

The future of the EU as global development actor Background note and key questions

Rationale of the event

The European Union's development policy is confronted with unprecedented challenges in [the COVID-19 context](#) and the Ukraine crisis. The EU will need all hands-on deck to continue to effectively play a leadership role in global development. Efforts will have to be made on many fronts: inclusive growth, investment and jobs, peace and security, migration and mobility, combating environmental degradation and climate impacts, governance, skills and education, research, innovation and the digital economy. Commission President von der Leyen's idea of [a "geopolitical" Commission](#) was meant to create a new political momentum to fundamentally re-energize the EU's role in the world and in the area of foreign policy and international cooperation. [The recent Ukraine crisis](#) confronts the EU with an urgent need to speed up this process.

It is against this background that [the European Think Tanks Group \(ETTG\)](#) and Elcano Royal Institute, with the support of the Spanish State Secretariat for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organised a closed-door workshop to discuss **the future of the EU in promoting global development**. This event involved policy makers from the EU and its member states, leading think tanks, the wider research community and civil society.

The underlying rationale of the event is, on the one hand, to foster a rethinking of EU international cooperation by better defining its distinctive features, added value and potential allies in the world, and on the other, to provide inputs for the Spanish presidency of the EU in 2023. The discussions were held in Madrid, under the Chatham House rule.

The workshop revolved around three main axes, each of them explored in a session with three or four speakers and one moderator, including political representatives from different Member States' (or EU) Ministries of Foreign Affairs and experts of the ETTG member institutes.

Venue

The Elcano Royal Institute, Calle del Príncipe de Vergara, 51, Madrid.

Session 1: Role of the EU as a global actor in a volatile world

Although the current process of globalisation may have peaked in the past decade, [the COVID-19 crisis](#) and the climate emergency have shown the depth of current international interconnections and the risks and threats (in addition to the benefits) that come with them. The event of such global public ‘bads’ explains, at least partially, the new ‘geopolitical’ narrative of an EU previously absorbed by its internal problems ([the 2008 Great Recession](#), the rise of nationalist and populist movements, the difficult digestion of the Brexit process).

A more geopolitical role of the Union and a higher profile in the global scene also require a clarification of its precise voice and role in the current context – a context now defined by [a multifaceted conflict between the US and China](#) that escalates in an increasing number of fields (trade, technology, innovation, and, more recently, the relations with Russia).

While the EU “learns to use the language of power” (following the High Representative Borrell’s words), it could also take stock of decades of investment in development cooperation that have *de facto* moulded its global identity and defined its political, social and economic connections with the Global South. This flagship external policy –which is key for achieving [the 2030 Agenda](#)– also differentiates the EU from the other two main global players and particularly from China, who exhibits competing development and development cooperation models.

This session will shed light on whether the EU can meet its high expectations and if it is able to stand up with these global roles in a multipolar world. This first part will also look at the implications of the gradual integration of the EU aid policy into the EU’s foreign policy. In order to achieve these goals, the session will concentrate on the following three main **guiding questions**:

1. Can the EU become a leader in the current global context? Is global development part of such leadership?
2. How can a development cooperation policy anchored in values such as peace and respect for human rights maintain or raise its profile in a 'Geopolitical Commission' and in the current (hostile) world context?
3. Can the 2030 Agenda be a road map for the EU's external action?

Session 2 - EU Alliances with “like-minded” partners

The COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine crisis have increased tensions and competition amongst global players and societal models. The global rules-based international order is increasingly coming under pressure. Polarisation is growing and alliances are shifting. Against this backdrop, the European Union will need to deepen relations with old and new allies in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas to find peaceful and multilateral solutions to regional and global problems. However, this will not be an easy task. As for Africa, despite the good intentions and declarations issued after the 6th AU-EU summit, the recent vote on Ukraine at the UN General Assembly showed that African countries are not fully aligned with their European counterparts. Power relations are gradually shifting with an African Union that has more choices of partners and a European Union that is under increasing pressure internally and at its borders. In a similar vein, the political and economic links between the EU and Latin America - a region potentially “Europe-compatible” in terms of values and approaches to global governance - seem increasingly weak. The return of military power in Europe could also lead to negative spill-over effects on Europe's development cooperation policies, triggering a dangerous securitization of the political debate, as well as diverting resources from longer term development plans towards other areas with a high political pay-off such as border controls, migration management and military expenses.

The aim of this session is to analyse potential alliances between the EU and other actors in a multipolar world (i.e., Africa, the Americas). The aim is to investigate whether the EU is effectively able to play its global role and possibly ready to address power imbalances in multilateral fora, including the implications of the Ukrainian crisis. In order to achieve this goal, the session will concentrate on the following three main **guiding questions**:

1. What will the implications (risks and opportunities) of the Ukraine crisis be on the EU partnerships with the Global South?
2. On which key multilateral agendas would the EU need to foster alliances with Africa as its “closest neighbour” and with Latin America as a key potential partner in the multilateral system?
3. In light of the Ukraine crisis, are the initiatives taken at the last AU-EU Summit (e.g., the Global Gateway) still fit for purpose in building a solid partnership of equals between both continents? What other initiatives and concrete actions could be considered to further strengthen credibility and trust between both partners?

Session 3 - Adapting approaches and practices to new realities

Europe has been struggling to effectively play a leadership role in multilateral settings and many see Europe’s footprint on the world stage to be shrinking. Internally, the European integration process is hampered by strong divides, as well as by authoritarian and populist tendencies that affect the EU’s ability to be a credible global normative power. Externally, despite unexpected unity shown in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine, the EU struggles to present a united front on many issues and to prevent conflicts and instability in its Eastern and Southern neighbourhood and beyond. These limits are also evident on development cooperation policies where, despite the EU and member states being the largest contributors to Official Development Assistance (ODA), the dominant narrative in terms of impact is that the EU is a ‘global payer’ rather [than a ‘global player’](#).

Therefore, the aim of this session is to assess the extent to which Europe is willing and able to respond to the above-mentioned expectations of playing a leadership role in global development. It will start from the analysis of the development tools that need to be strengthened and/or revised and look at the progress realised so far (Global Europe, Joint programming, Policy Coherence for Development, Working Better Together Agenda, investing in multi-stakeholder partnerships, restoring values agendas, European Peace Facility, finance for development, migration and refugees). In this session, we will also look at the implications of COVID-19 and the Ukraine crisis in speeding up the necessary reforms. New priorities (green transformation, digital agendas...) and initiatives (Team Europe) will be highlighted. In order to achieve this goal, the session will concentrate on the following three main **guiding questions**:

1. How can the EU help provide solutions to debt sustainability, commit to and speed up the reallocation of special drawing rights, and further enhance the ability of development finance institutions to mobilise private and public finance?
2. What is the role of the EU development and diplomatic community in ensuring that, in pursuit of the EU's internal priorities in issues, such as green and digital, the EU does not undermine partner country relationships and ultimately development goals? What are the tools that can help achieve this?
3. Do the Global Europe instrument, Team Europe initiatives and the EU Global Gateway really improve the credibility of the EU in partners' eyes? Do partners really want, care about or understand these tools, initiatives and approaches? What initial feedback do panellists have on partners' views?

Agenda of the meeting

5 May 20:00h Welcome and dinner. El Economato de Echegaray, Calle de Echegaray, 16, Madrid

6 May: Elcano Royal Institute, Calle del Príncipe de Vergara, 51, Madrid

9:30 – 9:45 Opening remarks by Charles Powell, Director of Elcano Royal Institute, and Geert Laporte, Director of ETTG and Senior Executive at ECDPM

9:45 – 11:15 **Session 1. The role of the EU as a global actor in a volatile world**

- Moira Feil, Head of EU division, BMZ, Germany
- Fabio Cassese, DG for Development Cooperation, MFA, Italy
- Geert Laporte, Director, ETTG and Senior Executive, ECDPM
- Moderator: Iliana Olivié, Senior Analyst, Elcano Royal Institute

The EU aims at playing a leadership role in the world and having a concrete impact on global development debates such as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This session will shed light on whether the EU can meet its high expectations and whether the EU is able to stand up with these global roles in the current multipolar world with competing development and societal models. This first part will also look at the implications of the gradual integration of the EU development policy (i.e. via concrete mechanisms such as joint programming or delegated cooperation) into its foreign policy.

11:15 – 11:30 Coffee break

11:30 – 13:00 **Session 2. EU Alliances with “like-minded” partners**

- Eva del Hoyo, DG for Sustainable Development Policies, MFAEUC, Spain
- Hugo Brauwers, Deputy General for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, MFA, Belgium
- Martín Rivero, Coordinator, Social Cohesion and South-South Cooperation, SEGIB
- Moderator: María Santillán, Research Assistant, Elcano Royal Institute

This session will analyse potential alliances between the EU and several other actors in a multipolar world (i.e. G20 perspective, actors from Africa, Latin America, Europe). The aim is to investigate whether the EU is effectively able to play its global role and possibly ready to address power imbalances in multilateral fora, including the implications of the Ukrainian crisis in the Global South.

13:00 – 14:30 Lunch

14:30 – 16:00 **Session 3. Adapting approaches and practices to new realities**

- Sébastien Treyer, Executive Director, IDDRI
- Félix Fernández-Shaw, Director for Sustainable Development Policy and Coordination, DG INTPA, European Commission
- Ina Friesen, Researcher, German Development Institute
- Moderator: Andrew Sherriff, Associate Director, Institutional Relations and Partnerships, ECDPM

This final session will start from the analysis of the development tools that need to be strengthened and/or revised and look at progress achieved so far (Global Europe, Joint programming, Policy Coherence for Development, Working Better Together Agenda, investing in multi stakeholder partnerships, restoring values agendas, European Peace Facility, finance for development, migration and refugees, SDR reallocation, debt sustainability). In this session, we will also look at the implications of COVID-19 and the Ukraine crisis in speeding up the necessary reforms. New priorities (green transformation, digital agendas...) and initiatives (Team Europe) will be highlighted.