

Report

Briefing Session for Parliamentarians, Brussels, 26 November 2007

Implementation of the European Consensus on Development: 2007 Policy Coherence for Development Rhetoric or Reality?

The first Report on Policy Coherence for Development, which was prepared by the European Commission and was finalized beginning of October, has intensified the discussion about Policy Coherence for Development within the EU. The report, generated by the Unit Policy Coherence and Forward- Looking Studies of DG Development, is one of the resulting working papers of the Commission after the EU adopted several commitments to promote Policy Coherence for Development in the ‘European Consensus on Development’ in 2005.

Because the report aims at “raising awareness and inform debates among all stakeholders within the EU” about Policy Coherence for Development (also referred to as PCD), the European programme of the Society for International Development (SID) initiated a briefing session on Monday the 26th November, together with the EDC 2010 and the EU Coherence Programme, to inform and discuss the findings of the PCD report with parliamentarians and other stakeholders.

The briefing session could not have been opened better then by the Commissioner for Development, Louis Michel stating that “all policy fields of the EU effect developing countries and contradictions with development aid should always be avoided”. A clear statement that reflects the political recognition of the importance and need of Policy Coherence for Development. “One of the clearest examples of incoherent EU policies are the subsidies for EU products. But if you look at where we started and where we are now, you can see we are correcting ourselves and we have set high goals. I am positively surprised about the capacity of our administration when I look at what is implemented and how they have digested all the corrections.” Michel said.

The recognition of PCD as a central element for development is for Mr. Michel today a reality in the European Union. The objective is now to put this concept into practice, “reinforcing the positive effects that European policies have on developing countries, so to support our partners’ efforts to reach the MDGs.” Commissioner Michel concluded that the EU was advancing on the agenda of Policy Coherence for Development, but still a lot would need to be done. Member states in particular need to take more and better action to promote coherence of policies at national levels.

After the worthy introduction by the Commissioner, the panel of experts, from different background and very active in the field of PCD, introduced themselves to the participants with their presentations. Louka Katseli, a current member of the Greek Parliament and former Director of the OECD’s Development Centre, gave a critical perspective from a national parliamentarians point of view. Katseli showed her concern about Member States’ awareness and capacities to promote policy coherence: “In Greece Policy Coherence for Development is not there, we can see big differences between the EU and Member States when we look at awareness and progress on this issue”. In her

presentation Mrs. Katseli made several recommendations for PCD to gain more basis, “there are few people specifically engaged with PCD and often capacity is lacking.” Therefore Mrs. Katseli concludes that sharing experiences and discussion among experts, decision-makers and NGOs is needed to put PCD in practice. Furthermore Mrs. Katseli stated that it is needed to streamline policy coherence through national budgets and that further progress of policy coherence should be monitored.

Thijs Berman, Member of the European Parliament and vice-chair of the development committee is very engaged with the subject of Policy Coherence for Development. According to Berman the Commission’s PCD Report is a good starting point, but he points to the obvious need to deepen it. Clear examples of incoherencies for developing countries are for instance high-tariffs on processed products and strict SPS-measures complicating developing countries to exploit trade opportunities. According to Berman we cannot always ask developing countries to attain to the same criteria as we in Europe do, a degree of flexibility is required.

According to Berman, the Report being a self-assessment and not a thorough external evaluation, does not provide useful tools to improve PCD. Therefore a political debate on improving coherence is needed. “I am in the parliament since 2004 and only for a short time a member of the Development Committee and it is clear that politicians are not aware of PCD. I have seen myself parliamentarians who one day plead towards more coherence and on another day in another Committee vote in favor of EU subsidies for our agricultural products while we know the effects for African countries and their products are disastrous!”.

Francoise Moreau, Head of the unit Policy Coherence and Forward Looking Studies of DG Development which published the first report on PCD, opened her speech by stating that Policy Coherence for Development above all is a tool to improve the impact of development aid. “To promote the implementation of policy coherence organizational mechanisms are important,” says Moreau. For example the joint ministerial debates to open the dialogue further about policy making. But she also admits the difficulties in the process of creating development policies. “Developing countries are not a homogenous group. Policies do have different effects on each developing country, so it is always hard to monitor in general impacts and problems occurring.” Like Louis Michel, Francoise Moreau also emphasized the growing political issue of migration, “Migration particularly is difficult because it concerns human beings and their fundamental rights of freedom to move, work and other principles of human rights.”

The PCD Report comes to the conclusion that PCD is widely recognized among the different actors, but progress on the national level is falling behind compared to the EU level. Capacity to promote coherence is often lacking and awareness, especially in non-development areas, is low. Therefore PCD and especially several outstanding issues still deserve more attention, debate and research.

Peter Heintze, director of the Evert Vermeer Foundation a Dutch political NGO actively lobbying for more Coherence in the EU Coherence Programme, described the PCD Report as being very thorough and detailed. But being too optimistic as well as the Commission sometimes failing to pinpoint where current policy measures actually undermine development objectives. Next to this, he pointed out that it remains unclear whether all member states contributed to the questionnaire and/or replied to all questions in the questionnaire, further clarification would be very welcome. The current self-assessment Report therefore lacks a critical point of view on the progress made by the Member States. Mr. Heintze concluded that there was a clear need for political leadership. The process of promoting PCD should continue under the direction of one institution. For instance, the Commission is the appropriate actor for pushing for more and sustained political will on national level. Next to this, implementation remains the biggest challenge.

The debate was concluded by Paul Engel, director of ECDPM, stating that according to him most development has been made on institutional level. Having in mind, for instance, that the Netherlands being the best country on the Commitment to Development Index only scored a six out of ten 'we have still a long way to go'. Mr. Engel concludes all commitments are so voluntarily that it's now up to politicians 'to take up the issue very seriously'. Calling as well towards academics and NGO's to put more evidence on the table to address incoherencies of policies for Development!

The presentations of the panel of experts were followed by a question and answer session, for contributions of the participants as well as the presentations please see the SID Europe website www.sid-europe.org.

For more information on the EC consultation on PCD please go to <http://ec.europa.eu/development/About/consultation/>