

## **Innovation in development: The future of EU international cooperation**

**As a continuation of the high-level public debate held at the European Parliament on 17 October, the European Think Tank Group (ETTG) organised a research conference on 18 October. The conference was attended by researchers, partners and other stakeholders interested in exploring Europe's possible new development agenda.**

The plenary session focused on the post-Cotonou negotiations and on priorities for a stronger political partnership between Africa and Europe, while the different workshops deeply analysed specific topics related to the priorities for the European Union's external action, identified by the ETTG.

With regard to *globalisation and inequalities*, the panel members agreed on the importance of the role of technology and trade in addressing inequalities between and within countries. At the same time, participants did not deny that if not managed with caution, both trade and technology can have disruptive effects. In this regard, the panel structured as a possible solution that to adopt a more integrated approach to respond to the challenges arising from technological change. To do so, Europe should continue to keep in playing a leadership role in multilateral institution, finding new international partners and supporting national innovation systems in developing countries.

As per the *'sustainability revolution'*, the workshop underlined the importance of linking EU internal actions with its external impact and external SDG implementation (e.g. impact of internal EU action on outside world). The European Union should put the SDGs back into discussions with major partners like MICs, not only on aid, but also on trade, partnerships and investments. The participants also pointed out that, in order to implement the SDGs, the EU should engage with new partners (regional organisations, cities, partner countries, United nations, private sectors) and in configurations that cross the treaties (ACP, EDF). Priorities for advancing SDGs are regulations, data monitoring and evaluation.

Regarding *fragility, peace and development in sub-Saharan Africa*, the discussion revolved around the evolution of the concept of peacebuilding in recent years and how, consequently, it becomes necessary to consider both a new link between peace and development (without the first, there can be no second) and the importance of protection, to complement the humanitarian actions already in place. The European Union needs to define its role in the peacebuilding framework, dealing with peace and development issues in a more structured way: with new instruments, new training and more resources. Panellists agreed also on the importance of country tailored-conflict analysis, as information from the ground are crucial in developing and sustaining the right policy. This should allow Europe to address the concrete needs of local communities.

Finally, on *normative power and fortress Europe*, the panellists underlined how the legitimacy of the European Union and African states to promote democracy and human rights is currently under debate, as the European focus on migration is actually diverting the attention from human rights and democracy issues. In this context, the European Union needs to define whether it has to take full responsibility or share it with all its member states. What the panel participants defined as necessary, is a change in the perspective through which the migration phenomenon is analysed, abandoning the security aspects that for a long time represented the *fil rouge* whenever migration issues were at stake.

All the workshops seem to agree on the strategic importance of making new partnerships, and linking development cooperation and innovation. As Federica Mogherini said 'putting together in a coordinated manner all the instruments Europe has at its disposal, the European Union becomes the real game changer when it comes to development'.

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