



The Current Column
of 26 October 2009

**The EU's Lisbon Treaty:
An opportunity for dealing with
fragile states**

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The EU's Lisbon Treaty: An opportunity for dealing with fragile states

Bonn, 26 October 2009. Now that Ireland, in a second referendum held earlier this month, has approved the EU Lisbon Reform Treaty, the road seems clear for the EU to adopt a new institutional structure in the coming year. This is good news for Europe's ability to take effective action in the world arena, and the EU's foreign-policy arm is set to be strengthened by a European External Action Service (EEAS) and consolidated under a High Representative with the rank of a Vice-President in the EU Commission. In this connection, approaches to dealing with those countries that have in recent years come to figure prominently in the media as "fragile states" stand to benefit most from Europe's new foreign-policy configuration.

As early as 2000 the UN member states reached agreement on the so-called Millennium Development Goals, one target of which is to halve poverty worldwide by 2015. As the year 2009 draws to a close, however, no other group of countries continues to lag so far behind in reaching these goals as the group of fragile states. With the economic successes they have posted in recent years, China and India, the world's most populous countries, may well reach these global goals by 2015 – although fragile states, most of them in Africa, are more than likely to ensure that this will be anything but a *global* success. These countries, which lack certain key state functions, including e.g. a state monopoly on the legitimate use of force, a rudimentary system of public welfare, or guarantees for the universal rule of law, are in need of better policies on the part of the rich countries of the North – both out of concern for the lives of millions of people living in the countries in question and in the - rightly understood - self-interest of the "donors" themselves.

Compared with other organisations, the EU has a virtually unparalleled storehouse of experience in dealing with fragile states – indeed, its own origins and history are closely bound up with just this phenomenon. Once the western European countries had been successfully stabilised in the early 1950s, the EU went on to further develop its organisational know-how in providing support for a number of fragile European transition countries in connection with several enlargement rounds. Furthermore, on top of being, today, a foreign-policy actor to be reckoned with, the EU also has considerable potential as an effective coordination forum.

In its 2003 Security Strategy the EU had already noted that fragile states represent a massive threat not only for their own, directly affected populations but also, and above all, for Europe itself. It is precisely these countries that serve as staging grounds for trafficking in drugs, arms, and humans, and these activities show a tendency to proliferate, rapidly, beyond national boundaries and to threaten entire regions, like e.g. West Africa. Here, an object lesson may be found in the first [European Report on Development](#), which has just appeared and is devoted entirely to the issue of fragility in Africa. While the choice of continent is in line with a long-standing focus of the EU's development policy, the issue chosen may certainly be read as a sign of the relevance the problem has from the perspective of development policy: Not only do fragile states have a long way to go on their path of transition to more security and stability, they also and at the same time confront the countries and donors that have been supporting them in the process with a number of very particular challenges.

On the one hand, the state institutions in such countries tend to be underdeveloped or dysfunctional: Agreements between political actors are rarely kept; the state sector – assuming there is one in place at all – tends to be indifferent or at a loss to cope when it comes to meeting its



responsibility toward the population; political life is often overshadowed by violence; and entire segments of the population are frequently left to their own devices. In this situation external influence has no chance of succeeding unless it sets, for actors on the ground, clear and unmistakable incentives to engage in cooperative, non-violent behaviours. On the other hand, this presupposes coherent support strategies on the part of external actors, including fair trade and agricultural policies and a willingness to closely coordinate the activities of the ministries or agencies responsible for diplomacy, development, and defence. In addition, there is a need to strengthen the ability of development-policy actors to take, without undue delay, important decisions on the ground and to translate them into action.

The EU is, in other words, faced with a need to act when it comes to dealing with fragile states. Two important points need to be kept in mind here: First, some first steps on the road to an EU strategy on fragile states have begun to take on shape since the Portuguese Council Presidency of 2007. The European Report on Development can lend new impetus to this task and contribute to ensuring that a greater measure of coordination and coherence is achieved, at least in the EU framework, and this would be of particular importance precisely in dealing with fragile states.

Second, the European Union will be able to enlarge its presence and its options “on the ground” – i.e. in fragile states themselves – in connection with the development of the EEAS. Even today, the European Commission has a network of external diplomatic representations more closely knit than that of just about any EU member state, and these are set, in the foreseeable future, to be upgraded into EU embassies in which representatives of Commission, Council, and member states will work closely together. At present the member states are engaged in a heated debate over staffing ratios and thematic and geographic configurations. In the ideal case the EEAS could serve as a means to merge, as comprehensively as possible, the work of the agencies currently responsible for diplomacy, development, and defence, creating a unique “common service.” In this sense the Lisbon Treaty offers the EU an opportunity to extend its peace-making and -building activities precisely beyond its own borders.



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