

## European Development Days 2016

### Turning commitments into actions?

Although it is considered by many as the 'Davos of Development', the European Development Days (EDDs) reach their tenth edition (15-16 June 2016) without the prestige and media coverage of the World Economic Forum. It is understandable that a development forum might not be able to challenge or match the attention given to the event annually held in Switzerland. In any case, one may regret the fact that this year's EDDs were to a great extent eclipsed in the media dedicated to European Affairs by the possibility of a *Brexit*. The forum is an important platform for discussing new trends in the European development policy and a major opportunity to exchange experiences with partners in both the developed and developing world. The Multinational Development Policy Dialogue of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (MNED) follows closely current development debates and supports this important initiative of the European Commission to strengthen the dialogue and cooperation among civil society organizations, experts and decision-makers in search of solutions for global contemporary development challenges.

After an extreme busy year for the development community, which included the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Agenda 2030, the launch of the EU Trust Fund for Africa and the adoption of the Paris Agreement, one single word constantly reminds the stakeholder community of the challenges

ahead: implementation. In this context, the EDDs 2016 were held under the motto 'Sustainable Development Goals in Action: Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future'. Without neglecting all the cross-cutting initiatives connected to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, the European Commissioner for Development, Mr. Neven Mimica, clearly stressed the focus of the event on the necessity to elaborate strategies to turn the United Nations sustainable development goals from commitments into actions.<sup>1</sup>

Over 120 events covering a broad agenda that included 15 key-topics of the global international agenda took place<sup>2</sup>. Therein, it is important to notice the effort of the European Commission to try to engage the development community to discuss the remaining challenges and reflect upon lessons learned and possible paths to respond ade-

<sup>1</sup> See *Key players from across the world come together for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of European Development Days* (IP/16/2175), available at [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-16-2175\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-2175_en.htm), access on 14 June 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The 15 topics were: inequalities; gender; 'leave no-one behind'; climate change; the circular economy/sustainable consumption production; the water-energy-food nexus; means of implementation; engaging the private sector; ensuring accountability, follow-up and review; inclusive sustainable and resilient cities; science, technology and innovation; trade, growth and sustainable development; working with fragile states; migration and refugees; and inclusive and peaceful societies.

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

**MULTINATIONAL  
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quately to the refugee crisis. In a moment where the European Institutions are still heavily criticized for the deal with Turkey and the lack of financial commitments to the EU Trust Fund for Africa, fruitful discussions were held with the stakeholder community on how to conciliate current global migration challenges with the principles on which the sustainable development goals (SDGs) are based.

The interest of the European Commission to build up on parallel processes taking place in the context of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations and support the role of subnational actors, especially cities, as key-agents for the promotion inclusive and sustainable development also became visible during the event. MNED has been actively engaged in the discussion on the role of subnational actors for the implementation of the Paris Agreement. The publication *Paris Agreement: How it happened and what next*, published in May 2016 in cooperation with Climate Strategies, discusses this and other issues relating to the future of global climate action.<sup>3</sup>

In line with the results of the Third International Conference for Financing for Development, extensive discussions on the role of the private sector as development agents, especially through public-private partnerships, were also conducted in the two days' time of the event. In addition, another topic on the spotlight during the forum concerned the future framework of cooperation between the EU and the ACP countries ahead of the expiration of the Cotonou Agreement.

This subject has also been a focal point of the activities of MNED, which organized in May 2016 the dinner debate *The Future of EU-ACP Relations* in cooperation with Michael Gahler MEP and Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung.<sup>4</sup>

The highlight of this year's EDDs was certainly the open ceremony though. Speeches were held by high-level authorities including presidents from developing nations, the UN Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Ban Ki-moon, and the Vice President of the European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Mrs Federica Mogherini. In his speech, the United Nations Secretary General stressed the challenges related to the implementation of the Agenda 2030. He emphasized the universality of the sustainable development goals agreed upon in September 2015 and the necessity to mainstream sustainable development in all policy areas. Mr Ban Ki-moon argued that in face of the difficult tasks relating to the implementation of the 2030 sustainable development agenda, development cooperation is critical. He pointed out the urgency to improve the quality of worldwide official development assistance (ODA) and the importance to make use of the holistic framework agreed in Addis Ababa to revitalize a global partnership for development.

In turn, Mrs Mogherini focused mostly on problems faced by Europe relating to the internal and external dimension of the EU foreign policy and on how current challenges might be used to re-

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<sup>3</sup> Available at <http://www.kas.de/mned-bruessel/en/publications/45077/> .

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<sup>4</sup> More information about the event can be found at <http://www.kas.de/mned-bruessel/en/events/68407/> .

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shape development policy and to some extent help address current internal European challenges. The Vice President of the European Commission started by acknowledging the dangers of a *Brexit* and arguing that for the first time in history the EU is about to move backwards instead of moving forward. On the refugee crisis, the High Representative reminded Europe that the continent's past is also one of migration. Mrs Mogherini underlined the moral obligation of the EU to promote growth and sustainable development around the world and in this context highlighted the importance of the agenda 2030. Finally she stressed the need to translate current development challenges and EU development policy responses into coherent policies and not to forget that they are also part of the response to challenges within EU member-states like radicalization, slow economic growth, and the need to advance a green economy. The High Representative highlighted the importance of putting forward comprehensive approaches and highlighted that the forthcoming *EU Global Strategy* was deliberately conceptualized not as a security strategy but as a coherent strategy that takes into considerations experiences and concerns relating to the role of the EU as a global actor, like those associated with the development agenda.

This year's edition of the EDDs did certainly not offer all the responses needed to address current development changes. At the end, this is actually not what this forum is designed for. In any case, in a moment where political turmoil put the future prospects of the European integration process into question, the event is not only a refreshing reminder of the great efforts made by the European Institutions and the development com-

munity in Europe and around the world, but also a chance to learn the lessons of thousands of projects that are already being implemented worldwide to fulfill the commitments of the Agenda 2030. One key-message that can be taken from the event is that there is an engaged development community that is exchanging experiences to try to develop better policies and take into consideration old and new global challenges. One can also see a European Commission that is aware of the importance to optimize a real comprehensive approach that integrates foreign, security, trade and development policies and is making genuine efforts to sustain multi-stakeholder dialogue on how to achieve more policy coherence and promote more and better global partnerships. With all its limitations, the EDDs show that action is already taking place and that there is a vibrant and engaged development community ready for dialogue, for pointing out deficiencies and for correcting the course so that in the long run the sustainable development goals might be achieved. The Multinational Development Policy Dialogue of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung will continue to follow the debate and promote the dialogue and exchange of experiences between European and non-European stakeholders in order to support the fulfillment of this agenda.