



The European Union's Strategy for Africa – Coherence in the Face of a Complex, Changing Continent?

In October 2005 the European Commission proposed a Strategy for Africa to be pursued by the European Union (EU). The European Council will decide on the strategy in December. What is new about this Strategy for Africa is that it is geared to the whole of Africa and that it seeks to place the various Africa strategies and policies of the Commission, Member States and European Community within a single framework. The main aim of the strategy is to foster the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa. Security, good governance and the economic environment are seen as preconditions for their lasting achievement.

As entry points for cooperation the Commission identifies in its draft African reforms under the New Partnership for Africa (NEPAD). The strategy is thus an attempt to react to recent continental developments in Africa, avoiding any temptation to take an indiscriminate view of the continent and emphasizing a country-specific approach. The strategy's great merit may lie in the resolution of conflicts of objectives at the policy-making

level and the reduction of coordination conflicts within the EU. It is, then, primarily an attempt to attain greater coherence in the policy of the whole EU towards Africa. It therefore provides reference points for all the various actors in European foreign relations, but it cannot eliminate the critical institutional weaknesses, which include, for example, the fragmentation of authority within the Commission.

The implementation of the strategy will largely depend on the Member States. The main challenges will be to put into effect the collective EU target of a progressive de facto doubling of Official Development Aid (ODA) by 2015. Internal coherence of all European actors, the complementarity of the Member States' and Commission's policies and closer on-the-spot coordination must also be seen as critical issues.

During its presidency of the EU Council in the first half of 2007 Germany may face the task of making the implementation of the Strategy for Africa into an important topic.

In October 2005 the European Commission proposed the European Union's first Strategy for Africa. Under the key words "one Africa" and "one Europe" it sets out "common objectives". The proposed strategy explicitly concerns the Commission's policy and the Member States' policies. If adopted by the European Council in December 2005, the Strategy for Africa will therefore also define a framework for Germany's Africa policy.

After waning in importance for some time, Africa has again found a higher place on the international agenda. This is primarily due to the conclusion that, as things stand, the sub-Saharan countries cannot achieve the MDGs by 2015. The international debate has therefore turned to recommendations for ways of averting this failure. A massive increase (doubling or tripling) of ODA for sub-Saharan Africa by 2010 or 2015 is an important, but controversial, aspect of the debate. The additional resources are to be provided predominantly for social sectors and investment in, among other things, infrastructure and rural development. This recommendation is often linked to a call for the improved effec-

tiveness of ODA, to be achieved, for example, through greater donor harmonization, coordination and longer-term planning. Opinions in the "Africa debate" differ primarily on the relevance of the political environment in the African countries. In the call for a massive increase in ODA there is a continuing danger of too little thought being given to governance issues. Thus the link between donors' ODA allocation decisions and Africa's own efforts in the governance sphere is unclear. Questions about ODA instruments remain unanswered, and doubts about the African countries' absorptive capacity persist.

A new framework – for all European actors

The main aim of a Strategy for Africa is to attain coherence in the face of a large number of actors and European policies that differ widely in content. Coherence has been described by the Commission on several occasions as a suitable policy mix, i.e. a coordinated and mutually supportive blend of different policies. The aim is certainly not to subordinate some policies (develop-

ment policy, for example) to the goals of others (such as security or trade policy), but to resolve conflicts of objectives.

On the whole, the draft confirms existing high-level policies on security and economic and financial cooperation with Africa. It follows on from recent EU strategies (see Box 1). It also emphasizes, for example, one of the main issues in the current Africa debate by again taking up the collective EU target of a progressive increase in ODA (see Box 2).

Box 1: Africa and the EU's security and development policy strategies

In 2000 the Council of Ministers and the Commission formulated for the first time the principles and objectives for the Commission's development policy in a joint statement, which focuses on poverty reduction and is currently being revised. In early 2005 the Commission proposed that it should be replaced by a "European consensus". A binding strategy, the policy statement now defines the principles and instruments of European development policy, i.e. both for the Commission and for the Member States.

In December 2003 the EU countries also adopted a common European Security Strategy (ESS). Global security and development are closely linked, with security seen as a precondition for development. The ESS pivots on the creation of effective multilateralism, i.e. on a strengthening not only of the UN but also of such regional organizations as the African Union (AU) and on the careful dovetailing of development and security policy (Messner / Faust 2004).

Both strategy papers concern major policies in the area of Euro-African relations and thus existing regional agreements and cooperation programmes (Cotonou Agreement, MEDA programme and Barcelona process). Other policy decisive areas for relations with Africa, such as trade, fisheries and agricultural policy, are largely communitarized.

The draft Strategy focuses on the MDGs and is thus guided by the international consensus. In this, excessive concentration on social spending is avoided, various policies being placed around the MDGs like the layers of an onion. The centre is formed by poverty reduction and improvements in the areas of education and health in line with the MDGs adopted in 2000. Beyond this central task, however, the economic environment for the achievement of the MDGs is also to be involved. And security and good governance are regarded as preconditions for both these aspects of development. The approach at any location is determined by local conditions. Far greater emphasis is placed on security and good governance as basic requirements for the achievement of the MDGs than in other contributions to the debate this year. A minimum of security and good governance is needed if support both for the economic environment and for the social and ecological sectors is to be meaningful.

Box 2: EU development financing in Africa

In May 2005 the EU Member States agreed on a plan for the progressive de facto doubling of their ODA. The "old" Member States undertake to set aside 0.51 % of their gross domestic product (GDP) for ODA by 2010 and 0.7 % by 2015. In 2004 the ODA ratio in the EU averaged 0.36 %, with Germany reaching 0.28 %. Given the tight budgetary situation in many Member States, this collective target is a challenge, which some Member States intend to meet with new financing mechanisms, such as a tax on air fares. Half of this additional ODA is to be spent on sub-Saharan Africa. With an ODA share of about 50 %, the EU as a whole (including the Member States) is the largest donor in sub-Saharan Africa.

Besides the Member States' bilateral ODA, some 20 % of all European development aid is administered by the Commission. Community ODA for the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) is very largely financed from the European Development Fund (EDF), which is renegotiated every five years and replenished by members' contributions. In contrast, cooperation with the other developing countries, including those of North Africa, is financed from the EU budget. The Commission's draft financial perspectives for 2007–2013, currently under discussion, proposes that the next EDF should be integrated into the EU budget. This would increase transparency and efficiency in development cooperation, but it might also mean abandoning the special position enjoyed by the ACP countries – to the displeasure of some Member States. However, the debate on the "budgetization of the EDF" seems to have largely come to standstill.

One Africa and one Europe? – The challenge of coherence

Things are on the move in Africa. A number of African initiatives have been launched in recent years. Change is being promoted not least by the African Union with its programme New Partnership for Africa (NEPAD). In the security policy sphere Africa has recently begun to act at continental level as the African Union (AU). Europe's instruments are not at present geared to cooperation with the whole continent. The countries which are party to the Cotonou Agreement do not include those of North Africa, which do, however, form an integral part of such continental initiatives as the AU. In addition, special arrangements apply to South Africa (under the Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement). The draft Africa strategy takes a positive view of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), an attempt at mutual examination of government action by African countries comparable to the system used by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The Commission explicitly proposes that reform efforts in response to these Peer Reviews should be financially supported with a governance initiative. Greater importance is also to be attached to cross-frontier cooperation in Africa in the areas of, say, infrastructure and water management. From the development policy angle a single African strategy certainly does not seem wise,

since the continent embraces both development-oriented, fragile and failed states. The strategy is, however, to include other areas of policy, such as security policy, and is thus a logical response to African initiatives.

Despite encouraging efforts by the African countries themselves, shortcomings persist, especially with regard to democratization and good governance, and these are considered in the explanatory annex to the draft. For some countries the Commission intends to promote the fight against corruption – as in the area of revenue from the natural resources commonly found in Africa. It is noticeable, moreover, that the Commission is mindful of the growing influence of newly industrializing countries. China has been increasingly active in recent years, especially in African countries rich in raw materials. This also has repercussions for EU policy in Africa, as in its attempts to promote human rights and democracy.

Practical planning, the Commission declares, must take place at country level. Locally, however, tensions between policies will persist, this being particularly true of trade policy (see Box 3).

A coherent European policy towards Africa may have to cope with a number of weak points due to rival competences. There is a general need for coordination between different departments. In the Member States, too, coherence must be achieved between foreign, development, trade and other policies – such as that on migration. At European level, however, there are two additional difficulties:

- Firstly, the weight distribution between the Commission and the Member States varies from one European policy to another. While the Commission speaks for the Member States in the case of trade policy, for example, European and Member State development policies exist side by side. In this sphere the Commission is meant to take action that complements the programmes of the now 25 Member States. Foreign policy, too, is largely decided by the Member States, Javier Solana, the “High Representative” of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), being responsible for coordination in this field.
- The second difficulty consists in the division of responsibilities for external relations in the Commission, not only by policy area but also geographically, between Africa north and south of the Sahara. EU Development Commissioner Louis Michel is responsible for development cooperation with sub-Saharan Africa, whereas North Africa is part of EU Foreign Affairs Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner’s responsibility.

Box 3: Economic Partnership Agreements with the regions in Africa

In Cotonou it was agreed that Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) should be negotiated. They are to replace the EU’s one-sided trade preferences for products from the ACP States, which are incompatible with the rules of the World Trade Organization. The aim of EPAs is to establish free trade areas with a view to achieving the “smooth and gradual integration of developing countries into the world economy” for which the EU Treaty provides. EPAs would have the advantage of consisting of contractual provisions rather than the current unilateral EU concessions.

On the European side the Trade Commissioner is in charge. Critics therefore fear the subordination of development orientation to the EU’s trade interests. It is not yet possible to say what form EPAs will finally take or what impact they will have on partner countries. The main challenge is that African producers are uncompetitive. For the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) EPAs present both opportunities and risks. The Everything-but-Arms (EBA) initiative currently guarantees them tariff- and quota-free access to the European market. For the time being, bananas, rice and sugar are excluded from this arrangement. In practice, other trade barriers, such as strict rules of origin and technical standards, cast doubt on the value of this market access. It remains to be seen whether EPAs generate more favourable conditions for the LDCs as regards rules of origin, non-tariff trade barriers and trade in services.

Since 2003 negotiations have been conducted with four regional blocs in Africa with a view to strengthening regional integration. However, the negotiating groups are only partly identical with existing organizations. As a result of overlapping membership of African regional organizations, EPAs also affect non-ACP countries with which the EU already has separate trade agreements (e.g. South Africa and Egypt). EPAs form one of the instruments of the Commission’s draft strategy. Although the need for better coordination between development and trade policy is emphasized in this context, nothing is said about the form this coordination might take.

European foreign relations have been undergoing reform since 2000. Despite the fragmentation of competences, a great deal has improved in the implementation of European cooperation policy owing, in part, to the establishment of country strategies. And a measure of dynamism is to be discerned not least in foreign and security policy – despite the unfinished business in many spheres, such as the European constitution.

Challenges for the Member States’ Africa policies

To produce a single European document on the Africa policy is a feat in itself. Regional strategies like the draft submitted, with its grouping of instruments around an overriding objective (such as the MDGs), provide important reference points for the many actors in European foreign relations. This may alleviate, though not permanently eliminate, institutional weaknesses in the EU.

Implementation very much depends on the Member States. The Strategy for Africa poses a number of challenges for them.

Besides the honouring of financial commitments (see Box 2), the Member States face various challenges relating to coordination and the division of labour among them: an EU Strategy for Africa with the goal of greater coherence presupposes internal coherence in the Member States' Africa policies, e.g. a definition of problem areas in Africa to which all government departments subscribe. In many cases, European actors also need to complement each other. For some States this may mean limiting the number of partners or the areas of activity in countries and so, possibly, willingness to face up to institutionalized interests at bilateral level. Moreover, shifting the emphasis in coordination to the level of the partner countries will raise particular difficulties, since the European countries vary in their local representation.

Not the least onerous task facing the German EU presidency in the first half of 2007 will be to decide how resolutely the honouring of commitments and targets by the Member States is to be scrutinized and demanded. The main issues will be:

- Achieving the increase in ODA and strengthening foreign policy actions by the EU will require great efforts on the part of all Member States if the EU budget is not to exceed its present limits (about 1% of European GDP). New forms of aid, such as budget support, should be developed further by the Member States so as to create national links and expertise for this ODA instrument, of which the Commission is making increasing use.
- For fragile states in particular a coherent policy of the various departments needs to be found. The EU Commission argues for "innovative concepts" to help fragile states and, in the annex to its draft, considers the expansion of budget support even where the initial situation is difficult. Involvement in fragile states is the acid test for the European Security Strategy and for cooperation with the AU.
- The decentralization of the Commission's decision-making to the level of the various delegations has been largely completed. This strengthening of European coordination at the level of the partner countries may put some Member States in a tight spot as regards political control of their local activi-

ties. For Germany in particular problems may arise here owing to its many implementing organizations and the absence of any immediate local structure of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

- The intention is to conclude EPAs until 2008. Conflicts of objectives between trade and development policy are therefore likely to become far more apparent during Germany's Council presidency, because the EPAs will then have to be given practical shape during the negotiations – in line with the declared aim of promoting development in the partner regions. Particularly where agricultural subsidies are concerned, this will call for compromises from the EU, the tenor of which can already be decided in Hong Kong in December 2005.



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