

Policy Forum on Development
Regional meeting Europe
Ghent, Belgium, 15-16 January 2018

On 15 and 16 January 2018, the first regional Policy Forum on Development (PFD) for Europe took place in Ghent, Belgium. Over **100 participants** from all Council of Europe countries, representing different civil society organisations (CSOs), local authorities (LAs) and EU institutions, attended the event. The meeting was part of the global PFD process facilitated by the European Commission which aims to foster and strengthen multi-stakeholder exchange and collaboration, as well as facilitate dialogue among all stakeholders with the EU institutions on EU development policies.



Opening remarks: Stefano Manservigi, Director General International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), European Commission (EC) opened the meeting by stating that the adoption of the European Consensus on Development aligned the EU's development framework with the 2030 Agenda, allowing the EU to implement the new approach to sustainable development in its future policies. "The operational details will become clearer once the next **Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)** will be agreed," he added. **Tine Heyse**, Deputy Mayor of the City of Ghent for Environment, Climate, Energy and International Solidarity, reflected on the fact that local and regional authorities play a growing role in the implementation of international projects and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) today. The city



of Ghent itself is involved in a variety of international networks such as [Eurocities](#). [Seamus Jefferson](#), Director of the European Confederation of Relief and Development NGOs (CONCORD), referred to the challenges faced by cities and local communities, which are the same as CSOs face, and welcomed the support they receive from the European Commission. He asked, “how does the EU effectively translate the commitments that it has made into its day-to-day programming?” and continued “the new Multiannual Financial Framework will show us where the priorities are.” He reminded participants that development effectiveness, gender and sustainable development should be mainstreamed throughout the entire EU budget, not just in development policies. He noted that CSOs and LAs have a crucial role to play in mainstreaming these common values.

An overview of the PFD and its role in the region: In this, session two members of the PFD Task Team, [Georgia Papoutsi](#) from Cooperatives Europe, and [Wouter Bousman](#) from PLATFORMA and [Loic Lallemand Zeller](#), Deputy Head of Unit of International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), European Commission (EC) explained how the PFD functions as a multi-stakeholder platform, bringing together different networks of CSOs and LAs from all over the world. In addition, current projects such as the revision of the PFD communications strategy and the ongoing multi-stakeholder survey were presented, as well as planned activities for 2018: the Global PFD in March, the participation in this year’s European Development Days and the next regional PFD for Africa in the autumn.

Policy Coherence for Development: During this session, the panel exchanged views and progress made on the EU’s commitment to Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) as a new and holistic approach to achieving the SDGs.

[Marie-Aurelie Vernin](#), Team Leader on PCD at DG DEVCO, European Commission, confirmed that the EU is a pioneer in PCD and that Member States are increasingly aware of the concept, although one of the current challenges is to adapt it to policy coherence for *sustainable* development (PCSD). PCD is being streamlined throughout the entire work of the EC. At the same time, the EU is regularly monitoring progress on PCD every two years. In keeping with the point that impact assessment is a fundamental tool to promote policy coherence, the EU is currently undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of PCD from 2009-2016, during which an **open public consultation** will soon be launched and which will result in a staff working document by the end of this year. The speakers also underlined that **strong inter-departmental communication** is crucial to guarantee the proper implementation of the SDGs. It is equally important to raise awareness among different governance levels (local, regional, national) and involve multiple stakeholders in the process. [Mirza Muleskovic](#), Head of Department for International Affairs and Projects of the Montenegrin Employers’ Federation, regretted the fact that relevant stakehold-



ers such as social partners, trade unions and employers are often not taken into consideration in the consultations. And **Marta Marin**, Delegate of the Basque Country to the EU, insisted, “**localising SDGs** is PCSD in practice. All the responsible authorities and citizens need to get involved.” The panel was followed by an active debate. Among the issues discussed were: the question of how to improve the setting for horizontal cooperation within institutions (“How to break the silos?”); incoherence in priorities between different EU programmes or the delay in implementing the SDGs in EU policies; and the need to bring the SDGs to the current “future of Europe” debates.

Enabling Environment: This session dealt with current trends in civic space in the achievement of the sustainable development goals, in particular with respect to increasingly shrinking workspaces that CSOs and LAs are confronted with throughout the world today.

Vasilis Maragos, Head of Unit for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and the Eastern Partnership in DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), European Commission, gave an overview of DG NEAR’s work with civil society, the challenges faced in some restricting environments and the continuing patience, perseverance and engagement with which the EU strives to address the main challenges for civil society. He also mentioned new innovative approaches and the focus to grassroots and the future strategic partnerships they plan to develop. On the Eastern Partnership, he mentioned the Eastern Partnership Summit held in November 2017 and its follow-up. With respect to local authorities, he stressed the issue of concrete results for citizens and activities in the areas of energy efficiency, economic growth and the Covenant of Mayors. **Anton Leppik**, Executive Secretary of the Pan-European Regional Council – International Trade Union Confederation (PERC-ITUC), pointed out that a comprehensive social dialogue is needed, in particular in Eastern Europe. **Frédéric Vallier**, Secretary General of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), welcomed the fact that local governments are increasingly involved in different policy areas through **decentralised cooperation**. And **Asa Thommason**, EU Policy Coordinator from CONCORD, shared the results of current studies and surveys, which show **worrying trends** for CSOs including the lack of workers’



rights, interference of the authorities, the arrest of people, a lack of belief in social dialogue, limitation of the right to strike and to protest, and human rights abuses. All these examples are proof of the shrinking space of CSOs and LAs imposed by national governments. The audience contributed actively to the session with many questions and comments, confirming the perception of growing restrictions in civic space. Some participants asked about the causes of the shrinking space as well as potential new ways to support trust-

building at the grassroots level. Using the SDGs as a framework for dialogue and engagement in countries where civic space is being undermined could be one possible solution. At local level, decentralisation and knowledge transfer/capacity-building from EU to partner countries can also be “a good basis for creating an enabling environment.”

Cities: This session focused on the realisation of integrated sustainable urban development and how current challenges in city governance (city and land management, urban planning or urban mobility) affect local authorities and CSOs, including the private sector.

William Cobbett, Director of City Alliances, presented four systemic obstacles that prevent growth in cities and thus create a “disabling environment”: the intergovernmental fiscal framework; the provision of services in general and access to land; the capacities of local governments as well as gender relations in the city. In addition, he called for “urban decision-makers to be empowered and resourced. It is not money that is missing in developing countries, but rather **frameworks** and **abilities**.” **Paolo Ciccarelli**, Head of Unit for Cities, Local Authorities, Digitalisation and Infrastructure, DG DEVCO, EC, also underlined that public finance management is a key issue and that fiscal planning could allow cities to become more self-sufficient. The speakers stressed the need to engage all relevant actors (private sector having a very important role) in these processes and that migrants/the diaspora bear an important potential for urban development. Twinning and other **city-to-city** or **peer-to-peer partnerships** can also have a positive effect on sustainable urban development, although sometimes it is not so easy to justify projects of decentralised cooperation to the citizens in developed countries. “It is our job as politicians to transmit these ideas to them,” stressed **Jérôme Tebaldi**, Deputy Mayor of Tours (France), Cités Unies France. The debate also focused on inequalities between or within cities; social dialogue; corruption; private sector involvement and long-term solutions vs. short-term interventions.



Private sector accountability in development: The panellists in this session explored the question of how to ensure that private sector interventions support development goals. The first part of the session was dedicated to presenting various initiatives of innovative development financing, in particular the recently launched **European Investment Plan (EIP)**. All the speakers agreed that private sector investments in developing countries are needed to achieve the SDGs. However, key elements in the debate were how we can ensure that private companies create decent jobs and **respect international conventions** (i.e., ILO conventions on labour rights, environmental and human rights standards). **Wobine Buijs-Glaudemans**, Mayor of Oss (Netherlands), Association of Netherlands Municipalities, recalled that “as a local government, I help my industries, universities and entrepreneurs to take part and deliver SDGs.” In addition, through decentralised cooperation, local authorities can have a positive influence on the implementation of SDGs in their partner cit-

ies or regions. However, “we need a systemic change to people-centred development” according to **Marc Noel**, International Development Director of the International Cooperative Alliance.

The audience participated in a lively debate, touching on many different issues such as: the challenges to attracting investors; the difficulties of investing in fragile states/macroeconomic stability; corporate social responsibility policies vs. changing the core business towards SDGs; transparency and accountability; support of cooperatives; differentiation of private sector(s); economic vs. SDG viability; and the contribution of the private sector to other development challenges such as resilience and terrorism, not only growth and jobs.



Security, migration and peacebuilding: The panelists in this session discussed how EU development policies can provide solutions to the rising number of challenges with respect to fragility, inequality, climate change and forced migration, and the role CSOs and LAs play in this. The panel started off by explaining that **fragility** and **resilience** are rather new topics to the development community, however, they are one of the main challenges for the development agenda today. This was reflected in the

2015 OECD report, which looked at fragile countries not only from the point of view of economic development but also from other societal, political and security aspects. Some practical examples from decentralised cooperation were presented and many other relevant aspects were commented on. For example, how mainstreaming decent work is a tool to address fragility in post-conflict situations and that it can prevent more serious abuses (slavery, child abuse). It was stressed that mechanisms to cope with fragile settings do not necessarily mean that these societies become resilient. However, “only by achieving resilience, can development be sustainable,” underlined **Manuela Cabral**, Head of Unit for Resilience and Fragility, DG DEVCO, EC. And **Liina Carr**, Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, reminded the audience that “de-

velopment must mean an inclusive dialogue, not just social dialogue but with wider CSOs.” This was complemented by **Izabela Toth**, Senior Strategist at COR-DAID: “if there is no ownership at local level, there is no way that development can be sustainable.”

Migration aspects were also widely reflected and discussed from different perspectives, including the refugee crisis, humanitarian actions, demography and labour market mechanisms for integration. It was noted that Europe is not the only



region that is facing this challenge. The audience responded with various questions and comments on how societies that repeatedly suffer shocks can prepare better to resist them; the need to invest in restoring the social contract to normalise the local setting; and how local governments should be included whenever possible in a more permanent dialogue in this field or work.

Conclusions, recommendations and closure: **Rosário Bento Pais**, Head of Unit, Civil Society and Foundations, DG DEVCO, EC, concluded the two-day meeting by saying that “inclusive dialogue and partnership has been very present at this first European PFD meeting.” She continued “there is an added value to having the private sector at the PFD discussions. They enrich the debate and have become more visible.” **Izabela Toth**, Senior Strategist at CORDAID also referred to the positive evolution of the PFD since the beginning of the Structured Dialogue (“this is not a process, but a movement!”) and that it would be desirable to include more young people from the PFD constituencies in the debates: “We should get more global youth movements involved in the SDG process, they are the future of our talks.”



And finally, **Kelmend Zajazi**, Executive Director of Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe, welcomed the growing EU focus on urban development and local authorities in these past years.

One of the major remaining challenges for both CSOs and LAs is the shrinking space for action which was a recurring element in the debates during these two days. The topic will be further discussed in the upcoming PFD meetings, including the PFD Global Meeting in Brussels scheduled for March 2018.