of member states to converge around strong common positions that the EU and member states can then collectively champion at multilateral fora.

A difficulty in applying and using Team Europe in multilateral fora lies in the fact that institutionally, Team Europe is not an entity and therefore cannot be represented or speak in multilateral fora. This raises the longer-term question of how to enhance the voice of the EU in multilateral fora and ensure mutual reinforcement with member states. The voice of the EU institutions at multilateral fora is generally hampered by political, institutional and legal challenges that make it difficult to coordinate and represent European positions. Certain member states have tended to take a leading role and have a stronger national voice and positioning than the EU institutions, notably at the UN (Medinilla et al. 2019). The EU holds only observer status at the UN, although there are strong coordination efforts around UN institutions. Moreover, legally for the EU to speak for EU member states, they must explicitly yield the floor at many multilateral fora so that the EU is able to speak in their name. This is often not considered to be in member states' own national self-interest. It is not a member of the international financial institutions (IFIs) at all and, in the past, coordination was extremely weak (Lehtinen and Sindzingre 2003). The report of the Wise Persons Group also called for a greater coordination of EU member states as shareholders of Multilateral Development Banks. While the EU is a full member of the G20, participating on an equal footing with member states such as France, Germany and Italy, the question of speaking with a common voice still arises due to conflicting national interests and the persistent desire of member states to act independently.

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In recent months, there were renewed efforts to improve coordination at the Bretton Woods institutions. This included the European Commission's DG ECFIN trying to coordinate member states at the IMF, and DEVCO leading coordination at the World Bank. At the IMF/World Bank Spring meetings, this helped to mainstream a new green consensus. There have also been a number of co-organised events by the EU and its member states in Washington DC. This coordination has largely been on the issues of the day, and does not necessarily have a long-term vision yet.<sup>19</sup> Interviewees noted that the organisation of countries into 'constituencies' can complicate member state coordination at the World Bank, but could also be positive as it can allow EU member states to advocate for the European position amongst the other countries in their constituencies.<sup>20</sup> Overall, there appears to be room to build greater coordination at the main IFIs, including on longer-term strategic questions. Given the proliferation of development banks and the development finance institutions globally,<sup>21</sup> it may take some time for this to be achievable across the board.

Coordination took place throughout the Autumn on adopting a common approach to the negotiations around restructuring debt from low- and middle-income countries, with a focus on the most vulnerable. The EU and other G20 members extended the G20-Paris Club Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) by 6 months and approved the "Common Framework for Debt Treatments beyond the DSSI" on 13 November. Council Conclusions "on international debt relief, in particular for African countries" on 30 November welcomed these developments, and stated that "debt restructuring should be negotiated where necessary, on a case-by-case basis, through a multilateral, coordinated approach with the IMF/World Bank and Paris Club and ensuring private sector participation." As with many of the other initiatives mentioned above, this reflects a shared "Team Europe" response, but again without making reference to "Team Europe." (Council of the European Union 2020b)

The Joint Communication on strengthening the EU's contribution to a rules-based multilateralism, announced in the 2021 work programme of the

Commission (European Commission 2020h) will be a major opportunity to build a strategic vision that incorporates a clear idea of what Team Europe hopes to achieve at multilateral fora.

## Conclusion & recommendations

Team Europe lays out a united EU and member state approach that begins to respond to a number of pre-existing needs and ongoing processes. It is far from a finished product, and will no doubt continue to evolve and develop in the coming months and even in the next few weeks. If political and institutional momentum can be sustained it has the potential to play an important role in building and communicating a clearer narrative about the evolving role of the EU in the world and of the EU's international partnerships in particular. Yet to achieve success, the EU will need to live up to its rhetoric of partnership and solidarity, dedicating more political will to pressing issues such as the swift and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines across the world. Operationally, there is the need to clarify linkages with existing frameworks, while member state buy-in will be essential for the success and sustainability of the Team Europe approach.

The Team Europe initiatives should now play a role in trying to build the reputation of the EU and its members by highlighting collective EU added-value and making the EU the go-to actor in key strategic sectors and areas of cooperation. At the same time, it is less apparent to date how successfully the EU will marry the Team Europe approach with the traditional and more bureaucratic joint programming process, which is the preferred approach for EU programming under the NDICI, on paper at least.

On the visibility front, Team Europe began to respond to the need to have a common brand that promotes both the EU and its member states simultaneously. It is by no means perfect, but allows for a common branding, whilst responding to the desire of member states to still highlight their own visibility. It is being developed and as yet, we do not have enough evidence to determine whether or not it has been

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effective in improving the visibility of the EU in the world.

Similarly, it is not yet clear how ambitious the EU will be about rolling out the Team Europe banner across its multilateral action. This is not necessarily an issue if the EU and its members continue to put the Team Europe spirit into practice in leading and supporting real change at multilateral fora.

- If Team Europe is to become a new brand for what the EU stands for, more needs to be done to develop the Team Europe mission/purpose and how it distinguishes itself from others players. As already discussed, this is beginning to become clearer in Brussels, but needs to be developed into more concise messaging that allows for enhanced communication of what Team Europe aims to achieve globally. EU delegations then need to provide leadership at the country level - or rely on the leadership of some member states; adapting the global messaging to the context of the country in which they work and coordinating closely with member states working in that country.
- Demonstrating the EU's full impact requires using the Team Europe label to communicate not only about EU development programming, investment guarantees and joint programming between the EU and member states. Member states will also need to mention Team Europe when communicating about their wider bilateral development projects and potentially even their investments. This is already beginning to happen in many parts of the world, but should be more consistently encouraged at the level of headquarters so as to show that all European economic and development cooperation is part of a greater whole.
- The Team Europe approach, which is more recent than the Joint Programming and Working Better Together concept and framework, is based on its own political rationale and branding strategy, but should nevertheless be seen as complementary by

bringing a more political approach and highlighting the need for better communication. The added value of the Team Europe approach lies in its unbureaucratic and flexible approach, and the inclusion of various types of actors and forms of cooperation. Yet, its impact beyond the strategic messaging, and the extent to which it will galvanise the EU and member states to work better together, will depend on how it links to the more formal NDICI (joint) programming exercise at country level, notably through the Team Europe Initiatives.

- Team Europe remains a donor-driven approach and carries the risk of being too eurocentric in its attempt to strengthen EU and member states' coordination. This should not be done at the cost of country ownership, and the design of Team Europe Initiatives should thus also involve national authorities and local stakeholders in partner countries, and make sure they are aligned to country needs and priorities.
- Further, the Team Europe branding and concept will need to move beyond the strict field of development cooperation, notably in terms of communicating the EU's role in the world. The EU should compile lists of combined EU member states trade with and investment in countries around the world and present these in attractive visuals that can be widely shared.
- The Team Europe approach is mainly promoted by those services in charge of international and development cooperation and aid (DG DEVCO, NEAR, ECHO, EEAS) but does not appear to be mainstreamed across the Commission. Although all are involved in the conception of Team Europe, DG DEVCO appears to control much of the initiative, with the EEAS playing a more peripheral role in giving the concept life. But as the diplomatic wing of the EU, the EEAS should be fully involved in providing political and strategic direction. Furthermore, should

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and how could Team Europe approach be scaled-up to other areas of EU cooperation - also beyond development to other spheres of foreign policy? What are the trade-offs and risks associated with this? Diluting the “European Union” brand or associating it too much with aid may not help the EU moving from the “payer to player” in public and elite perceptions, particularly in developing countries.

- Team Europe in itself is not public diplomacy. Public diplomacy can and should play an important role based on building lasting relationships. Done well, public diplomacy can contribute to building the EU’s network and understanding. It is likely to provide strategic value in reaching out to key stakeholders in partner countries, complementing wider strategic visibility aimed at elites, specific policy communities and the general public. The next NDICI 2021-2027 programming exercise provides more scope for elaborating public diplomacy, which seeks to develop long-lasting relationships with key and influential stakeholders.
- The Team Europe approach has potential in the area of multilateral cooperation, but most

importantly for now, there appears to be a growing impetus to work better together at international fora. Moving forward, the Team Europe banner might be used to brand more European-led initiatives at the multilateral level, but this should not be done at the expense of wider cooperation with other actors from around the world. However, the EU should take advantage of events such as the Italian Presidency of the G20 to work with Italy towards ensuring the Team Europe spirit is present throughout, and that the Team Europe banner is used to strategically brand selected initiatives (e.g. the Global Health Summit).

- Ultimately the European Union will be judged more on ‘results’ and partners will have to see that the collective approach of Team Europe has genuine weight to deliver or at least promote change beyond being a slogan. Partners will make their own assessment of this, and in an area of geopolitical competition this will often be by making a comparative analysis against other global players. If Team Europe isn’t seen to deliver, there will be a cost for the European Union in its own credibility.

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- <sup>2</sup> At the time of drafting this paper, the adoption procedure of the draft Council Conclusions on Team Europe was blocked due to opposition by two member states to language on "gender" and "gender equality".
- <sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this study, ECDPM reviewed available EU policy documents as well as internal notes to which it had access on a confidential basis. The authors also interviewed 11 representatives of member states and EU institutions, in HQ and at field level. Finally, the analysis also builds on the insights and experience of various stakeholders (e.g. MS officials in MFA and Embassies, EU officials in Delegations and HQ) with whom ECDPM interacted in the framework of webinars and workshops on Team Europe.
- <sup>4</sup> For more details on the response of European financial institutions to COVID-19 and their coordination initiatives, see the online event organised by ECDPM "[Team Europe: Joining forces for financing the global recovery](#)".
- <sup>5</sup> Feedback picked up in workshops in which ECDPM participated, including with MS officials in MFA and Embassies and EUDs.
- <sup>6</sup> Interview, 20 October 2020.
- <sup>7</sup> Interview, 19 October 2020.
- <sup>8</sup> Currently NDICI specific trilogues between the Council, Commission and Parliament are on-going. A political agreement on the NDICI was reached between the European Parliament and the Council in December 2020. Yet, the formal approval and launch of the NDICI requires the Council and European Parliament as the budgetary authorities to legally approve the regulation text through the legislative procedure.
- <sup>9</sup> Interviews with member state officials, 9 September, 30 September, 6 October 2020. Workshop, 5 October 2020.
- <sup>10</sup> Interviews with member state officials, 9 September, 30 September, 6 October 2020. Workshop, 5 October 2020.
- <sup>11</sup> E.g., Nigeria and Niger.
- <sup>12</sup> As of 13 Nov 2020.
- <sup>13</sup> [@FrenchEmbassyZA](#); [@LithuaniaSA](#); [@cagruen](#); [@emmaboekee](#)
- <sup>14</sup> [@DKAMBinSA](#); [@FrenchEmbassyZA](#)
- <sup>15</sup> [@lechevallierAS](#)
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- <sup>18</sup> "[Only victory in Africa can end the pandemic everywhere](#)"
- <sup>19</sup> Interview, 21 October 2020.
- <sup>20</sup> Interview, 30 September and 21 October 2020
- <sup>21</sup> <https://afdshiny.shinyapps.io/developmentbanksdatabase/>



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