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**Europe is reorganising its external  
relations – And development policy?**

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## Europe is reorganising its external relations – And development policy?

Bonn, 2 November 2009. The day seems to have been saved. Now that Vaclav Klaus has been roped in, the road is now clear for the Lisbon Treaty. At long last. After eight long years of waiting, the time has now come for reforms to the EU's external relations, reforms designed to heighten the Union's visibility and enhance the effectiveness of its external policy. But what do these changes mean for development policy? the one or other interested person may ask. In fact, the changes provided for in the Treaty of Lisbon do have implications for development policy as well, because they will alter its institutional setting.

To start out with the good news: The new treaty specifies sustainable development and eradication of poverty as goals of Europe's *external* policy. This implies that far from being the hobby of an individual, perhaps well-meaning commissioner in the overall context of the EU's external relations, development policy is now formulated in such a way as to constitute an element of the EU's self-conception. The uncertainties involved are due for the most part to the creation of new institutions. The EU will in the future have an EU Council president, appointed for a term of two years, and a *de facto* foreign minister. And structures shape the substance of policy. These new posts will be filled with more or less ambitious personalities whose actions will leave their mark on the role and the relative weight of development policy.

But it remains to be seen what influence the future Council president will actually have. He or she will be appointed, for a term of two and a half years, by the EU's heads of state and government; a second term is possible. The new Council president will, though, not be allowed to hold a national office during his or her term. Under the new treaty, alongside the president of the Commission and the "High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union," the Council president will have a role to play in representing the EU abroad. Much will depend on who is appointed and how the new Council president fulfils the tasks of his or her office. It is not least for this reason that the speculation surrounding names like Tony Blair or Jean-Claude is so interesting. Aside from representing the Union on the diplomatic stage, the new Council president will need to devote a good share of his or her efforts to the search for consensus – a fact that has cast a shadow over a possible Council President Blair.

The other new, and – also with regard to development policy – weighty office is that of the "EU foreign minister." True, the official title is "High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union," the reason being that the title foreign minister has, for several member states, too much the ring of an official state function. But the short form, foreign minister, is likely soon to gain currency – because, among other things, the office largely resembles the one provided for in the - failed - European Constitution. The "*de facto* foreign minister" will be appointed by the Council and serve at the same time as vice-president of the European Commission. This means that powers and responsibilities will need to be reshuffled in the European Commission as well. The new high representative will be responsible for coordinating the external relations of the various Commission services as well as the foreign policies of the member states, and in doing so he or she will rely on the support of an common External Action Service yet to be created.

The Treaty of Lisbon has little to say about the formulation of the tasks and the composition of the future European External Action Service (EEAS). The main points of controversy include, as



is often the case, the new service's legitimacy and its funding. What is known is that national and Community institutions are to be merged in the future EEAS – a fact that inevitably raises accountability issues. Who will, ultimately, have a say in what? There is no doubt whatever that the European Parliament will demand a say for itself, not least because it is hardly likely to relinquish any part of its – still limited - sovereignty in budgetary matters. Und the member states themselves have an interest in coordinating, and not necessarily in being coordinated. One third of the EEAS' staff is to be recruited from the member states. What influence will the national parliaments manage to acquire here, and how? The service's legitimacy is bound up closely with the issue of what access it will have to financial resources: Will the EEAS be funded from the existing EU budget, or will there be a new, parallel source of funding, possibly one supplemented by national resources? And an issue closely associated with the latter: What budget instruments will be available to the future "foreign minister"? Potentially, this has implications touching on the European Parliament's powers of oversight. The plans for the EEAS still require approval of the European Parliament – and approval is certain to be made contingent on stronger rights for the latter. In other words, even if the heads of state and government do reach agreement at the upcoming summit, there will still be a need for further negotiations. The EEAS is set to be up and running by April 2010.

There is a risk that development-policy knowledge and competence may be lost if development goals are neglected in the new structures, or indeed made subordinate to foreign-policy interests. In view of emerging global challenges, it is essential that development policy should continue to have a dedicated voice in the Commission. A strengthened structure for development policy, one that, dovetailed as it may be with the office of the de facto foreign minister, yet retains its autonomy, would be most consistent with efforts to continue unerringly to pursue the EU's present goals. While the EU now also makes use of "hard power" (military and diplomacy) in its external relations, it makes far more frequent use of "soft power" (model function, persuasion, cooperation). The EU is not a world power, it is a union of states created to seek common solutions to common problems. Many challenges – climate change, global poverty, the impacts of social inequality – are far too great to be tackled by nation-states acting on their own. Improved coordination of Europe's external relations is still an excellent idea for in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and one that serves, not least, our own interests in long-term survival in a world it is worth living in. We will be best advised to make use of our institutions to ensure that our concrete policies are closely calibrated to emerging and future global challenges.



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