

External Evaluation of the Policy Coherence Unit of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Summary

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EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT POLICY MANAGEMENT
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Acronyms

ACP	Africa, Caribbean and Pacific
BNC	<i>Beoordeling Nieuwe Commissievoorstellen</i> (committee that assesses European Commission policy proposals)
CoCo	Coordination Committee on European Integration and Association Problems
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DDE	Sustainable Economic Development Department
DIE	European Integration Department
DMW	Environment and Water Department
DSI	Social and Institutional Development Department
DGIS	Directorate General for International Cooperation
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
EU	European Union
IGWG	Intergovernmental Working Group
NGO	nongovernmental organisation
ODA	official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCD	policy coherence for development
PCU	Policy Coherence Unit
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

About this Discussion Paper

This ECDPM Discussion Paper presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the second external evaluation of the Policy Coherence Unit (PCU) of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The final report of this evaluation was completed in February 2009. As part of the arrangements made for conducting the evaluation, it was agreed that ECDPM would publish an English summary of the final report. This is that summary. It is hoped that the content of this document contributes to further informing actions in EU member states and other OECD members with regard to promoting policy coherence for development.

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Introduction

This document presents an English summary of the main findings, conclusions and recommendations of the second external evaluation of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Policy Coherence Unit (PCU). This unit was established in 2002, following a letter to the Dutch Parliament by the then Minister for Development Cooperation Eveline Herfkens. In the letter, the minister confirms the Dutch government's awareness that the main goal of its development cooperation policy – sustainable poverty reduction – is not just a mission for the Minister for Development Cooperation and not just a matter of providing development assistance. The minister subsequently states that moving towards a coherent policy for poverty reduction requires careful examination of the development dimension of all relevant policy areas, and that the interests of low income countries must be explicitly taken into account.

Outside of the Dutch government's policy, the 1992 Treaty on European Union contains a single sentence introducing a legal requirement to make efforts to improve the coherence of European policies towards promoting development. Although this treaty does not use the word "coherence", the obligation to 'take account of development objectives' in policy areas that are likely to affect development later became popularly known as "the coherence article". Moreover, the 2000 Cotonou Partnership Agreement between the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group and the European Union contains a specific article referring to the coherence of other policies with development objectives.¹

If ratified, the Draft EU Reform Treaty (Lisbon Treaty) will unambiguously extend the 1992 coherence obligation to the whole of the European Union.² This relative continuity in treaty formulation, however, is accompanied by the significant developments and changes that have occurred in and around the concept of coherence over the years. Among other things, these developments have raised the level of ambition conveyed in political statements, including in the 2005 European Consensus on Development:

We reaffirm our commitment to promoting policy coherence for development, based upon ensuring that the EU shall take account of the objectives of development cooperation in all policies that it implements which are likely to affect developing countries, and that these policies support development objectives (paragraph 9).³

In the Netherlands, a minister with full cabinet status is responsible for international development cooperation.⁴ Having responsibility at this level allows the minister to negotiate on policy coherence for development (PCD) issues with fellow ministers from a position of equality. This means PCD issues can be discussed and interests properly weighed at the cabinet level. Unlike some EU member states, the Netherlands has no formal legal framework in place to address PCD in government policies, neither does it have a statute law underpinning development cooperation.⁵ Nonetheless, in addition to the priority on policy coherence that has been confirmed in Dutch policies for development cooperation, PCD has

¹ This concerns article 12, titled 'Coherence of community policies and their impact on the implementation of this agreement', available at <http://www.acp.int/en/conventions/cotonou/accord1.htm>

² See article 188D of the draft treaty amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty Establishing the European Community, available at <http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/cg00001re01en.pdf>

³ For information on the EU Consensus on Development, see http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/9interventionareas_en.cfm

⁴ Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is responsible for Dutch foreign policy and overall ministry leadership. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is assisted by the Minister for Development Cooperation and the State Secretary for European Affairs (called the 'Minister for European Affairs' in international fora). For more information on the organisational structure, refer to http://www.minbuza.nl/en/ministry/organisational_structure

⁵ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006), 'Policy coherence for development: the Dutch experience'. The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <http://www.minbuza.nl/binaries/pdf/os-subsidies/brochure-nl-pcd-experience--maart-2006.pdf>

increasingly featured in joint policy statements issued by various ministries.⁶

The Dutch Policy Coherence Unit (PCU) was first set up as a dedicated task force in May 2002, partly based on the experience of an earlier ad hoc PCD group within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The PCU is part of the Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS), and reports directly to the director general of DGIS and the Minister for Development Cooperation. Its principal features can be summarised as follows:

- It has a staff of six, comprised of a director, a senior policy officer/deputy director, three senior policy officers, and one assistant.
- The unit reports to and advises the Minister for Development Cooperation. The director participates in the formal policy and management structures of DGIS.
- The unit works on PCD dossiers in close cooperation with other divisions within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The unit involves its specialists in dedicated project teams that are mostly led by the unit.
- The PCU can draw on DGIS funds for impact research, lobby activities, strategic support and coalition building with developing countries, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders.⁷

The PCU applies three intervention strategies:

1. It provides inputs related to development cooperation in the interdepartmental committee that formulates positions for decision-making in government on proposed European rules and legislation.
2. In a project mode, it works towards concrete results on a limited number of topical PCD dossiers in collaboration with departments within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other relevant sectoral ministries.
3. It strengthens attention to PCD within the European Union, the European Commission and the OECD, by participating in evolving groups of like-minded countries on specific PCD dossiers.

The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD has confirmed the important encouraging role played by the Dutch on PCD towards the other OECD members. The most recent DAC peer review concludes:

The Netherlands now has a “winning combination” of political commitment, a clear policy framework and the capacity to deliver through a dedicated Policy Coherence Unit (PCU) located within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁸

The current Discussion Paper concerns a summary of an external evaluation of the PCU. It first briefly introduces the external evaluation’s main features and objectives. It then summarises the evaluation’s main findings, structured according to the three intervention strategies of the PCU. Regarding the second intervention strategy, three sub-sections look at concrete examples of the unit’s engagement. That is, in the area of non-trade concerns, in relation to the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement and

⁶ Such documents include the policy note on development cooperation and agriculture (with the Ministry of Agriculture, December 2002), the policy note on Africa and trade (with the Trade ministry, July 2004), two policy notes on migration and development (with the Ministry of Social Affairs, July 2004 and May 2006), and the letter to the Dutch Parliament on agriculture, rural entrepreneurship and food security (with the Ministry of Agriculture, May 2008).

⁷ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006), ‘Policy Coherence for Development: the Dutch experience’. The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <http://www.minbuza.nl/binaries/pdf/os-subsidies/brochure-nl-pcd-experience--maat-2006.pdf>

⁸ OECD (2006), ‘Netherlands: Development Assistance Committee peer review’. Paris: OECD. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/49/38/37531015.pdf>

access to medicines in developing countries, and regarding the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) being negotiated between the EU and ACP. Subsequently, the main conclusions of the evaluation are presented in conjunction with recommendations for consideration by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

1. Context, purpose and methodology of the evaluation

The mandate of the PCU, which was first set up as a temporary unit in 2002, required two independent evaluations: a mid-term evaluation in 2004 and an end-of-term evaluation in 2006. The mid-term review was finalised in 2005 and drew four main conclusions:

- The establishment of the PCU had led to positive results.
- The efficiency of the project teams was generally good.
- The structure, approach and institutional positioning of the unit were relevant and appropriate.
- The next evaluation should look in greater detail into the effectiveness of the unit's functioning.

Based on the mid-term evaluation results, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to extend the term of the unit until the summer of 2010, and to conduct the second evaluation in 2009 (originally foreseen for 2006) to examine the extent to which continuation of the PCU in its current form was justified. This agreement was confirmed in a plan finalised in 2008 detailing reorganisation actions foreseen for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The terms of reference for the present evaluation defined three key questions:

1. What are the main features of the PCU's engagement regarding promotion of PCD?
2. What results have been achieved?
3. Has the establishment, engagement and mode of operation of the PCU resulted in an effective and efficient contribution to the results concerned?

Based on these key questions, the evaluation team chose three research methods to guide the collection and analysis of empirical data.

- A document analysis was carried out, examining public and internal documents relevant to the PCU as well as other studies and publications on the issue of PCD.
- Interviews were conducted, starting with eight exploratory interviews of current and past PCU staff, followed by semi-structured interviews with 41 people, including civil servants from all the involved government ministries in the Netherlands, former Dutch ministers, international diplomats (in Brussels and Geneva), NGO representatives and selected officials in other EU member states, in the European Commission and in OECD member states.
- An e-mail questionnaire was distributed presenting sixteen statements about the main messages aggregated from the interviews. The questionnaire was sent to 63 people, including the people that had been interviewed and a number of respondents who could not be interviewed for a variety of reasons. They were asked to give numerical scores between 1 and 5 to indicate their (dis)agreement with the statements. The response rate to the questionnaire was over 60%. A complete report of the questionnaire responses is provided in the full evaluation report. Section 5 of this summary highlights responses to selected statements.

2. Screening Dutch positions in the EU

The PCU's first intervention strategy relates to its involvement in the BNC, a committee that assesses new policy proposals made by the European Commission. The BNC meets weekly, and its deliberations result in concise briefs detailing the Dutch position on new legislation. These briefs are sent out to the Dutch parliament and also inform the Netherlands' further negotiations in Brussels. This part of the PCU's work is considered opportune as it enables the unit to raise awareness of the importance of PCD at a relatively early stage of EU policy formulation. In addition to the unit's involvement in this committee, its director also participates in the Coordination Committee on European Integration and Association Problems ("CoCo"), which is chaired by the Dutch Secretary of State for European Affairs.

Building on earlier efforts made by the Sustainable Economic Development Department (DDE) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the PCU advocated the inclusion of a separate "development cooperation assessment" as part of the BNC's procedures. A recommendation to this end was formulated in a 2002 interdepartmental study on policy effectiveness and coherence, leading to the assessment being introduced in May 2004. Thus, the BNC is now required to look into the effects on developing countries of all new European Commission policy proposals. Respondents confirmed that the inclusion of this assessment has made it more difficult for the committee to ignore the interests of developing countries. Table 1 presents a quantitative analysis of the use of the BNC's development cooperation assessment. The figures are from an internal evaluation finalised in November 2006.

Table 1 Application of development cooperation assessment in the BNC, 2004–06

Year	Number of BNC briefs	Number of times remarks were made under point 13 (regarding the effects of proposed policies on developing countries)	Number of times that remarks made under point 13 affected point 14 (the Dutch position)
2004 (after 8 June) ⁹	122	42	16
2005	138	46	28
2006 (until 26 April)	71	20	11

Respondents indicated that the PCU's participation in the BNC had contributed to an increased attention to and acceptance of PCD within different government ministries. The various PCU staff who took part in the committee over time fulfilled this role in different ways. Respondents from the ministries considered it constructive that the unit had transformed its involvement from a more or less exclusive focus on the development cooperation assessments to greater involvement in the formulation of the overall briefs and coordination of inputs to the BNC from DGIS. The PCU is now viewed as being more inclined to make compromises in the formulation of the briefs than in its first years of operation, and this more dynamic and less "dogmatic" attitude was appreciated.

⁹ On this date, new BNC procedures came into effect which aimed to take developing countries' interests better into consideration.

3. Working towards results on concrete PCD dossiers and projects

Of the PCU's three intervention strategies, the work it does in relation to concrete PCD themes is best known at both the national and international levels. During the core period for this evaluation (2005–08), the PCU worked on themes such as trade liberalisation (specifically, the Doha Development Round and negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreements), product norms, non-trade concerns, reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, fisheries, intellectual property and access to medicines, migration, climate change and biofuels. In its work on these themes, the PCU makes a key distinction between “dossiers” and “projects”. The terms denote the extent to which a topic has become integrated into the ministry's workload and thinking.

- The term coherence “dossier” refers to the regular process of policy formulation and arbitration in which all relevant ministry departments play a role, according to their specific thematic responsibilities. This concerns a daily task whereby the PCU is only intermittently involved, for example, when coordination of EU decision making or horizontal reporting on PCD is required.
- The term coherence “project” refers to themes on which the unit makes a concerted effort to break new ground, forming a small group including various ministry officials for the purpose of temporarily increasing and facilitating the ministry's input and capacity on the theme at hand. Once the project is concluded, the responsible department(s) resume work in relation to the project's topic.

It should be noted that in some cases, different departments may feel responsible for the same dossier, and it is also possible for ministry departments to temporarily increase their cooperation on a “project basis” without involvement of the PCU.

Though relatively clear on paper, evidence gathered in the course of this evaluation indicates that the distinction between projects and dossiers is less clear-cut in practice. First, the term “project” is not part of the standard vocabulary of the government officials, as “projects” were often referred to as “dossiers” in the interviews. In addition, it has proved difficult for the PCU to work “project-wise” on a number of dossiers, mostly due to the fact that the dossiers concerned had been de-prioritised by the responsible departments or were otherwise given little attention. In some of these cases, the PCU's content- and process-related involvement increased to the point that the unit began de facto to manage the dossier.

The PCU decides whether to become involved in a specific dossier or project based on three considerations:

- the chances on the national, European or international agenda;
- possibilities for cooperation with developing countries and/or other like-minded cooperation partners;
- prospects for achieving short- to medium-term concrete successes.

The PCU's mandate and 2002 plan of action emphasise the formulation of “SMART”¹⁰ objectives in clusters of policy areas. The goals and areas of work identified by definition must have important interfaces with the work of several departments within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and/or with other ministries in The Hague. The PCU mandate requires coherence issues to be identified in close consultation with stakeholders that are directly involved, and subsequently be endorsed at the departmental and political level. This formal

¹⁰ The five SMART criteria are ‘specific’, ‘measurable and unambiguous’, ‘attainable and sensitive’, ‘relevant and easy to collect’ and ‘time-bound’.

approach to planning as proposed in the unit's plan of action led to a policy note produced in November 2002 identifying a first set of coherence issues to be addressed. Following the approval of the note at the management level, the PCU thereafter regularly reported on progress made during its first few years of operation.

After some time, and especially during the focus period of this evaluation (2005–08), the practice of setting goals and subsequently monitoring them evolved into a more pragmatic and less formalised approach. What remained was the formulation of annual plans that featured descriptions of what coherence projects had been commenced and which finalised or postponed. These annual plans were discussed with the departments involved and subsequently approved by the director general of DGIS. The gradual "informalisation" of the planning process meant that it became more difficult to ascertain why the PCU is involved in certain coherence issues, what goals it would like to achieve from its engagement, and the extent to which successes or the lack thereof can be attributed to the unit.

The evidence collected in the course of this evaluation points to a number of general findings in relation to the work on concrete PCD themes.

- Departments in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs referred to overlap and even appropriation of some thematic issues by the PCU. This phenomenon is relatively dossier-specific and is examined further in the three case studies. Lack of clear agreements have now and then led to tension and duplication of work. This is for instance related to the disagreement about whether the PCU should work actively in Brussels and Geneva or whether its work should focus more on the preparatory phase in The Hague. Where agreements are clear, effectiveness and efficiency of the cooperation is demonstrably improved.¹¹ However, those interviewed also emphasised that having a good match of personalities involved in dossiers and projects is just as important as formal agreements.
- Concluding work on specific coherence dossiers and subsequently "returning" the dossier to the relevant department is often ineffective. Even though Ministry of Foreign Affairs departments sometimes protest when a dossier is appropriated too greatly by the PCU, it is an entirely different issue when it comes to handing back the responsibility for the dossier. In some cases (e.g. on fisheries and developing countries' access to medicines) it has proven difficult to return the dossier to the respective department because there was no one left working (actively) on it. Opinions vary on whether the PCU should work on dossiers that are already being given priority within another department or whether it should pick up only those tasks that departments have de-prioritised.
- The internal division of tasks is obviously less important for departments in other government ministries, for which it matters little whether they are in contact with someone from the PCU or another department in DGIS. What matters to them is that the development cooperation side comes with a coordinated position. A point of irritation among departments in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is that evaluations have sometimes attributed achievements solely to the PCU, whereas successes generally owe to a collaboration between the unit and departments.
- Staff from various ministries indicated a need for more emphasis on the promotion of coherence as a "two-way street", interpreted as a joint quest for workable compromises that serve the interests of multiple parties. The PCU was perceived as being less confrontational and more consensus-minded compared to its involvement in the BNC during the unit's first few years of operation.

¹¹ One such example was the PCU's cooperation with the Sustainable Economic Development Department (DDE) and the Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries in the area of novel food products.

- Some respondents noted that after the finalisation of a dossier or project, too little attention was given to monitoring implementation of a new or revised policy. This led to the impression that the PCU was too focused on “scoring bullet points” in policy texts.

To put the above general findings into context, it is useful to look at descriptions of some of the PCU’s work. We do this in relation to three coherence project themes: non-trade concerns; Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) and access to medicines in developing countries; and negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and ACP.

3.1 Non-trade concerns

The term “non-trade concerns” refers to societal worries related to the effects of the international trade regime, for example, impacts on labour norms, the environment, animal well-being and food security. Attention to non-trade concerns has surged in past years, and there is a growing interest and readiness to take policy measures to address some of these issues. However, such measures can have unintended as well as intended effects, for example, on developing countries’ market access and their terms of trade.

The direct motive for the PCU’s involvement in the non-trade concerns dossier was the frequent return of the issues in World Trade Organization (WTO) discussions and the absence of a clear Dutch position on these issues. Within DGIS, three departments are involved in sustainability aspects of non-trade concerns. In line with their respective mandates, each of these departments emphasises different aspects. The Social and Institutional Development Department (DSI) emphasises “people”, the Environment and Water Department (DMW) emphasises “planet” and the Sustainable Economic Development Department (DDE) places emphasis on “profit”. With its contribution, PCU aimed to bring these perspectives together, weighing the different dimensions to forge an effective sustainable development policy.

Since the formal start of the non-trade concerns project in 2006, several key outputs have been realised. The first was the publication of a major study commissioned by the PCU and conducted by Dutch academics Peter van den Bossche, Nico Schrijver and Peter Faber. The study looked into the possibilities and limitations of the WTO treaty and other international agreements for decisions related to non-trade concerns and the effects of trade agreements on developing countries.¹² The study report, which includes a foreword by the Minister for Development Cooperation, was officially presented on 9 October 2007 to representatives from several ministries, NGOs, consumer organisations, universities, advisory councils, labour unions and some media. It was also disseminated internationally.

The second important output stems from the PCU’s participation in an interdepartmental working group on non-trade concerns. That working group, led by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, was established in 2007 with a view to reaching government-wide decisions on non-trade concerns and trade policy. To prepare for the interdepartmental discussions, and to better inform the wider societal debate, a seminar on the subject was organised by the Ministry of Economic Affairs on 12 November 2007. That seminar was followed by four targeted seminars during the first half of 2008 covering, respectively, animal well-being, wood, biofuels and labour norms. Together with an official from DDE, the PCU represented the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the interdepartmental working group to formulate the government position on non-trade concerns, which had not yet been finalised at the time of this evaluation.

The third key output concerns the PCU’s contributions and influence on various issues associated with the wider non-trade concerns theme, such as biofuels, wood, and sustainable consumption and production. PCU officials have participated in intra- and interdepartmental exchanges on these topics. Box 1 presents an example.

¹² Van den Bossche, P.L.H., N.J. Schrijver and G. Faber (2007), ‘Unilateral measures addressing non-trade concerns: a study on WTO consistency, relevance of other international agreements, economic effectiveness and impact on developing countries of measures concerning non-product related processes and production methods’. The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <http://www.minbuza.nl/binaries/en-pdf/thema-s-en-dossiers/beleidscoherentie/ntc-study-webversie.pdf>

Box 1 Non-trade concerns and biofuels

There is a vigorous debate in the Netherlands on non-trade concerns related to the production of biomass for energy purposes. Discussants have asked, for example, whether stimulating the production of biofuels leads to deforestation, and whether biofuels are a factor in the recent food price increases. Debate on these and related questions surged following the work of the so-called “Cramer Commission” on the sustainable production of biomass, and the publication of its report. This report proposes sustainability criteria for biomass produced for energy purposes. The criteria cover a wide spectrum of social concerns, such as environmental protection, climate change, food security, biodiversity, economic growth and social well-being.

The PCU participated in the interdepartmental working group on “biomass sustainability” (*Beleidsinpassing Duurzaamheid Biomassa*) which looked into the EU and WTO conformity of the proposals made by the Cramer Commission. In addition, the unit was closely involved in coordinating the government’s response to the commission’s report. The PCU played a role in:

- the interdepartmental discussion of a possible revision of Dutch policy on biofuels in road transport (*Biobrandstoffen Wegverkeer*), particularly regarding the blending requirement;
- decision-making regarding the innovative biofuels subsidy programme;
- interdepartmental coordination of the Dutch position on the proposed EU directive on renewable energy;
- investigation coordinated by DMW of measures to stimulate sustainable production and export of biofuels, as well as certification processes in partner countries.

The findings on the effectiveness of the PCU’s involvement in this coherence project are four:

- The external study on non-trade concerns was unanimously praised by the respondents interviewed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in other ministries and at NGOs. Respondents commented that the study had facilitated and informed the national debate on non-trade concerns. Though the report was disseminated widely in Europe, no concrete effect on the European debate was as yet discernable.
- The stakeholders involved noted that the additional interdepartmental discussion and the process of formulating the government’s position were relatively strenuous. The interdepartmental discussion on the government’s response had not yet been completed at the time of this evaluation. Some stakeholders occasionally noted a disconnect in the discussion between foreign affairs and development cooperation, which at times led to situations in which development cooperation’s arguments could easily be ignored.
- The PCU succeeded in raising PCD issues in a variety of interdepartmental coordination processes related to non-trade concerns. Nonetheless, from time to time the unit entered meeting rooms uninvited, as with the involvement of the PCU director in the aforementioned working group on biomass sustainability. The PCU’s requests to join such coordination fora were usually approved, however, showing the unit’s effective activist stance on this theme. The PCU’s active involvement may encourage more regular invitations to participate in such policy processes.
- According to the interviewees, the PCU influenced several dossiers within the non-trade concerns theme by making contributions considered strong in terms of content. This relates to both Dutch policies and the Dutch negotiation position in the European Union. Nonetheless, relatively little investment has been made in creating coalitions of the like-minded within the European Union. The influence of the PCU in the overall

non-trade concerns theme therefore runs mainly via the process of formulating the Dutch position on related topics.

Regarding the efficiency of the PCU's work, the main evaluation findings are three:

- The division of tasks between the PCU and the policy theme departments within DGIS has been less efficient. In a number of cases, the PCU has played a supporting role, which was appreciated but raises the question of whether the PCU is not standing in for other departments and doing their regular tasks. No clear division of responsibilities had been agreed upon, which meant that it was not always evident who was to do what. This has led to some duplication of effort.
- As mentioned earlier, returning dossiers to the responsible policy theme departments has not always been smooth. In fact, no clear cases of such a transfer have been observed since the start of the coherence project on non-trade concerns.
- In the context of non-trade concerns, the PCU has invested heavily in producing knowledge and building an interdepartmental network. Interviewees perceived the PCU's cooperation with officials in other ministries as positive. PCU staff are considered both accessible and knowledgeable. Whilst NGOs were critical of PCU inputs related to non-trade concerns and trade policy, this is likely because their own positions tend to differ from those of the unit. This seems less the case with the other two themes highlighted in this report: TRIPS and the EPAs.

3.2 TRIPS and developing countries' access to medicines

In May 2003, policy officers from DDE, DSI and the European Integration Department (DIE) and the PCU started a project team on the issue of the TRIPS agreement and developing countries' access to medicines. The TRIPS agreement was included in the WTO in 1994 and contains far-reaching rules on intellectual property rights, including on patent protection of medicines. The project team initiated work on this theme in collaboration with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports.

Central in this project was to balance the interests of private pharmaceutical research, protected by TRIPS, and enabling public access to medicines. The project's strategy was *'to ensure that the TRIPS agreement does not create obstacles to improve access to affordable medicines for developing countries'*. Continuing differences in legal interpretations of the TRIPS agreement regarding compulsory licenses and increasing concerns about public health in developing countries prompted the WTO to adopt a ministerial declaration in 2001 on TRIPS and public health (part of the Doha Declaration). The PCU worked to inform the WTO ministerial declaration in 2001 and 2003, and from 2004 onwards to revise the Dutch and EU regulations on implementation of the WTO decisions concerning paragraph 6 on compulsory licenses.

In 2006, the World Health Organization (WHO) formed an Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) on public health, innovation and intellectual property rights. The PCU subsequently focused its work in relation to TRIPS on the process of formulating a worldwide strategy and action plan to improve both the development and availability of medicines for the poor in the IGWG process.

Several outputs have been achieved with regard to TRIPS and developing countries' access to medicines:

- The Dutch position on access to medicines contributed to the positive outcomes of

the 2001 Doha Declaration, which were reaffirmed and communicated in various fora, including the UN General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Commission, the European Commission, and the Third Least-Developed Countries Conference, as well as public meetings in the Netherlands involving representatives of the private sector, the science community and civil society.

- In 2004, the Netherlands became the first EU member state to integrate the WTO Ministerial Declaration, Decision and Amendment in its national TRIPS-related legislation. To make the case for a European directive to implement the WTO agreement, the project team drafted a proposal for an EU directive, which among other items suggested the efforts to be made to formulate a workable proposal and to take developing country interests into account. At the same time, the team provided support to developing country negotiators based in Geneva. In November 2005 the European Commission and the European Parliament reached agreement, and in 2006 the EU Council approved the *Directive on Compulsory Licensing*, which included many of the Dutch proposals.
- In 2007, the PCU organised a high-level meeting in the Netherlands in cooperation with the OECD/DAC entitled *Policy Coherence for Availability of Medicines for Emerging and Neglected Infectious Diseases*. This meeting resulted in the so-called 'Noordwijk Medicines Agenda' which was used in the IGWG process.¹³
- As part of the project team, the PCU actively contributed to development of a European position in the IGWG, collaborating with DSI and the ministries of Economic Affairs and Health, and with the Permanent Representation of the Netherlands in Geneva between 2006 and 2008. The Netherlands was one of the few EU member states to present a harmonised position, despite the often contradictory interests of industry and developing countries.¹⁴ The PCU's supportive role on this theme extended to the Slovenian EU Presidency. During the 2008 World Health Assembly, the global strategy and plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property were approved, just one World Health Assembly meeting later than originally intended.¹⁵

In December 2005, the PCU suggested finalising its work related to TRIPS and medicines in early 2006, as most of the goals that had been planned for had been achieved. The practical support to African countries to benefit from the changes in the TRIPS agreement and EU legislation were to be carried on by DSI and DDE, with PCU support. However, in 2006 the Health and Economic Affairs ministries and the PCU continued to cooperate. No new overall strategy was devised, and programmatic choices were made iteratively based on ongoing political developments.

Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the coordination between DDE and PCU was unclear, which resulted in the PCU becoming de facto responsible for the dossier. DDE indicated having no plans to resume work on the dossier as part of its regular tasks. There was initially no capacity in DSI to work on TRIPS and medicines, though from the second half of 2006 there was an increased interest and involvement on the topic.

¹³ See www.oecd.org/sti/biotechnology/nma

¹⁴ The concerted actions of DGIS and the Netherlands' ministries for Economic Affairs and Health had great effect within the European Union, given that the Dutch had a joint position and a relatively large delegation. This was a clear difference from other less prepared and less well-represented member states. For those countries, the decision to collaborate with the EU Presidency by preparing a matrix to facilitate decision making proved important for bringing about the negotiation results achieved in Geneva.

¹⁵ The Global Strategy and Plan of Action are available at http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/A61/A61_R21-en.pdf

The interviews and internal documents consulted in the course of this evaluation indicate that the PCU work surrounding the IGWG was very efficient, due to the good internal cooperation within DGIS and between the different ministries. The PCU often took the initiative and managed to combine a coordinating role with bridge-building. While the other project team members were often occupied with other issues, the PCU had time available to coordinate activities and inputs related to this coherence project. The PCU was very well informed on the subject, and other departments in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs often came to the PCU first, when they had questions on TRIPS and access to medicines.

Respondents from other ministries commented that the PCU was not only occupied with its own interests and objectives, but also supported achievement of goals set by the other ministries involved. Working on “non-aid issues” earned the PCU the trust and goodwill of the other members of the project team. Respondents from the departments and at the Permanent Representation in Geneva mentioned that this cooperation had left them more inclined to take and defend “development-friendly” positions in future policy negotiations.

The IGWG process can thus be considered an example of “good practice” with regard to the promotion of PCD. The TRIPS and access to medicines project demonstrated meaningful and intensive inter-ministerial coordination. In retrospect, the continuation of the work beyond 2005 led to an increase in the agency of the PCU and to a strong project team. Good coordination was also evident in the team’s contacts with other EU member states. Finally, good results were achieved with regard to raising awareness on PCD with the ministries involved.

3.3 Economic Partnership Agreements

The third and last case examined work related to the negotiation of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). From the start, trade has been one of the most visible and intensive themes on which the PCU has been engaged, first with the WTO negotiations, informally known as the “Doha Development Round”. Yet the trade and development realities facing developing countries are increasingly shaped by regional trade accords. The PCU has therefore also monitored the ongoing negotiations of EPAs between the European Union and regions of the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. The 2000 Cotonou Partnership Agreement requires that EPAs replace the existing privileged trade preferences of the ACP; and a WTO waiver allowed these preferences to continue only up to December 2007.

The target of the EPAs is to contribute to poverty reduction and the integration of the ACP countries into the world economy. To ensure these objectives are met, the negotiations and eventual agreements must take into account differences in levels of economic development between the six negotiating regions and facilitate regional integration processes. To do so, agreement was reached in the second half of 2007 to make available additional EU financial means to help the ACP regions adjust to liberalisation and regional integration and to contribute to the development of their trade capacities.¹⁶

Following an initial period of relatively slow-paced negotiations, which on the EU side were led by the European Commission’s DG for Trade, the talks accelerated after the close of 2006, as the December 2007 deadline came into sight and became increasingly significant in driving the pace and character of the process. Although the PCU was already informally involved, it formalised its participation in its 2007 annual plan, which included support to existing and intensified cooperation between DDE and DIE on this subject. The annual plan

¹⁶ This European strategy on ‘aid for trade’ is available at <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st13/st13070.en07.pdf>

refers to the importance of formulating a clear plan with an internal division of tasks and lobbying activities.

The DGIS departments involved felt that it was strategic to add the extra “manpower” of the PCU to the team, given the demanding pace of the negotiations and the high political priority attached to them by the Minister for Development Cooperation. The PCU proved flexible and well-placed to reinforce the project team. Even though three ministerial departments were involved in work on this single topic, the cooperation between the team members was described as valuable and efficient.

Analysis of the outputs achieved confirms that the EPA project was a dynamic one. Given the involvement of the Minister for Development Cooperation, a great deal of time was devoted to prepare for meetings at which the top-level Dutch policymakers contributed (e.g. at the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council and meetings of the EU directors of development cooperation) and to draft answers to letters from NGOs (often together with the Ministry of Economic Affairs). In addition, time was spent coordinating with the Economic Affairs colleagues who participated in the EU Trade Council Working Party (in the so-called “Committee 133” meetings).

Other important outputs of the project team included two commissioned studies conducted by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and ECDPM. These aimed to better inform the EU Commission and member states and ACP countries on two issues that received much attention in the negotiations and were both linked to possible consequences for the ACP if no EPAs were signed before the WTO deadline.¹⁷ In addition, the project team prepared a number of internal papers to further the formulation, coordination and communication of the Dutch position in the EPA negotiations.

Next to the formal meetings in Brussels, the project team contributed to several informal meetings with Dutch NGOs and “like-minded” EU member states. At one such meeting, in Dublin on 10 May 2007, Ireland, Denmark, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom were present, in addition to the Netherlands.¹⁸ During these meetings, both of the commissioned studies were presented to the appreciation of the member states.

A number of remarks can be made on the efficiency of the PCU’s efforts:

- The project team was able to draw up and finalise the terms of references for the two external studies within a short timeframe, and entrusted the studies to two organisations that proved able to deliver the desired research output on time.
- The coordination between the PCU and the two Ministry of Foreign Affairs departments was efficient. Earlier attempts to split the work according to the six geographic ACP regions did not work because in the policy process the geographic groupings became less relevant (and in some cases the composition of the regions also fluctuated).
- The PCU contributed to the planning and efficiency of the project team’s work by drafting a document entitled *Strategy for a Coherent Outcome of the EPA Negotiations*. This short paper, which was updated and adopted in mid-2007, was welcomed by the other members of the team.

¹⁷ These two papers are (i) ODI (2007), ‘The costs to the ACP of exporting to the EU under the GSP’. www.odi.org.uk/IEDG/Publications/Final-ODI-ACP-GSP-report.pdf and (ii) Bilal, S. (2007), ‘Concluding EPA negotiations: legal and institutional issues’. Maastricht: ECDPM Policy Management Report 12. www.ecdpm.org/pmb12

¹⁸ Finland, Denmark and Sweden were part of the group, but not present at this meeting.

- Most respondents commented that given the political priority placed on the EPA process, the involvement of the PCU was logical and desirable, regardless of the involvement of the other departments.

Regarding the effectiveness of the PCU's contribution to the project team's work, several aspects warrant mention:

- The contributions made by the PCU were modest but appreciated. The specific added value of the PCU, however, was unclear to several respondents. It was mentioned that the direct contact with the director of the PCU in 2007 proved strategic, given his expertise on trade policy.
- Although the coordination between the PCU and the two involved departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs turned out to be efficient, the wide involvement did leave outsiders (particularly those at the Ministry of Economic Affairs) with the impression that participation of other ministries was not needed. This coincided with the evolution in the negotiations after 2006, whereby more attention was paid to development and regional integration aspects and involvement at the political level increased. The contributions by the Netherlands Permanent Representation in Brussels also increased at that point, with most efforts going into reporting on the many EPA meetings that took place in the second half of 2007.
- Despite the Ministry of Economic Affairs' realisation that DGIS had the most capacity on this theme, it nevertheless perceived the cooperation as being valuable, whereby coordination focused especially on harmonising the Dutch positions in Committee 133 and the Council Working Party on Development Cooperation. Regular discussions were held between both ministries and typically focused on how far one could go in taking certain positions without becoming politically isolated in Brussels, which would be counter-productive. The Ministry of Economic Affairs was mostly in contact with DDE and DIE, though they occasionally met with the PCU official involved on certain occasions.

A general conclusion on this coherence project is that the effectiveness of the work can mostly be attributed to the cooperation between the two Ministry of Foreign Affairs departments.¹⁹ It should be added that the relatively limited contribution of the PCU was partly due to the fact that a former PCU official (who had worked in the PCU from 2002 to 2006) played a key role at DIE. This person possessed a great deal of PCD expertise. If this expertise had not been available, the PCU's contribution would have had to be larger.

¹⁹ This effectiveness was limited, however, in the sense that the minister's own development targets for the EPAs were only partially achieved once the December 2007 deadline had passed.

4. Raising international and European awareness on PCD

The third PCU intervention strategy concerns raising international and European awareness. Here, emphasis is on promoting PCD among EU member states, in the European Commission and within the OECD, as well as forming strategic coalitions of like-minded countries around specific PCD dossiers. The PCU's mandate states that information and communication activities should form an integral part of the specific coherence projects, and they should aim at promoting higher-level debate on PCD. The mandate further speaks of increasing the "coherence mentality" of DGIS officials by exploring options for training.

Since its establishment, the PCU has produced or contributed to a number of important studies and publications on PCD:

- inter-ministerial policy research on the effectiveness and coherence of development cooperation in 2002 (*Interdepartementaal Beleids Onderzoek*);
- reports on Millennium Development Goal No. 8 published in 2004 and 2006 (in Dutch and in English) with a foreword by the Prime Minister of the Netherlands;
- questionnaire for the first EU report on PCD sent to Parliament in April 2007 (no other EU member state had as yet made their questionnaire formally available in the public domain);
- progress reports on PCD published and sent to Parliament in 2006 and 2008, including English translations;
- publications in English including the 2006 brochure *Promoting Policy Coherence for Development: The Dutch Experience* and a contribution to the ministry's essay collection *A Rich Menu for the Poor* in 2008.

An analysis of the dissemination of the aforementioned publications suggests that it would be worthwhile to invest in updating and expanding the distribution lists, to ensure wider dissemination of future PCD publications, especially in international circles.

During the evaluated period, the PCU often took advantage of opportunities to make presentations at conferences organised itself and by other departments, in external organisations and at the European and international level. In addition to raising awareness on PCD, many of these presentations focused on the diverse coherence projects, though most tended to combine awareness-raising and attention for individual issues. The PCU further contributed the basic course in development cooperation (the *OS Basiscursus*) during the unit's first few years of operation. Respondents agreed that this course, alongside the introductory course for new diplomats at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provided a strategic opportunity to familiarise practitioners with the contents and requirements of PCD.

The PCU played an active role in establishing the informal EU PCD network in late 2003. This network provided various actors in the EU and the Commission (DG Development) opportunities to exchange information on current PCD issues and ways to deal with them. Despite the good amount of information that was shared in the network over the past few years, respondents were not of the opinion that the network had been a success. First of all, respondents felt it was not "informal" enough, and it had proven difficult to identify PCD experts in many EU member states. This latter difficulty is related to the progress made in promoting PCD. In some countries it appeared easier to mobilise expertise at the conceptual level (What is PCD?) than at the level of PCD practice. In addition to participating in this network, the PCU has presented its experiences on a bilateral basis in many EU member states. Between 2005 and 2008, presentations were made in Finland, Ireland, Spain, Poland and Romania.

Within the OECD/DAC, the PCU contributed to a 2007 workshop on institutional approaches to promoting PCD and gave a presentation on the case of cut flowers to the OECD Working Party on Trade. The fact that the Netherlands was able to present such a concrete case made a strong impression on the OECD members present at the meeting.

5. Analysis of findings and conclusions

It must be emphasised that the functioning of the PCU can be understood only within the context of the wider functioning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The evaluation design took this broader context into account, while keeping the onus on the performance of the PCU as the object of the evaluation. Based on the interviews and the e-mail survey (sent to 63 e-mail addresses with a response rate of over 60%), this section analyses findings in relation to seven key questions that were formulated during the preparation of the evaluation.

5.1 Policy and institutional landscape for PCD in the Netherlands and Europe

Question 1: To what extent has the policy and institutional landscape for PCD in the Netherlands and Europe changed in the period since 2002, and what challenges can be expected in the near future?

In the period between 2005 and 2008, PCD held a central place in Dutch policy on development cooperation. It was also a priority of the Netherlands EU Presidency during the second half of 2004. The priorities of the present Minister for Development Cooperation include plans to further deepen and shape the work on PCD, judging from his recent speech on the future of international cooperation.²⁰

Several respondents referred to the consolidated ministerial responsibility for development cooperation as confirming the Dutch political priority to promote PCD. This was affirmed by the relative consensus on this point in the responses to the e-mail survey (Table 2).

Table 2 Survey statement no. 5: Ministerial responsibility for development cooperation is especially defensible given the minister's task to move towards more coherence at the level of peers in government

	Completely disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Fully agree (5)	Average	Standard deviation
Total 38	0	5	4	13	16	4.05	1.04

The interviews indicated a growing awareness of the evolving political and institutional context for development whereby in the present international debate the role of development cooperation is increasingly associated with broader global challenges. As a result, development is becoming more intertwined with other policy areas. This process is, for instance, evident in the Netherlands in the increasing number of inter-ministerial policy notes which formulate PCD-relevant goals between (normally two) ministries.

The evaluation survey showed that views still differ on the best way for the PCU to position itself in these developments: actively searching for workable compromises or ensuring that other ministries' policies become more development friendly (Table 3).

Table 3 Survey statement 10: The PCU should increase its focus on improving inter-ministerial coordination on strategic dossiers, and be open to workable compromises as opposed to "one-directional coherence"

	Completely disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Fully agree (5)	Average	Standard deviation
Total 38	2	9	5	16	6	3.39	1.17

²⁰ Lecture by Minister Bert Koenders, 'International cooperation 2.0: a modern agenda for fighting poverty' (in Dutch), 8 November 2008, University of Amsterdam.

Most of today's global challenges, such as security, climate change, migration and global finance, affect both the relatively rich and the poor areas of the world, which shows prospects for using development cooperation as a form of "leverage" in the context of international cooperation. This would allow more space for a development cooperation that stays focused on poverty reduction, but also increasingly orients itself to ensuring more attention for support to developing countries in the development of solutions to the global challenges. The question whether and how such a use of development cooperation can be realised is an important new challenge for work on PCD.

5.2 PCU interventions and relations

Question 2: How has the PCU in the evaluated period shaped its interventions and relations with relevant parties in order to achieve its goals, and in what ways have changes occurred during 2002–08?

The unique institutional positioning of the PCU under DGIS is aimed to facilitate direct support to the Minister for Development Cooperation on PCD. The two previous ministers had regular contact with the PCU director (sometimes even on a weekly basis). This direct contact appears to have diminished under the current minister, especially during the past year.

Comparing the periods 2002–05 and 2005–08, the key changes concern the relative watering down of the strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation aspects of the PCU's work (including the coherence projects). Although new coherence projects are confirmed via the annual plans, further decisions, such as on divisions of labour with other Ministry of Foreign Affairs departments have seldom been specified and operationalised during the latter period.

More than the regular Ministry of Foreign Affairs departments, the PCU has had considerable freedom in shaping its actions, which has led to a situation in which some of the priorities formulated in its original mandate (such as monitoring the implementation of policies and systematic communication with representatives of developing countries) have moved to the background. Most emphasis in the three intervention strategies has been put on the second strategy: thematic work in the coherence projects. This has led to the perception in the departments that the PCU's main interest is to do content-related work, which in some cases has had implications for cooperation.

The draft annual plan for 2009 notes the diminishing involvement of non-PCU officials in PCD-related work, which it links to the '*steering and content-focused task of the PCU officials, and a fading monitoring and reporting cycle*'. On this basis, it can be concluded that the PCU increasingly resembles a regular department in the ministry. Returning to a more formal planning approach could be considered a way forward to bring about a more effective functioning of the ministry as a whole in promoting PCD.

5.3 Impact at the national, European and international/multilateral levels

Question 3: To what extent have the PCU's choices, activities and projects achieved the expected results at the national, European and international/multilateral levels?

Evaluation findings indicate that the PCU achieved important results in the promotion of PCD during the core period for this evaluation. This is confirmed by the level of concurrence with the statement in the e-mail survey regarding the contribution of the unit (Table 4). This item

earned the second-highest “score”, after the statement inquiring into the perceived importance of consolidating the PCU’s proactive approach.

Table 4 Survey statement 2: Since the start of the PCU, the unit has made an important contribution to increasing support for the promotion of more coherent policy in relation to development cooperation

	Completely disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Fully agree (5)	Average	Standard deviation
Total 39	0	3	6	16	14	4.05	0.92

It should be noted that many of the results were – in accordance with the PCU’s mandate – achieved in close cooperation with departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with other ministries, and with the permanent representations.

With regard to the coherence projects, it was not always clear what the PCU wanted to achieve, and there was an overall lack of result-orientation on the dossiers and projects in which it was involved. Measuring these outputs was therefore more difficult, though it is clear that results have been achieved, including unexpected ones.

The division of labour between the PCU and departments appeared insufficiently led by the agreed logic that the PCU is to play an awareness-raising and facilitating role.

The observed cases of overlap with other departments (particularly DIE and DDE) somewhat undermined the effectiveness of the work on PCD, which is why a more participatory annual planning process is desirable. At the same time, good results have been achieved in those areas where follow-up in other departments proved difficult (e.g. on fisheries). The tendency of the PCU to be involved in coherence dossiers for an extended period of time has proved to be effective. This, however, is inconsistent with the agreed strategy of short-term involvement in a dossier, after which the responsibility is handed back fully to the department concerned.

In the relations with other ministries, the willingness of the PCU to cooperate and compromise was valued. The constructive positions of the PCU show that it takes account of the realities and power relations at play. This has worked efficiently and effectively, in the sense that there is now more acceptance of the need for PCD within the ministries for Health, Environment and Economic Affairs.

5.4 PCU efficiency

Question 4: To what extent has the chosen approach been efficient?

The most visible of the PCU’s efforts has been its work in relation to the thematic dossiers. As a consequence, the lack of clear agreements and occasional duplication of work between the PCU and DGIS departments were frequently referred to in the interviews. It was also noted that the rationale behind the PCU’s choice for certain coherence projects was not always clear, and by extension, it was not always apparent why the PCU did not work on some topics (e.g. the International Labour Organization instructions or OECD guidelines for the private sector). The choices made were nonetheless considered pertinent given the unit’s capacity and the political priorities, judging from the relatively high 3.45 score on the related item in the e-mail survey.

Past cooperation has enabled important results to be achieved, but due to the sometimes low involvement of the departments, a PCD mindset has as yet failed to permeate throughout the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Rather, the departments appeared to sometimes prefer letting the PCU do the “dirty work” on PCD.

The PCU's relations and networks are better with some ministries than with others. For instance, cooperation with the ministries of Justice and Agriculture was more strenuous than that with the Health, Environment and Economic Affairs ministries. NGOs considered the PCU approachable, but so too were other departments within DGIS. Some respondents commented that the enlargement of the European Union had made it more difficult to influence policies efficiently in Brussels, and also confirmed that raising awareness about PCD among new member states had been a good choice of focus. There were differences of opinion as to whether the PCU should prioritise work in The Hague or should be more present where the decisions are made (e.g. in Brussels and Geneva).

A few respondents felt that the PCU was too preoccupied with scoring “bullet points” in policy formulation and insufficiently active in realising those points at the policy implementation stage. In this respect, a recommendation was made to work on the more concrete side, by encouraging PCD practices including more technical examples, in addition to remaining active on the political side. The diminishment of formal planning has made it more difficult to attribute results to the PCU or other involved parties.

The unit has made relatively small investments thus far in information and awareness raising – such as updating its intranet and website and keeping NGOs and colleagues informed. Nonetheless, information activities could potentially make an important contribution to improving efficiency. Investments in training within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and better dissemination of public documents could raise the efficiency of the PCU's work.

5.5 Relevance of the mandate, added value and approach

Question 5: What is the relevance of the mandate, added value and approach of the PCU for the implementation of PCD policy?

Given the PCU's mandate and the responsibility of the Minister for Development Cooperation, the establishment of the unit as a temporary entity was a pragmatic choice, not a strategic one. Practical reasons explain why the decision was made to set up a temporary unit. The unit assumed some of the functions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that are actually regular tasks of permanent departments (e.g. representing DGIS in CoCo and BNC). Some respondents seemed to link the unit's “temporary” character with the idea that the PCU would dissolve itself once PCD was sufficiently integrated and permeated throughout the government administration. The same respondents, however, felt that this could not be realised in the short term, or even within a period of twenty years. The e-mail survey showed a high degree of consensus of the importance of a proactive role by the unit for improvement of PCD (Table 5).

Table 5 Survey statement 4: In order to achieve results, it has been and will remain important that the PCU proactively remind colleagues in government within and outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about their responsibilities with regard to promoting PCD							
	Completely disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Fully agree (5)	Average	Standard deviation
Total 39	1	3	3	10	22	4.26	1.07

The PCU was initially expected to (and did) provide direct support to the Minister for Development Cooperation in a way that would have been more difficult from within a normal ministerial department. It is notable that the director general of DGIS played a more activist role with regard to promoting PCD up to 2005. In the current period (2005–08), the director general has been less involved with the PCU's work, and given the recent shifts in management, clear and concrete agreements in this regard appear necessary.

The mandate of the PCU was in no way questioned by the respondents. Reactions indicated that acceptance of PCD has increased since 2002. A limited number of respondents commented that PCD had lost some momentum as a "political trend". Others pointed out that with the current cuts in Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff, there seems to be less support for maintaining special units like the PCU. At the international level, though, there is increasing support for creation and utilisation of such specialised mechanisms.

Some respondents commented that the PCU at present was not always willing to "stick out its neck", but preferred instead to take more expected routes. This might indicate that its current high institutional position is no longer required. It should be noted here that the past director of the PCU was a crucial determinant in the unit's visibility and influence, mostly due to his knowledge and experience related to the WTO.

Regarding the practice of the PCU, the findings of this evaluation underline the pertinence and strategic value of the three intervention strategies. In the European and international context, it could be argued that the PCU's mandate and approach is an example of "international best practice" in promoting PCD. In addition, important results have been achieved in all three areas: in screening and influencing Dutch positions in the European Union, in interventions on specific dossiers and projects, and in raising awareness. The relevance of the PCU's approach is therefore unquestioned. What might be further examined is the distribution of energy and attention over the various tasks and the way the agenda around PCD is shaped and implemented.

5.6 Equipping for the future

Question 6: Is the PCU in its present set-up adequately equipped to meet the most important challenges of coherence policy in the coming years?

The main challenges expected for the coming years are two:

- further consolidation and anchoring of the Dutch efforts to promote PCD at government-wide, European and international levels;
- picking up new issues related to the possible "leverage function" of development cooperation in relation to several international cooperation challenges.

In view of these challenges, it could be argued that the achievements of the PCU and the recognition thereof at various levels provides a strong base for the future. At the same time, there is room for improvement of the "coherence function" in general. Further consolidation of the Netherlands' policy on PCD can be realised only with cooperation between the different ministers, directorate generals and departments and, finally, in the European and international context. Here, the PCU has played and can continue to play a valuable role.

This evaluation observed four main areas for improvement, some of which exceed the direct influence and responsibility of the PCU:

- maintenance of direct contacts between the PCU, the director general and the Minister for Development Cooperation on current and future coherence dossiers and support for the minister's preparations for the weekly meeting with colleague ministers and secretaries of state;

- contributions to the broader and deeper institutionalisation of the policy agenda-setting process around PCD;
- provisions for systematic and substantially larger inputs by the DGIS departments involved on relevant PCD dossiers;
- strengthening the PCU's communication and awareness-raising role.

Many respondents referred to an imbalance between the attention given to long-term macro-concerns and the short-term management of official development assistance ("the 5 billion"). Several interviewees emphasised that the present human resources policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whereby officials can radically change specialisation at least once every four years, erects a barrier to the implementation of PCD in general and for the functioning of the PCU in particular. In addition, there is a clear need to improve networks linking the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with knowledge communities within and outside of the Netherlands. Respondents also mentioned that promoting PCD requires a very detailed control of content. Partly in recognition of this, over 60% of the respondents to the e-mail survey felt that the PCU should be able to recruit external expertise on priority themes.

In the context of the current plans to reorganise and downsize the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, further agreements will be made regarding placing responsibilities for trade policy in one central department. The document describing these changes also states that the present evaluation will provide the basis for deciding whether the PCU can continue as a separate unit or should be relocated in an existing department.

This evaluation also looked into the question of whether the PCU could be discontinued and its functions mainstreamed. Here, the responses to the e-mail survey show a mix of views, but most felt that mainstreaming would not serve the effective promotion of PCD (Table 6).

Table 6 Survey statement 8: It is not possible to effectively promote coherence by dissolving the PCU and mainstreaming PCD in the ministry							
	Completely disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Fully agree (5)	Average	Standard deviation
Total 39	5	9	5	10	10	3.27	1.43

In this context, reference is made to a recent meta-evaluation of three attempts at mainstreaming by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), respectively on HIV/Aids, environment and gender. The comparison of these cases led to the conclusion that SIDA had been unable to effectively mainstream work in the three policy areas. Attention to the themes had been irregular, issues were frequently ignored, and emphasis had become very dependent on the interest and commitment of individuals.²¹

The pressure to disburse ODA, combined with the relative neglect of macro policy work (including on PCD) and the lack of success of earlier mainstreaming attempts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, leads to the conclusion that discontinuing the PCU and mainstreaming its tasks would diminish the effective promotion of PCD. Suggestions expressed in the other direction appear to be due mostly to the ambiguity of the division of tasks and the cooperation with the departments. The majority of respondents felt that mainstreaming or discontinuing the PCU would send a signal to other EU member states that the Netherlands no longer sees PCD as a priority.

²¹ The study can be found at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/0/40/39070485.pdf>

5.7 Lessons on relevance, sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency

Question 7: What lessons can be drawn regarding the relevance, sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency of the PCU, also in comparison with other EU member states?

The introduction of this report referred to a conclusion from the 2006 OECD/DAC peer review which reads: *‘The Netherlands now has a “winning combination” of political commitment, a clear policy framework and the capacity to deliver through a dedicated Policy Coherence Unit (PCU) located within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.’* The PCU is widely acknowledged as a source of inspiration for other EU member states, and EU-wide evaluations have pointed to the crucial role played by the PCU in establishing effective national policy towards promoting PCD.²² This recognition of the Netherlands’ positive role on PCD throughout Europe and the OECD was referred to in several interviews, and confirmed by respondents to the e-mail survey (Table 7).

Table 7 Survey statement 15: Discontinuing or mainstreaming the PCU would signal to other EU member states that the Netherlands deprioritises PCD							
	Completely disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Fully agree (5)	Average	Standard deviation
Total 39	2	6	4	17	10	3.69	1.17

The findings of this evaluation indicate that long involvement by the PCU in a dossier is often necessary to create trust within DGIS and among ministries and with European/international colleagues. It is thus a key factor in the PCU’s effectiveness. The 2009 annual plan’s suggestion to occasionally review the political relevance of the different projects with the Minister for Development Cooperation would seem an important addition in the context of the proposed more intensive and structured planning. Similar suggestions for proactive and long-term engagement have been made in other European and international studies.

Finally, improved and increased communication about PCD from DGIS and the PCU, in particular to parliament and different groups in society is an important instrument to sustain the “demand” for PCD.

²² For example, OECD (2008), ‘Synthesis report on policy coherence for development’. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/21/10/41558897.pdf>

6. Recommendations

Based on this evaluation's findings and conclusions, presented in the previous section, a number of recommendations can be put forward regarding the Dutch efforts to promote PCD, and the PCU's functioning in this regard.

6.1 Recommendations

With regard to the successful implementation of PCD within DGIS, following the pioneering period of 2002–08, the PCD function should now become more broadly anchored and given a permanent place within DGIS. In doing so, more responsibility for PCD and energy expended living up to the PCD responsibility needs to be devolved to the relevant policy theme departments. Successful implementation requires active steering from the highest political and management levels within DGIS. Such political and management drive should also aim at ensuring optimal institutional conditions for promoting PCD within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The existence of a pro-active group of people with a facilitating role – exempted from day-to-day ODA management – within the setting suggested above is of the utmost importance. This group can provide additional input and expertise on PCD where needed. To realise this, clear agreements are needed on allocation of the available time and resources, taking into account the main conclusions of this evaluation:

- More priority should be given to the screening and formulation of the Dutch positions in European and multilateral policy discussions. This should include support to top-level policymakers in preparing PCD-sensitive dossiers to be discussed at the weekly Ministerial Council.
- Similarly, more emphasis should be given to communication with the national Parliament, societal groups and knowledge institutions. Increased emphasis is warranted on the facilitating role in internal and external awareness-raising, including follow-up on joint policy notes between ministries and the development cooperation “leverage” function.
- As much as possible, the content-related work on PCD-sensitive dossiers should be kept with the responsible policy theme departments, with the PCU adhering to a facilitating role.
- Where a specific dossier is politically urgent but cannot be taken up sufficiently by the respective departments, the PCU should be able to engage its own networks and research budget to break new (institutional) ground and give a strong impetus to the necessary intra/inter-ministerial coordination.
- Given the many new challenges in maintaining and expanding tasks, the present capacity in terms of full-time equivalents and available financial resources for the PCU is insufficient.

6.2 Two future scenarios

Two future scenarios can be foreseen for the institutional positioning of the PCU, taking into account not only the current evaluation but also the institutional options explored in the first PCU evaluation of 2005.

- *Scenario 1:* The PCU's functions are located in a separate, permanent cluster within an existing DGIS department. Given the evolution in mandate foreseen under the present reorganisation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Department for Effectiveness and Quality (DEK) could be envisaged. This would clarify the various lines of communication but nevertheless be complex in view of the relation between the director, head of cluster, and (deputy) director general. The cluster should be given additional capacity to operationalise the announced changes to PCD policy and the support to the Development Cooperation minister on PCD dossiers for the Ministerial Council, under supervision of the (deputy) director general of DGIS.
- *Scenario 2:* The present institutional position of the PCU is maintained with an updated mandate and a permanent function for the unit. The division of tasks between the policy theme departments, the PCU and the (deputy) director general of DGIS should be clarified and the communication lines made as short as possible. This would give the PCU the required autonomy and responsibility to play its proactive and facilitating role. The final responsibility for management of the PCU's inputs and cooperation with the policy theme departments would be with the (deputy) director general. The mandate should include clear decisions on an improved approach to planning, expected results and the allocation of the available time and resources over the PCU's various functions. Additional capacity should be created to operationalise the announced changes in development cooperation policies and for support to the minister on PCD dossiers for the Ministerial Council, again under supervision of the (deputy) director general.

Given the results of the PCU during this evaluation's core period (2005–08) and earlier, and in view of the importance of the unit's visibility and proactive autonomous operation, the evaluation team considers the second scenario to be preferable. This is especially so in light of the recognition earned by the unit in European and international settings.

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