Working better together? A comparative assessment of five Team Europe Initiatives

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Elcano Policy Paper

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Summary

The concept of Team Europe takes a central role in current policy debates on the EU's international cooperation and is commonly understood as a strategic and practical way of redefining how the EU jointly engages with international partners.

The most visible outputs of the efforts made under the Team Europe label to date are the so-called Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs). TEIs are joint flagship activities that combine the contributions by the EU, selected member states, banks and other European actors in relation to specific themes in a specific country or region, or those being pursued at the global level.

Two years after the first TEIs were launched, and coinciding with the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council,[1] this Policy Paper analyses how Team Europe and a selection of associated TEIs have progressed to date since the overall approach was endorsed by the Council in June 2020. Based on a review of the literature and key policy documents, we analyse TEIs' contributions in the four dimensions of: (a) visibility and communication; (b) effectiveness and development impact; (c) ownership; and (d) dynamics of harmonisation, integration and joint planning. Five case studies of TEIs are subsequently selected to analyse comparatively, on the basis of semi-structured interviews with 30 respondents, the design choices and the challenges and opportunities associated with preparing and implementing actions and joint efforts among European actors and with partner countries. They concern two regional TEIs and three TEIs in selected EU partner countries, respectively located in and covering Latin America, Africa and Asia.

The study's overall conclusions are as follows:

- TEIs can increase the collective visibility of the EU's actions, creating momentum and attracting interest, which in turn may facilitate the mobilisation of additional resources. While visibility trade-offs to TEI partners differ in relation to the nature and size of their bilateral cooperation portfolios, this in no way hampers their commitment to and involvement in Team Europe and TEIs. Questions and concerns remain, though, over the visibility of overarching TEIs as compared with their component parts, as well as to the unclear relationship with other EU strategic frameworks including Global Gateway.

- Concerning effectiveness and development impact, this study picked up promising signs concerning the plausibility of the positive contribution of TEIs to the collective impact of the EU's external action. In this context, flexibility seems to be key for TEIs to achieve quick results and maintain their relevance over time. Even if TEIs largely or exclusively consist of existing and ongoing projects and programmes in a given thematic or geographical context, appropriate governance structures may help to

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capitalise on their interrelationships. Challenges that were identified concern a lack of clarity on the intended reach of TEIs' goals, funding, timelines or long-term operational (and added) value. Such a lack of clarity in turn hampers monitoring and evaluation, as well as result-orientation more generally.

- On the issue of ownership, this study concludes that the fact that TEIs start as 'European initiatives' and articulate at the starting point a European cooperation agenda does not mean that by definition they cannot promote and be supported by broad-based ownership over time. While this study focuses on a limited number of TEIs, it is noteworthy that the TEIs considered to be most successful are those in which dedicated efforts were made to respond and give space to the interests and priorities of the EU's partner country governments. Last but not least, all TEIs still show considerable room for improvement in terms of promoting the direct participation of local partners, CSOs, private companies, regional networks and other relevant stakeholders.

- Finally, the analysis of the fourth dimension of harmonisation, joint planning and integration identifies the benefits of responsive governance arrangements and dedicated efforts to strengthen the inclusiveness of TEIs in terms of the number of member states involved in them. Co-financing of shared interventions is also considered to be a key expression of the increased cooperation among European actors in the context of TEIs. When seeking to strengthen the inclusiveness of TEIs, a differentiated approach is needed in view of the strong costs in terms of time and human resources required by a full participation, particularly in the larger regional TEIs. Further specification of the overarching goals of TEIs in terms of promoting 'working better together' may also consider assessments of the existing processes and procedures that have been put in place over the years to enable the co-financing of activities between the EU and its member states.

This study presents a series of recommendations to those involved in policy discussions about Team Europe and in the further conceptualisation and realisation of TEIs. The recommendations have been clustered in relation to five key overarching policy concerns for Team Europe that were identified by participants at an informal seminar convened by the Spanish Permanent Representation to the EU institutions on 2 October 2023. These policy concerns relate to:

- Clarifying and specifying the objectives of TEIs and Team Europe more broadly

- Deepening the operational framework and working modalities of TEIs

- Strengthening the inclusivity of TEIs

- Striking a balance between streamlining and the local adaptation of TEIs

- Promoting the broad-based ownership of TEIs

1 Introduction

The term Team Europe was first coined in April 2020 in the context of its proposals for providing a coordinated external response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (European Commission, 2020). Team Europe aimed to support the EU's partner countries in the fight against the pandemic by pulling together financial resources from all EU institutions, member states, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Although originally aimed at delivering a fast-track response by repurposing planned projects, the positive resonance among European actors led to a broadened understanding of Team Europe, which expanded from its initial primary focus on visibility and COVID-19 support financing towards the process of preparing longer-term cooperation strategies that cover the entire scope of the Union's development policy.

Today the concept is commonly understood as a strategic and practical way of redefining how the EU jointly engages with international partners. The approach seeks to strengthen cooperation among and joint action between various stakeholders, including the EU, its member states, financial institutions, implementing agencies, partner countries, civil society and the private sector.

The most visible outputs of the efforts made under the label of Team Europe to date are the so-called Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs). TEIs are joint flagship activities that combine the contributions of the EU, selected member states and banks in relation to specific themes in a specific country or region or those being pursued at the global level. The EU, through its official statements and policy documents, has underscored the significance of Team Europe in general and the TEIs in particular. TEIs do not replace but rather both complement and incorporate other –old and new– tools and initiatives to advance European development cooperation objectives, such as Joint Programming and Global Gateway.

Two years after the first TEIs were launched, and coinciding with the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council,[2] this study analyses how Team Europe and the associated TEIs have progressed to date since the overall approach was endorsed by the Council in June 2020. Based on a review of the literature and key policy documents, we identify four dimensions to guide this analysis and to shed light on the TEIs' contribution to: (a) visibility and communication; (b) effectiveness and development impact; (c) ownership; and (d) dynamics of harmonisation, integration and joint planning. Five case studies were subsequently selected to comparatively analyse the design choices and the challenges and opportunities associated with preparing and implementing actions and joint efforts among European actors and with partner countries.

The goal of this Policy Paper is not to carry out an evaluation of TEIs, but rather to explore and assess the challenges and opportunities that have emerged across the selected five TEIs to date. This comparative analysis provides information and enables us to learn about the respective strengths and areas for improvement of TEIs in order to ensure the geostrategic impact, development results and general coherence of the Team Europe approach and initiatives. Although the analysis of these initiatives and the criteria through which they were selected guarantees a rich pool of evidence on Team Europe in practice, the large number of TEIs –over 160 registered to date– and variety between them means that the five TEIs selected do not constitute a representative basis for drawing generalised findings on the performance of all TEIs in general. Yet the evidence presents points towards plausible patterns of their functioning to date, which combined with European stakeholders' experiences provides a solid basis to consider current efforts, results to date and potential future ambitions and directions.

The selection of the TEIs under study responds to several criteria aimed at ensuring their diversity. The selection criteria are: (a) geographical diversity; (b) sectoral variety; (c) a balance between bilateral and regional TEIs; (d) TEIs of different sizes, that is, with the participation of multiple or few member states; (e) TEIs that are currently at different stages of their formulation or implementation; and (f) some TEIs that are also framed as Global Gateway initiatives and that could thus shed light on how these tools are integrated.

The five TEIs selected are: Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)-Security and Justice Partnership (TEI-LAC); Paraguay-Reducing Inequalities (TEI-Paraguay); Cambodia-Sustainable Landscapes, Forests and Agriculture (TEI-Cambodia); Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, Medicines and Health Technologies in Africa (and in particular in Rwanda) (TEI-MAV+ and TEI-MAV+ Rwanda); and Armenia-Resilient Syunik (TEI- Armenia) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Selected Team Europe Initiatives

TEI	Geographic focus	Sectorial focus	Launch and status
Security and Justice Partnership [TEI-LAC]	Latin America and the Caribbean	Rule of law, fight against transnational organised crime	Launched in 2022. Implementation of following phase still pending
Paraguay – Reducing Inequalities [TEI-Paraguay]	Paraguay	Inclusion of isolated populations through digitalisation	Launched in 2021. Still in design phase. Implementation pending
Cambodia – Sustainable Landscapes, Forests and Agriculture [TEI-Cambodia]	Cambodia	Sustainable use of natural resources, sustainable agriculture and landscape restoration	Launched in 2022. Under consultations with the newly appointed government
Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, Medicines and Health Technologies [TEI-MAV+]	Africa	Strengthening local pharmaceutical and manufacturing capacities	Launched in 2021. In implementation
Armenia – Resilient Syunik [TEI-Armenia]	Syunik (Armenia)	Increased competitiveness, public services and sustainable development of the Syunik region	Launched in 2023. In implementation

Source: the authors.

Following a general assessment of Team Europe and TEIs, this Policy Paper presents the analysis of each of these TEIs in turn, describing their background, main features and analysing the design, governance and implementation aspects. The TEIs are then jointly analysed to identify both general conclusions on the current strengths and weaknesses of the TEIs, as well as insights into how the specificities of each initiative can further condition their relative progress or success. A total of 30 key informants, each involved in one of the five selected TEIs, were interviewed for this study. The respondents included EU officials based in Brussels and in Delegations abroad, member states' development authorities, partner country officials and civil society actors. The interviews were conducted by videoconference between June and August 2023 and were not recorded.

In the following section, we explore the key challenges and opportunities identified by previous analyses. The subsequent section provides a detailed analysis of the five selected TEIs, followed by a joint examination of the insights provided by these five TEIs, together with two Global Gateway projects that were analysed in the context of a previous study. Based on this analysis, the final section of this report draws overall conclusions and policy recommendations.

2 Team Europe and Team Europe Initiatives

The European development cooperation landscape has undergone important transformations in recent years. Fifteen years since the entry into force of the Treaty on the European Union, and in line with the Union's Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy of 2016, the EU's development policy has been gradually reformed to become more flexible and more aligned to the Union's strategic interests (Burni *et al*., 2021; Lehne, 2020; Pleeck & Gavas, 2021). The EU's current policy priorities are manifested, among other things, in the promotion of convergence between developmental and political objectives, with the corresponding expansion of budgets, in the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument / Global Europe (hereafter: NDICI), and in the launch of the Team Europe approach and the Global Gateway initiative (Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Lehne, 2020; Concord 2021b; Keijzer *et al*., 2021). These initiatives should be seen as part of an ongoing trend whereby the EU's development policy is progressively integrated into the EU's external action (Burni *et al*., 2021; Keijzer *et al*., 2021), which means that developmental and political goals and the complementarities and balance between the two are considered increasingly necessary. The discursive shift from 'EU development policy' to 'EU international partnerships policy' under the von der Leyen Commission progressively portrays the policy area as an important part of the EU's external projection and alliances on the global stage (Urpilainen, 2020; Bassot, 2020).

In April 2020 the European Commission and External Action Service proposed guiding principles for the EU's external response to the then emerging global COVID-19 pandemic under the label 'Team Europe' (Council of the EU, 2020). Initially conceived as a collaborative mechanism to unify the responses of the EU and its member states to the pandemic's challenges, the proposals aimed to amplify the collective impact of the EU and member states by pooling resources, influence and expertise (Pleeck & Gavas, 2021; Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Burni *et al*., 2021; Keijzer *et al*., 2021; Di Ciommo & Sergejeff, 2021). This collaborative approach, based on the 'working better together' idea, allowed the EU to tackle the urgent needs arising from the pandemic more effectively, and thus to elevate its global leadership in international cooperation and foreign affairs (European Union, 2022; Bassot, 2020). As the joint Commission/EEAS Communication states, Team Europe aims to unite the EU, member states, financial institutions and implementing agencies to drive impactful development outcomes, with the overarching objective of contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through strategic collaboration (Concord, 2021a; Iglesias & Jiménez, 2022). Following the initial EU pandemic response that accentuated the total finances mobilised by Team Europe, Council Conclusions adopted in June 2020 signalled a desired shift to turn Team Europe into a more comprehensive, long-term and strategic framework (Council of the EU, 2020). According to this political statement, the understanding of Team Europe subsequently broadened beyond its pandemic response towards an emerging 'method' through which the EU shapes its cooperation endeavours, seeking to exhibit a cohesive and unified front.[3]

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3 The authors are aware that the term Team Europe is occasionally also used in other contexts and meaning, eg, in earlier discussions on EU migration policy, in ongoing discussions on EU international research cooperation, and in the recent announcement of the prepared EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding. This report however will focus on Team Europe based on the original April 2020 Joint Communication and separate clarifications and additions as agreed by the Council in 2020 and 2021.

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In the context of the 'pre-programming phase' of the NDICI that started in the summer of 2020, initial discussions started on the preparation of Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs). These concerned specific 'packages' of planned and ongoing interventions by the aforementioned European actors in a dedicated sectoral or geographical area (Pleeck & Gavas, 2021; Keijzer *et al.*, 2021 Jones & Teevan, 2021). Exceptions notwithstanding, country-level TEIs are driven by EU Delegations and member states maintaining a presence in the country concerned, while regional TEIs tend to be driven by Brussels and member State officials in their respective capitals (Keijzer *et al.*, 2021).

At the time this paper was written, public websites registered over 160 TEIs in total, comprising 132 national, 32 regional and four global TEIs (European Union, ndb). With regard to the TEIs developed at the regional level, Sub-Saharan Africa stands out with a total of 17 regional TEIs. In addition, six regional TEIs are being developed in the Latin America and Caribbean region, six in the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific and three in the EU neighbourhood, two of them focusing on the Eastern neighbours and one on the Southern neighbours (*ibid*.). These initiatives encompass a wide range of areas, including but not limited to health, education, climate action and economic development. They have become the tangible manifestations of the collaborative ethos conveyed by the idea of Team Europe. Team Europe is becoming an increasingly integral part of how the EU enacts its cooperative efforts, showcasing its role as a united force (Jones & Teevan, 2021; Pleeck & Gavas, 2021; Concord, 2021a; Hodson & Howarth, 2022). This comprehensive coverage of the TEIs underscores the commitment to addressing diverse challenges on a global scale, ensuring a well-rounded and impactful response to the complex needs of partner countries (Keijzer *et al.*, 2021).
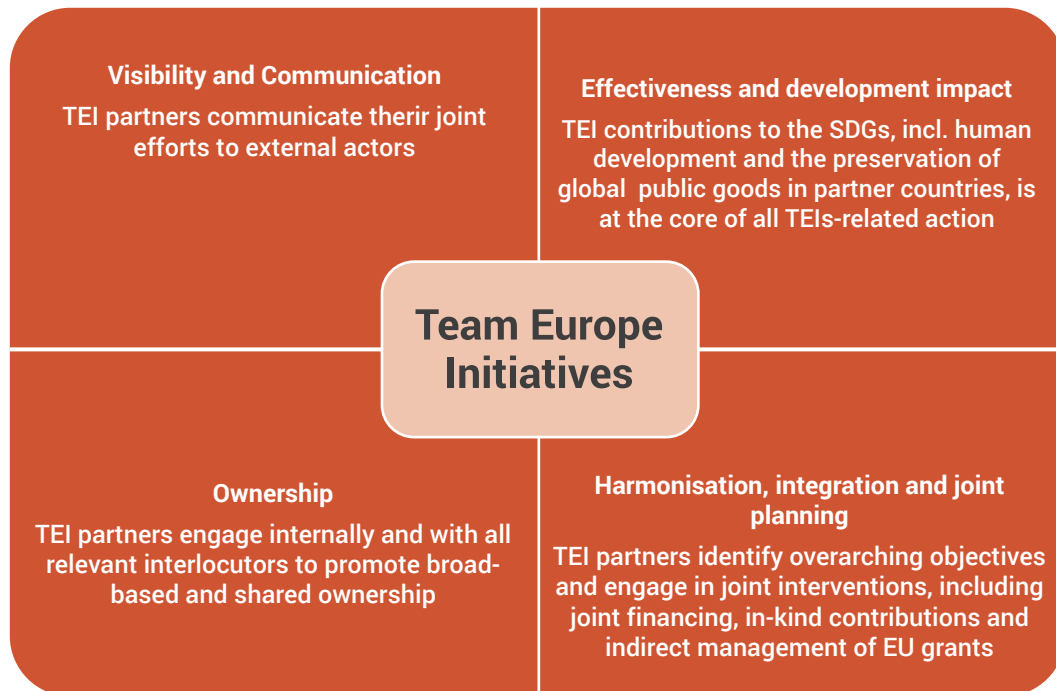
Analyses to date have highlighted certain key dimensions that have been motivating and driving efforts under the label of Team Europe. This is not to say that these are the official objectives of Team Europe and the TEIs, but rather that the actors involved in them commonly identify these as associated priorities (*ibid*).[4]

These dimensions are: (a) visibility and communication; (b) the effectiveness and resulting development impact that ought to result from coordinating efforts and stakeholders; (c) the necessary ownership of development action by both EU and partner countries to ensure balanced collaboration while respecting unique needs; and (d) harmonisation, integration and joint planning across sectors and actors, which is crucial for maximum impact. These dimensions should not be seen as static and constant factors in each TEI. Instead, their purposeful adaptation and promotion over time within individual TEIs will partly shape their trajectory, strengths and potential success (see Figure 2).

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[4] Earlier research on Team Europe has discussed the pros and cons on the lack of formal objectives and operationalisation of the term (see Keijzer *et al.*, 2021).

Figure 2. Key dimensions for Team Europe Initiatives

Visibility and Communication

TEI partners communicate therir joint efforts to external actors

Effectiveness and development impact

TEI contributions to the SDGs, incl. human development and the preservation of global public goods in partner countries, is at the core of all TEIs-related action

Team Europe Initiatives

Ownership

TEI partners engage internally and with all relevant interlocutors to promote broad-based and shared ownership

Harmonisation, integration and joint planning

TEI partners identify overarching objectives and engage in joint interventions, including joint financing, in-kind contributions and indirect management of EU grants

Source: the authors.

2.1. Visibility and communication

The conception of the Team Europe approach in the context of the pandemic response and the subsequent launch of the TEIs, as described above, responded to an identified need for coordination between the EU and its member states' international action. This was done not only in search for improved coherence and maximised impact, but also as part of a wider, more systemic European attempt to make the EU's presence in the world more visible (Olivié & Santillán O'Shea, 2023). Team Europe sought to equip EU development cooperation with a clearer team narrative and promote the effective joining of forces between EU actors –with their respective resources, expertise and comparative advantages– to contribute to strengthening the EU's position and image as a global (development) partner vis-à-vis its allies in the world (Jones *et al.*, 2020; Concord, 2022).

In line with this, several analyses point to the potential of the Team Europe approach and initiatives to help clarify the EU's role in the world and in its international partnerships (Jones & Teevan, 2021), by solidifying its reputation as a reliable and coherent actor (Council of the EU, 2021b; Jones *et al.*, 2020) and by contributing to the alignment between the EU and its member states' external and domestic policies (Jones & Teevan, 2021; Pleeck & Gavas, 2021; Jones *et al.*, 2020). Indeed, the idea of EU players presenting themselves in multilateral settings as part of one entity (or Team) that shares and defends certain distinctive values is seen as an opportunity to improve both the reach and the quality of its visibility (Jones &

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Teevan, 2021). This strategic potential is expected to grow once TEIs become institutionalised as the streamlined channel through which to deliver EU development projects (Pleeck & Gavas, 2021). This expectation, in fact, partly explains the widespread communication efforts and political support that the initiative has received from several European actors (Jones & Sergejeff, 2022). The several TEI-related high-level visits by European leaders show the considerable degree of political drive associated to the initiative.

Nonetheless, precisely due to this consensual support and perception of the Team Europe approach and initiatives as an opportunity for improved strategic visibility (Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Concord, 2022), there is now significant pressure on TEIs to deliver agile and impactful results in order to ensure Team Europe's credibility (Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Jones & Teevan, 2021). The long periods of time that are often required both to design and agree on the TEIs and to put them in motion can indeed end up hindering this credibility (*ibid*.; Lehne, 2020). To appear credible also requires a level of clarity in the TEIs' goals and intended reach that they have sometimes been criticised for lacking (Jones & Teevan, 2021; Gawel, 2023). Several analyses highlight the confusion surrounding the practical and political depth that is sought through Team Europe: for instance, whether it is simply a way of working in a more coordinated manner or a channel through which to mobilise additional resources. In this respect, there are certain concerns that an over-communication of the initiative with insufficient clarity will be counter-productive in terms of attracting and retaining the interest of partners (*ibid*.).

Other aspects of the initiative that are perceived as potential risks to its visibility and credibility are the absence of a strong and clear leadership (Lehne, 2020), the lack of clarity surrounding its interaction and integration with other European frameworks or strategies like joint programming or Global Gateway (Concord, 2022; Jones & Teevan, 2021), the potential inconsistencies with member states' national policies (Lehne, 2020), and the alleged absence of partner countries' authorities and priorities in the definition of the TEIs (Concord, 2021a; Gawel, 2023; Concord, 2022). The EU is faced with the challenge of striking a balance between following a flexible and functioning European trial and error process and consistently preserving its priorities and values (including partner-country ownership, as discussed later on) in the design and implementation of initiatives (Jones & Sergejeff, 2022).

Therefore, going forward, some suggest that Team Europe will need to ensure clarity in its mission and purpose and in the role of the different actors in pursuing them –including EU delegations, NGOs, the private sector and decentralised cooperation (Iglesias & Jiménez, 2022)–. This will require concrete actions that lead to results that can be made visible or demonstrable, as well as their effective communication through diverse channels, including those that go beyond traditional development cooperation (Jones & Teevan, 2021). The inclusion and support of all member states as well as true cooperation between them are vital in order to achieve this (Jones & Teevan, 2021; Council of the EU, 2021b). Certain efforts, such as the TEI tracker, have already begun in this regard, but their remains a significant scope for improvement in terms of completing information on projects and timelines (Concord, 2022) or the methodological guidance and monitoring regularly

provided by EU institutions for working better together in a Team Europe approach (Council of the EU, 2021b).

2.2. Effectiveness and development impact

The strong focus of the Team Europe approach and TEIs on coordinating and working better together for increased visibility in the world (European Commission, 2020; Concord, 2021b; Council of the EU, 2021a; Concord, 2022) can have different consequences for their ultimate effectiveness and development impact upon partner countries. On the one hand, an improved coordination and strategic outlook can result in more attention and resources –financial or non-financial, such as political dialogue, knowledge sharing and mutual learning (Council of the EU, 2021a)– being devoted to these development projects and to the EU and member states' development action as a whole, as well as to a maximisation of the development results obtained through the existing –more efficiently coordinated– resources. This flexible way of working can indeed be beneficial for finding synergies and complementarities between different European actors' capacities (Bilal, 2021) for avoiding duplications and fragmentations in development work, and thus for ensuring maximum efficiency and rigour in its implementation.

On the other hand, the same sharp focus on working better together between European actors can risk sidelining the alignment with development priorities of, and ultimate development results upon, partner countries if they are not properly and sufficiently incorporated into the design and various phases of projects. In this respect, the effectiveness of TEIs faces several challenges, some of which correlate to equivalent concerns surrounding their visibility, as expressed above. For instance, TEIs will have to find a clear practical and narrative integration with pre-existing development efforts (Jones & Teevan, 2021), not only to maximise their strategic impact but also to ensure their additionality in terms of development outcomes. The involvement of national partners' stakeholders in the conception and implementation of TEIs should go beyond the sphere of development cooperation (Jones & Teevan, 2021), the delivery of tangible results (bearing in mind timeline limitations) should be sought (Jones & Sergejeff, 2022), and the inclusion of and compatibilities between different member states' development agencies' work will need to be pursued as well (Jones, 2021).

So far, some critics consider that the alignment of TEIs with the aid effectiveness principles is low (Concord, 2021a). Partner country ownership, as will be further explained below, is said to be limited (*ibid*.; Gawel, 2023; Concord, 2022), and consultation processes between EU delegations and member states inadequate (*ibid*.). Several analyses also emphasise the lack of transparency and accountability in TEI-related processes in general –from the establishment of priorities to the identification and design of initiatives (Concord, 2021a; Concord, 2022)–, and civil society actors are repeatedly said to be excluded from them (Concord, 2021a; Concord, 2022). These concerns are exacerbated by the insufficient, non-transparent or simply absent monitoring mechanisms associated to the initiatives to assess and show up their impact (Concord, 2021b). Overall, some authors argue that the shift away from the initial mission of Team Europe –a coordinated international response to a (health) emergency situation in line with EU values (European Commission, 2020; Council

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of the EU, 2021b)– towards broader strategic goals could hamper their core development mandate (Pleeck & Gavas, 2021; Concord, 2021a) if these broader strategic goals are not contemplated jointly with development objectives in a complementary manner.

Thus, there are several elements that might influence the ultimate effectiveness and development impact of the Team Europe approach and initiatives in the coming years. These relate to how the work surrounding TEIs is ultimately carried out, to how the different actors are included and involved, and to how these efforts are communicated. In terms of the operationalisation of the TEIs, the actors concerned will need to invest the political and technical capital necessary to devise practical ways of working jointly in order to translate goals into practice (Jones, 2021; Jones *et al*., 2020; Concord, 2021a). There is also an identified need for the clarification of roles, parameters, budgets, modalities and programming processes in a way that is transparent and inclusive (Jones, 2021; Concord, 2021b; Concord, 2022), and that ensures complementarities over duplications of work between processes and with other EU instruments (Jones & Teevan, 2021; Iglesias & Jiménez, 2022). This includes clarifying whether TEIs aim to mobilise more resources for development or simply to better leverage existing resources for development, as this will help establish the corresponding benchmarks for evaluating the initiatives' success. Importantly, the operationalisation of the TEIs will need to guarantee their alignment with the aid effectiveness principles, the SDGs and the defence of global public goods through continued trying and learning (Concord, 2021a; Jones, 2021).

As for the inclusion of the different actors, the clarity mentioned above, coupled with a streamlining and simplification of procedures and an effective leadership from the European Commission could further incentivise the involvement of member states (Concord, 2021a; Jones, 2021). It will be essential for member states and their agencies to seek collaboration in their areas of expertise and truly coordinate beyond the narrative level (*ibid*.; Concord, 2021b). EU delegations have a role to play in actively engaging with all actors on the ground (European Commission, 2021a; Jones, 2021), with one specific point of attention being that the participation of civil society organisations in the design, governance and implementation of TEIs still needs to be further defined (Concord, 2021b; Concord, 2022). Lastly, all these actions will have to be accompanied by the corresponding strategic communication efforts through different adequate channels (Jones & Teevan, 2021; Council of the EU, 2021b), while avoiding over-communication.

2.3. Ownership

As previous studies highlight, ownership, within the specific perspective of TEIs, takes on a practical significance. As the approach is rooted in strategic partnerships and collaboration between the EU, member states, financial institutions and implementing agencies, there have been discussions not only on the extent of different European actors' true participation and support for the initiative, but also on the channels through which partners' needs, priorities and autonomy are incorporated (Iglesias & Jiménez, 2022; Keijzer *et al*., 2021; Concord, 2021b). Interviewees for this study confirmed this view, noting that the very term 'Team Europe Initiative' suggests that the initiative concerned is taken by European actors.

They moreover acknowledged the importance of continuous partner involvement and input for the TEI's success. What is more, partner country ownership is not only essential for development impact directly, but also through the necessary political acceptability that it helps generate.

On the one hand, and as stated in the EU's official communications and reports, the Team Europe approach's emphasis on shared responsibility is fixed in its design (Council of the EU, 2020; European Union, 2022). By bringing together diverse (European and non-European) stakeholders, this approach should indeed facilitate direct engagement and cooperation with all of them, including partner countries (Jones, 2021; Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Iglesias & Jiménez, 2022; Keijzer *et al*., 2021). Moreover, the Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs), stemming from Team Europe, operate on the same foundation of collaboration, designed to align with partner countries' priorities and needs (*ibid*.). This tailored approach to development action would address concerns about donor-centric approaches and ensure respect for the principle of ownership (Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Keijzer *et al*., 2021). It could be argued in this context that in general there can be trade-offs between promoting 'European ownership' of TEIs and promoting ownership of the EU's partners in this context (*ibid*.).

Moreover, the Team Europe approach explicitly acknowledges that sustainable development requires local ownership, as noted in various EU reports (Council of the EU, 2020; Council of the EU, 2021a). This recognition would in theory be demonstrated through the involvement of partner countries in the design and implementation of TEIs (Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Jones, 2021; Keijzer *et al*., 2021). By promoting inclusivity and encouraging partner countries to actively shape interventions, the TEIs implemented under the Team Europe approach should inherently foster ownership.

However, challenges persist, as highlighted in previous discussions and analyses. The balance between harmonised collaboration and partner countries' autonomy can be delicate. Ensuring that partner countries genuinely lead in their development works requires meticulous attention to their unique contexts and priorities (*ibid*.; Concord, 2021a). Moving forward, the strength of Team Europe must lie in its responsiveness, offering partner countries flexibility to adapt initiatives to their specific circumstances, thereby enhancing their ownership over a developmental process led by the EU (*ibid*.; Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Jones & Teevan, 2021).

There are also challenges in the operationalisation of joint work between European states. It is worth noting that achieving a coherent and consistent commitment from diverse European actors can be challenging. Varied interests, differing national policies and bureaucratic complexities might hinder the ownership of European states and stakeholders (Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Jones, 2021; Gawel, 2023). Ensuring that all actors are equally engaged and committed, while maintaining alignment with the Team Europe's principles, is a significant aspect to address in order to enhance ownership within European circles (Jones & Teevan, 2021; Gawel, 2023).

The Team Europe approach's account of ownership therefore requires the operationalisation of shared responsibility and the fostering of inclusivity, in order to ensure that partner countries take the lead in shaping their development trajectories (Concord, 2021a; Jones & Sergejeff, 2022). Looking ahead, the true realisation of ownership will depend on how initiatives are implemented and challenges addressed.

2.4. Harmonisation, integration and joint planning

Integration, as mentioned above, constitutes a leading dimension within the Team Europe approach and the TEIs, as reflected in both the Team Europe's principles and in previous analyses (Keijzer at al., 2021; Jiménez & Iglesias, 2022; Burni *et al.*, 2021). There are both opportunities and challenges associated with integration. The Team Europe approach's essential blueprint underscores its collaborative framework, nurturing integration among the diverse stakeholders (Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Keijzer *et al.*, 2021). This concerted architecture seeks to streamline endeavours and synchronise actions for more potent development cooperation, thus leveraging the richness of European actors' diversity in terms of expertise, presence, capacities and networks.

By amalgamating the EU, member states, financial institutions and implementing agencies, the Team Europe perspective promotes unified action (Jones & Teevan, 2021). This cooperative way of working attempts to ensure that the different development initiatives and inputs are coordinated and complementary (Jones & Teevan, 2021; Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Di Ciommo & Sergejeff, 2021; Jones, 2021; Iglesias & Jiménez, 2022; Bilal, 2021), while remaining aligned with partner countries' priorities and contextual nuances (Keijzer *et al.*, 2021; Concord, 2021a; Concord, 2021b; Bilal, 2021). This proactive integration approach should act as a countermeasure to fragmented attempts, culminating in a more cohesive response to intricate challenges. This coherence also emerges from aligning development activities with shared values, streamlining operations and presenting a unified image to partner nations and the global community, thus enhancing the TEI's developmental and geostrategic impact (Pleeck & Gavas, 2021; Burni *et al.*, 2021).

The prominence of integration within the TEIs manifests itself through collaborative structuring, joint evaluations and strategic coordination, that are inherent to the Team Europe approach (Burni *et al.*, 2021; Di Ciommo & Sergejeff, 2021; Jones, 2021; Jones & Teevan, 2021; Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Keijzer *et al.*, 2021). Through these mechanisms, Team Europe should effectively channel integration between partner countries, member states and other stakeholders, thereby augmenting the overall potency of developmental cooperation (*ibid.*). This choreographed approach not only promotes unity but also stands as a robust response to global challenges, underscoring Team Europe's steadfast commitment to impact (Bilal, 2021; Di Ciommo & Sergejeff, 2021; Jones, 2021; Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Keijzer *et al.*, 2021).

Yet there are challenges on the path to integration and coordination within the Team Europe approach and the TEIs. The intricate scenario of diverse sectors, with different standards and ways of working; the variety of stakeholders' interests, values, priorities and roles; and

the complexity of diverse geographic landscapes can pose barriers to integration (*ibid*.; Bilal, 2021; Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Jones 2021; Gawel 2023; Jones & Teevan, 2021). Bureaucratic intricacies and competition between stakeholders might further hinder the full realisation of Team Europe's potential for integration (Jones & Sergejeff, 2022; Jones, 2021; Gawel, 2023). Moreover, it appears that possibilities for joint planning and joint action in TEIs are biased to larger member states with substantial bilateral development cooperation budgets and implementing capacity of their own, which allows them to co-finance actions with the EU (Keijzer *et al*., 2021). Given these differences, discussions on the inclusiveness of Team Europe were considered in 2021 (Jones, 2021). These challenges accentuate the ongoing requirement for adaptive strategies, open dialogue and responsive approaches going forward in order to preserve integration as a driving force within the Team Europe approach's developmental pursuits.

3 Case studies

3.1. Team Europe Initiative for Justice and Security (TEI-LAC)

3.1.1. Description

The TEI on Justice and Security for Latin America and the Caribbean is a regional initiative that was officially launched in Paris in May 2022, during the French Presidency of the Council of the EU (El PAcCTO, 2022; FIIAPP, 2022). In addition to the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), a number of member countries participate in the programme: Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Spain (European Union, n.d.a). In the Latin American region, the countries involved are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela (FIIAPP, n.d.).

The aim of the TEI is to leverage the transformative impact of EU-LAC cooperation on the rule of law and fight against transnational organised crime by joining forces with EU member states, Commission Directorate Generals (DGs), EU specialised agencies (EUROPOL, EUROJUST, CEPOL, EMCDDA, FRONTEX) and OLAF (European Union, n.d.a). Therefore, the initiative takes a bi-regional approach. It involves several countries and regional institutions in both Europe and Latin America, and also aims to respond to shared challenges in security and justice, such as the fight against transnational organised crime and the defence of the rule of law. Security-related interventions are more efficiently addressed at regional and multi-country level, particularly those related to organised crime. The specific objectives are: (a) strengthening the LAC's overall rule of law environment; (b) consolidating structural regional and inter-continental cooperation networks to fight against organised crime; and (c) focusing on bi-regional cooperation on the main 'lines of business' of LAC organised crime (drug trafficking, environmental crimes, cybercrime, trafficking in human beings and firearms trafficking) (*ibid*.).

This TEI builds on pre-existing European projects and programmes, namely the Europe-Latin America Programme of Assistance against Transnational Organised Crime (El PAcCTO, after its name in Spanish), the programme on cooperation between LAC and the EU on drugs policy (COPOLAD, after its name in Spanish), or EUROFRONT (on border management and combating human trafficking and smuggling) (FIIAPP, 2022; IILA, 2022). At the time of writing, COPOLAD is at its third phase (which started in 2021) while the first phase of El PAcCTO has been completed. A second phase of the latter should be launched before the end of 2023.

3.1.2. Design

In general terms, interviewees for this case study perceive that there has been a strong implication of all parties involved (EC, member states, EU delegations in LAC and LAC

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counterparts) in designing the TEI, with the one exception of civil society organisations (CSOs), that were not part of this process.

The low implication on the part of CSOs could be explained by the very nature of this TEI, which deals with security-sensitive topics such as drug trafficking and cybercrime. However, on the other hand, it could also be argued that a number of CSOs are already working with vulnerable groups affected, for instance, by human trafficking schemes; with such groups being potential stakeholders of this TEI. An additional reason for this low involvement of CSOs, provided by one interviewee, is that institutions involved in the TEI, such as justice and homeland security departments and law enforcement agencies, are generally reluctant to engage with third civil parties in their programming work.

The EC was identified by the interviewees as the main leader in the process of designing and launching the TEI, in line with the institutional setting of TEIs where regional ones are coordinated from Brussels, whereas national TEIs are coordinated in the field by EU delegations. Although this coordinating role in the phase of design corresponds to DG INTPA, several people involved in the TEI underlined the fact that the initiative transcends international partnerships with a broader role of the EC via DG HOME, DG JUST and the EEAS, hence potentially leading to a greater internal coherence on the EU approach to LAC partners and to cross-pollination between development and other foreign policy goals on the part of Europe.

Nevertheless, one official argued, the design of the TEI was a bottom-up process. Strongly built on pre-existing programmes such as El PAcCTO, this TEI is the result of the perseverance of a small number of member countries –this same official mentioned France, Italy, Portugal and Spain– 'convincing' DG INTPA on the relevance of such a TEI. This would have been necessary for INTPA to own, and then lead, the TEI on Justice and Security.

This also explains the strong implication of member states in putting this TEI together. As mentioned above, officials approached for this study see a high level of involvement on the part of member countries in formulating the TEI. Nevertheless, such involvement seems to vary between members for two reasons.

First, obviously, between members that are part of the TEI and those who are not. In the transition from previous programmes to the TEI, all member states were consulted so that those not participating in pre-existing programmes would have the possibility to join the TEI. However, according to one interviewee, the initiative was not mature or clear enough at that stage and, as a result, only a small number of new members did actually join the TEI. Regarding the lack of clarity, the TEI was initially presented to member states as a mechanism for leveraging additional funds to those already invested in the sectors, countries and programmes included in the TEI. This probably functioned as a disincentive for non-traditional donors in the LAC region. In this context, the EC approached some countries with a potential interest in the contents of the TEI such as the Netherlands, given the component of drug trafficking it included. That was, nevertheless, and until now, the only entry point for additional members.

Secondly, not all the eight members participating in the initiative are equally involved. In this case, the different levels of implication correlate with the dimensions of the TEI where countries are participating and interested. For instance, Estonia would be very much involved in the cybersecurity branch but not necessarily in the others. As one interviewee put it, member states that are involved are highly motivated while the rest simply do not participate in the TEI. All in all, a couple of interviewees identified four leading countries: France, Italy, Portugal and Spain. For these participating states, since the TEI is led from Brussels, their involvement also transcends the development cooperation dimension. There is an active participation on the part of European Ministries of Justice and the Interior, therefore paving the way for a greater coherence of their external action, although with some coordination difficulties.

The perceptions of interviewees on the involvement of Latin American counterparts show an interesting picture. Although these were not active players in designing the TEI –they were not informed or consulted until the launch in Paris in May 2022– and despite the fact that as a result, according to European officials, their level of participation in the designing phase was rather low, LAC officials consulted for this study feel that their countries' priorities are well reflected in the TEI. This might be explained by the fact that the TEI strongly builds on pre-existing programmes and, more specifically on El PAcCTO, where local counterparts have been regularly consulted for years and where ownership mechanisms are already in place. Also, when being interviewed for this study, several LAC officials were instinctively sharing their thoughts on El PAcCTO rather than on the TEI; something that shows the overlap between the TEI and its contents as well as the margin for improvement in the clarity and definition of this particular TEI.

All in all, to put it shortly, in this particular aspect, the priorities of LAC countries have been taken into account when designing the TEI despite the fact that there are no formal mechanisms for integrating partner countries' priorities among the initiative goals. Despite the generally positive view on the incorporation of LAC countries' priorities and development goals, some experts felt that, to some extent, the TEI design might imply a step back in terms of ownership, from a bi-regional to a regional approach: some of the programmes it relies on were almost conceived as bi-regional initiatives, where Panamerican structures and networks already played an active role. In this respect, the Conference of Ministers of Justice of the Iberoamerican Countries (COMJIB, after its name in Spanish) as well as the Iberoamerican Association of Public Ministries (AIAMP, as it is known in Spanish) were mentioned more than once. The very name of the initiative (Team Europe) reinforces this perception.

In this same line, interviewees identify a recentralising effect, where the design and leadership of development cooperation is re-transferred from the field to Brussels. This responds to institutional reasons, since regional TEIs are coordinated by INTPA and it also explains the general perception, on the part of interviewees, that the EU delegations and member states' embassies and development cooperation offices in LAC have played a minor role, when compared with that of the Commission and the EU capitals.

It is difficult to determine the exact scope of the TEI in terms of funding. As mentioned earlier, the TEI was initially presented as a new activity, aimed at leveraging additional funds on the part of member states but was then reoriented as a platform for integrating, connecting and coordinating the different initiatives in this particular sector and region of all member states and the EU institutions. Their combined support for the initiative would amount to at least €144 million in grant funding, including technical assistance from EU member states to security and justice-related institutions. The time frame for the TEI is also unclear at this point of the process.

All interviewees expressed that they considered the level of transparency of the initiative to be high, at least within the European sphere and under this framework, where a clearer definition of the TEI is needed. So, in short, TEI goals are understood and shared on the EU's part and, in that same line, EU officials feel that it has led to an increased visibility of the EU by third parties.

3.1.3. Governance and implementation

The challenges and opportunities of the governance scheme are the natural result of the design process. Interviewees perceive that the EC and the member states lead the TEI, with a lower involvement of partner countries' authorities, a very low participation of the EU delegations and hardly no participation at all of CSOs or the private sector.

As already mentioned, the political objectives of the TEI are perceived to be very clear as well as shared by the EU: both by the eight member states involved and, according to the Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council published last June (European Commission, 2023), by the EU as a whole. Moreover, since this partnership on justice and security is explicitly mentioned in the Declaration of the EU-CELAC Summit held last July (Council of the EU, 2023), it can be said that these are objectives shared, in general terms, by parties involved in the two regions.

However, the reporting mechanism needs to be fine-tuned. According to one interviewee, coordination meetings are held only once a year. Another official mentioned that the TEI is nothing more than the design and mapping of EU initiatives in these sectors and partner countries. As a result, there is not a de facto governance structure. One possible explanation is that the TEI might be little more than the sum of its programmes and, more precisely, only slightly more than El PAcCTO. Since the first phase of the programme has already been implemented and that El PAcCTO 2 has not yet been launched, the TEI is consequently also on hold.

In addition, informants do not see a clear integration between TE and Global Gateway. On the one hand, they tend to deal with different topics. If Global Gateway is about promoting digital and green transition in collaboration with the private sector, this TEI deals mostly with the promotion of justice and security with public systems. In a way, this could be seen as a thematic division of work between EU tools but the general perception of informants was that this was not an intended result when designing them. Moreover, one interviewee argued, there could, indeed, be a greater involvement of the private sector in this particular

TEI. For instance, tech companies such as Google could be very relevant in the fight against cybercrime and the private banking sector a key ally in combating illicit financial flows. Nevertheless, these options have so far not been explored.

3.2. Team Europe Initiative on Reducing Inequalities in Paraguay (TEI-Paraguay)

3.2.1. Description

This TEI on reducing inequalities –an objective for which it has also been associated to Global Gateway– is one of the two initiatives agreed upon by the EU and Paraguay under Team Europe (European Commission, 2021c). It was proposed by Spain and Germany –the two European countries with a significant development cooperation presence in Paraguay– and then supported by other member states including France and Italy. Its main goal is to promote and support gender equality, social protection and education-related measures to reach the isolated sectors of the Paraguayan population, with a focus on digitalisation processes as a means to achieve this (European Union, 2021b). These aims are to be pursued through the different cooperation modalities and projects that are already in place between Paraguayan and European partners, such as budget support, triangular cooperation, technical assistance, blending, knowledge exchanges and grants (*ibid*.).

The 2021-27 Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) for Paraguay foresees an expected financial contribution on the part of the EU of €26 million for the 2021-24 period for this TEI, with assumed additional funding mobilised through guarantees and blending through the EFSD+ (European Commission, 2021c). However, it should be noted that the recent elections and change of government in Paraguay have put its design and implementation on hold. It is therefore at a very early stage and has not yet moved beyond its theoretical formulation on the part of EU partners. The identification of pre-existing programmes, projects and financing schemes that can contribute to the objectives of this TEI, which will constitute the first step towards turning it into reality, is still pending. The specific contents, coherent narrative and general vision of the initiative are therefore still insufficiently defined, and its implementation has not even begun at the time of writing.

3.2.2. Design

As the interviewees consulted revealed, the formulation and design process of this TEI emerged directly from the (few) European development actors that are present in Paraguay and the development work they already had in place. These actors are basically the EU Delegation, Spain and Germany, with a lesser Italian and French presence. Led by the EU Delegation, the European actors engage in the identification of possible coincidences between: (a) Paraguayan needs and priorities; (b) the development cooperation already being implemented by member states in the country; and (c) action areas where a good degree of acceptance and appropriation on the part of Paraguay can be achieved. The result of the exercise has been the creation of the TEI on reducing inequalities –intentionally presented in these broad terms in a search for political acceptability– along with the 'Green Paraguay' TEI.

The role of Brussels in the design of this TEI was thus very marginal, given the decentralised nature of the process. The local authorities and civil society were not involved at this stage either, to the extent that identifying an adequate local counterpart to interview in the context of this study was unfeasible, which it could be argued undermines the initiative's ownership and thus its potential effectiveness, although local priorities are still considered to have been incorporated indirectly, through the accumulated experience and knowledge of the European (Spanish and German) development actors on the field. The consultation process for the setting up of this TEI was therefore transparent and sufficient for European member states and the EU Delegation, but it was not extended to include local actors, such as local authorities or CSOs. Indeed, interviewees considered there was a good level of coordination among TE actors on the field, insofar as there is a relatively low number of them. In this respect, the TEI is said to have contributed positively to the integration of European actors and to the visibility of their development action on the ground.

What is more, one interviewee pointed out that the initial push for this TEI originated in the EU Delegation, where clear instructions from the EC were received on the need to launch the TEI, while there was initially a lower level of ownership on the part of member states, whose headquarter instructions were less clear. Nonetheless, over time, the existence and persistence of the TEI has ended up promoting a stronger involvement and appropriation on the part of member states, both on the field and at the headquarters level.

Ownership, however, is still low among Paraguayan actors. The objectives that are specified as part of this TEI are seen as a reflection of European priorities. They contribute to and increase the visibility of the European agenda in the region, thus turning the TEI into a political tool that transcends development cooperation. Yet certain aspects of the reducing inequalities agenda (particularly regarding gender inequality considerations) are currently being contested by sectors of the Paraguayan political scene, which could partly explain the delays in turning the TEI into concrete action.

3.2.3. Governance

As mentioned above, this TEI is not yet being implemented and its day-to-day functioning and governance have not yet been put in motion, since, as explained above, the initiative has not so far moved beyond a –European– idea and into the identification of potential projects to be included in it. The perceptions shared by interviewees concerning the TEI's governance are thus mere theoretical assumptions or foreseeable developments, largely based on the more evolved 'Green Paraguay' TEI, rather than actual observable realities. It is likely that, once truly launched, the TEI's governance will be articulated through periodic meetings and information exchanges between Team Europe actors in the field (member states and the EU Delegation), without local authorities and without the involvement of Brussels. These meetings will not exclusively cover the TEI and there will be no specific TEI steering committee due to limited capacities, but their sufficiency and frequency will be guaranteed by a fixed quarterly meeting and other ad-hoc meetings according to necessity. This flexibility is indeed considered to be positive for the TEI's correct functioning and effectiveness, as it would help avoid over-burdening a small number of actors with limited human resources with unnecessary additional mechanisms. Once in motion, the TEI would

theoretically also seek a stronger involvement and ownership on the part of local actors, such as civil society and the media.

The initiative mainly consists of a political exercise of bringing and presenting together the European actors' pre-existing work in reducing inequalities in Paraguay. In that sense, the TEI's political objectives are neither complementary to nor differentiated from those sought via other EU tools but are rather aimed at boosting the visibility of those same pre-established goals. The initiative's political objectives are thus perceived to be clear and shared among member states, and hence to positively affect the visibility and effectiveness of EU development action in Paraguay. However, on the other hand, the fact that these same objectives are not as clearly communicated to nor shared by non-European –local– actors due to political differences might pose a challenge for the day-to-day implementation and in turn compromise this same visibility and effectiveness. What is more, the wide array of topics covered by the initiative's objectives makes it difficult at times to identify a clear leadership for each topic.

An inevitable result of the still pending implementation of this initiative is the absence of reporting mechanisms to monitor its progress. It is likely that the monitoring mechanisms to ensure the TEI's effectiveness in the future will be those related to each individual project. Once again, interviewees considered that monitoring efforts ought to leverage the currently high level of flexibility and coordination among European actors and acknowledge their limited capacities, instead of overloading them with new mechanisms.

In terms of this TEI's alignment with other European strategies, namely Global Gateway, it is so far only theoretical and purely narrative, like the TEI itself. It remains to be seen whether this will translate into a practical alignment once both initiatives are effectively in motion, and how the complementarity, integration, coherence and additionality between them will be ensured. One interviewee expressed concerns about possible overlaps and confusion between the two initiatives, as they were both launched very close in time and seemingly serve similar strategic goals.

3.3. Team Europe Initiative for Sustainable Landscapes, Forests and Agriculture in Cambodia (TEI-Cambodia)

3.3.1. Description

The Cambodian economy heavily relies on an economically unproductive and environmentally unsustainable primary sector. According to World Bank data, the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors account for almost 23% of Cambodia's GDP and employs nearly 40% of the workforce, showing low levels of productivity (World Bank, 2022). Also, according to the European Commission (EC)'s assessment, massive farmland expansion allowed for impressive growth rates of the primary sector's GDP (at over 5% annually during the 2000s, according to World Bank figures) but also resulted in an accelerated process of deforestation that accounts for 80% of the country's very high and increasing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, according to EC sources.

It is against this backdrop that the EU designed a Multi-annual Indicative Programme (MIP) for the 2021-27 period (European Commission, 2021b), presented to the Cambodian authorities in May 2022 (OpenDevelopment Cambodia, 2022) and driven by three priority areas: (a) green growth and decent jobs; (b) education and skills development; and (3) good governance. The MIP includes, among other activities, projects and programmes, two proposals of TEIs that are still very preliminary and whose specific design is still under preparation:[5] one on sustainable landscapes, forests and agriculture (hereafter SLFA) and another on green energy and industrial value chains (European Commission, 2021b).

Despite the fact that the TEI on SLFA was presented in May 2022 as a proposal, the EC tracker displays information on the initiative valid as of September 2021 (European Union, 2021a). This shows, on the one hand, the fact that this TEI, as many others, is strongly based on previous activities conducted by EU institutions and member states in Cambodia. Indeed, as interviewees explained, this TEI will be delivered through a mix of ongoing and new actions, with new projects financed under the EU Annual Action Plan 2023 expected to contribute substantially to it, which the EC tracker is expected to reflect eventually. On the other hand, this indicates that, at this early stage, it is not always easy to understand the exact process and evolution of each and every TEI, with information showing a certain back and forth dynamic on several key aspects such as the priorities, the partners or the total budget.

According to the EC tracker, the TEI's main objectives are to support sustainable landscapes, forests and agriculture as well as sustainable agriculture and agri-food through the following activities: (a) promotion of the sustainable use of natural resources, combining protection and increasing incomes for the rural population; (b) support for sustainable agriculture and agri-food value chains; (c) support for landscape restoration, watershed management and university partnerships; and (d) support for forest defenders, land-rights organisations and accountability through civil society participation (*ibid*.).

The EU actors identified in the MIP are the EC, France, the EIB, the Czech Republic, and Belgium (European Commission, 2021b). This document also foresees the involvement of Switzerland in the implementation phase. In addition to these, the EC tracker includes Germany, that joined the TEI at a later stage (European Union, 2021a). Nevertheless, some interviewees clarified that participation in TEIs remains open to other Team Europe partners active in the TEI's policy sectors. This means that not all EU member states that might potentially engage in TEIs are mentioned in the MIP, as it was approved in 2021. Sweden is an example of a member state that was only later associated to TEIs in Cambodia.

Despite joining at a later stage, Germany has become one of the most prominent actors in the initiative, according to the funds disbursed and the opinions of the interviewees for this study. According to data provided by DG INTPA for this study, the ongoing activities of the TEI on SLFA are being funded by EU institutions (the EC with €163 million and the EIB with €65 million) and three member states: Germany (with €172 million), France (€151

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5 The consultation process is being restarted with the newly appointed government, with the agreed approach being to review TEIs with lead line Ministries at the working level before presenting an agreed draft to the government. Consultations are expected to be finalised in 2023.

million) and the Czech Republic (around €2.5 million). In addition to this total amount of €552 million, the EC expect these same actors to provide an additional €590 million in the future, meaning that the total budget for this initiative would now be at €1,142 million, substantially above the initially provisioned €385 million. Also, with this particular TEI the EU has managed to incorporate other institutions, beyond the Commission (the EIB). Despite Switzerland's active involvement in the area covered by the TEI and its contributions to previous joint programming efforts dating back to 2014, it is not formally associated with this TEI (European Union, 2023), although it is de facto closely associated with the TEI process at the country level.

3.3.2. Design

Unlike regional TEIs, national TEIs, such as this one, are designed locally by EU actors in the field. This explains why, according to interviewees, the EU delegation in Phnom Penh and several member states' delegations had a major role in putting the TEI together, with a minor role played by Brussels and European capitals. Nevertheless, even though the Cambodian EUD is in constant dialogue with EU member states to promote their involvement in TEIs, the participation of member states was still considered to be uneven by interviewees, with some major donors paving the way. In this respect, and in line with the budget description of the previous section, Germany and France were considered to have a leading role in this particular TEI. It was argued, however, that the process managed to include the inputs, vision and priorities of smaller donors, such as the Czech Republic.

In the context of this TEI, the involvement of various actors, including the Cambodian authorities, private businesses and civil society organisations (CSOs), during the design phase has been somewhat limited. The Cambodian authorities were formally made aware of the TEI's contents during the presentation of the 2021-27 Multi-Annual Indicative Programme (MIP). The feedback received by EU actors following the presentation was generally positive. However, the formal engagement of the Cambodian authorities was primarily limited to the MIP process. It is worth noting that one interviewee pointed out that the political cycle, with Cambodian general elections scheduled for July 2023, posed a challenge to greater involvement from the Cambodian authorities at the time. According to another interviewee, in terms of private sector (PS) and CSOs, the EUD has presented and discussed TEIs with Eurocham and CSOs during programming-related consultations on multiple occasions and received feedback from them. PS and CSOs are supposed to be involved in implementing some of the projects related to TEIs. Also, another respondent pointed out that local priorities and preferences could be incorporated since the TEI builds on the experience of the donors' community in the country (with projects and programmes that already incorporate mechanisms for local ownership) and also via (informal) working level coordination meetings that accompanied the entire MIP and TEI processes, particularly with the Ministry of Economy and Finance. Lastly, according to another interviewee, ownership is limited to the public authorities, something that could be problematic given the human rights dimension at stake in several of the activities programmed in the framework of the TEI. Nevertheless, according to another of the interviewees, Team Europe coordinates with CSOs and Think Tanks monitoring human rights in Cambodia.

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Regarding CSOs, it should be noted that these are expected to take an active role in the TEI on SLFA, specifically, in the fields of opportunities for the youth and of climate change (protection of tropical forests and biodiversity, support for climate-smart agricultural practices and work on poverty reduction through agroecological diversification). Despite this, these have not been greatly involved in the designing phase, a fact that is in line with the EU institutions' aim of first building up the 'EU offer'. There is as yet no institutionalised entry point for CSOs within the framework of the Team Europe approach in the design process. CSOs participated, though, in the working groups that were put together for debating the initiative's general guidelines.

In general terms, interviewees consider the TEI process to be highly transparent, with a good level of communication and information sharing with the stakeholders involved. Also, not only do they consider the TEI to be a good fit for EU (both EU institutions and member states) development objectives, but it also helps making the EU visible as a development partner.

Finally, despite the fact that the TEI is explicitly framed in the MIP, some EU officials noted certain difficulties in integrating the two processes that, to some extent, have been conducted in parallel. Something similar has occurred with the integration of the TEI with Global Gateway.

3.3.3. Governance and implementation

The TEI on SLFA has not yet been officially accepted by the local authorities so it is not formally at the implementation stage, though some pre-existing activities associated to the TEI are of course already underway, as shown in the description section of this case study. For this same reason, there is no proper governance scheme in place. However, one interviewee argued, the TEI is not meant as a parallel programme with its own governance, management, implementation and monitoring schemes but rather as a common framework that puts together a number of activities (some of them pre-existent) in order to achieve a common set of goals. This coincides with what is perceived by other experts, linked to other TEIs, interviewed in the framework of this study.

Given the incipient stage of this TEI, opinions of interviewees on governance and implementation were tentative and scarce but they coincide in attributing a stronger role in the governance scheme to the EU delegation and to member states' (that are effectively involved in this TEI) representations in Cambodia, when compared with EU capitals, local authorities, private businesses or CSOs. This is in line with the relative involvement of different parties in the designing phase (see previous section) and also in line with what we found in other TEIs explored for this study.

3.4. Team Europe Initiative on Manufacturing and access to Vaccines, Medicines and Health Technologies in Africa (TEI-MAV+)

3.4.1. Description

The Team Europe Initiative on manufacturing and access to vaccines, medicines and health technologies in Africa, best-known by its acronym MAV+, was set up as a regional TEI during and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. MAV + is probably among the best known and most politically visible TEIs, and was first formally introduced by the Commission President at the 2021 G20 Global Health Summit in Rome. The detailed name of the TEI reflects the ambition to carefully balance manufacturing and access to vaccines, medicines and health technologies. It also promotes a careful interplay between the 'hardware' (infrastructure) and 'software' (human resources, standards and systems) required to make it work. MAV+ actors refer to this broad scope as the TEI's '360 degrees' approach.

In addition to its position as one of the best-known and most-visible TEIs, the initiative was also highlighted as a key priority of the EU's Global Gateway initiative by the Commission President during her annual 2022 State of the Union address to the European Parliament (European Commission, 2022).

The visibility and momentum created by MAV+ is also reflected by the considerable levels of funding it has attracted, both from the EU and the many member states that are involved in it. Under the TEI, €1.2 billion have been committed to support the cooperation at the level of the African Union as well as those in Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa by the European Commission and EU member states (Belgium, Germany, France and the Netherlands). Of these €1.2 billion, around €980 million was approved and under implementation by September 2023, involving a wide variety of modalities including direct grants, loans, budget support, blended finance and twinning. At the time of writing, the Commission was in the process of acquiring additional funds from the so-called 'cushion' of its external action budget for the period 2021-27.

As reflected in the Commission President's quote above, the TEI has experienced a key transition from an 'immediate response' and pandemic-focused TEI towards a longer-term and more horizontal focus, as reflected by the linking to the AU's Agenda 2063 (which was adopted long before the pandemic) and the association with the EU's Global Gateway initiative. Given its large geographic focus and scope of associated interventions, and in view of this study's purpose to compare and describe specific TEIs, it was chosen to combine an analysis of the regional TEI overall with a specific focus on its engagement in Rwanda. Rwanda was purposefully chosen given the presence of both software and hardware investments and the considerable involvement by the partner country government.

3.4.2. Design

MAV+ consists of the overarching regional engagement and four national engagements in Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa –with additional packages now emerging in Nigeria and Egypt–. Given the size and political importance of MAV+, the TEI is taken forward by a regional team that focuses on the TEI overall and the various country-level

teams in the countries. Both groups of TEI elements are supported by the Team Europe Support Structure (TESS), which consists of a joint secretariat staffed by implementing agencies from three member states: Enabel (Belgium), Expertise France (France) and GIZ (Germany). The counterparts of the regional (or rather 'continental') TEI actions concern the African Medicines Agency (AMA), the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (AfCDC), the Partnership for Africa Vaccines Manufacturing (PAVM), AUDA-NEPAD, the African Medicines Regulatory Harmonisation Initiative (AMRH) and WHO's mRNA technology transfer and access to health products programmes.

The overall objectives of MAV+, pursued in relation to six workstreams, reflect a shared agenda between the EU and its continental cooperation partners. Its aim links both to the EU's original objective to provide a visible and ambitious external response to the pandemic and the AU's objective to make sure that by 2040, 60% of vaccines used on the continent are produced in Africa. The latter is a highly ambitious target, given that at this point Africa still imports practically all of its vaccines, with the WHO reporting that almost half of the continent's citizens still lack access to essential medicines (AHAIC, 2021). It is thus also a good example of the long-term and broad-based nature of cooperation agendas that can be pursued by TEIs.

The focus of the TEI has broadened over the course of the initiative's timeline from COVID to essential medicines. Interlocutors from member states highlighted that the situation changed from pandemic to 'inter-pandemic times'. Interlocutors differed whether, in the process the emphasis had shifted from access to production, while others maintained the TEI's '360 degrees' orientation. It could be argued that Global Gateway has reinforced an emphasis on production, since the focus is on the strategic importance of the TEI and on visible 'hardware' compared with less visible 'software'.

While embedded in the overall MAV+ initiative, the four national cooperation processes –which can be regarded as 'individual' TEIs– each adapted in their own way and involved country level coordination as well. Their four governments concerned had in common that they ambitiously sought to position their countries during the pandemic as cooperation partners on vaccine production.

TEI-MAV+ in Rwanda

In the case of Rwanda, at the beginning of 2021 the IFC (World Bank) prepared a business case for the production of vaccines in Rwanda. The assessment and the strong interest of the Rwandan government prompted European donors to become engaged in the form of a dedicated Team Europe Initiative. At that time, there was hardly a pharmaceutical sector to speak of in Rwanda, as well as negligible levels of foreign direct investments in this area. Interviewees stressed that the TEI started organically and was action-oriented, starting with the EU Delegation committing unspent funds, which in turn inspired discussions and further joint actions.

Key in the design process was the strong and concrete demand articulation by the Rwandan government, which set out clear objectives and shared preferences in terms of which actors it deemed to be in a position to provide different kinds of support. It was this capacity

for demand articulation and the possibility of ensuring an optimal enabling domestic environment that helped to attract the German company BioNTech to invest in Rwanda. Rwanda was considered an attractive partner for BioNTech as it is widely considered to be a strong state with a reliable setting and context for external investment. After the foundational actions had been put in place, the EUD opened a twinning possibility for EU member states to advise and support the Rwandan Food and Drug Authority, which showed a proactive entrepreneurial approach by tapping into unspent funds for this purpose (Delegation of the EU to Rwanda, 2022). Generally speaking, the members of the TEI functioned as a team during its design with, for instance, the EIB being brought in to explore funding the solar panels that would allow sufficient and reliable power for the future factory. Another key aspect is the joint EU and Belgian cooperation in supporting the University of Rwanda to set up an MSc course in biotechnology, in cooperation with European universities (Nsanga, 2023). Across the board, the TEI in Rwanda mainly runs and is run by official actors, although in addition Dutch and Rwandan NGOs are involved in associated activities.

Important for understanding these dynamics and flexibility is that cooperation in Rwanda is a new initiative for all actors engaged and not based on pre-existing and already running projects. This situation differs from other TEIs where pre-existing projects are packaged to become a TEI and thus lack a joined starting point and strong central dynamic. In the view of our interlocutors (EU and member states) this joined starting point is one of the initiative's key success factors. One interviewee described it as joint programming at a sector level. An additional success factor was the necessary investment provided by BioNtech that laid the ground for the realisation of MAV+.

A key 'design challenge' to be confronted in the coming period concerns the right balance between the M and A components of MAV+, in other words, what kind of balance is required between manufacturing and access. Both are needed specifically for Rwanda but also for the success of Team Europe more generally: visibility will only pay off in the future as long as cooperation is effective, and effective cooperation alone does not suffice when it is not tangible and concrete. Yet it is clear that the desired balance also reflects each partner's overall assessment of the 'theory of change' and the best sequence to do so, with interviewees differing in their valuation as to whether the TEI is primarily about health or about economic development. Since TEI members differ in their various areas of expertise, the balance chosen and sequence of activities also has a bearing on which implementing agencies can become involved. The availability of EU funding for indirect management was, nonetheless, broadly regarded as enabling –as opposed to inhibiting– cooperation.

3.4.3. Governance and implementation

There are a number of unique characteristics of MAV+ compared with other TEIs. One member state interlocutor highlighted the frequency of coordination meetings at headquarters level to steer national engagement and the regular exchange with other involved member states and the EU, which is unusual for TEIs and reflects MAV+'s high political priority. In several of the larger member states, multiple units (geographic and global health) within their Ministries responsible for development policy are also involved, with the TEI thus also facilitating internal coordination processes. The same goes for the

Commission, as several of its DGs are involved in MAV+. The TEI members also maintain a dialogue with key civil society organisations (eg, MSF and Global Health Forum) as well as interacting with interested private sector actors.

Around half of the financial resources involved are also contributed by member states, which is why some of them also increase their own communication efforts in relation to MAV+ as opposed to doing so via the EU (for instance: Bünder *et al*., 2022; EAC-Germany, 2022). In one recent key engagement, in June 2023 Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Germany and the EU sent a joint high-level delegation covering five relevant TEIs (including MAV+ overall) to Addis to meet with key MAV+ stakeholders. The joint visit was prepared by internal EU discussions at the DG level.

As shown by the Addis visit, there is a strong shared ownership among TEI members. Member state interlocutors highlighted that all member states can speak on behalf of the TEI and that the EU does not act as a spokesperson in this respect. This will be reinforced by the creation of the TESS, since it is effectively a shared project and not a consultancy that operates based on TORs set by an individual organisation. Interviewees expected that the TESS will be able to work in a more flexible and adaptive manner in terms of supporting all involved MAV+ actors. The TESS is in operation since the beginning of 2023 and will operate until 2026. Alternate chairing of meetings by TEI members was also considered to have the potential to promote shared leadership.

In addition to the frequent interaction between the member states and EU representatives covering MAV+ at the working level, there is a high-level steering meeting at the DG level that meets less regularly to consider the overall direction at the DG level. This steering meeting can also be used for arbitration and for forging compromises if member states and the EU have different views over purpose and direction. Since global health and cooperation with the AU is a key priority for the bilateral development policies of the member states, the meetings can serve to determine the right balance between bilateral communication with the AU and doing so in the context of the TEI. Doing so, however, might lead to over-coordinating or duplicating messages, a risk that was considered to be outweighed by the benefits of a coordinated approach.

According to one member state interviewee, TESS was not only created as a support structure but also to ensure that all actors work jointly on outputs and to avoid duplications and agencies living separate lives. There is currently also the question of whether every big TEI should have its own TESS, or if single TESS structures (eg, dealing with a specific area) could service multiple related TEIs –which, given the hybrid structure of MAV+, the TESS already does–.

TEI-MAV+ in Rwanda
The governance of the TEI overall and cooperation in Rwanda have evolved over time. Early on in the planning stage there was a higher frequency of meetings between participating member states and the EU on how to best support Rwanda in its effort to become a producer of essential medicines, including vaccines. Due to its high relevance to the Rwandan

government, MAV+ is also frequently discussed during the monthly Heads of Cooperation meeting. At this initial stage, the comparative advantages of the different donors involved were discussed and the work-streams identified –in addition to the work-streams in which each donor wanted to be active–. The process was considered to have worked very well by all our interviewees and the strategic orientation and objectives of MAV+ are considered to be clear and jointly agreed upon by all actors. The frequency of these coordinating meetings has reduced as the focus has shifted to the implementation of individual actions and thus has become somewhat decentralised during the implementation phase.

The question of inclusiveness was also discussed in interviews and more specifically whether member states without bilateral ODA inputs should be able to be part of TEIs. The consideration was that, in order to offer added value to the team, it would be important that the member state concerned be present 'on the ground' and have a country presence. The core group of the TEI may thus naturally grow over time. In general, our interviewees consider the TEI a useful way to work together in view of the concrete and joint interest and agreed that the TEI had improved the interaction and communication between different member states and between the latter and the EU. One member state interlocutor highlighted that there are also disputes and administrative hurdles and competition and a certain degree of 'elbowing', which means, however, that there is a far stronger European dynamic.

All interviewees highlighted that cooperation with the Rwandan government on MAV+ works well and that it is getting used to the dynamic, which is different as previous interaction relied more on bilateral exchanges. It was felt that the Rwandan government can therefore bring its vision and priorities, while leaving operationalisation and implementation to its international partners.

3.5. Team Europe Initiative: Resilient Syunik (TEI-Armenia)

3.5.1. Description

On 18 January 2023 the Team Europe Initiative 'Resilient Syunik' was launched as a joint initiative by the EU, the European Investment Bank, EU member states Austria, France, Germany, Poland and Sweden, and Switzerland as an external partner. The TEI was jointly prepared and announced with the Armenian government, which was represented at the launch by its Deputy Prime Minister and the regional Governor of Syunik province (Delegation of the EU to Armenia, 2023).

With TEIs typically addressing a specific sector or issue at the national, regional or global levels, the Syunik TEI stands out for bundling all relevant development actions targeting a specific province. The many activities associated with the TEI address one or more of the following overall objectives: (a) an improved business environment for the MSMEs and enhanced private sector competitiveness; (b) improved access to quality citizen-centric public services; and (c) prioritised green regional development and increased protection, sustainable use and restoration of biodiversity.

Following the official launch, at different points in time further member states joined that were active in the province: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland and the Netherlands. As the findings below set out, the specific genesis of the 'provincial TEI', the strong involvement of the regional Governor as well as the dynamic 'learning by doing' approach offer interesting points for consideration by TEIs that are being conducted elsewhere.

3.5.2. Design

The TEI Resilient Syunik started two years ago under difficult conditions with the combined enduring pandemic and the 44-day long war with Azerbaijan. Around that time, MIP preparations were underway while Team Europe efforts were still relatively new in the EU's Neighbourhood. After initial discussions between the EU Delegation in Yerevan and member states, it was jointly decided to adopt an action-based focus and to target a specific province within Armenia instead of a specific reform or topic for the TEI. The Annual Action Plan for 2021, existing Joint Programming frameworks and its focus on the Syunik region were a significant influencing factor for the TEI. Syunik is a remote region in southern Armenia that is of high strategic (geo-) political importance as it shares a border with Azerbaijan in the East and Iran in the South.

In general, there are only few member states with a strong presence in the Syunik province. For the same reason, TEI partners worked actively with Switzerland, which is well-established, having implemented cooperation programmes in the province over a long period of time. All involved agreed that all member states could join the TEI as long as they were active in the region, regardless of the financial scope of their involvement. According to our interviewees, care has been taken to include activities that are sufficiently Syunik-specific. Interviewees highlighted that due to the high strategic importance of the Syunik region, there is a great interest among member states to be a part of the TEI and that after the launch in January 2023 four more member states joined. The resulting TEI is an eclectic package of small projects and larger ones, covering almost the full spectrum of development interventions that can be pursued in the field of rural development. To underline the efforts to promote inclusiveness, Switzerland became part of the TEI due to its long-standing involvement in the region and its broad portfolio of activities there. The needs and the cause of the TEI were considered very clear and compelling. Some interviewees felt that the existence of the TEI has meant that more funds have gone to the region than would otherwise have been the case. They shared examples of how the existence of the TEI allowed them to more easily justify proposed projects –ie, the existence of a larger TEI facilitates further planning and funding allocation–.

The TEI also counters one of the main critiques of Team Europe: that it was merely a packaging of already existing (bilateral) projects instead of promoting new joint actions. In the case of the Syunik TEI, packaging at the provincial level proved to be a strong point. The difficult period around the pandemic and the war with Azerbaijan had given rise to a perception in Armenia that Europe had forgotten it. The cooperation package that the TEI Resilient Syunik provides is interpreted as having increased Europe's visibility in Armenia. Some interviewees further suggested that the TEI, combined with the independent decision to deploy a non-executive, non-armed civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

Mission (known under the acronym EUMA), is seen as evidence that the EU 'does care' about Armenia and supports its territorial integrity. This provides a clear example of the political value of this specific TEI beyond its development cooperation benefits and indicates that some TEI benefits will be context-specific rather than general: the same feature that is considered a TEI strength somewhere may be regarded as a weakness elsewhere. The long-term operational value of 'connecting the dots' and having this overall mapping of the EU's engagement in the province, however, remains to be determined, in particular its potential for facilitating further coordination between the TEI members.

All our interviewees acknowledged that the initial phase of the TEI was a very iterative process ('learning by doing') with many very detailed discussions between all participants that was considered both 'confusing and creative'. Headquarters guidance was not considered that relevant in this respect, and instead the TEI efforts have been characterised as learning by doing. According to some of our interlocutors, there were initial expectations among some member states that TEI participation could mean getting access to EU funding, which shows the continued need for the management of expectations and clarifying the specific objectives and aims of TEIs.

The Armenian government strongly welcomed the TEI and its specific focus on Syunik and the regional Governor was trying to coordinate matters by formulating a table of needs. The EUD met with the Governor to discuss the plan while the TEI was under preparation. The Governor strongly emphasised the importance of donor coordination and was thus among the project's key initiators. Our interlocutors all felt that the TEI has helped to strengthen the relationship between the EU and the Armenian government. Beyond cooperation with government, the Syunik TEI stands out due to its high levels of inclusiveness and large variety of actors. While private and official actors are also involved, a large number of actions are carried out by Armenia's vibrant Civil Society Organisations in an implementing role.

One example of the dedication to inclusiveness concerns the participation of Finland. Finland is a 'non-resident member' of the TEI, with its Ambassador and staff working from Finland and only travelling to the region for meetings and other important events.[6] According to our interviewee, the project in Syunik funded by Finland was already underway when the TEI was founded and the EUD subsequently reached out to Finland to join the TEI. It was mentioned in our interviews that by joining the TEI Finland was hoping to gain visibility for its project and to engage more with other member states and the EU.

3.5.3. Governance

Interviewees confirmed with appreciation that the EUD took a leading role in initiating and guiding the TEI, in particular during its inception phase, and that the involved Commission officials had pushed for inclusiveness all along. The leading role of the EUD was considered very positive and the EUD's approach quick, competent and reliable. Now that the TEI is running and further planning has been completed in terms of clustering activities and setting up a monitoring framework, the plan is for the EUD to leave more initiative to the other

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6 In this context, a 'non-resident member state' refers to a member state that does not maintain a physical presence in the country where a TEI is carried out.

members. One interviewee emphasised that, in general, the TEI should in due course evolve from Commission-led to being jointly led. Member state interlocutors said that they now felt more confident about the TEI and sharing the guiding work than at the beginning. One member state interviewee noted that the TEI in Syunik is very active compared with others in the region. During the course of the TEI, joint visibility and communication guidelines were created, including standard formulations and hashtags. The TEI was considered more as a framework for already ongoing projects than as a guiding framework for future action.

In the beginning, coordination meetings at Head of Mission level took place once a month, while nowadays these meetings take place on average every two months. These face-to-face meetings are considered very helpful as information is shared and in particular smaller member states highlighted that they find them beneficial to get to know more about the country and other ongoing projects of member states.

Additional communication is done via e-mail. Some of our interlocutors highlighted that this mode of communication and the amount of information shared takes time to absorb and was sometimes hard to keep up with. Interviewees suggested that it would be better to meet more often in person to exchange ideas about the nature and focus of the various projects in order to gain a better overview, which could potentially be more effective than passive learning about the projects by means of general descriptions. This preference may not apply to all TEI participants, also in view of people's preferences for information sharing and learning, yet also reflects the variation between those members with adequate capacity for development cooperation and considerable portfolios, and those who have to combine this with other mandates and face time and resource constraints.

A joint TEI trip by the entire group was organised this year in May around Europe Day and was considered important for the EU to be jointly visible and seen to be doing positive things together. There was also a good media reporting about the trip. Such visits are key also to make sure that the heads of cooperation and/or Ambassadors are sufficiently aware and supportive of the TEI, which interviewees recognised as key in view of some recent personnel changes in this regard. An associated key initiative was the development of communication guidelines for the TEI that were shared with all members.

While these and other initiatives were valued by TEI members, this was less the case with a European Commission funded consultancy that supported the group in developing the Joint Intervention Logic (JIL) and associated matrix of indicators as a means of monitoring the TEI and its results over time. It proved somewhat challenging for some members to categorise their activities, some of them at an early or even emerging stage, to the various sub-themes that had been associated. Looking back, perhaps the development of the JIL came somewhat early in the process, yet at the same time the importance of actually monitoring what comes out of a TEI is undisputed –also in view of the time investment required by its participants–.

Beyond the specific nature and approach of the TEI Resilient Syunik, one horizontal concrete cooperation challenge raised by interviewees in relation to the inclusiveness of TEIs in general concerned the possibility of entering into joint projects with the EU. One partner sought to include the EU in an existing project yet realised that the EU's procedures were challenging

to work with. Due to indirect management, they could only work through a pillar-assessed organisation like UNDP or GIZ. To enable co-funding with the EU, such an organisation would then need to be involved as a 'middleman' to fund the organisation that was already carrying out the existing project. Flexibilities may be sought and explored, yet options to pursue joint actions appear to be biased for those organisations that are pillar-assessed by the EU. While clear in approach, the type of organisation that can be pillar-assessed may be technically sound but may not always be the most relevant and appropriate actor to implement an intervention.

3.5.4. Implementation

To secure a smooth implementation, a secretariat for the TEI is being set up and is run by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) as part of its project portfolio with the EU. ADA has an office in Syunik's capital, Kapan, and is managing several projects for the EU in addition to running the TEI's Secretariat.

The secretariat will be active in monitoring and reporting and is taking the aforementioned monitoring matrix and JIL as a basis. Based on the JIL, 17 indicators were defined, and member states will report on selected indicators that are relevant to their actions. For each of the 17 indicators there will be a methodological note on how and what to report. This process was also supported by a local partner that visited all projects and looked at log frames. The ambition is that there should not be parallel reporting for the TEI, but that instead TEI members can feed into this reporting process based on their individual and ongoing project reporting processes: specifically, each project implementer would report their indicator values to the ADA secretariat with their respective donor (TEI member) in CC. The methodology and general approach is expected to be ready by the September 2023 meeting of the TEI members and in that sense launch the next phase of the TEI process. Following these preparations and the support they provided, the consultancy contracted by DG NEAR in Brussels reported in detail on the good practices developed, which can be considered by other TEIs as part of their monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Overall, all our interviewees emphasised that the Syunik TEI is functioning well. Some suggested it could serve as a role model for other potential TEIs in other provinces in Armenia. Member states with smaller development cooperation footprints in Armenia, including those without a country presence, felt well included and highlighted that everything they get out of the TEI is beneficial and a bonus for them. There was a general perception that the developmental aspects of the TEI have helped the EU to improve its visibility in the region and in Armenia at large, while in particular smaller contributors felt that their individual visibility was increased as well ('the TEI makes us look bigger'). This visibility also potentially allows the EU to confirm the perception that, in view of other larger crises in the region, it has not forgotten about and continues to engage in Armenia. In that respect some interviewees also expected an internal effect in terms of the TEI supporting the preservation of existing ODA budgets in Armenia, in view of the external pressures to reallocate funding as observed by some EU member states –specifically in relation to Ukraine–.

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The (geo-political) importance of the combination of the TEI and the EU civil-military mission was considered equally important to the developmental aspects, as Armenia's territorial integrity and its borders are under threat. The government explicitly asked for an EU civilian mission in the region and the EU made it happen. Russia, in turn, was too late with suggesting its own, hence the deployment of the mission has been considered a strategic win for the EU. In this case, EU and member state interviewees emphasised that the TEI contributes to wider political objectives.

4 Conclusions

The EU and its member states have in recent years made important reforms to change the ways in which they cooperate with each other and with their international partners to deliver an ambitious and universal global development agenda. Team Europe stands out in this respect as it has generated a new positive spirit of working together. While the initial motivation for Team Europe was a shared conviction that the COVID crisis was too profound for actors to tackle individually, Team Europe has adapted into an ambitious agenda that seeks to change the way in which European actors seek to work better together.

This Policy Paper has analysed five TEIs of varying geographical scope, sector coverage, scale and level of implementation. On the basis of these five case studies, we identify a number of conclusions on the strengths and challenges of TEIs that are linked to the four associated key dimensions identified and based on our review of the literature and policy documents. Since the TEIs are not stand-alone efforts but are integrated into other European international cooperation initiatives, we include conclusions and recommendations on how TEIs could better co-exist with other tools and mechanisms, both pre-existing (such as MIPs) and new, like Global Gateway. Our assessment on the latter is based on the analysis conducted for this policy paper and also on recent studies on this particular initiative (such as Olivié & Santillán O'Shea, 2023).

4.1. Visibility and communication

In general terms, EU representatives perceive an increased visibility of EU action –both political and developmental– and priorities on the ground as a result of the launch of TEIs. Such a higher visibility, in turn, creates momentum and attracts interest –while in some cases also enables the mobilisation of additional funding–. This effect, which is generally perceived among European actors, is also noted by other stakeholders such as local counterparts and civil society representatives in some TEIs. Moreover, such a greater visibility seems to benefit particularly smaller member states with a limited presence on the ground, who feel that their participation in Team Europe raises their profile in a given country or region. This result is very much in line with the perception of increased coherence of Europe's external action as manifested by key informants when exploring Global Gateway's green hydrogen project in Chile. Some interviewees observed that member states with considerable bilateral development cooperation programmes experience stronger trade-offs between the visibility of the TEI and that of their own bilateral portfolio. Yet the same interviewees indicated that this in no way hampered their commitment to, and involvement in, Team Europe and TEIs.

Nevertheless, there are also a series of challenges in this domain. First, a number of local actors seemed more aware of the individual projects that were part of a given TEI than of the actual TEI itself, which might to a greater extent be targeted towards a European audience. This is the case with TEI-LAC, TEI-Paraguay and TEI-Armenia, and the issue has also arisen in the case of the Global Gateway green hydrogen project in Chile. Secondly, in this line

and referring exclusively to Global Gateway, in the two projects that were explored by Olivié & Santillán O'Shea (2023), interviewees thought that portraying Global Gateway as a European response to China's increasing presence in partner countries was not strategically beneficial for the EU's visibility vis-à-vis its partners. Other interviewees simply did not consider Global Gateway as a Brussels-based discussion to be relevant to the more concrete and action-oriented cooperation they were taking forward in the TEI. Thirdly, and related to this, in the case of TEI-MAV+, the association with Global Gateway raised questions among some stakeholders regarding whether the focus would shift from access to medicines to their production, while the main stakeholders emphasised that the initiative's 360-degree approach would be maintained. Lastly, the TEIs' visibility can be hindered when European and partner countries' political priorities are not aligned. This is the case with TEI-Paraguay, where the EU's gender equality goals are no longer shared, at least not enthusiastically, by the newly elected Paraguayan government.

4.2. Effectiveness and development impact

The TEIs explored in this Policy Paper, according to the perceptions expressed in the interviews, are considered to be aligned with European and, in general terms, with partner countries' development goals. This is the case with TEI-LAC, TEI-Cambodia, TEI-MAV+ and TEI-Armenia. Also, some TEIs have helped to mobilise additional resources and making a more effective use of pre-existing funds, since greater coordination of all stakeholders avoided the duplication and fragmentation of efforts, as in the case with TEI-Paraguay and TEI-Armenia. Also, although with some notable shortcomings (as explained below under 'Ownership'), partner countries' inputs are considered in the design process of TEIs, either directly, as in the case of TEI-MAV+, or indirectly, through the European actors' accumulated knowledge and experience, for example in TEI-LAC and in TEI-Paraguay.

Flexibility seems to be key for TEIs to achieve quick results and maintain their relevance over time. An adaptive approach has led to the creation of different governance schemes depending on the TEIs' scope. For instance, while the very large, regional and multi-actor TEI-MAV+ includes a permanent secretariat and its own support structure, TEI-Paraguay, involving only two member states and the EU delegation, is grounded on pre-existing European coordination schemes. What is more, both types of governance structures are considered by respective interviewees to be operational and beneficial for the particular characteristics of each of these TEIs.

Effectiveness and development impact might be also more easily achieved in some TEIs due to the involvement of the private sector and a good level of counterparts' ownership (TEI-MAV+) or inclusiveness (TEI-Armenia).

Nevertheless, TEIs consisting of a mere repackaging of pre-existing efforts –an observation that came up during conversations on TEI-LAC and TEI-Paraguay– could limit their effectiveness and additionality in terms of development impact. In other cases, however, where EU visibility serves broader political objectives, eg, in the case of Armenia where this expressed Europe's overall support to the country, what may –out of context– be considered

a weakness of TEIs –mainly summarising existing activities as opposed to doing something new– in fact can represent a strength. This underlines that the relevance of individual TEIs is context-dependent.

Another perceived flaw pointed out during this study is the lack of clarity (and potential information density and corresponding fatigue) on the intended reach of the TEIs' goals, funding, timelines or long-term operational (and added) value. This is the case in TEI-LAC, TEI-Paraguay and TEI-Armenia, as well as in both Global Gateway initiatives explored (BELLA II and the green hydrogen project in Chile). Although this downside more directly refers to visibility and communication, it has a direct impact on effectiveness and development impact. There might also be some confusion on the balance of elements within each initiative (for instance, vaccines vs treatment in TEI-MAV+) and on how TEIs are expected to coexist with other initiatives like Global Gateway (a comment made in the framework of TEI-LAC, TEI-Paraguay and TEI-Cambodia).

This unclear information sometimes combines with insufficient monitoring mechanisms (TEI-LAC and TEI-Paraguay) or an insufficient involvement of key stakeholders such as CSOs and private companies (TEI-LAC and TEI-Cambodia but also the Global Gateway project in Chile).

Lastly, in line with the visibility and communication domain but linked to effectiveness and development impact, the strong emphasis on geopolitics could ultimately hinder the development impact of projects, especially in the cases of the Global Gateway initiatives.

4.3. Ownership

Ownership is a hot topic in new EU cooperation mechanisms, as Global Gateway and TEIs are Brussels-led initiatives, aimed at putting together an 'EU offer' on how to relate with the Global South. Both Team Europe and Global Gateway have been criticised for the lack of ownership on the part of some of the main stakeholders involved, be it EU member states, partner countries' governments and administrations, CSOs, the business private sector or other multilateral organisations.

Notwithstanding this criticism, most of the interviewees tend to agree that TEIs are sufficiently capable of incorporating partner countries' priorities, even when local counterparts are not formally and/or deeply involved in designing the TEI. This happens indirectly, as mentioned above, given the accumulated knowledge and previous experience in partnering with the Global South (such would be the case in TEI-LAC, TEI-Paraguay and TEI-Cambodia) or even directly through the joint undertaking of the initiative and in the framework of concrete actions initiated or led by local actors (TEI-MAV+ and TEI-Armenia).

Ownership does, of course, vary over time. According to interviewees, member-state ownership has increased over time (as is the case of TEI-Paraguay). Nonetheless, interviewees pointed out that ownership on the part of member states was often uneven across European countries or limited to a very small number of them. In this respect, not all members with

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activities in a third country are involved in TEIs launched in a given country. Also, not all of them are equally committed or active (as in TEI-Paraguay and TEI-Cambodia), something that is also echoed in the Global Gateway projects (BELLA II). Additionally, ownership of local counterparts can tend to decrease (as in Paraguay with the new government's approach to gender equality issues). In any case, ownership has gone, as in TEI-MAV+, with the partner country setting the vision and the EU acting as an implementer, or reached high-level political declarations (such as the mention of TEI-LAC in the EU-LAC Summit's declaration).

Nevertheless, all of this should be framed in the context in which most TEIs are actually designed without the direct participation of local partners, CSOs, private companies, regional networks or any other stakeholder, different from EU institutions of member states, even if these ultimately participate in the implementation of the initiative. Moreover, even when local priorities are taken into account, they are limited to those of public authorities, even in the context of democratic flaws. Also, in this informal setting, ownership is the result of specific champions, who have generally worked previously with local or European counterparts, hence with the risk of a potential lack of continuity (see TEI-Armenia and TEI-LAC).

4.4. Harmonisation, joint planning and integration

In general terms, all five TEIs explored –and the two cases of Global Gateway projects revisited– show that these new initiatives, generally initiated by Brussels or by EU delegations on the ground, actually strengthen coordination, resulting in a stronger European dynamic. They have also proved in several cases to be appealing and interesting to member states that were not previously engaged in specific joint EU development cooperation activities (as with TEI-LAC and TEI-Armenia). Something similar has happened with Global Gateway's BELLA II, which shows the capacity to attract more and more diverse actors.

In some specific cases, such as in TEI-Armenia and in TEI-Cambodia, TEIs are integrated in pre-existing coordination initiatives and joint programming (specifically, MIPs), connecting with the shared ownership by EU institutions and member states alike for some TEIs, such as that on vaccines; in the case of Global Gateway's green hydrogen project this is partly reflected in the convergence of ideas between the parties involved. As mentioned above, the fact that TEI-LAC's objectives became part of the Joint Communication on Latin America and in the joint declaration of the EU-LAC Summit exemplifies the level of convergence and integration that a TEI can trigger, or show.

The institutional flexibility that has allowed to adapt governance schemes to the particular features of each of the TEIs explored, as mentioned above, also allows for a more consistent integration process between the members involved.

Lastly, while not without its challenges (see below), the possibilities for so-called 'pillar-assessed' agencies to manage EU funding, potentially co-funded by member states, is a key driver and potential multiplier of the TEIs. This is not without controversy, since not all member states have the same implementing capabilities, yet all in all it has contributed

to balancing the TEIs in a way that makes them less dependent on Commission/EUD initiatives. Such an advantage far outweighs the disadvantages of inclusiveness concerns that joint financing patterns may raise, which should, however, be considered with specific accompanying measures.

Challenges also arise in the area of harmonisation, joint planning and integration. In general terms, we can observe insufficient pro-activity (or even interest), in the first stage of TEIs, on the part of member states due to the centrality of Brussels and/or the EU delegations at the TEIs' launching and/or to the lack of priority attributed, at that moment, by the capitals in Europe. Also, the transition from theoretical integration to actual joint work and funding on the ground needs to be better dealt with, as shown in the case of TEI-Paraguay. This would be due, at least in the cases of TEI-Armenia and Chile's Global Gateway, to procedural obstacles and slowness. In general terms, and regarding the co-existence of TEIs with Global Gateway initiatives, there is not enough clarity on the internal coherence and the specific added value of each of them.

Additionally, in some particular cases, the integration potential would be limited by the scope of the TEI. Such is the case with TEI-LAC, given the very central role of El PAcCTO. Also, coordination challenges arise in Global Gateway's projects such as the green hydrogen project in Chile.

5 Recommendations

Based on this study's findings and its overall conclusions, a number of recommendations are presented, aimed at those involved in overarching policy discussions about Team Europe and in the further conceptualisation and realisation of TEIs. They have been clustered in relation to key policy concerns for Team Europe, as identified by participants at an informal seminar convened by the Spanish Permanent Representation to the EU institutions on 2 October 2023. These policy concerns are as follows:

- Clarifying and specifying the objectives of TEIs and Team Europe more broadly
- Deepening the operational framework and working modalities of TEIs
- Strengthening the inclusivity of TEIs
- Striking the balance between streamlining and local adaptation of TEIs
- Promoting broad-based ownership of TEIs

For all recommendations, it should be borne in mind that they are not directly applicable to individual TEIs in terms of representing a blueprint for success. Instead, they should be considered and adapted, if deemed appropriate, to their specific context.

5.1. Clarifying and specifying the objectives of TEIs and Team Europe more broadly

- The exploration of these five case studies shows that TEIs seem to have brought increased visibility for the EU. Under the right conditions, namely when there is a clear overarching narrative and strong demand from Europe's partners, this happens even when the TEI involves the repackaging of existing initiatives. A convincing TEI may also attract additional European actors and the accompanying resources. Yet having a clearer view of what visibility is sought (towards whom, for what end and of what) could help further strengthen it. This in turn requires determining and specifying the longer-term objectives of Team Europe and the goal hierarchies between them. For instance, expecting additional funds from EU members that join a TEI might have a positive impact on the total volume of financing for development but, nevertheless and in certain cases, undermine the goal of inclusiveness (and vice versa).

- In some cases, high ambition comes with a very wide thematic or geographical scope (TEIs in Latin America, Africa and Armenia). In these cases, a very precise set of objectives should be defined and communicated and an adequate governance, implementation and monitoring scheme put in place for these objectives. This should include a balance between the different substantive objectives pursued by TEIs.

- The co-existence of different EU mechanisms needs to be better resolved, both at the narrative/mission level and in terms of (technical and financial) procedures. The combination of TEIs, MIPs, joint programming and/or Global Gateway is not currently operating as a toolbox but rather as overlapping and sometimes competing tools. This also adds confusion in terms of communication, hindering the integration process.

5.2. Deepening the operational framework and working modalities of TEIs

- Possibilities for co-financed actions between the EU and member states should be explicitly promoted as a means of stimulating a shared analysis and capitalise on the knowledge of various European actors. In view of the greater demand and ambition for joint action, it should be considered whether the existing pillar assessment system for indirect management of EU funding is fit for the purpose –or whether other working modalities (such as trust funds or other forms of pooled funding) could be relied on instead–.

- Measures should be considered to make TEIs less dependent on Commission/EUD initiatives such as rotating chairs. The EU and its member states should in due course also assess existing Team Europe support structures and associated supporting projects, to consider how they contribute to the success and sustainability of TEIs over time.

5.3. Strengthening the inclusivity of TEIs

- Taking part in specific TEIs is and should remain voluntary. A voluntary nature results in a high level of motivation and commitment from respective members and also facilitates the identification of common objectives and associated internal coherence.

- Although smaller member states co-exist with bigger ones in TEIs and the former feel that TEIs have helped to increase their visibility (and not the contrary), a greater effort should be done in terms of strengthening the inclusiveness of TEIs. This is particularly necessary once the TEI moves from design to implementation, and when the difference in cooperation means and ongoing programmes becomes more apparent. In general, actors should be cautious of overly pragmatic approaches and make dedicated efforts to bring and keep all relevant European actors on board.

- Dedicated efforts are needed to bring in the expertise of 'non-resident member states' into dedicated TEIs where they can be of added value, including in-kind contributions and twinning processes. Such actions are needed in view of the significant differences between EU member states in terms of available bilateral development cooperation budgets, existence of implementing agencies and/or banks, and noticeable differences between member states in terms of their representational networks and offices in developing countries.

5.4. Striking the balance between streamlining and local adaptation of TEIs

- Flexibility in governance schemes leads to the adaptation of the institutional setting to the –potentially evolving– features of each TEIs (geographical and sectoral scope and number of members involved). This lowers coordination costs and has, potentially, a positive effect on effectiveness and development impact. Such a flexibility, however, needs to go hand in hand with clarity on objectives and procedures (see below) to avoid duplication, ambiguities and communication short-circuits. Given the early stage of Team Europe and the TEIs, there should be a margin for learning and generating evidence on what works under given circumstances as TEIs evolve, and these should in turn be effectively communicated.

- Over-prescription and standardisation of TEIs is a threat to the enthusiasm and commitment of all involved. As different levels are involved, and some supporting functions are Brussels-led, some technical support such as preparing intervention logics and indicator matrices may be well-intentioned, but can come at too early a stage in a number of TEIs. Both the timing and the depth of such support should be considered along with the TEI participants.

5.5. Promoting broad-based ownership of TEIs

- The TEIs explored in this study are facilitating the definition of an 'EU offer' that is first determined by EU partners and then presented to local authorities. As mentioned above, this process is resulting in a higher visibility of the EU that can now be perceived as speaking with a single voice. The process is not incompatible with a stronger level of partners' ownership. Instead, a clear shared yet sufficiently adaptive EU cooperation agenda facilitates subsequent demand articulation and ownership by its partners.

- While not being a representative sample, all successful TEIs analysed in this study involved strong partner involvement, while those with lower success similarly also largely concerned their (non-) involvement. Hence, once the EU has defined overarching cooperation objectives of specific TEIs, more precise EU-led initiatives should only be developed with the active support and involvement of local counterparts. These should be consulted and involved earlier in the process in order to guarantee (if possible) the success of the project and extend it to a wide array of actors, beyond local administrations and governments, such as development banks, multilateral actors (like UN agencies) and local networks.

- Further decentralisation of regional TEIs. Although the process of identifying and defining regional TEIs is Brussels-led, in the next stage dedicated efforts should be made to move the initiative to those in charge of developing and implementing specific actions in consultation with their local counterparts. Such 'devolution' of decision-making on TEIs would also better equip them to adapt and respond to local leadership and needs. To maintain coherence and promote learning, there needs to be a continuous dialogue between the actors involved in country-based actions and those contributing to cross-border (regional) actions.

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