

Policy Forum on Development - Regional meeting Europe – Assessing the impact of Europe’s internal dynamics on its external action

Context:

On 15 and 16 January 2018, the first regional Policy Forum on Development for Europe will take place in Ghent, Belgium. Participants from all countries of the Council of Europe will represent the different constituencies: NGOs, women’s groups, cooperatives, private sector, local and regional governments and trade unions.

The meeting fits in the global PFD process that is facilitated by the European Commission and aims at accommodating and strengthening multi stakeholder exchange and collaboration, as well as facilitate dialogue with the EU institutions on EU external policies and practices. Each year a Global Policy Forum on Development is held in spring in Brussels with participants from across the world representing NGOs, women’s groups, cooperatives, private sector, local and regional governments and trade unions. Participants engage in intensive multi-stakeholder dialogues and discuss the challenges for sustainable international development and the contributions the European Union makes to the global agendas, to national and local development.

Focus:

The first Policy Forum on Development with a focus on Europe creates a unique opportunity to debate how the EU external action relates to the internal dynamics in politics and societies on the European continent.

Throughout 2016 and 2017 the European Union adopted key policy documents that bring the UN 2030 Agenda framework and the EU Global Strategy closer to practice - in particular the EU Consensus on Development, the New Urban Agenda and the European Urban Strategy, the Joint EU Communication on Resilience, on a new impetus for the partnership with the African Union, and on a sustainable future for Europe. From 2018 onwards, the EU needs to put these policies into operational programmes within a context where the EU is facing multiple challenges.

In its policy documents for external action, the European Union strongly adheres and promotes values of democracy, defence of human rights, subsidiarity and sustainability. The Policy Forum on Development has repeatedly assessed and discussed the state of play of civic space, of the enabling environment for civil society organizations to participate in public life and for local governments to participate in national development planning in the EU’s partner countries. It is timely that the forum also assesses the situation within Europe, and how that affects the EU’s external action.

The European Regional Policy Forum on Development in 2018 will work along two streams:

- a) The coherence in policies and practice between the external action of the EU and its Member States and the values captured in the treaties and key policies.
- b) The shrinking civic space and recentralization in European countries and how it affects democracy, local self-governance, citizens participation and accountability.

Objectives:

Within the mandate and goals of the Policy Forum on Development, the European meeting will assess what this means for EU's external action and for the European civil society and local government actors to engage in international cooperation – including their possibilities to engage with national governments and European institutions. It will do so whilst taking into account that Council of Europe Region includes participants from donor (EU) and recipient countries (non EU, neighbourhood countries).

- Facilitate dialogue between grass-roots organisations, local governments and civil society at large about the current state of Europe and the impact thereof on its development policies
- Facilitate European civil society and local governments to input EU development policies
- Analyse the enabling environment for the key development actors in relation to the EU's external action within the EU and on continental Europe
- Exchange with international partners in the PFD process on the challenges of European actors to continue engagement in international cooperation

Debates:

The forum debates will assess how reality relates to the narrative. What is happening on the ground? What are the concrete support-programmes and initiatives the EU is developing? How are both in line with the political commitments? What new multi-stakeholder partnerships are growing within this context? What roles for different stakeholders?

Specifically, the meeting will look into:

The SDGs as trigger for increased policy coherence for development at home and abroad

2015 was an important year for development with the adoption by the United Nations Member States of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since then, the European Union has worked to translate the Agenda in its development policy framework. This process led to the adoption of the new European Consensus on Development, which recognizes the role of the different stakeholders in the development agenda. The concrete implementation of the new Consensus in EU's external policies is a particularly important topic for PFD members.

In addition, beyond EU's external policies, and taking into consideration the EU's commitment on Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development, it is crucial to ensure that EU's internal policies do not contradict but benefit developing countries and increase the effectiveness of the development cooperation. Internal dynamics could influence the practice on the international field as well as the strategies for internal follow-up and monitoring.

SDG ambitions – with their imperative to 'leave no one behind'- ask for new thinking on the nature of fragility, and consequent peace and security agenda. They ask for a shift from a one-dimensional understanding towards a more holistic approach, recognizing degrees of needs, each with a spectrum of dimensions and risks. It asks for collaborative, regional and global solutions to tackle root causes and consequences of transnational fragility and risk. It forces all of us to think 'beyond aid' and to broaden the use of institutional influences, policy levers, and expertise. However, in a number of areas the synchronisation between the EU external

and internal dynamics and the harmonisation with European values and principles is still heavily debated.

During the last couple of years reactive measures have constrained both the debate and possibility to tackle one of the long term challenges that Europe and other parts of the world, notably Europe's neighbours face: the movement of population from poverty and conflict. Migration influx and restrictive policies sharpen the debate and action, whereby often basic human rights of people are not respected. Civil society organisations responding the challenges are not everywhere supported, and local authorities and municipalities encounter large populations that they need to cater, often without the necessary resources and guidance.

Especially in a context of fragility and crisis, development programming, including that of the EU, needs to better reflect this new understanding and needs to be holistic and integrated by nature, with respect for human rights and other fundamental values at all times. Only then can we realize the commitments made under the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, and ensure that the most vulnerable are not left behind.

How enabling is the context in Europe for civil society and for local government actors to contribute to international sustainable development?

Despite large political and policy acknowledgement of role and value added of civil society, the reality of the day confronts us with ever more shrinking space and lack of enabling environment for civil society to play its role. This manifests itself at the level of political debate, in restrictive legislations to operate, violations of human rights, shrinking space for media and in operational space (including funding). This is stringent in countries outside Europe, and nowadays a reality within the borders of the Union as well. The European Union and its institutions are champions for CSO space, however, the leverage provided at country level can be much improved.

Similarly, the key role of local and regional governments to deliver sustainable development for all – particularly through their potential to step-up citizens' participation in democratic state building - has been increasingly recognized in political commitment documents at the levels of the EU (European Consensus on Development, Next steps for a sustainable future for Europe) and UN (SDGs and New Urban Agenda). The European Union has been a natural ally to those advocating for place based approaches to development: territorial development, subsidiarity and multi-level partnerships are at the basis of the EU project and have had a proven positive impact on wellbeing of the European citizens and their societies.

However, recent years have brought territorial and state reforms in countries across the world and in Europe that show clear tendencies for recentralization of decision taking and fiscal management.

Within the mandate of the policy forum on development a threefold approach to the trend is valid:

- a) how do these tendencies within Europe relate to the European Commission's commitments to support the enabling environment for civil society organisations and to empower local authorities through decentralisation reforms?
- b) what will be the impact of recentralization in EU member states on the effectiveness and credibility of EU initiatives to accompany decentralisation processes in partner countries and at continental levels (such as the adoption of the "African Charter on Principles and Values of Decentralisation"?)
- c) what will these internal evolutions mean for the possibilities of European actors to engage in partnership relations with their counterparts outside of the EU?

Review of recent trends in EU External Action policies and programmes, particularly:

Private sector accountability in development:

The EU External Investment Plan (EIP) will complement EU development aid by catalysing investment in Africa and the EU Neighbourhood. This responds to a funding gap to realise the SDGs, and also to an increased interest on the private sector as actor for sustainable development.

The private sector makes an important contribution to job and growth creation, but how to guarantee that jobs are decent and growth is sustainable? The debate will explore how to ensure private sector interventions in development are a matter of multi-stakeholder dialogue in donor and recipient countries. It will also explore how PFD constituents can engage in EU initiatives on innovative development finance (e.g. blended finance) and how to ensure these mechanisms abide to development effectiveness principles.

Security, migration and peacebuilding:

More than 2 billion people live in countries where development is affected by fragility and armed conflicts. By 2030 the share of global poor living in fragile and conflict-affected situations is projected to reach 46% (source: World Bank). Currently 65 million people have left their homes, seeking refuge elsewhere. Many of them die in the attempt.

The world has changed drastically in the last decade. More than before in recent history, global dynamics are driven by insecurity, forced migration and inequality, as well as by climate change and increasing natural hazards.

Especially in a context of fragility and crisis, development programming needs to better reflect this new understanding and needs to be holistic and integrated by nature. Only then can we realise the commitments made under the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, and ensure that the most vulnerable are not left behind.

Taking into consideration the particular close connection of EU internal issues with the realities in the “ring of Europe” region, including CoE countries, the PFD members will discuss:

- 1) the value added of whole of society approach - based on strong multi stakeholder actions
- 2) the role that Europe can play to further the peace and security agenda in and around Europe
- 3) the role of CSO and Local Governments, and particularly of the PFD community, to contribute meaningfully to the broader aim.

Proposed meeting structure:

- Day 1

Introduction session : scope and mandates of the Policy Forum on Development, objectives of the PFD Europe meeting

Plenary Opening:

Address by the European Commission

Address by the Mayor of Ghent

Panel exchange: European stakeholders' engagement in international sustainable development – what Europe do we want to tackle our main challenges and to leverage opportunities (each constituency represented)

Plenary Debate I: The SDGs as trigger for increased policy coherence for development at home and abroad

Break-out groups:

- how to apply policy coherence for development and multi-stakeholder engagement in the age of SDGs
- how do these values apply to the neighbourhood policies and programmes

Dinner at City Hall

- Day 2

Plenary Debate II: How enabling is the context in Europe for civil society and local government actors to contribute to international sustainable development

Break-out groups: What Europe do we want and need for a sustainable future?

Plenary Debate III: Review of recent trends in EU External Action policies and programmes, particularly

Visiting projects in Ghent?