DECENTRALISED COOPERATION: WHAT FUTURE FOR LOCAL TO LOCAL EU’S DEVELOPMENT POLICY AFTER 2020?

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For decades, European cities and regions have worked hand in hand with partners within Europe and across Africa, Asia or Latin America to establish partnerships and carry out cooperation and development projects together.

This ‘decentralised cooperation’ has made it possible to better adapt the EU’s cooperation and development policies to the needs of the people in the field, as they get engaged in the decision making process.

However, with the new Multiannual Financial Framework about to be negotiated, the role of local authorities in EU’s cooperation with third countries might be at stake.

In this Special Report, we will assess the role of decentralised cooperation in the European Union after 2020.
Mimica: Decentralised cooperation will remain at heart of EU’s external action

Religion should not be used to sow divisions

Decentralised cooperation: building bridges for local-to-local development beyond 2020

Decentralised cooperation gets results: the PLATFORMA coalition is there to prove it!
With negotiations on the next EU long-term budget about to start, Commissioner Neven Mimica defended Europe’s commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals and praised the role local authorities play in international cooperation.

Neven Mimica, the Commissioner in charge of international cooperation and development, spoke to EURACTIV.com’s Beatriz Rios about how the European Union plans to comply with the SDGs and what will be the role of local authorities in helping to do so.

The negotiation for the next Multiannual Financial Framework is about to kick off, do you think that the current proposal goes in line with the commitments reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals?

Yes, absolutely. The sustainable development goals are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which provides a global framework on how to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development across the globe. We are committed
Continued from Page 4

to this Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

We have proposed an ambitious external action budget worth €123 billion for the 2021-2027 period. This is around 30% up compared to the current budgetary period, which is a very significant increase. A key proposal within the external action is the one to create a single instrument on Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation of which at least 92% will go to official development assistance. This instrument is fully in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. Education, health, food security or the eradication of poverty – just to name a few – will continue to be at the forefront of our partnership with developing countries.

Do you believe that EU cooperation and development will be sufficiently funded in the next MFF?

It’s crucial that the EU can match its words with its actions when it comes to our commitments with the SDGs and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. For this, we need an ambitious budget. And I am proud to say that we have made such an ambitious proposal. According to the Commission’s proposal for the instrument on Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation, it would be endowed with €89.5 billion, which would allow us to increase the budget available for most of our work. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the budget would increase by 23%.

There are two caveats I need to make: First, the Commission proposal is very ambitious and positive for development cooperation, but it is the European Parliament and the Council that will decide. And second, I am convinced that the EU and its member states need to take all efforts to deliver on our firm commitment to spend 0.7% of our Gross National Income on development. So far, we stand at about 0.5%. The Commission’s proposal on the future budget would bring us a significant step further, but it would have to be reflected in the national budgets on development to go the full way.

In addition, we need to find new, innovative instruments that help us to do more with less. Thus, the emphasis on enhancing development financial instruments like the like the current External Investment Plan, that aims at providing leverage to private and public investments in sustainable development projects that can create new jobs and opportunities. ODA alone will not be enough to meet all SDGs needs.

After a deep analysis of all budgetary provisions, EURACTIV.com reported that the EU will spend more money on migration and border control than on developing Africa, what is your view on this?

I trust that discussion with our experts would help to easily dispel this myth. The majority of external expenditure in the EU budget will continue to be development cooperation, through our commitment to dedicate more than 92% of our funds to Official Development Assistance.

Local and regional authorities have played an important role in cooperation and development over the years, in particular in the localization of the SDGs. However, in the new MFF, funds seem to be more centralized. Do you believe in the importance of local to local cooperation? Are there any tools included in the MFF that might be used to this effect?

I am convinced about the importance of local actors for successful development cooperation. To implement the SDGs, we need broad partnerships going far beyond the government to government relations, in which local actors play an important role.

Let me give you just two examples to highlight that we are determined to strengthen the role of local actors: In fragile countries, cooperation with the central government may be difficult; in such case, however, experience shows that at local level you can have highly effective cooperation on issues such as waste management or local transport which helps to rebuild confidence at a larger scale.

Another example relates to the more advanced developing countries that are successfully improving their economic performance; in their transition towards more advanced economies, they don’t need any aid anymore but can still very much benefit from our support in terms of knowledge transfer or capacity building – which again is an area where city-to-city cooperation can be highly effective.

What we are proposing is a major streamlining of the external financing instruments for the next budget. Through the creation of a broad Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, complementarities between geographic and thematic instruments should be enhanced. Actions that are currently financed through thematic programmes (including those related to local authorities) should instead be implemented, to the extent possible, through geographical programmes.

This will help ensure that we will be better equipped to apply the right mix of tools for each country without causing overlaps or inconsistencies. It will also help bring EU action closer to partner countries and their populations.

What can local and regional authorities do within this framework to keep Continued on Page 6
engaged in this area? How would you like them to get involved in cooperation and development?

Discussions on the next budget are still ongoing with the European Parliament and the Council. Therefore, decisions are still to be taken. Nevertheless, I can already say that local and regional authorities will, as usual, have an important role to play when it comes to implementing actions. We rely on their collaboration to ensure the success of our development policies. I am sure that good cooperation will continue.

Another challenge ahead is the negotiation of the post-Cotonou agreement. How would you evaluate the achievements of the partnership now that it is under review?

With a single legally binding framework with underlying values and principles (ratified by all EU and ACP countries), the Cotonou Agreement has allowed us to achieve significant results in many areas that affect people’s lives.

It has also allowed the EU and the ACP to be more influential on the international scene. The most telling example of such political cooperation between the EU and ACP was their alignment of position in the ‘High Ambition Coalition’ that led to the Paris Agreement on climate change in December 2015.

As announced by President Juncker during his State of the Union speech, the relations with Africa are a priority for the EU. How can the follow-up to the Cotonou agreement contribute to this end?

The future “post-Cotonou” agreement will not be limited to the relation between the EU and the ACP as a group. Quite to the contrary, with a strong focus on the regional partnerships, it will, in particular, strengthen our relations with each African country and with the continent as a whole. This is important for taking our partnership with Africa to the next level.

Negotiations started only very recently – in New York on 28 September – but in concrete terms, an African pillar should focus on a set of priorities, based on the new political, economic, technological, environmental and social realities in Africa and the EU.

Priorities include unleashing economic opportunities (investment/growth/job creation), achieving peace and stability, managing migration and mobility, consolidating democracy and good governance, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and tackling climate change.

This approach is fully in line with the outcome of the African Union-European Union Summit held in November 2017 in Abidjan; it will take into account the diversity across the African continent and the specificities of each country.

In fact, the ACP-EU Partnership and the new “Africa-Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs”, announced in September by President

Continued from Page 5
Continued on Page 7
Juncker, are part of a single approach towards Africa. The aim is to bring our continents closer together by fostering growth, trade, investment and job creation, improving overall governance while supporting education and skills that will benefit European and African people alike.

Going back to the negotiation on the post-Cotonou agreement, are you already in contact with local and regional partners, as well as with civil society organisations?

The Commission has been maintaining a continuous dialogue with local, regional and continental partners (AU, SADC, ECOWAS, CARIFORUM, PIF) and with civil society organisations, through informal consultations and open debates. The Policy Forum for Development held annually in Brussels, and this autumn in Gaborone (Botswana), is a good example of that dialogue at work.

Proof of this mutual engagement includes the position papers produced by the European Confederation of Relief and Development NGOs (CONCORD) and by the European and International Trade Union Confederation (ETUC/ITUC). These are available online for public consultation. Other organisations have also made comments on the Post-Cotonou process, expressed their expectations, and flagged topics of specific concern for them.

We are certainly aware of the interest surrounding the future of the ACP-EU relations and we are committed to maintaining the same proactive dialogue with civil society organisations during the negotiations.

As civil society, ACP regional organisations are actors for cooperation under the Cotonou Agreement. In addition to regular dialogue with them, we have been conducting targeted outreach, to raise awareness and stimulate engagement early on in the process.

Migration will be a key issue among African and European partners, how to ensure that this does not become a condition to cooperate with them, as the New European Consensus for Development suggested?

As you refer to the new European Consensus on development, let me make one point crystal clear: The Consensus does not make development cooperation conditional on migration. In response to the complexities of today’s migration and mobility, it recognises that a holistic and structured approach is needed in order to maximise all EU policies and tools. We need to make migration an issue of aspiration and not desperation.

This is also true for Africa. Cooperation with African countries will never be made conditional to the migration file. For the post-Cotonou agreement, our focus will be on seeking tailor-made responses and strengthened partnerships with African countries, not on imposing conditions.
Good news for all the supporters of development policies: city-to-city development cooperation will remain at the heart of the EU’s external action. And localising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a priority supported by the European Union, writes Frédéric Vallier.

Frédéric Vallier is the secretary general of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), lead partner of PLATFORMA, the 10-year old pan-European coalition of local and regional governments and their associations, active in city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation.

Indeed, the 2030 Agenda, which will be at the core of European development aid in the coming years, clearly gives a pivotal role to local and regional governments. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda emphasises on the importance of local implementation and the necessity to involve all local players.

continued on Page 9
For that, local and regional governments have worked together to gain recognition of their role, and as a consequence, most of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are directly or indirectly relevant to towns and regions.

Being the sphere of governance which is the closest to citizens, cities and regions are best placed to conceive and implement local development strategies in coordination with all their local partners from the civil society and the private sector.

This role of local governments is clearly stated in the new European Consensus on Development adopted a year ago which confirms the 2013 EU communication on empowering local governments in partner countries. Moreover, city-to-city cooperation, or decentralised cooperation, is clearly mentioned as an aid delivery modality which contributes to the localisation of the SDGs. Unfortunately, words don’t always translate into facts and this is a very different picture when we see EU policy frameworks.

In the mandate adopted by the EU to negotiate the future partnership with the countries from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, known in Brussels as the Post-Cotonou framework, local and regional governments are marginalised. They are, for instance, absent from key issues such as the political dialogue and the programming of EU aid in ACP countries. This approach is a step back compared to the existing Cotonou Framework.

This agreement clearly states that local and regional governments have a complementary role to play in the framework and should, therefore, be informed and involved in consultations, should receive capacity-building, should receive financial support and, finally, should be involved in the implementation of projects and programmes.

While many things could have been improved regarding the role of local and regional governments in the EU-ACP partnership, the post-Cotonou Framework should certainly not make things worse!

Another recent contradiction between EU and international commitments regarding the role of local and regional governments in the 2030 Agenda context and its policy translation is the European Commission’s proposal for the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF).

This framework, which will define the financial orientations and instruments of the European Union between 2021 and 2027 will most likely include a new instrument for developing and neighbouring countries.

While the proposal does mention the role of local and regional governments on different issues, it fails to show how the EU will concretely support them. This is another step back compared to the current situation where local governments have a dedicated financial instrument for them and civil society.

In addition, while towns and regions are considered key players on urban governance, they are absent from the Commission’s perspective on key challenges where they actually have a strategic role. Indeed, on migration issues, on the improvement of the business environment, on climate change and on other key issues for the success of SDGs, local governments are nowhere to be seen.

It is time for the European institutions to understand that cities and regions are relevant when it comes to deliver and gather around all SDGs and not just urban issues!
Decentralised cooperation has been a pillar in international development for the past 10 years but stakeholders fear the new EU long-term budget might threaten the role of local authorities in the field.

Difficulties in acquiring a birth certificate often result in people struggling to obtain a passport, register for school, open a bank account or even getting married. This had been a problem for years in Dogbo, in Benin, but was solved thanks to a partnership with Belgian town Roeselare.

Decentralised cooperation allows European cities and regions to work hand in hand with partners within Europe and across the world to establish partnerships for cooperation and development projects.

PLATFORMA, an organisation that brings together local authorities and stakeholders working in the field, has been supporting decentralised cooperation for the past ten years.

“No country can develop without taking into account the local authorities,” Vincent Codjo Acakpo, Mayor of Dogbo and winner of the 2018 PLATFORMAwards underlined during a meeting during the celebration of the 10th Anniversary of PLATFORMA in Brussels.

Decentralised cooperation, Acakpo stressed, “brings the North and the South closer,” allows them to “learn from each other” and to exchange and duplicate good experiences.

The cooperation established between the two towns goes far beyond the development of the cities but led to establishing a close relationship, an exchange of practices but also of culture and values. “We overcome the old system of imposition,” Acakpo argued.

On the other side of the globe, Rob Metz is mayor of Soest in the Netherlands, a town that has been working on decentralized cooperation for over thirty years.

His experience goes from working hand in hand with a twin city in Germany to travelling to Iraq to visit the city where refugees living now in his village come from.

“They find important that their mayor now has been there and can understand now what they experienced, why are they here,” Metz explained. “And I can tell local people that not everyone that when people flee their countries is because there is a reason for that. It helps me do my job,” the mayor stressed.

Like Vincent Codjo Acakpo, Metz

Continued on Page 11
Continued from Page 10

believes decentralised cooperation brings communities together and allows experiences to be exchanged both ways, helping to put an end to the North-South imposition “because local authorities recognize each other because cooperation goes both ways.”

“PLATFORMA is not just an institution, is what bring us together,” he said.

THE BENEFIT OF LOCAL-TO-LOCAL COOPERATION

People tend to present their problems to local authorities, which are the closest public institutions to them. “However, even if local powers might have the solutions, often they do not have the resources,” the mayor of Dogbo stated.

“National governments have the resources but in most cases, they do not know the actual problems of the people in the field”, he warned.

This logic is applicable to international development as well and this is where decentralized cooperation can make the difference.

“We need to make sure that the legal text includes provisions so that local governments can spend,” McAvan said.

The proposal presented by the Commissioner for Budget Günther Oettinger has been criticised by the Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions precisely because it lacks localisation, in particular when it comes to international cooperation and development.

“We should remain vigilant so that the territorial approach does not disappear in cooperation,” Acakpo stressed.

Despite the criticism, Carla Montesi, Coordinator of the European Think Tank Group argued. “Cities and local governments have an important role in making Europe stronger,” she stressed.

THE FUTURE OF DECENTRALISED COOPERATION AT STAKE

Next year, the European citizens will go to polls, the United Kingdom will leave the EU, a new Commission, a new Parliament will take office, and a new generation of development programs will be designed.

Furthermore, in the coming months, the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council will have to negotiate the next EU long-term budget that will provide funds for the next 7 years.

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“Where national governments fail, local authorities can still succeed,” Linda McAvan, member of the European Parliament underlined.

This is why, McAvan said, the Committee on Development in the Parliament strongly supports boosting decentralized cooperation by strengthening the role of local and regional governments in the field.

Decentralised cooperation, Metz highlighted, “can help to reach national and international goals while promoting local cooperation.”

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a particularly important target for decentralised cooperation.

“The SDGs means that all citizens take responsibility and ownership for the future,” Tamar Taliashvili, Vice-president of the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia highlighted.

“If we talk about SDGs, it is very close to what local governments every day do,” Taliashvili insisted.

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The good news, the MEP highlighted, is that thanks to organizations like PLATFORMA, local authorities are more and more involved in the decision making process.

However, McAvan also urged local authorities to lobby their national governments, as they have the key for a stronger budget.

“All this is happening now and it is happening fast,” she warned.

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Despite the criticism, Carla Montesi, Director at the DG of International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission, defended centralised cooperation at the core of the EU executive external actions.

This demands an important and difficult political dialogue but sometimes the results are very important, she said.

In peace processes such as the ones ongoing in the Central African Republic or Nigeria, local authorities have been key in bringing the national government to the table, Montesi explained.

The Commission, said Montesi, tries to push forward decentralization in all cooperation projects with third countries.

In the past ten years, said Frédéric Vallier, Secretary General of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, “we have learned that the public policies cannot be carried out without the participation of local and regional authorities.”

“With the SDG we have won a battle, the one on the localization,” Vallier insisted.

The battle will now be working to preserve local and regional influence in EU cooperation and development strategy and to ensure that decentralised cooperation remains a pillar of the European external action.

“We are experiencing a rise of populism but cities are places of resistance,” Giulia Maci, Coordinator of the European Think Tank Group argued. “Cities and local governments have an important role in making Europe stronger,” she stressed.
Discover concrete examples of what city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation can bring to cities and regions from the EU and partner countries.

The PLATFORMA coalition just celebrated its 10th anniversary on 10 October 2018, at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels.

Learn more about the challenges of local-to-local development for the future!

http://platforma-dev.eu