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**Think tanks calling for a
new beginning in European
development policy**

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Think tanks calling for a new beginning in European development policy

Bonn, 22 February 2010. The European Union (EU) has a number of new faces in its Commission, a European Parliament whose hand has been strengthened by the Treaty of Lisbon, and a promise by the member states to improve the coordination of European foreign policy in its various facets. With the new EU Commission in the process of constitution, the “European Think-Tanks Group” – comprising the [German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik \(DIE\)](#), the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the *Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior* (FRIDE), and the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) – has presented its EU-Memorandum entitled “[New Challenges, New Beginnings – Next Steps in European Development Cooperation](#)”. The Memorandum analyses both current European policy and emerging challenges – climate change, migration, trade policy, coherence of and division of labour in development policy. Based on this analysis, the European Think-Tanks Group has formulated a number of recommendations for national and European decision-makers. Europe has still not succeeded in carving out a place for itself as a player in the world of the “Big Two” - the US and China. This became evident not least at the end of 2009, in the failed climate negotiations in Copenhagen, where, when it came to the pivotal rounds of the talks, the US and China constituted more or less a group of their own.

If we viewed the European Union’s external relations as a chorus, what we would see is a group of inveterate soloists seeking to prepare a new piece without a conductor. In adopting the Treaty of Lisbon, this group – the EU – might be said to have struggled though one page of the score. This deserves praise. But – to go on with our metaphor - at a point of time where the dilapidated state of the global concert hall is becoming only all too evident, the real concern is: At present the substance and emphases of world politics are shifting towards the Pacific.

While Europe is a globally networked region, it does have a marked “Atlantic” orientation. Peace and prosperity in Europe are dependent in crucial ways on whether or not the decisions taken in international bodies are of a long-term nature. One consequence of this is that the distinction between domestic and foreign policy (or European and world politics) is growing increasingly blurred. There is no Isle of the Blessed in a global financial and economic crisis, neither in Europe nor in Africa nor anywhere else. The global climate is changing, and our way of life is going to have to change. This goes not only for the US or China, the “new global polluter,” but also for Europe, and precisely for it – as well as for Africa, which has contributed as good as nothing to climate change. In short: We have an enlightened self-interest in global development.

The tenor of the EU-Memorandum’s authors: If Europe is to continue to be taken seriously as a global actor on its own merits, both European and national leaders need to address five central points:

First, development policy needs to be seen as an element of approaches to global problem-solving – which means that it needs to become one of the central areas of European foreign policy. Here Europe must offer global leadership. The world trade talks are set to continue in Geneva this year. In September the United Nations will be hosting a summit on the results achieved thus far by development policy, measured in terms of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), officially adopted in 2000. In June Canada will be hosting the G8 / G20 for a conference to derive lessons from the current financial crisis. In addition, the climate talks will be returning to Bonn in June, again at the working level, with the aim of preparing the ground for an agreement prior to the next climate summit in December in Mexico. How far will Europe’s voice carry in these concerts?



The second point concerns commitments on the volume and effectiveness of global development assistance. This is a matter of Europe's own credibility. Not enough that the donors operating in Africa often trip over one another for lack of coordination, the EU countries are currently offering 20 billion euros less in aid than they had originally pledged. And there are fears that commitments on climate protection finance could come at the expense of other fields, with Europe, in effect, pursuing a zero-sum policy –taking, as it were, funds from its right pocket and putting them into its left.

Third, development assistance must not be allowed simply to make up for what European policy has taken away elsewhere. Trade, climate protection, and immigration policy are key fields that need to be coordinated with the objectives of development policy. This is a permanent task for which there can and will be no quick fixes.

Fourth, it is essential to invest in global partnerships. These are investments in a shared future. Partners need to be able act on equal terms – in order then to seek, on an equal footing, solutions to common problems. In view of the fact that reforms of the Bretton Woods institutions are on the immediate agenda, the international decisions that need to be taken in the near future will put Europe to the test. International power shifts are already becoming evident. Measured in terms of its economic power, which is declining in relation to Asia, Europe is overrepresented in IMF and World Bank. When it comes to international bodies, Europe often seems to confuse quantity with quality, and having a large number of representatives in the G20 or the IMF does not necessarily mean more influence if efforts to coordinate such steps have not been successfully coordinated in advance. Only as a chorus will Europe prove able to make its voice heard.

And finally, fifth, the authors of the EU-Memorandum point to the potentials of the new European Foreign Service. Its mix of personnel drawn from member states and EU institutions may be seen as an opportunity. At present, though, there are more questions than answers concerning this matter. Agreements – including the reform-oriented Lisbon Treaty – will be doomed to lead a life on paper unless Europe's responsible institutions and leaders prove able to improve their cooperation. In other words, the question is: Does Europe now need to opt for more centralisation? This is, in fact, not a realistic option, as the protracted wrangling in recent years over EU reforms has shown.

The Treaty of Lisbon is certainly not the big bang for European global power. But it does provide a good framework for improved coordination. It is essential that efforts to improve the EU's division of labour actually bear fruit if Europe's diversity is to be orchestrated to form a good chorus. Otherwise Europe's voice is likely to turn out to be little more than world-political background noise. But one thing that can be said with certainty is that for the European countries global acoustics would be far worse in a world dominated by the "Big Two."



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