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# Shifting priorities of the EU as a development actor: context and consequences

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## ABSTRACT

EU development policy conforms reliably to a stable and predictable policy-cycle between 1957 until the early 2000s. After that, we see a shift towards more explicitly frame-based outputs utilising the mechanism of policy nexuses. This article, drawing on a range of primary policy documents and key case studies, illustrates the difference between the first era by which EU development retains a stable process within the boundaries of the policy cycle and the subsequent shift to the use of ‘framing’ to bind a series of separate activities to the core of development policy via the use of ‘policy nexuses’. The article concludes with reflections on the resulting seminal changes to the EU’s overall approach to development, and its implications for the EU as a development actor.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

With roots as far back as the 1957 Treaty of Rome, European Union (EU) development policy represents a vast area of activity, one that has witnessed several fundamental changes in both its definition and goals. These same changes have largely occurred in parallel to the seminal changes of the European Economic Community (EEC) and subsequently the EU itself, as a regional and global actor. The way the EU’s development policy has evolved over time has been subject to recent academic study (notably Bergmann, Delputte, Keijzer, & Verschaeve, 2019; Delputte & Orbie, 2020; Furness, Ghica, Lightfoot, & Szent-Iványi, 2020; Hackenesch, Bergmann, & Orbie, 2021a; Saltnes, 2021). This literature highlights that by the early 2000s, EU development policy had evolved to become “a self-standing EU external policy area” (Bergmann et al., 2019) with an explicit legal focus on poverty reduction (Koch, 2015). The same literature shows that since the high water mark of the Lisbon Treaty, EU development policy is increasingly being used to “serve” other areas of external action. We examine how this evolution has occurred since the turn of the millennium, showing that a series re-framings have occurred that graft development onto other goals via a series of

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“nexuses”, including security-development, migration-development and climate-development (see Carbone, 2013; Hackenesch et al., 2021a). The challenge is that as development transformed from a core policy to a multipurpose “one-stop-shop”, it has shifted from “constitut[ing] the core of the EU’s external relations” (Steingass, 2020) to a part of the EU’s increasingly multi-layered, integrated approach to external action. This approach to development is required to address multiple “root causes”, as well as the myriad consequences of poverty, inequality, weak governance, climate change, environmental degradation and unmanaged migration (Furness et al., 2020) and as such is constitutively different from its post-2000 successor in its definitions, budget, designated actors, as well as its implementation and evaluation.

We acknowledge that the EU’s actions have been informed by the wider post Washington consensus narratives (Delputte & Orbie, 2020) and that similar shifts have occurred in the development policies of other DAC donors creating a series of tensions in development policy in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom (Swiss, 2018). Thus, we see some convergence around the increasingly wide range of policy instrument designated as “development” tools, and aid-based actors, including those from the private sector. However, given the way the EU has presented itself as an international actor these changes have profound consequences for the EU’s overall actorness and this forms the overall focus of the paper. The accumulative influence of emerging development actors (especially China) in Africa combined with increased agency on the part of developing countries has shifted the dynamics of development (Carbone, 2013; Haastrup, 2021) and triggered a period of relative decline in the EU’s influence in this and other regions, with consequences for the EU vision of itself as a global actor.

This article first outlines how we apply the policy cycle approach before outlining the same for policy framing. By mapping against “centrepiece” documents that reflect the “feelings of the EU a group” (Olivé & Pérez, 2019, p. 186), and underwritten by public policy analysis and scholarship on policy framing, we suggest that while the *policy cycle* best maps the historic phasic qualities of development as an autonomous EU policy, *policy framing* analysis and the use of nexuses best identifies the procedural and substantive shifts entailed post-2000. We then show that framing cross-policy responses via the key nexuses identified in EU documents and the academic literature (migration, private sector actors, climate change and energy) provides a useful way to understand the wider political drivers behind EU development policy. Our concluding observations suggest that future development framings may prove catalytic for EU actorness, such as entailing radical overhauls to accommodate the expediency of transformations like Brexit and the rise of non-traditional donors or fundamentally damaging, given populist European governments demonstrating increasing scepticism about foreign aid and the ongoing migration pressures.

### **Applying policy cycles and policy framing to EU development policy**

Policy definitions are all-important. Ought EU development policy be defined *strictu sensu* on the basis of financial input from the EU and quantifiable progress in recipient communities and states, driven by budgets to improve basic living conditions? Or can the policy as a whole be “reconceptualized as an interrelated set of multifaceted economic, environmental, and institutional challenges” epitomized by the SDGs, or set-pieces

like the 2017 New European Consensus on Development (Furness et al., 2020). More challengingly, ought EU development policy retain its traditional focus on poverty alleviation as an *end* in itself, or must it now operate as one of many *means* to complex ends within EU foreign affairs more broadly? We argue that there is a visible shift in the definition, implementation, and evaluation of EU development policy between its extended first phase (1957–early 2000s) and its emerging second phase. To understand the nature of the shift and its implications for EU development policy, we suggest that the first phase is most effectively captured via the phases of the policy cycle. A central methodological feature within public policy analysis, the policy cycle itself is a convenient phasic structure, in which each successive dimension of a given policy is effectively captured in consecutive self-contained cycle. Getting the most out of the policy cycle depends upon goodness of fit. As illustrated below, EU development policy in its emergent period of 1957–2000 evolves, progresses and operates in relatively stable steps. This first phase of EU development policy can be reliably analysed thanks to its largely *linear* progress in moving steadily around the policy cycle. In doing so, this key facet of EU policy can be plotted from its first stage of agenda-setting, to formulation and policy construction; from formulation it moves onto the adoption of preferred choices, underwritten by tools, actors and budgets, into the implementation and monitoring stage, and finally evaluation in which the overall policy is maintained, adjusted or terminated (see for example Jann & Wegrich, 2007; Janssen & Helbig, 2018).

Both the extensive and long-term development agreements including the Yaoundé Convention (1963–75), the first Lomé Convention (1976), its subsequent renegotiation and renewal between 1985 to Lomé IV in 1999, as well as pre-2000 centrepieces like the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, as well as the first stage of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement can all be mapped against the structure of the policy cycle. Broadly speaking, each of the key EU development accords as well as EU treaties covering development provisions illustrate the synchronicity of the EU’s desire to combat poverty alongside the requirement from recipient states for aid, preferential access based on quota systems, and parallel forms of investment and support. These goals were prioritized and enacted through the successive stages of EU development policy, as it rotated around the policy cycle in terms of identifiable problem-solving definitions, tools, actors, implementation and evaluation. While each phase of the policy cycle can be disaggregated into analytically separate stages, they remain conceptually inseparable, because these same components were supported procedurally at the institutional level by the EEC/EU, sustained substantively in terms of their overall goals and work in linear fashion from the perspective of policy analysis. Indeed, Maastricht established the EU as a global development actor by formalizing development itself as a competence shared with its member states and introduced the focus on poverty.

However, while its approach remained one of solidarity between the global north and south, Maastricht’s Common Foreign and Security Policy arguably sowed the seeds for future cross-policy bridge-building in which EU development policy could augment the EU’s own identity, independence and emerging influence (Treaty on European Union, 1992, p. 4). This trend was accelerated by shifts to post-2000 Cotonou framework in respect of specific changes to the application of conditionality to and beyond the “essential elements” of democracy, human rights and rule of law to encompass wider modes of “good governance”. EU development in this first era was characterized by

*autonomy* in terms of its overall policy status, *normative/idealism* in terms of its external interests, *poverty reduction* (narrowly-defined) in the interpretation of its overall goal, its manifestly ends-based purpose requiring other EU external policies to operate as a means, “in support of development concerns” (Bergmann, 2019, p. 537).

The policy cycle best captures those areas in which EU policy develops in a phasic fashion via a series of non-radical evolutions. However, the policy cycle is less capable of handling episodic, and even radical divergences that occur *beyond* the perimeters of the policy cycle. These developments are resolutely non-linear, defying the built-in, phasic structure of the policy cycle, either by materially altering the fundamentals of the original definition (formulation) of EU development policy, or substantively transforming the modes of its initial use (agenda-setting), its subsequent implementation, or the criteria of its evaluation. The policy cycle is even less appropriate in discerning both the discursive rationale behind such shifts and changes, and the particular tools – in this case “nexuses” – used to re-interpret, or re-frame aspects of EU development policy. Such shifts fall demonstrably beyond the scope of the policy cycle, and require a different format, one capable of capturing the iterative, possibly unrelated shifts the EU development policy has undergone in its second, post-2000 phase. As explored below, it is during this second phase that EU development policy exhibits repeated examples of being reworked, and essentially “reframed” to represent a range of alterations in from its initial definition, implementation and evaluation. As such, drawing upon the methodology of framing itself provides an optimal method of deconstructing these changes, as well as fresh, but equally rigorous mode of analysis when set against the use of the policy cycle to discern the work of EU development policy’s first phase.

The use of framing within policies is essentially that of *effecting change* both to the nature of a policy, and the institutional level in which the policy operates (see Daviter, 2007). In this way, as Knill and Lehmkuhl argue, the use of frames “influence values and participation patterns” at domestic, European or even global levels “in a direction compatible with specific projects or ideas” (1999, p. 24). From an analytical perspective, examining policies to see the specific frames chosen by policy-makers is highly effective method of exploring the nature and implications of such changes. In the present case, they effectively capture the non-linear alterations that occurred within EU development policy operating *beyond* the bounds of the policy cycle, and on occasion, the profound change over a comparatively short period. Policy frames are therefore a productive avenue for the current analysis, helping to illustrate clearly that “EU development policy can be conceptualized as a distinct discursive space, subject to continuous processes of (re) framing” (Bergmann et al., 2019, p. 536). As explored below, a number of primary policy documents illustrate the rapid-fire transformations affecting the definitions, implementation and evaluation of EU development post-2000.

This process of framing and reframing has had two significant impacts, both of profound importance for the location, and role of development policy within the terrain of EU foreign affairs. First: framing has shifted developments *procedural* methods from stand-alone implementation, separate budget lines and self-contained evaluation to sit as part of a wider policy toolkit justified largely under the efficiencies of the Comprehensive Approach. Second, framing: and particularly the use of eponymous “nexus” – has shifted the *substantive* composition of EU development from that of an autonomous policy focused chiefly on poverty-reduction a multipurpose vehicle tool by which the

EU can justifiably tackle a set of highly multifaceted, though not necessarily interrelated twenty-first century challenges as part of EU foreign affairs overall. The use of “policy nexus” effectively permits one stand-alone policy like development, to be subsequently spliced with the implementation, tools or even goals of separate, and possibly unrelated policies. As explored below, the pressures of twenty-first century development policy inevitably demand generosity, commitment and flexibility to keep ahead of the complex needs of both recipient communities and demands of donors alike. Few policies can remain entirely autonomous of the wider exigencies of foreign affairs. As examined in the conclusion, the unreflexive quality of constant framing of development policy, combined with the discursive impact of nexuses that routinely cross-fertilize the goals and tools of other policies may not ultimately produce good results for either side.

### ***Bringing in policy frames***

From 9/11 onwards, with the rise of failed states, terrorism and a host of key security risks (identified first in the 2003 European Security Strategy), the EU underwent a substantial re-evaluation of its role relative to wider external goals. Key governments and polities in the global north, alongside shifts in central international organizations, led by the UN, and prompted by the emergence of performance indicators like MDGs saw broad, multi-policy support for the theme of “sustainable development”, requiring aid to be rendered quantifiably more efficient in its costs and effective in its outcomes. Redistributed amongst other global goals, aid itself would begin to underwrite, rather than pioneer foreign policy. Accordingly, EU development policy in this second (and current) era transformed into an incorporated rather than autonomous part of the EU’s overall policy toolbox. Some of these reframing’s may complement the way the EU characterize itself as an actor, including the use of the UN’s Millennium and then Sustainable Development Goals (MDGs and SDGs), allowing the EU to produce a robust approach to sustainable development. Other re-framings however are driven increasingly by the rise of private-sector/ foreign direct investment interests, as well as overtly security-driven dynamics connected to enhanced control over borders, migration, and energy. Thus we see the shift to strategic interests, which we understand to be general, overarching interests that overrule specific policy objectives, including economic, development and human rights objectives, in the myriad, multi-dimensional approaches to development, some of which operate as root causes and precursors (e.g. insecurity), others only partially related to poverty-reduction (e.g. energy security), operating instrumentally in support of procedural coherence in EU foreign affairs (Hadfield, 2007).

Early examples of disruptive reframing occurred with the 2005 European Consensus on Development. While poverty eradication remained a “moral obligation” for the EU (European Union, 2006), it was no longer an autonomous goal, but rather a precondition to a range of global goals enabling the EU to build “a more stable, peaceful, prosperous and equitable world”, diminishing at a stroke the overall autonomy of development as a policy (European Union, 2006, p. 8). The impact of the Treaty on European Union (Lisbon) in 2009 codified this change by setting out that development policy must be conducted within the broader framework of the EU’s external relations. The Lisbon Treaty is very much a product of its time; attempting to respond to increasing security challenges

and globalization in the first decade of the new millennium, both of which “test[ed] the traditional boundaries between external and internal issues” (Sherriff, 2019, p.17).

The EU joined a global conversation on the merits of retooling development policy alongside other key DAC actors, such as Australia, Germany, Canada and the USA (including merging development policy and ministries within broader foreign ministries). Austerity-driven demands arising from the 2008-9 Eurozone crisis also framed the implementation of Lisbon, leading to the streamlined methodology of the Comprehensive Approach in which budget cuts bit deeply into development spend at both EU and member state level. Aid budgets were redirected to reflect broader concerns, including the advent of re-framing driven by issues external to the EU itself, rather than the needs of recipient countries.

In this way, development policy has moved from being an end in itself to a means by which to promote a wider array of external EU policies. In doing so however, the process has rendered the EU a *less*, rather than *more* distinctive development actor regionally and globally. Although Lisbon attempted to retain aspects of development as separable from the growing bulk of EU external affairs, two distinct shifts in this same period undermined that approach: the pragmatically-oriented Comprehensive Approach that defined the Lisbon era itself, and the instrumental ethos of the “integrated approach” set out in the 2016 Global Strategy (Faleg, 2018). The Comprehensive Approach itself has financial and institutional roots, both of which are important for development policy. From an institutional perspective, it is part of the larger goal of the Lisbon Treaty to ensure far better coherence in EU external action, principally through institutional, horizontal and vertical coherence. For development, horizontal coherence (improved coordination between external policies) was affected both by the High Representative/Vice President’s “mandate as one of the guardians of coherence” and “turf battles on the division of tasks between the EEAS and the Commission staff of DG Development” (Pomorska & Vanhoonacker, 2016, p. 55). For development policy, the outcome represented a *procedural revolution*, namely the permanent rupture between the two halves of the development policy cycle, as explained by Vanhoonacker and Pomorska: “... the EEAS would be in charge of the political and strategic choices, while the Commission would assume a more technical role and deal with implementation of development projects. It led to concerns that EU development policy would become increasingly politicized, leading to a dilution of its core objective of reducing and eradicating poverty” (2015, pp. 55–56).

These concerns became evident in the *substantive revolution* brought about by the Comprehensive Approach, initially designed to address the ongoing financial constraints prompted by the 2008–9 Eurocrisis by ensuring that EU foreign policy operate in a more joined-up fashion, avoiding duplication and extra costs. While the goal of streamlined tools allowing the EU to act in a more “strategically coherent and effective way” specifically towards “external conflicts and crisis” was itself laudable, the increasing use of the policy “nexus” by which to effect the splicing and layering of policies pursuant to integration has in practice permitted a seemingly endless series of iterative, but highly consequential changes to the overall goal and viability of EU development policy (Vanhoonacker and Pomorska, 2016, p. 56). We argue that from a conceptual perspective, these separate changes can no longer be institutionally or indeed substantively



mapped against the policy cycle, and must perforce be captured via the use of dominant “frames” that represent the dominant approach of a given political agenda.

### **Integrating nexuses**

One of the central mechanisms for effecting precisely the transformations outlined above is that of the policy “nexus”. As EU development policy is invariably one of the two or more policies that are subsequently conjoined into a given nexus (e.g. the development-security nexus, the development-climate nexus, or the development-innovation nexus), a brief explanation is required. In essence, the use of nexuses promote two possible approaches. The first is a technical “binding” of two or more policies, with the deliberate aim of ensuring that commonalities held across both policies are rendered symbiotically operable in the resulting nexus. At its most basic, EU development policy can, for example, be combined with climate change simply “by listing a range of procedural and organizational adjustments that allow donors to take climate change into account” (De Roeck, Delputte, & Orbie, 2016, p. 437). When this technical bundling begins to affect the standard operating procedures of a given institution, then nexuses expand from basic inter-policy connections to intra-policy streamlining. An example of this is the EEAS’s Comprehensive Approach, which enables cross-policy efficiency with budget savings and duplication prevention. It also promoted the integration of formerly autonomous areas like development area within the wider canon of EU external affairs. The majority of technical nexuses retain these aims, but on a smaller scale, i.e. pulling a wider range of policy tools together with the aim of streamlining input and increasing the chances of an effective output.

The second type of nexus is substantive, introducing the re-conceptualization of an entire policy area. This process is deeply discursive in transforming the original “form” of the policy (i.e. its *raison d’être*), its content (i.e. tools, budget, actors, implementation and evaluation), and ultimately the identity of the policy maker itself. From this perspective, the fusing of two or more policy areas is not merely a policy adaptation, but “a complex political and social process influenced by power relations, rather than a linear and neutral response to change” (Langan and Price, 2016, p. 437).

Given its heritage, its normative content, and its deep connection to the identity of the EU itself, the shift from pre-2000 to post-2000 EU development policy goals via the introduction of policy nexuses including development-security/migration/climate change is substantive in nature (Carbone, 2013; Delputte & Orbie, 2020). The impact of nexuses however can be challenging. First, the infusion of the other “half” of the policy (e.g. migration or climate change) with the “original” value-set (including poverty-reduction) of development policy is likely to be uneven in nature and difficult to implement in practice. Second, the uncritical use of nexuses gradually “normalizes” the linkage of formerly unlinked policies, promoting an unworkable confluence of internal and external policies, while increasing the chances of politicizing, monetizing, and even securitizing of the ensuing policy mix, as highlighted below. Third, *all* policies are ultimately vehicles of identity, operating crucible-like to fuse the domestic identities of an actor with its external actorness. When development policy is made and remade through the successive use of nexuses that define and redefine its goals, this challenges the rhetoric of the EU’s own identity. The choice to



create such policy nexuses is therefore neither value-free for the content of the policy, nor consequence-free for the identity of the policy actor.

There are positive and negative consequences for the use of nexuses in EU development policy. There are arguably procedural benefits from the streamlining mechanism of the Comprehensive Approach, in terms of the strategically coherent use of the EU's tools and instruments for external action, dependent upon the "joined-up" deployment of EU instruments and resources. The 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS) (EEAS, 2016) subsequently expanded this into the concept of the integrated approach, which extends the scope and ambition of the CA by attempting to improve the EU's ability to amalgamate institutions, expertise and instruments in prevention, peacebuilding, crisis response and stabilization (Faleg, 2018). There are also highly effective instruments that can rework an entire policy area, such as the EU's Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP)<sup>1</sup>, which links development with security, allowing the EU "to offer rapid assistance in crisis situations" and sustainably finance "trans-regional security-development projects" including limiting the use of small arms (Zwolski, 2020, p. 9). The integrative philosophy of nexus are also routinely employed by other DAC actors i.e "whole of government" or "3D approach" (Defence, Development and Diplomacy) (Faleg, 2018).

But, as explored below, there are very real limits to the use of nexuses when deployed in a way that uncritically alters the fundamentals of a distinct policy area absent evidence that the outcome brings material benefits for its recipients. Development nexuses like aid/trade, or development/migration or development/security are inherently unwieldy in attempting to splice policy instruments with predominant political and security goals, rendering the overall policy terrain politicized, and/or securitized, potentially undermining the quality, and credibility of the EU as an international actor. EU development policy has long operated as a microcosm of the EU's own normative foundation. No other policy operates so effectively as a vehicle for the values, intentions and goals of the EU in the world as does its development policy. The irony is that the more development policy becomes another tool of external action, ultimately the less autonomous and unique it – or the EU as its author – can truly be in sponsoring it, and its impacts. From this perspective, the epistemic implications derived from the framing of successive nexuses arising from post-2000 EU policy developments are vital. Frames permit the capture, change and infusing of value and belief sets constituting the European ontology of development, and the fundamental shifts *in* those values from one belief system to another.

### ***Framing cross-policy responses***

This shift towards more global-oriented strategies and the increased use of identifiable nexuses between key external policies – specifically neighbourhood, security and migration – is discernible in both the 2011 Agenda for Change (AfC) (European Commission, 2011) and the 2017 New European Consensus on Development (ECD). Grounded in the budgetary efficiencies of the Comprehensive Approach, the 2011 AfC laid the groundwork for redirecting EU policies including development (and implicitly the MDGs) "towards a broader agenda that is directly connected to EU foreign policy" (Bergmann et al., 2019, p. 548). Both documents are replete with references to policy

nexus, synergies and “mixes”, with much EU external action from 2011 redefined as *sustainable development*, framed as a workable spectrum of trade, aid, political dialogue and other policy requirements.

The AfC triggered a change in the overall approach to bilateral and regional partners, using the principle of “differentiation” between developing countries (DCs), allowing the EU to distinguish between poorest countries (requiring greater support), while crafting new forms of partnership with middle income countries (MICs) more broadly. Priority in 2011 was accorded to sub-Saharan Africa and states in the EU’s immediate neighbourhood; countries beyond these regions, or that failed to meet new criteria would receive less aid. Redrawing the map of aid on the basis of differentiated development partnerships unsurprisingly opened the door to a range of other donors, including non-traditional development states including China and Russia, and the increased use of private sector actors, both encouraged to draw up their own allocation criteria for aid and approach a host of DCs formerly supported by the EU.

The outcome in policy terms is uneven. On the one hand, the **2017 ECD** itself represents the cornerstone of the EU’s development policy, enabling development policy to retain a key place – if not a cardinal role – in the 2017 implementation review of the 2016 Global Strategy (and the 2019 update) as well as the **EU’s 2030 Agenda** (covering sustainable development). The 2017 Consensus sets out a far clearer vision for EU external action than its predecessor, but one that makes explicit that development policy will no longer be afforded an autonomous role in the pantheon of EU tools. This also means that the opportunity for other Directorate Generals (DGs) to input into development policy has grown, as it has in other DAC actors. Integrated external action arguably requires a coherent narrative between the EU and its designated aid recipients; the question is whether the explicit use of ODA ensures merely the EU’s own “credibility, legitimacy, accountability, added value, influence” or forms a genuinely reciprocal part of producing global change. Pre-Covid, the policy attempts to balance the very real challenges awaiting the EU externally and internally, with a “European model of development that created value for money and contribute to our wider political priorities” (EC, 2019).

### **Wider political priorities within EU development policy**

At issue is the shift of EU development from an autonomous policy, to the gradual inclusion of frames and nexuses under the Comprehensive Approach, to being fully integrated within the pantheon of EU external affairs. The outcome is a shift from the pre-2000 era in which development was effectively ring-fenced “from encroachment of other policy objectives” (e.g. security and migration) regarded “as narrow EU self-interest rather than as primarily supporting sustainable development” (Sherriff 2019, p. 17), to the polymorphous application of development policy to tackle virtually every ex-EU challenge. While the Integrated Approach is still in the process bedding in across the EU, it is possible to identify the direction of travel in recent flagship policies, which together illustrate that development policy is moving well beyond the initial narrative of poverty reduction and refocusing on migration/security and climate change/sustainable development, as well as private sector inclusion. The question is whether such

changes are appropriate for the EU as a development actor, and suitable for the policy itself, in terms of what it can achieve legitimately.

The major advantages of framing development through nexuses are that they “acknowledge the need to bring development and related policy areas closer together, but without making this too explicit and without endangering the process of doing so by forcing various actors into their trenches” (Keukeleire & Raube, 2013). However, with core development activities increasingly challenged we start to see a number of frame conflicts in EU development discussions. The shift to mainstream or integrate development into other policy areas has enhanced this tension, as has the increased politicization of the topic. The next section highlights this discussion in four key areas.

### **Migration**

Migration was not regarded as a key aspect of development in the 2005 ECD, but by the 2017 ECD it was seen as a key theme regarded as intimately attached to poverty, political instability, social insecurity and a primary economic driver (Furness & Gänzle, 2017; Keukeleire & Raube, 2013). Tackling migration at source requires both a broad approach to overlapping challenges but also a more facilitative approach to ensuring partners’ cooperation. We also see other DGs having a greater involvement in development activities, especially Migration and Home Affairs (Hackenesch et al., 2021a). At the same time, we see member state policy makers calling on the EU to use its diplomatic influence and especially its development resources for wider political purposes. The focus was to be on using development to tackle the root causes of migration, rather than respond to migration crises when they occur. This was the steer from member state governments to make the disbursement of aid conditional on cooperation on migration and security, especially as governments started to pay more attention to where their money was going. EU documents stress that tackling migration at source consistent with the poverty reduction.

The 2018 DAC peer review encourages the EU to reflect on this wider tension. As it argues “cross-policy responses to global risks are promoted in the EU Global Strategy, which recognizes that peace is connected to prosperity and inclusion ... [but] linking development co-operation with migration increases the risk of allocating development funds according to migration patterns, thus diluting focus on development objectives” (OECD DAC, 2018). In addition, Allwood (2019) for instance, argues that as development policy is increasingly framed with reference to priorities such as migration, security and climate change, other issues including gender and even poverty reduction itself will soon become less visible. Thus development policy becomes increasingly about EU interests and less about the partner countries’ long-term development needs, something that runs counter to the EU’s image as an external actor.

### **Private sector actors**

Within development circles, there is an increasing focus on the “beyond aid” agenda and the EU is no different (see Delputte & Orbie, 2020). This is politically convenient given the impact of austerity and the uncertainty created by Brexit has meant that the question of where the money comes from for development is increasingly in the spotlight. With

state spending under restriction the impetus for growth was increasingly seen to come from leveraging in private sector money. Private sector actors are also seen as the “missing link” within development policy (Langan & Price, 2021, p. 285). This is consistent with the “work is best way out of poverty” narrative that has been visible within the EU for some time. How to support this was set out in a 2014 Communication which sought to place the private sector at the forefront of the EU’s development approach and commits it to engage more with actors from the private sector to strengthen the impact of its development efforts.

The leveraging and blending activities between the EU and private financing as Holden (2020) argues has the clear motivation to support the European private sector. He argues that “access to finance and risk sharing instruments in developing countries is . . . an important prerequisite for EU investors seeking to venture out into these markets” (Holden, 2020, p. 110). He also shows how this leveraging “enhances the financial firepower of EU external action” (p. 111). This firepower can also be utilized for wider political goals including showing the relevance of the EU. “In development policy, for instance, the creation of trust funds as new EU instruments has increased public awareness of the relevance of the EU as an actor in addressing security and migration challenges” (in Hackenesch et al., 2021a). The Global Strategy’s 2019 update continues the commitment to “principled pragmatism” while introducing innovations like the EU trust funds to enhance development effectiveness in key areas including Africa, Syria and Columbia (Zardo, 2020). Hauck, Knoll, and Herrero Cangas (2015) for example argue that EU trust funds are being used in an attempt to shape a more comprehensive external action. Trust funds can be politically helpful in promoting the view that the EU was engaged in activity to tackle the root causes of migration thereby showing the public they were responding.

A prime example is the migration crisis and insecurity in the neighbourhood and Africa around 2017. A prominent policy solution was the European External Investment Programme, which aimed to utilize the financial power of the EU to support investments that might otherwise be deemed too risky by private investors. The aim was that the €4.1 billion from the EU’s budget will leverage more than €44 billion in funding by 2020 (EU, 2017). The EU here is acting like other key DAC members in leveraging finance to support development but also wider goals—climate change and sustainable development. We can see the political goals of utilizing development to achieve wider goals via the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) and the Africa-Europe Alliance for sustainable investment and jobs. The EU argues that by building partnerships with private actors it can support decent job creation to foster growth and reduce poverty. It also argues that this type of activity supports sustainable energy, sustainable agriculture and agribusiness whilst also promote crosscutting issues, such as the fight against climate change, the protection of the environment, women empowerment, and human rights—issues that clearly influence global migration patterns.

There is also a narrative that links back to actively promoting the benefits of development actions for European business and jobs. Various studies have shown that there is a positive connection between EU aid and EU exports (Mendez-Parra & te Velde, 2016). They found that “for every \$1 the European Commission spends on aid, European Union exports increase by between \$1.02 and \$3.69 generating over 140,000 jobs in the EU” (p. 1). This focus on the role of the private sector in development is not

without controversy as there is evidence to suggest money is channelled to European corporations rather than SMEs with African states (see Langan & Price, 2021). According to the Commission, the type of activities outlined above complement more traditional development activities yet still have poverty reduction at their heart. They argue that by moving from a focus on purely social and financial terms to more multifactorial explanations of the various causes and effects of poverty gives the EU room to manoeuvre in designating a whole host of problems as effectively contributory to poverty.

### *Climate change and energy*

In terms of the wider integration approach, we see the human security implications of climate change emphasized in key documents (De Roeck et al., 2016) Therefore, the climate-development nexus interconnects with other nexuses via its ability to exacerbate conflict or to push migration. This should be no surprise as sustainable development is a cross cutting theme. However, here again we see the potential for the poverty reduction frame to get lost especially as policy areas such as migration and energy interconnect with internal politicized policies. Whilst the 2017 Consensus states that that international objectives ought also to reflect the EU's headline policies at home this is more difficult once you start to examine policies within the boundaries of the EU.

For instance, in terms of “the scale of financial investment needed to bring about universal access to safe and clean energy services”, the 2017 Consensus states that “supporting Africa and the EU's neighbourhood in this energy transition will be part of the enabling framework for the EU's energy Union” (European Commission, 2017, p. 24). However, energy policy (as a core EU shared competence) has a focus on liberalizing markets and market access for EU energy firms, especially those with expertise in energy transition (Kuzemko & Hadfield, 2016). This can create tensions in the relationship with developing countries, as the EU can be perceived to be pursuing different agendas at the same time, in particular energy as a public good or a tradeable commodity.

Positive results by the 2014–2020 Partnership Instrument for example showcase how further work in this area can be continued; aligning the goals of the Global Public Goods and Challenges programme (GPGC)<sup>2</sup> with the growing needs of climate-driven sustainable development is another possibility, while embedding the original goals of the above-mentioned Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace within emergency funding structures. Also visible is the shift in terms of instruments, such as the European Fund for Sustainable Development and broader attempts to leverage private sector finance for development ends (Holden, 2020).

EU energy diplomacy for example aims to accelerate the global energy transition, while ensuring affordability, safeguarding the environment and achieving the SDGs. To this end, in view of the need for a rapid shift toward climate neutrality, EU energy diplomacy will promote energy efficiency, the deployment of safe and sustainable low-carbon technologies, the increasing uptake and system integration. There is also the plan to phase out reliance on fossil fuels. The challenge is for energy diplomacy and climate diplomacy to interconnect. Oberthür (2016) highlights how climate geopolitics is heading towards growing support for decarbonization, arguing that the EU's position in climate geopolitics will depend on the development of its internal climate and energy policy framework for 2030 and beyond. The complexity of reconciling these priorities

with the broader goal of sustainable development means that once again there is a fear that the specific focus on poverty will fall further down the priority list with the need to prioritize internal climate priorities over external development objectives.

There are further examples of implicit blurring of internal and external policies or the explicit use of nexuses in the European Green Deal<sup>3</sup> which represents simultaneously the EU's new post-pandemic growth strategy, and a plan to make Europe the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050. The interconnection between climate diplomacy, which has a relatively clear framework for external action, and energy diplomacy, which does not, will be crucial (Petri, 2021). The ambition is clearly for the EU to embark "on this new phase of "Green Deal diplomacy" (...) using all the means at [the EU's] disposal – from trade policy and technical assistance, to capacity building and development cooperation, as well as our crisis management tools when needed" (Montesi, 2020). This so-called "Team Europe" approach sees the EU using "its political and economic influence, expertise and financial resources" to tackle climate change (Montesi, 2020). Development assistance will be used to leverage private finance to tackle climate change, in line with the taxonomy on sustainable finance. While indicating the need for all the "EU actions and policies to support a successful and just transition towards a sustainable future", the Commission proposes a relatively ambiguous and programmatic "do no harm principle" (Sikora, 2021). Therefore whilst the EU rhetoric is around defining a wholly new partnership agenda with developing countries, the reality is more that "some ideas that sound promising ... will need to be followed by actions and diplomatic efforts to convince partners that an external action in the service of the Green Deal is in their mutual interest" (Hege, 2020). For example, there is a concern that the Green Deal is very much a European agenda with a focus on climate mitigation whereas the African Unions' Agenda 2063 gives strong priority to poverty reduction, climate adaptation and jobs (Hackenesch, Högl, Knaepen, Iacobuta, & Asafu-Adjaye, 2021b).

As explored, the use of "nexuses" have themselves shaped the substantive inputs, and impact-based outputs of development policy, as well as redefining the various "opportunity structures" for EU foreign policy more broadly (Knill & Lehmkuhl, 2002, p. 21). While the surfeit of policy intersections characterizing EU foreign affairs has complicated the overall architecture of EU foreign affairs, nexuses themselves have arisen because of the increasing abundance of internal policies with external dimensions, and external policies with domestic consequences. Equally, while arguments to keep development wholly separate will likely continue, "it is difficult to think of an EU policy area that is not part of an increasingly accelerated internal/external nexus, whether it be trade, environment, climate change, security, agriculture, fisheries, employment, migration, research and innovation, information society, transport and energy" (Sherriff, 2019, p. 18).

Together, these examples of migration, climate change and energy illustrate that EU development policy is now moving well beyond the initial narrative of poverty reduction and refocusing on migration/security and climate change/sustainable development, as well as private sector inclusion. Using the mechanism of nexuses, these iterative re-framings of EU development policies reflect a cumulative shift of EU development from core development goals to a broader range of ambitions, actors and approaches in a way that inevitably increases the politicization, monetization and securitization of EU policies, and possibly the EU itself (Delputte & Orbie, 2020). The direction of travel suggests



that development policy is destined to do more, as exemplified by the pivot towards energy-climate-development as set out by the Green Deal.

Equally, while these framings are bound to remain controversial, they may ultimately permit EU development policy to remain politically relevant to its own member states, EU public opinion and external observers. Recent research shows that enthusiasm for EU aid “stems from a sense of enlightened self-interest; namely, by acting in the interest of the underdeveloped, the European public is also – at least partially – pursuing self-serving goals” (Kiratli, 2021). However, the same research goes on to highlight that by framing development policy as a multi-purpose tool by which to tackle a host of converging political issues “unrealistic realistic assessments of what development cooperation can actually achieve and what it cannot” may be created in the minds of EU publics (Kiratli, 2021).

## Conclusion

EU development policy remained relatively faithful to its internal logic, from the problem-solving target designed at the beginning, to the designated tools, budget and audience, to the modes of implementation and evaluation. However, from 2000 onwards, EU development policy has had other policies spliced onto the original development framework, from security to sustainable development and migration, requiring a different analytical structure to help identify not simply how, but why such changes were enacted.

We have shown how the EU’s frames of development policy have moved over the decade and why. Brexit, the euro crisis and the rise of populist governments all work against development in that many governments wish to focus the limited spending at home (see Beringer, Maier, & Thiel, 2019; Bodenstein, Faust, & Furness, 2017). Olivé and Pérez (2019, p. 193) argue that various arguments can co-exist within aid narrative but that the emphases can change over time. From 2000, and in particular from 2016/7, largely by virtue of being subsumed within an overly-ambitious and indistinct foreign policy structure, the internal logic of EU development policy appears to have changed so radically that it is both internally incoherent and externally impractical. This in itself affects EU actorness. Each shift represents both a substantively different policy framing from the preceding policy, but contains within it sub-themes that represent a range of varying understandings of development, from its root causes, its permissive environment, and crucially, those other areas with development policy can plausibly fuse, creating a policy nexus (e.g. development-security or development-migration). Each of these constitutes a separate frame, while remaining inseparable from the evolution of development policy itself.

It is not intrinsically problematic to merge internal and external EU policies. Indeed, we have seen a similar trend in many DAC members. Even the use of political goals as an “end” via the use of development policy as a “means” is not programmatically problematic. The challenge relates to the way the EU projects itself globally as a development actor. Can the EU “re-define its global position as a leading donor of official development assistance and as a decision-making system where global development norms and standards are set”? (Furness et al., 2020, 91; Delputte & Orbie, 2020). The challenge is that given the political context within the EU at present such transformations carry high

risks. Development remains “the EU’s cornerstone policy”, capable of being deployed to tackle both root causes and multi-sectoral effects from climate change to conflict, from poverty to poor governance, including the chronic disparities brought about by Covid. However, “such enormous expectations inevitably raise impossible demands” on the EU’s structure, budget and its constituent member states (Furness et al., 2020, p. 91).

EU development policy has attempted to align the EU’s own desire to tackle poverty reduction in its own way, with broader global shifts in the definition and use of aid policy, and the rise of both human security and sustainable development as overarching global narratives. This foreign policy clash means that EU development policy is increasingly “situated between the bloc’s normative ideals and global geopolitical realities within which it is embedded” (Beringer et al., 2019). The new narrative around Team Europe shows again that the EU wishes to frame itself by its values, something recently explored in relation to the COVID-19 by Burni et al., 2021. Core policies such as the Multiannual Financial Framework (21–27), the post-Cotonou agreement and Agenda 2030 are being revisited in light of the accepted use of nexuses. The forces for development appear to be losing the battle for the normative direction of the EU’s external policy to those who wish to see development supporting the strategic goals of the Union.

## Notes

1. The Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) funds activities in the areas of (1) crisis response, (2) conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis preparedness, and (3) response to global, trans-regional and emerging threats. Under the Multiannual Financial Framework, the activities of the instrument will be continued under the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument.
2. The European Union (EU) Global Public Goods and Challenges Programme 2014–2020 contributes to poverty eradication, social cohesion and sustainable development, aiming to address global problems through global development outcomes that are inclusive and sustainable.
3. The EU’s Green Deal sets out the EU’s plan to be the first climate-neutral continent.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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