



EEAS and EC need to better coordinate their actions, inter service agreement reveals

One year after the launch of the European External Action Service (EEAS), an EEAS-European Commission (EC) inter-service agreement has been agreed, setting out the division of labour between the two EU bodies. Whilst the joint work of the two entities was sought to strengthen EU external policies, including the programming of EU aid to third countries, institutional arrangements continue to be insufficiently co-ordinated, experts have warned.

According to the agreement — an internal unpublished document, the EC and the EEAS jointly plan the overall spending strategies of the external relations budget, whilst the three commissioners in charge of external policies remain in full control of the design and implementation of the projects. The EC moreover has the responsibility to oversee the EEAS' internal budget.

An assessment of the programming cycle of EU aid granted to third countries reveals that the division of tasks between the Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation-EuropeAid (DG DEVCO) and the EEAS constitute complex working processes that require a high degree of co-operation between the different actors. This process has been however slow and cumbersome, EU officials have expressed.

In an assessment of the agreement, the European think tank ECDPM has pointed to the often understaffed EU delegations that have made an efficient co-operation process difficult. The EEAS that has been often criticised for primarily focusing on EU strategic foreign policy interests to the detriment of EU development policy has still to prove that it actively tries to mainstream development concerns in its work, the document continues.

"It is important that good cooperation mechanisms will be established and function well between DEVCO and the EEAS so that the objectives and spirit of the Lisbon Treaty related the EU's development policy and poverty reduction remain at the core of these activities", ECDPM concludes.

Sources:

- [EUobserver](#)
- [ECDPM - Talking Points](#)

The Potentially of Intra-African Trade

Following the agreement by African leaders to establish a Continental Free Trade Area (C-FTA) by 2017, the international community stepped up emphasising the importance of boosting intra-African trade. The lack of an oversight body to guide the process and the many diverging views among members of the different African regional groupings forecast a long and cumbersome way for African trade, experts have warned.

"There is a huge potential for the Africanisation of African trade", WTO Director Pascal Lamy said after the African Union (AU) Summit in January that saw the endorsement of plans to set up an African C-FTA by 2017. Especially in light of the on-going crisis in Europe and the US that has led to a slow-down in global trade, Africa should find a way to "make the economy of the continent more resilient and less prone to external shocks", Lamy believes.

The importance of boosting intra-African trade is also emphasised in a new World Bank (WB) report, entitled "De-Fragmenting Africa: Deepening Regional Trade Integration in Goods and Services". Whilst experts have often argued that regional integration could only play a limited role in Africa due to the similarity of endowments between the countries, the report points to the huge potential agricultural cross-border trade in agricultural products could exhibit, especially for areas with a food deficit.

The lack of diversification is one of the most critical areas in current African trade structures, the WB believes. The continuous existence of trade barriers and the imposition of restrictive policies have significantly hindered the African economy to diversify trade and to strengthen its production chain. "If all countries were to open up to the region, exploiting [the advantages of intra-continental trade] collectively would encourage... the emergence of regional value chains, creating employment and promoting export diversification", the report argues.

Whilst the importance for Africa to strengthen intra-continental trade constitutes an uncontested issue within the international community, the roadway towards the realisation of such plans remains uncertain. With only five years left until the C-FTA is supposed to be in place, experts have already pointed out that such plans are likely to remain beyond realisation. A first step towards a boosting of intra-African trade should be a significant reduction in trade barriers among African nations, as well as within and among the different regional economic communities, according to experts. "To become credible, African leaders should act at home on the effective implementation of the regional agenda", Dr. San Bilal, Head of the Economic Governance Programme at ECDPM believes.

Read the WB report here: [The World Bank](#)

Sources:

- [Afronline](#)
- [FT.com](#)

Humanitarian aid system should be strengthened at local level, Oxfam argues

In light of the rising numbers of disasters and conflicts worldwide, the non-governmental relief agency Oxfam has called for a revision of the current humanitarian system. In the report entitled "Crises in a New World Order", Oxfam emphasises the need to shift the focus from global crises responses to the support of crisis prevention at local level, if current challenges in the humanitarian system are to be faced successfully.

Taking stock of the international community's responses to emergencies in recent years, Oxfam concludes that support has been "too little and too late". By shifting resources to the local level, these will be more readily available in crisis-affected countries and will thus enable for a quicker and more efficient aid response, the report suggests.

However, whilst crisis response constitutes an essential part of the humanitarian system, the prevention and reduction of disaster risks should be put more into the forefront, Oxfam believes. "International aid agencies cannot just pitch up, patch up and push-off, they also have to ensure that people and countries are better prepared to withstand future shocks", said Oxfam GB Humanitarian Director Jane Cocking. In 2009, aid to the reduction of disaster risks only amounted to 0,5% of total aid spending, displaying a lack of effective action in this field, the report reads.

Pointing to the rise of new aid donors in the humanitarian sector, such as China, Oxfam emphasises the importance to provide aid on the basis of need and independence rather than political interests.

The increased involvement of the private sector in supporting aid efforts is another challenge the current humanitarian system is faced with, the organisation believes. "The increased involvement of the private sector in supporting the aid effort is welcome and has many benefits but running aid programs themselves will challenge humanitarian principles given that commercial interest sits uncomfortably with putting human need first and foremost", Oxfam warns.

Read the full report here: [Oxfam - Policy & Practice](#)

Sources:

- [Devex](#)
- [Oxfam International - Press releases](#)

European Civil Society voices its positions towards Rio+20

Following the publication of the zero draft document for the upcoming UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) to take place in June 2012, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) hosted a conference during which European civil society organisations (CSOs) agreed on a set of recommendations for EU and global leaders. Participants emphasised the need for a greater emphasis on the social dimension of sustainable development and called for the eradication of poverty to be a top priority on the Rio+20 agenda.

The conference took place from 7-8 February 2012 in Brussels and saw the participation of European CSOs, decision-makers, EU officials and public officials. Discussions focused on the current state of the Rio+20 processes and the concept of green economy, for which a common definition is yet to be agreed upon. Participants also took stock of the European contribution to sustainability and the enhancement of sustainable development in non-EU countries.

In the outcome document, participants call on EU member states to commit to the principles of sustainable development and to reduce their resource consumption. Political leaders should furthermore agree on a green economy roadmap, with clear goals and monitoring mechanism, the document reads. Proposals for a new monitoring and evaluation mechanism include the creation of a new sustainable development council and the setting in place of a new UN agency for the environment.

According to EESC president Steffan Nilsson "the Rio+20 summit will not solve the world's problems overnight; however it will be able to harness the will to act and give new momentum to sustainable development". He emphasised the need for a greater CSO involvement in the different negotiation and implementation processes, an issue that should be addressed by political leaders during the conference, Nilsson stressed. He furthermore encouraged CSOs to step up their actions ahead of the conference. "Civil society's thinking and action for the Rio+20 summit are important because civil society can speak with one voice across EU Member States and other nations" he added.

Prominent speakers, such as European Commissioner for the Environment Janez Potočnik, EU Development Commissioner, Andris Piebalgs and Executive Coordinator of the UN Rio+20 Conference, Brice Lalonde, acknowledged the efforts of the Committee to channel European CSO voices on sustainable development and climate change and encouraged the body to play a more active role in the negotiation and implementation process of the sustainable development agenda, to be agreed upon.

Sources:

- [Building the Peoples Summit Rio+20](#)
- [EMWIS - Euro-Mediterranean Information System on know-how in the Water sector](#)

Development-led, not finance-led globalisation, UN says

In a new report, entitled "Development-led globalisation: Towards sustainable and inclusive development paths", the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) calls for a fundamental reform of the current global financial system, in order to create a more stable and inclusive economic development process. If potential gains from trade are to be maximised for everyone, developing countries should have the freedom to choose their own policies to build up diversified and resilient economies, the report reads.

The report sets out the main issues to be addressed by the UNCTAD XIII conference in Doha in April, which is the first ministerial conference on trade and development to be held after the outbreak of the economic crisis. According to UNCTAD secretary-general Supachai Panitchpakdi, many governments have returned to a 'business as usual' approach regarding the functioning of the financial market, a development that has to be halted and reversed if the negative trends in trade are to be restored, he warned.

"Financial markets and institutions have become the masters rather than the servants of the real economy, distorting trade and investment, heightening levels of inequality, and posing a systemic threat to economic stability," warns the report, labelling the international economic system of the last three years as "finance-driven globalization". Under the current trading system, priority is placed on liberalisation and deregulation policies, neglecting other issues, such as technology transfer, non-tariff barriers and restrictive business practices. Such policies have strongly affected trade performances of developing countries.

The policies of unregulated financial markets, as advocated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) have been criticised by the UNCTAD that has warned already in the 1990s against the consequences likely to derive from the systemic risks from derivative markets and rapid financial liberalisation processes. The report states that the IMF should not be involved in the negotiations between sovereign debtors and private creditors, as the countries addressed are among the shareholders of the fund, which also constitutes a creditor.

"Stable monetary and financial arrangements are a pre-condition for making trade and investment work for inclusive growth and development," said Panitchpakdi. Such policies however requires the channelling towards the right kind of productive activities, as means to foster industrial development — a priority for many developing countries "because of the big opportunities it provides to raise productivity and incomes, and to get the most from international trade".

With regards to the current aid system, the report points out that programmes in recent years have mainly focused on social areas, including education and health that has led to a lack of focus on how recipient could be enabled to mobilise their own resources for development.

Read the full report here: [UNCTAD](#) (pdf).

Sources:

- [UN News Centre](#)
- [guardian.co.uk - Global development](#)