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**How did the Agenda 2030 and changes in the pool of actors
at global level in the last two decades influence the
evolution of EU development cooperation strategy**

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Abbreviations

AAAA	Addis Abeba Action Agenda
ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AU	African Union
BAG	Business Advisory Group on the Global Gateway
BAPA	Buenos Aires Plan of Action
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
BWIs	Bretton Woods Institutions
CIA	American Central Intelligence Agency
COAFR	EU Council Working Party on Africa
COASI	EU Council Working Party on Asia and Oceania
CODEVPI	EU Council Working Party on Development Cooperation and International Partnerships
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DCI	Development Cooperation Instrument
DG	Directorate-General
DG AIDCO	Directorate-General for EuropeAid
DG DEV	Directorate-General for Development
DG DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
DG GROW	Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
EDF	European Development Fund
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEC	European Economic Community
EFAD	European Financial Architecture for Development
EFSD (+)	European Fund for Sustainable Development (Plus)
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIP	European External Investment Plan
EMC	Eurocentric, Modernist and Colonial
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EP	European Parliament
EPA	Economic Partnership Agreement
EPP	European People's Party
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
G77	Group of 77
GNP	Gross National Product
GPEDC	Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation
HDI	Human Development Index
HR/VP	High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy /Vice President of the European Commission
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IBSA	India, Brazil, and South Africa

IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPS	Pre-Accession Assistance
JPC	Joint parliamentary committees
ISSCAD	Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development
LDCs	Less Developed Countries
MDBs	Multilateral Development Banks
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MIKTA	Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia
MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programme
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NDB	New Development Bank
NDCs	National Determined Contributions
NDICI-GE	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe
NIEO	New International Economic Order
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OACP	Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation agreements
PCC	Parliamentary Cooperation Committees
PCD	Policy Coherence for Development
PRC	People's Republic of China
RFP	Request For Proposals
RSP	Resolution on topical subjects
SAA	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
SAPC	Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SSC	South-South Cooperation
SSCAF	South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund
TCDC	Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries
TEU	Treaty on the European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
TOSSD	Total Official Support for Sustainable Development
TrC	Trilateral Cooperation or Triangular cooperation
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	UN Conference on Trade and Development
UNDCF	UN Development Cooperation Forum
UNDP	UN Program for Development
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNGCRG	UN Global Crisis Response Group
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UK	United Kingdom
WB	World Bank

Abstract

This thesis sets to respond to the question of how and to what extent did the Agenda 2030 and changes in the pool of actors globally involved in development cooperation, occurred in the last two decades, influence the evolution of EU understanding of development cooperation, as reflected in its current strategy. Through constructivist lenses and the introduction of the concepts of “global and local understandings”, and by the means of discourse analysis, consultation of official UN and OECD data and interviews from the field, this research uncovers the transformation of the sector, both at global and at EU level, from being a dominion of the North, to becoming a contested field where the focus on poverty reduction and economic and social development is replaced by one on collective efforts in facing global development challenges - including environmental ones - according to diverging models and national priorities - including security and migration - engaging more and more the private sector and financial development institutions, and contemplating a rhetoric of partnership more than one of aid. The changes in the scope and ambition of the definition of development cooperation brought by the Agenda 2030 and the transformations witnessed in the pool of actors, blurring the traditional donor-recipient divide, are proved to be central drivers behind this evolution.

“How did the Agenda 2030 and changes in the pool of actors at global level in the last two decades influence the evolution of EU Development Cooperation Strategy”

1. Introduction

‘The European Union (EU) – EU institutions and member states together – accounts for the largest share of total official development assistance (ODA) among Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members and has a development co-operation presence in all regions and across all sectors’ (OECD, 2024). As repeated in most of the official documents and webpages of the EU dealing with development cooperation, this makes the EU “the largest development cooperation donor in the world”. Indeed, as it will be abundantly shown in this thesis, development is not limited to ODA, nor ODA represents the currency through which is possible to evaluate development cooperation performances worldwide; however, such primacy, and the way in which it is boasted, already tells us something about the relevance this sector holds for the EU.

In 2021, in correspondence with the elaboration of the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021-2027, an important restructuring occurred in EU development cooperation policy. The “Global Europe: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe)” was created merging ten pre-existing instruments and integrating the biggest EU external financing fund, the European Development Fund (EDF), previously not part of the budget. In the same year, the EU Council published recommendations on a new European Financial Architecture for Development (EFAD), the relevant Directorate General of the Commission changed name from DG International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO) to DG International Partnerships (INTPA), and the Commission published a new flagship initiative, the Global Gateway.

The importance of the sector and the relevance of the changes occurred have already attracted a considerable number of contributions from the academia, and this thesis is not the first to look for the comprehension of the actual extent of such changes and of the main drivers behind them. This work adds to the existing literature by trying to introduce a new perspective and method. We start from the conviction that, especially when dealing with external action, one cannot fully understand the “local”, in our case the European, without sufficiently acknowledging the “global”. Based on this, we hypothesise that changes at global level in the definition and scope of “development cooperation”, epitomised by the Agenda 2030, as well as in the pool of actors involved in it may be regarded as drivers with substantial explanatory capability (within the maze of uncountable con-causes and factors) when it comes to the comprehension of the current EU strategy. In this way, our research question moves from a generic: “what are the drivers of the recent evolution of EU development cooperation strategy”, to a more specific: “How did global-level changes in the scope and definition of “development cooperation” and in the pool of actors involved influence the evolution of EU Development Cooperation Strategy”. Given that, as far as changes in the scope and definition of “development cooperation” we will refer, as turning point, to the Agenda 2030, elaborated in 2015, and, as far as those concerning the pool of actors, we will mostly focus on the evolution witnessed in the last two decades, our research question can eventually be rephrased as follows: “How did the Agenda 2030 and changes at global level in the pool of actors in the last two decades influence the evolution of EU Development Cooperation Strategy”.

To answer to this question, the thesis starts (chapter 2.1) from a description of the EU strategy for development cooperation as it is now and of the actors that are involved in it, in order to introduce the topic and to establish from the beginning some point of reference. Then (chapter

2.2), a panoramic of the existing literature on the subject is presented to identify the gap this thesis set to fill and the context from which it starts.

More than a gap, this thesis individuates the need of introducing new theoretical and methodological perspectives to enhance the comprehension of such a complex and multifaceted issue, and there is where this thesis provides a new perspective, which is introduced in chapter 3. In particular, it is here inverted the usual point of view: to discover the effects of some independent variables on a dependent variable, usually one would start from mapping the changes occurred on the dependent variable, and then would try to trace back their origin; in our case, instead, it is proposed to start from substantiating the hypothesis that our global independent variables are indeed relevant, with the crucial help of existing literature, by outlining their effects at global level, and then to connect the global and the local through parallelisms or contrasts. Moreover, starting from a constructivist perspective, narratives and understandings are taken as tools of analysis, with the introduction of the concepts of “global” and “local” understandings. Narratives are studied through discourse analysis starting from preambles of pieces of legislation or agreements, speeches, press releases, web pages, and the like. From there, attention is also focused on the practical ramifications (through the analysis of official UN and OECD data) and on what such narratives tell us about the understanding underpinning them. Interviews to several experts from the sector enrich the research. This framework has two advantages: first, it allows to situate EU understanding in the global arena in which it actually forms, without bending the global to the need to explain the local; second, it allows to have a panoramic of the sector as a whole, which is then deepened by the “local” example of the EU.

Therefore, chapter 4 presents our independent variables and shows how they strongly contributed to the transformation of the “global understanding” of development cooperation. It first focuses on the enlargement, and consequent reshaping, of the pool of actors, with its roots in the second half of the 20th century and the increase of its relevance and impact in the new millennium, providing also a focus on China, undoubtedly one of the protagonists of this transformation. Then it describes the second enlargement, regarding the scope and the ambition of “development cooperation” as emerged from the Agenda 2030, through a comparison between the MDGs and the SDGs. Finally, it outlines and summarizes the combined effects of the two “enlargements”, namely the resulting “global understanding of development” and its differences in comparison with the one preceding such changes. Development cooperation, it is there concluded, passed from being mostly regarded in terms of developed countries providing assistance to the “global South” with a focus on poverty reduction and economic and social development to being

considered as a collective effort in facing global development challenges - including environmental ones - according to diverging models and national priorities - including security and migration - engaging more and more the private sector and financial development institutions, and contemplating a rhetoric of partnership more than one of aid.

In chapter 5, such global understanding is compared with the understanding that would seem to emerge from the description of the EU strategy for development cooperation detailed in chapter 2. Once individuated some points of contact, namely elements of the EU strategy that would seem to go in the same direction of some trends individuated at global level, the latter are further analysed diachronically. The idea is to see whether they indeed represent a novelty or not. Once ascertained that they do represent a relative novelty, we look at the practical ramifications they brought and at how the process of change that introduced them was framed and justified, to evaluate the weight of our independent variables as reflected in EU official narrative.

The findings are summarized in chapter 6, where it is concluded that indeed the Agenda 2030 and the reshaping of the pool of actors played a significant role in forming the current EU understanding of development cooperation, as reflected in its strategy. Indeed, it is argued, they shaped the whole sector at global level, and, given the continuous interrelation and intertwining between the “local” and the “global”, they ended up contributing very much to changes at EU level.

2. State of the art

2.1 EU Strategy for Development Cooperation

According to Article 208 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU, 2009) the ‘Union development cooperation policy shall have as its primary objective the reduction and, in the long term, the eradication of poverty.’ It shall also be conducted ‘within the framework of the principles and objectives of the Union's external action’ which are enlisted in Article 21(2) of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU, 2009). These include not only the specific aim of fostering the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of developing countries, with the primary aim of eradicating poverty, but also those of consolidating and supporting democracy, the rule of law and human rights, preserving peace, encouraging the integration of all countries into the world economy, improving the quality of the environment and the sustainable management of global natural resources, assisting populations confronting natural or man-made disasters and promoting multilateral cooperation and good global governance.

How to achieve such objectives is precisely the question the EU strategy for development cooperation tries to answer to. We could describe a strategy as composed of guiding principles, a vision, some sort of legitimization, a plan of action and implementation tools. All in all, a strategy allows to understand how a particular actor, in our case the EU, frames a certain issue, and elaborates and justifies a certain response. But to really understand that, before detailing such strategy in all its components, we need to get to know our actor better. Indeed, it would be rather simplistic to consider the EU as a unitary agent, especially when it comes to foreign policy. Development cooperation is a shared competence between the EU and its Member States, and multiple institutions, both at EU level and at the level of each of the twenty-seven member States, are involved in all the stages of the strategy, from its elaboration to its implementation, in what, with Fabbrini (2013) we could define a “compound democracy”.

2.1.1 EU Development Actors

For the Commission, EU’s executive branch, the relevant Directorate-General is DG INTPA, namely the Directorate-General for International Partnerships. Such DG was born in 2011 from the merging of two former DGs: EuropeAid (AIDCO) and Development (DEV). At the time it was called DG Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid (DEVCO). In 2015 it was then renamed DG International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO), up to 2021, where the von der Leyen Commission gave it its current name (PDC, EU Monitor, n.d.). It is now the one stop shop of the Commission when it comes to development cooperation, except for specific tasks relating to EU’s neighbourhood policy, which, since 2015, fall within the domain of DG NEAR (formerly ENLARG) (PDC, EU Monitor, n.d.-b). It is important to underline that development cooperation does not include internal development, i.e., the development of EU regions and territories, which is of competence of other DGs such as DG GROW - dealing with the single market, industry entrepreneurship and SMEs - and DG REGIO, focusing on regional and urban policy.

For the European Parliament, one of the two legislative branches, with EU citizens as its constituency, there is no specific standing committee on the Neighbouring policy, thus it is the Committee on Development (DEVE) which in general deals with all development cooperation (EP, 2021). In fact, the picture is way more complicated, since several interparliamentary assemblies should be also made part of it. These include, for example, the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly - established in 2011 in the framework of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), composed of sixty members of the European Parliament and ten members from each partner’s country’s

parliament (EP, n.d.) – or the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, the EU-Latin America Parliamentary Assembly, just to name a few. Moreover, with a large number of countries around the world the EP regularly organizes interparliamentary meetings. Finally, joint parliamentary committees (JPC), Parliamentary Cooperation Committees (PCC) and Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) are established respectively with candidate countries, after the signing of association agreements; with countries which have concluded Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with the EU; and with those South East European countries with which a stabilisation and association agreement (SAA) is in place (EPP, n.d.).

Then there is the EU Council, the other legislative branch, where ministers of member states' governments sit in different configurations. Development cooperation falls within the scope of the Foreign Affairs configuration, which deals with EU's external action in its entirety, including foreign policy, defence and security, trade, development cooperation and humanitarian aid. This configuration brings together foreign policy ministers, as well as defence, development and trade ministers based on the issue on agenda (Council of the European Union, n.d.). The meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council are chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP). At preparatory bodies' level, we have the Working Party on Development Cooperation and International Partnerships (CODEVPI), as well as different Working Parties covering specific geographical regions (e.g., Africa Working Party – COAFR - , Asia-Oceania Working Party – COASI-, etc.) (General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, 2023)

Last but not least, since its formal launch in 2011 (although created by the Treaty of Lisbon, entered into force in 2009) there is the European External Action Service (EEAS), i.e. the European Union's diplomatic service, working under the political guidance of the HR/VP and in close contact especially with foreign and defence ministers from the member states. Being responsible for the diplomatic representation of the EU abroad, the EEAS plays a crucial role in the building of networks and partnerships, in bilateral cooperation and relationship with foreign countries, as well as in promoting EU values around the world. As far as development cooperation is concerned, these Delegations and Offices represent a crucial part of the executive branch, functioning as contact points and promoters of development programmes through projects and grants. They are also crucial to analyse and report on the activities carried out in their host country (EEAS, n.d.).

Then, each Member State has its own development cooperation strategy, policy and institutions, including not only foreign ministries but also development agencies and public financial institutions entrusted with policy implementation such as Germany's Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), France's Agence Française de Développement (AFD), or Italy's Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (AICS).

In this thesis we mostly focus on the EU strategy, understanding, and policy, but the reader must always bear in mind the complexity that persists behind the label "EU" and the inevitable limits it brings in terms of having a full-fledged common policy for development cooperation.

2.1.2 How is the strategy composed

Due to this compound nature of the EU and to the multifaceted one of the issue under scrutiny, the current EU strategy for development cooperation is itself composed of many different parts, produced throughout the years, through different means and by different actors. In fact, formally, there is no such thing as a EU strategy for development cooperation; this is just the name used in this thesis to describe the system of principles, objectives, plans and tools that the EU elaborated in the field of development cooperation. For this reason, the presented documents do not form a closed nor an exhaustive list, although, according to the author, a representative one.

The guiding principles were set (or, better, reiterated and updated) in June 2016 through the Resolution on topical subjects (RSP) 'Shared Vision, Common Action: A stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy' (the Global Strategy), elaborated by the EEAS, and, more specifically, in June 2017 with the New European Consensus on Development (the New European Consensus) – a joint declaration by the Council, the representatives of the governments of the member states within the Council, the Commission and the Parliament - which also sketched a plan of action. The latter was complemented in 2021 by the Global Gateway Initiative – a joint communication by the Commission and the HR/VP to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank - focusing on investments, especially in infrastructures. In the same year, a major reorganization of the financial and operational tools also occurred with the introduction of the NDICI Global Europe instrument (Regulation 2021/947), and of the Council conclusions on enhancing the European Financial Architecture for Development (EFAD).

Concomitantly, from November 2020 to December 2021, country, regional, Erasmus+ and

thematic multi-annual indicative programmes (MIPs) were elaborated, in order to detail specific objectives and priority areas for the period 2021-2027. Regional MIPs were prepared for Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific and the Americas and the Caribbean, while the thematic ones centred on human rights and democracy, civil society organisations, peace, stability and conflict prevention, and global challenges. Country MIPs were elaborated in cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders including partner countries, EU Member States, CSOs, local authorities, the private sector, the UN and other donors (EC, n.d.). Additional specific instruments are adopted in EU relationship with OACP (Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries) countries; such relationship is regulated by the Samoa partnership agreement (2024), as well as by Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) signed in the 2000s by the EU with 33 of the 79 OACP countries, through 7 regional agreements. In sum, at the level of programming the EU tends to operate at regional level.

All these different documents are strictly intertwined, together they compose the backbone of the EU strategy for development, although we should be careful not to jump to the *a posteriori* conclusion that they are all part of a pre-determined scheme elaborated with the intent of creating a EU strategy for development cooperation as we just described it.

2.1.3 Basic and operational principles of EU development cooperation

According to the Global Strategy, EU external action is to be guided by a ‘(p)ricipled pragmatism’, stemming ‘as much from a realistic assessment of the current strategic environment as from an idealistic aspiration to advance a better world’ (p. 8). In other words, the EU commits to being a responsible global stakeholder through dialogue and connection with the wider world, promoting its own interests within the framework of a rules-based global order based on multilateralism (The Global Strategy, 2016). The basic principles guiding EU external action can be found in Article 21 (1) TEU and include democracy, rule of law, universal and indivisible human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, equality and solidarity, as well as respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law. These same principles constitute also the basis on which the UN Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are built upon. The relevance of this Agenda, signed by 193 UN members’ governments in 2015, cannot be understated; indeed, the New European Consensus is declaredly conceived as EU’s response to – and full acknowledgement of – the Agenda 2030, as elaborated more comprehensively in chapter 4. The Consensus, in a section dedicated to the principles and values guiding development action, after having made due reference to the pillars

just mentioned, stresses some principles in particular, starting from the importance of political dialogue as the sole tool with which it is possible to uphold EU's values and to promote them responsibly. Then, it identifies in gender equality a core value cutting across all the SDGs and crucial for the achievement of all of them. More in general, the document calls for a right-based approach 'ensuring that no-one is left behind', meaning both fighting against any form of discrimination and encouraging the inclusion, engagement and participation of civil society and civil society organizations (CSOs) in development. Finally, the Consensus reiterates EU commitment toward "development effectiveness" as first defined – and agreed on by more than 160 countries - in 2011 in Busan and then renewed in 2016 in Nairobi under the framework of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC). Here the concept is understood as dependent on country ownership, a focus on measurable results, inclusive partnerships, transparency and mutual accountability (both among countries and between countries and their respective constituencies) (GPEDC, 2016).

As seen at the beginning of this chapter, Article 21(2) TEU, while underlining the fact that EU external action objectives are to be understood also as development cooperation objectives - being the latter part of the former -, recognises the reduction and, in the long term, eradication of poverty as the primary goal of development cooperation. Since the Lisbon Treaty of 2009, however, objectives to be attributed more directly to development cooperation seem to have multiplied, starting from the SDGs up to security and the fight against the root causes of migration. We will come back to this apparent issue of multiplication of objectives later in this research, for now it is sufficient to underline how they encompass the fight against climate change, as much as education, trade, innovation, health, migration and much else.

The main way to achieve these objectives, according to the documents composing the strategy, is by 'working better together' (The New European Consensus, 2017). This means both increasing coordination among the EU member states and coherence among EU policies - the so-called "Policy Coherence for Development" (PCD) introduced in 1992 by the Treaty of Maastricht and reinforced in 2009 by the Treaty of Lisbon - as well as enhancing partnerships with third countries. From the point of view of internal coordination, borrowing from the prophetic words by Jean Monnet¹, Europe has been forged in crises. It is, indeed, during the Covid-19 pandemic that Europe has come together and joined efforts in the form of the so-called "Team Europe", an approach now promoted also in development policy. Introduced in April 2020 by the Commission

¹ 'Europe will be forged in crises, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted in those crises' (Matthijs & Blyth, 2015)

and the EEAS through a Joint Communication (Burni et al., 2022), the Team Europe approach consists in pooling contributions and resources from all EU institutions, Member States – with their implementing agencies and public development banks - and financial institutions, such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), in order to ‘muster a critical mass that few others can match’ (European Commission, n.d.-f; Joint Communication on the Global EU Response to COVID-19, 2020). Additionally, such an approach calls for jointly setting priorities, as well as designing, financing and implementing actions, involving also as much as possible other international organizations, multilateral financial institutions, partner countries and the private sector. The idea is not only to increase coordination and coherence, but also to boost visibility and impact. Already in the Joint Communication it was apparent that the exercise would have not been confined only to the response to the pandemic, but it is with the Council conclusions on enhancing the European financial architecture for development (EFAD), issued in June 2021, that the experiment is officially extended to EU development cooperation policy.

Internal coordination guarantees also more coherence in terms of policies. However, ensuring policy coherence, as we read in the New European Consensus and as enshrined in the UN Agenda 2030, means also to take into account the impact of all EU policies, from whatever sector, on sustainable development at EU, national, local, other countries and global level.

This internal coordination and coherence, as anticipated, should be matched also by a coordination with partner countries. Partner countries are not only like-minded governments with whom to elaborate joint strategies for the development of third parties, but are also and most crucially these “third parties”, who no longer respond to the name of “aid recipient countries”. The idea behind this EU rhetoric and approach is to try to overcome the accusations of paternalism and of perpetuating an Eurocentric, modernist and colonial (EMC) paradigm. In other words, the EU does not wish anymore to present itself as a goodhearted disinterested donor, but acknowledges its own responsibilities and openly promotes its own interests while cooperating with partners in achieving their own goals in an alleged win-win arrangement (Delputte & Orbie, 2020; Orbie, 2021). This shift, as elaborated on more thoroughly in chapter 5, arguably occurred relatively recently and a hint of its occurrence was given by the renaming of the relevant Commission DG operated in 2021 by the first von der Leyen Commission, as shown above. Partnership, though, is not only pursued in relation with third countries’ governments, but also with Parliaments, political parties, regional and local authorities, research institutions, philanthropic organisations, cooperatives, the private sector, civil society and in general all the

actors more and more involved in the development landscape; moreover, it is supposed to substantiate in an all-encompassing cooperation, including also joint implementation of development projects (The New European Consensus, 2017) .

A special mention should be devoted to an actor that has seen its role growing in importance not only in the development sector, but also, for example when it comes to the digital and green transitions (Spaltini et al., 2023), namely the private sector. ‘A stronger role of the private sector in achieving inclusive and sustainable growth in developing countries’ is the title of a Communication issued by the Commission in 2014. In its introduction we read that:

‘Given the private sector’s potential for generating inclusive and sustainable growth in developing countries, private stakeholders including businesses, financial intermediaries, associations and workers and employers organisations are emerging as ever more active in the development field, both as a source of finance and as partners for governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and donors.’

This focus on engaging the private sector is then present repeatedly in the New European Consensus and even more in the EFAD and NDICI-Global Europe, where it is often coupled with the idea of guaranteeing flexibility of funding also through elaborating innovative tools. As with the Team Europe approach, the idea is to pool resources from as many sources as possible in order to increase the impact. Moreover, to engage the private sector means to guarantee a future for the projects put in motion by public financing, once the latter inevitably finishes, i.e., to make such projects self-standing. On this issue too we will come back, analysing it both at global level (in chapter 4) and at EU level (in chapter 5).

2.1.4 In practice: NDICI-Global Europe and the Global Gateway

After having described the main ideological and operational principles underscoring EU development cooperation, it is now time to turn to how, in practice, is EU development cooperation organised. It is not possible nor useful for the purposes of this thesis to go into every detail of it; it will be sufficient to briefly present the two most representative instruments currently providing operational guidelines and tools to EU action in the sector: NDICI Global Europe and the Global Gateway, both established in 2021.

NDICI-Global Europe

The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument-Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe), with a budget of €79.5 billion², was established for the purpose of the EU MFF to replace and merge ten different external financing instruments. The aim was to increase coherence and coordination by integrating most of the dimensions of EU external action in a single instrument. In general, the instrument is set to contribute to the achievement of international commitments and objectives of the Union, in particular the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement, as well as framing EU cooperation with all third countries (European Commission, n.d.-e). It also intends to allow the EU to address global challenges, including migration and mobility, and to respond rapidly to crises, disasters and Union foreign policy needs (NDICI). What it does not include is humanitarian aid nor military and defence issues, respectively covered by the EU humanitarian aid instrument (Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996) and by the European Peace Facility (Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/509 of 22 March 2021).

The instrument is built on three pillars, namely the geographic, thematic, and rapid response pillars, as well as on a “cushion” of unallocated funds, a flexible reserve. These pillars represent the type of projects that can be funded by the correspondent share of allocated funds. 75% of the fund (€60,38 billion) is destined to the geographic pillar, with at least €19,23 billion to be used to finance projects in the EU Neighbourhood³, €29,181 billion for Sub-Saharan Africa, €8,489 billion for Asia and the Pacific and €3,395 billion for the Americas and the Caribbean. Projects in these regions shall focus on areas of cooperation listed in Annex II of the regulation, including good governance, democracy, the rule of law and human rights including gender equality; eradicating poverty, fighting against inequalities and discrimination, and promoting human development; migration, forced displacement and mobility; environment and climate change; inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent employment; peace, stability and conflict prevention; and partnerships. Moreover, indicatively €1,8 billion from this pillar should be earmarked for financing actions under the Erasmus+ programme. €6,538 billion are allocated for the thematic pillar, which encompasses projects in the areas of human rights and democracy (€1,362 billion); civil society organizations (€1,362 billion); peace, stability and conflict prevention (€908 million); and global challenges, including health, education, gender equality

² What the European Commission had initially proposed, in 2018, was 10% higher, nonetheless this amount still represents a 3% increase compared to the overall amount of all previous external action instruments now consolidated in the NDICI-Global Europe (Di Ciommo, 2020)

³ The countries that compose the Neighbourhood are listed in Annex I of the NDICI-Global Europe regulation

and women's and girls' empowerment, children and youth, migration, forced displacement and mobility, decent work, social protection, inequality and inclusion, culture, climate change, sustainable energy, sustainable and inclusive growth, decent jobs and private sector engagement, food and nutrition security, and building of partnerships⁴. Moreover, the thematic pillar complements the geographic pillar by funding activities that are best addressed at a global level. To the last pillar, dedicated to rapid response actions, €3,2 billion are allocated. This nonprogrammable envelope is expected to be used to finance 'actions contributing to peace, stability and conflict prevention in situations of urgency, emerging crisis, crisis and postcrisis, including those which may result from migratory flows and forced displacement' (p.74); as well as 'actions contributing to strengthening resilience and linking humanitarian aid, development actions and, where relevant, peacebuilding' (p.75) and 'actions addressing Union foreign policy needs and priorities' (p.76). Finally, €9,53 billion, roughly 11% of the overall budget, remain unallocated as a reserve cushion, which can be used either to respond to unforeseen and emerging challenges and priorities either to top up initiatives in all three pillars. The last pillar and the cushion make the instrument relatively flexible, another sign of EU pragmatism, of the relevance of its own strategic priorities in designing development cooperation, and of the mounting uncertainties among economic crises, pandemics and wars.

Additionally, the regulation establishes some spending priority targets on the overall allocated funds. At least 93% of the funding should meet the official development assistance (ODA) criteria set by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which means, among other things, that it should be destined to one of the countries and territories enlisted among the possible recipients by the OECD, in the form of grants, technical assistance or "soft" loans (i.e., loans whose grant element is at least 25% of the total) (OECD, n.d.-b). At least 20% of such ODA-eligible funds, should be earmarked for social inclusion and human development. Moreover, 30% of the overall instrument budget should cover climate change and environmental objectives, 10% should tackle irregular migration and forced displacement, as well as address their root causes, and 85% should have gender equality either as a primary or significant objective (NDICI - Global Europe, 2021).

To distribute the funds, the instrument uses a wide array of modes of financing, from grants and procurement contracts for services, supplies or works to budget support, contributions to trust funds set up by the Commission, financial instruments, budgetary guarantees, blending

⁴ Areas of intervention are specified in a more detailed manner in Annex III of the NDICI-Global Europe regulation

operations, debt relief (in the context of internationally agreed programmes), financial assistance, and remuneration of external experts. Moreover, the new European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) the financial arm of NDICI (EEAS, n.d.-b) aims at maximising additionality of funding, crowding-in private investments and addressing market failures and sub-optimal investment situations by enhancing coordination with the European Investment Bank and other eligible counterparts through External Action Guarantee agreements.

The Global Gateway

The Global Gateway, issued by the EEAS and the EU Commission in December 2021, complements the EU strategy for development cooperation with a focus on infrastructural investment around the world, and is currently considered the EU flagship policy on development cooperation. It builds on the New European Consensus and on NDICI and it aims at reducing the global infrastructure investment deficit, as well as ‘to forge links and not create dependencies’ (pag.1). In other words, while restating the commitment to high standards, good governance, high transparency and a value-driven approach, the Global Gateway provides a ‘positive offer’ (pag. 2) for partner countries’ development as well as for EU strategic interests in terms of security, including security of supply chains, and strategic autonomy. The priority areas individuated for infrastructural development are digital, climate and energy, transport, health, education and research.

The initiative aims to mobilise up to €300 billion for the period 2021-2027. This sum is expected to be reached pooling together €135 billion under the EFSD+ - starting from €40 billion in guarantee capacity (€26,7 billion via EIB and €13 billion via a new dedicated window under EFSD+) -, up to €18 billion of grant financing from other EU external assistance programmes (such as, but not limited to, Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) III, Interreg, InvestEU and Horizon Europe), €145 billion of planned investment volumes by European financial and development finance institutions, as well as through better coordination with EU Member States to enhance EU’s role in the boards of Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and through the use of innovative financial instruments to attract private capital (Tagliapietra, 2024; The Global Gateway, 2021). However, the Global Gateway is not only focused on financial assistance, but very much also on technical assistance and expertise, on creating the conditions for projects to autonomously outlive the initial investment (Tagliapietra, 2024).

The Global Gateway is expected to deliver through Team Europe Initiatives, namely projects

elaborated and implemented together by EU institutions, Member States European financial institutions, European businesses, civil society and the private sector in partner countries. To steer the implementation process a Global Gateway Board - composed of the President of the Commission, the HR/VP of the Commission, Member States Ministers of Foreign Affairs and, as observers ad hoc, the EP, and representatives from the EIB, the EBRD and Member States' national development banks (European Commission, n.d.-c) - is periodically convened. The Commission also launched, in September 2023, a Business Advisory Group on the Global Gateway (BAG), namely an informal expert group focused on private sector involvement and aimed at providing a stable structure to include input from the business perspective (European Commission, n.d.-b). Finally, also a Civil Society and Local Authorities Dialogue Platform was set up in October 2023, including 57 members, to constitute a space for civil society and local authorities to provide feedback on Global Gateway rollout, as well as to discuss with the Commission engagement opportunities in country-level Global Gateway partnerships, complementing local consultations (EC, 2023b).

2.2 Literature review

Veronique Dimier (2014), in her “The Invention of a European Development Aid bureaucracy – Recycling Empire” explored the evolution of European institutions, actors and practices dealing with development, from the birth of the European Economic Community to the beginning of the 2000s. Her work not only allows to visualise and interpret the changes occurred, in particular the progressive bureaucratization, in this field of European agency, but also to detect the main drivers which brought to those changes, primarily shifts in the balance of power between member states (due to EU enlargement) and changing personal profiles of the functionaries involved. A similar comprehensive account of most recent changes, at least since the Lisbon treaty, is missing, but the issue is far from neglected by contemporary literature.

A first strand of works discusses in general terms the actual extent of the changes occurred in the last two decades (Bergmann et al., 2019), namely the elements of continuity and discontinuity (Di Ciommo, 2021; Orbie et al., 2022) and whether we can talk or not about a paradigm shift (Delputte & Orbie, 2020). Across these contributions a frequent trend, which can be defined as “post-colonial”, is that of trying to understand whether the “development of EU development” brought this field to overcome its underlying Eurocentric, modernist and colonial (EMC) paradigm, which is something generally agreed not to have entirely occurred (Delputte & Orbie, 2020; Orbie, 2021).

A second group of scholars focuses more on specific trends of change occurred in the last two decades, as the (geo-)politicization of development (Chaban & Elgström, 2021; Hackenesch et al., 2021; Hilpold, 2017; Olivié & Santillán, 2021; Stahl, 2023; Youngs & Zihnioğlu, 2021) or its financialization (Orbie et al., 2022), or its instrumentalization (Bergmann et al., 2019; Furness et al., 2020; Holden, 2020) through “policy nexuses” (Hadfield & Lightfoot, 2021) with trade (Amadio Viceré & Venneri, 2023; Bharti, 2022), security and migration (Berger, 2022; Delkáder-Palacios, 2019; Rodríguez Aurrecoechea, 2022) as well as on its capability of maintaining internal coherence in such context (Berger, 2022; Furness et al., 2020; Hodson & Howarth, 2023; Wouters & Ovádek, 2021). Others focus on specific policies, such as the new EFAD (Hodson & Howarth, 2023), the NDICI (García Cancela, 2022), or the Global Gateway (Furness & Keijzer, 2022; Tagliapietra, 2024), or on specific relations, such as those between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries (Hurt, 2020), or again on specific approaches, such as the differentiated approach adopted by the EU since the 2014-2020 MFF (Pilke, 2019).

Reflections include also attempts to understand the main drivers of the detected changes. First of all, as in the abovementioned example of Dimier (2014), where the study of the personal profile of the personnel of the relevant Commission DG proved insightful in understanding specific dynamics at the basis of its functioning and of its later change, reform can be brought by a “change of the guard” in the EU personnel dealing with development, or by new inter-institutional equilibria. This is the case also in Keijzer (2020), where the author analyses the impact of endogenous changes in the system of institutions governing EU-Africa relations on changes in EU practices and frameworks of action in this area. However, as far as more recent evolutions go, examples of the latter can mostly be found at the other side of the equation, namely as part of the description of what changed and of how changes are reflected in the internal functioning of the EU. This is the case in Delputte & Orbie (2020), where the authors highlight the recent shrinking in size of the European Commission’s administration dealing with development, and a simultaneous increase in relevance of the European External Action Service, or of DGs dealing with trade, home policies, or neighbouring policies. This may indeed be linked to the progressive instrumentalization of development that part of the literature individuated. Institutional balance changes are also observed by Orbie et al. (2022) in their analysis of the 2021 “status quo plus” reform, as well as by Burni et al. (2022), exploring the new role of the European Parliament in EU development policy.

Another variable of interest may be represented by a shift in the balance between EU member states, most commonly due to an enlargement, but also, as has recently been the case with Brexit,

by a shrinkage. On enlargement we could once again resort to Dimier (2014), where the considerable impact of the 1973 accession of the UK is assessed, or, more indirectly, to Szent-Ivanyi & Kugiel (2020) who reflect on the challenges brought by the rise of illiberalism in Hungary and Poland on EU development cooperation. On shrinkage, thus on Brexit, the literature is already rich, and interested not only on its effects on EU development policy, but also on the global landscape of development (Langan, 2020; Perez & Olivie, 2020; Price, 2019; Szyndl, 2020).

A third viable independent variable concerns changing international norms and actors. In particular, the new approach to development provided by the Sustainable Development Goals and the rise of new “donors”, most notably the BRICS, have been object of study. As for the SDGs, interesting contributions include Bodenstein et al. (2017), Rabinovych (2020), and Steingass et al. (2021), and some reference *a latere* can be found in Furness et al. (2020). In the latter, among the challenges faced by EU development strategy figures also that of the emergence of the BRICS as new donors; their different approach to development, as well as the geopolitical relevance of their ascendance, are by many parts said to influence, among other things, EU’s capability of promoting its own values and imposing its political conditionalities (Bodomo, 2019; Hackenesch, 2018; Soyaltin-Colella & Cihangir-Tetik, 2022). A specific focus is often devoted to the rise of Asian donors (Dole et al., 2021) and of China in particular (Ahrens & Kalkschmied, 2021; Che & Bodomo, 2023; Christiansen et al., 2019; Grimm & Hackenesch, 2017; Hooijmaaijers, 2018), but other rising donors and aid practices, including the so-called “south-south cooperation”, are also explored extensively (Bergamaschi et al., 2017; Greenhill, 2013), in the context of what Bodomo (2017) defines the globalization of foreign investment.

Strictly related to the latter, a final variable can be individuated in mutated requests coming from aid-recipient countries. The link is provided by the fact that the emergence of new donors, and the consequent diversification of sources of development, arguably causes an improvement in aid-recipient countries’ agency and bargaining power (Carbone, 2013; Christiansen et al., 2019; Hurt, 2020; Lundsgaarde, 2012; I. Taylor, 2014). As an example, Hodzi (2020) explicitly links China’s rising influence in Africa with a renewed African agency and a renegotiation of the terms of its relationship with the EU.

Beyond the aspect of reforms and changes, the EU development framework has been object also of studies concerning its capability to deliver in terms of human rights (Saltnes, 2022; Wouters & Ovádek, 2021) or gender equality (Allwood, 2020; Debusscher, 2013; Sanz Ventín, 2021), as

well as of studies trying to evaluate the impact of Covid-19 (Burni et al., 2022; Di Ciommo, 2021; Kołodziejczyk, 2022) and other global challenges (Furness et al., 2020; Herceg-Kolman & Bandov, 2022; Holden, 2020) on it.

This thesis, while recognizing the validity and potential explanatory power of all the variables mentioned above, focuses predominantly on changes in international norms and actors. This choice is motivated by the fact that only these variables allow for a study of EU reforms as something happening in a global and multifaceted background, including both donors and recipients (in keeping with a terminology more and more contested at the level of developmental strategies and discourses, but still useful as an approximative reference point; Keijzer, 2020; Saltnes & Steingass, 2021), and not as isolated or regional phenomena. To try to assess how this global context influences EU development policy also means an attempt to understand the relative position of the EU in the mosaic of development cooperation and its own perception of it. In particular, as further explained in the next chapter, this thesis examines the issue under a new perspective that, compared to existing literature focused on these same independent variables, presents two main novelties drawn from a constructivist optic. Firstly, it goes from the global to the local, contrarily to what is commonplace, namely to analyse the change at EU level and then to retrace their origin and drivers at global level. Indeed, in our case we start from our global independent variables to describe their effect on the sector as a whole at the level in which they intervened, namely the global one; then we see how such effects trickled down at the EU “local” level, due to the assumed interrelation between the global and the local levels. Secondly, it takes as units of analysis narratives and the understanding underpinning them, which better allow for a global-local comparison.

The assumption, built also on the presented literature, is that the very idea of development cooperation has undergone some important changes at global level in the last two decades, in the direction of an overcoming of the donor-recipient divide, of an increased scope of its definition, of its more explicit insertion in the wider realm of foreign policy tools, of its financialization and of its movement beyond aid, towards a rhetoric of partnership. The hypothesis is that such changes have been brought and testified by the Agenda 2030 and a progressive reshaping of the pool of actors, and that such variables similarly impacted at the EU level, contributing to the formation of the EU current understanding of development cooperation, as reflected in the strategy presented above. Consequently, the thesis reconstructs the recent evolution of the EU understanding of development cooperation through the exposure of the interconnections between global and local understandings, in order to situate it in a wider framework that allows a better

comprehension of it.

3. Theoretical framework and method

As just mentioned, the perspective provided by this thesis has to do with narratives and understandings. It starts from the constructivist assumption that, borrowing from the title of a seminal work by Alexander Wendt (1992), development cooperation ‘is what states make of it’, or, more in general, what actors involved make of it. In other words, there is no universal and static definition of what development cooperation means and the way in which different actors interpret it has ramifications well beyond mere rhetoric. “Constructivism”, a label coined by Onuf in his “Making Sense, Making Worlds” (1989) (Behraves, 2011; Kubáľková et al., 1998), was born as a critical approach to the mainstream study of international relations and comprises various currents. What makes constructivism a critical IR theory, i.e., going against materialist and rationalist approaches, is its assumption that the fundamental structures of international politics are social rather than material, and that such structures not only shape actors’ behaviours, but also their identities and interests (Wendt, 1995).

The main aspects that characterise constructivism in particular, and unite its various currents under the same label, are a shared ontology and epistemology. As far as the first goes, constructivists share the assumption that the social world is made of social structures, composed, in turn, of ‘shared knowledge, material resources, and practices’ (Wendt, 1995, p.73). In these social structures, ideas, material objects and institutions interact in a reciprocal relationship (Cox, 1986). Ideas are to be intended as “intersubjective meanings” (Bieler, 2001) and ‘collective images of social order’ (Cox, 1986, p.218). On material objects it is important to bear in mind that they ‘only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded’ (Wendt, 1995, p.73). Institutions are to be understood as ‘particular amalgams of ideas and material power which in turn influence the development of ideas and material capabilities’ (Cox, 1986, p.219). In other words, a phenomenal world, external to thought, is not denied; what is opposed is its possibility to constitute itself as object of knowledge independently of discursive practices (Guzzini, 2000; Wendt, 1995). This leads us to epistemology, where constructivists take an interpretivist approach, as opposed to an objectivist one, by arguing that, as famously stated by Nietzsche (1974), ‘there are no facts, only interpretations’. According to critical constructivists, the social scientist, while observing the meaning that facts hold for the actors involved, can, with their own interpretation, have a feedback effect on the object of their study, in what Giddens describes as “double hermeneutic” (Giddens,

1984; Guzzini, 2000; Hopf, 1998; Katzenstein et al., 1998). This makes it impossible, for them, to conduct objective abstractions and generalization as it is done in natural sciences. However, conventional constructivists soften this postpositive epistemology allowing contingent generalizations (Adler, 2012), namely the analysis of particular spheres of human activity in their historically located totality.

Something inspired to the latter is the approach adopted in this paper; indeed, the idea is not to generalise human understanding of development cooperation, but precisely to situate the variations of such understanding in a specific temporal line and sectoral and geographical context, in order also to identify the reflection of these variations on the “material world”. The assumption is that the way in which the idea of development cooperation is framed by international actors is not merely a rhetoric superstructure put in place by them to justify actions in pursuit of their own material interests (as it may sound from a realist perspective), but it is a framework for action constituted by the intersection of different interests with which it is in a relationship of reciprocal influence. In other words, actors act based on identities, narratives, institutional norms and interests that they do not form in complete isolation, but in constant dialectic with other actors. This generates, it is here argued, two layers of understanding of a given socially constructed idea: the first layer is the “local” one, each actor’s idea of what development cooperation is, on which it constructs its narrative and its actions; while the second layer, the “global” one, represents the battlefield in which different “local” understandings continuously clash and interact with one another influencing and constituting one another. The “local” and the “global” levels are, thus, mutually constitutive. In other words, each actor has its own understanding (in the case of the EU created by the continuous dialectic between its member States and institutions and in continuous dialectic with other actors) of how development cooperation’s landscape looks like at global level and tries to respond by communicating it through a specific narrative, in order also to shape, in turn, the global understanding itself, as it sees it. This is the assumed mechanic that underpins the theoretical framework of this thesis.

To further clarify, we can distinguish actions, narratives and understandings, where narratives constitute the bridge of the triad. Narratives are those who back actions while being rooted in a specific understanding. At the same time, though, differences between narratives and actions can signal differences within the actual understanding and the narrative and this is why a differentiation between the latter two is needed. In this thesis we will see examples in which a specific rhetoric is used to convey a certain narrative, while substantially betraying a different understanding (e.g., the reinstating of the “eradication of poverty” as main objective of EU

development cooperation coupled with the gradual disappearance the term “poverty” in strategic documents and international agreements and with the reduction of the share of funds devoted to the LDCs). Moreover, a certain rhetoric too represents an action, for instance, if changes of narrative are not accompanied by changes of action, this counts the same as a statement, as an action that will trigger a response from other actors and will shape their future expectations and strategies: words are actions and narratives shape international relationships as much as practices do. Behind these narratives and these practices there is a certain understanding of what development cooperation means, of the role an actor has to play in it and on the way other actors understand it and should understand it. Therefore, to comprehend EU understanding of development cooperation is also a way of better grasping the logic behind its actions and narratives. But, again, the only way to really comprehend the EU understanding of development is to situate it in the “battlefield” that is the global understanding. In turn, the global level will benefit from a more local focus, which can serve as an example of the ramifications of its evolution. The strength of constructivism is precisely that of allowing to study how EU frames its own identity as a development player in relation and constant exchange with the rest of the world, in order also to understand its practices. Here, again, it is important to always bear in mind that the EU’s compound nature makes its “local” understanding somewhat multilayered and more complex than it sometimes may look.

This piece of research individuates changes occurred in the last twenty years in the global understanding of development cooperation - in the direction of an increasingly fragmented and contested pool of actors, of an increased scope of its definition, of its more explicit insertion in the wider realm of foreign policy tools, of its financialization and of its movement beyond aid, towards a rhetoric of partnership and cooperation - as caused and testified by the emergence of new actors and the elaboration of the Agenda 2030. Then, based on our theoretical framework and on our hypotheses, we expect to see such changes reflected in some way (by convergence or by contrast) in the current EU understanding of development cooperation - as reflected by its strategy outlined in chapter 2 - due to the constant local-global interrelation. Once individuated such aspects, we try to see when they came into being, to see if the timing corresponds to what we would expect based on the global changes we hypothesise as drivers. It is important to note that we do not necessarily look for a relationship of cause and effect, but we can expect changes to have occurred concomitantly, given the mutual influence exercised by the local and global levels on one another and the relevance of the EU as a global normative actor in the sector. The idea is not to say that EU’s understanding of development cooperation changed only in reaction or due to global level changes, but that the one cannot be fully understood without the other. The

same is somewhat true also in reverse, in as much as the EU level will provide a valuable example for better comprehending changes described at global level. Finally, we look at the official justification provided by EU actors to the changes occurred, to see whether they indeed reflect such connection with global level changes and how do they interpret such connection; e.g., they refer to increased geopolitical competition in the sector, they focus on the idea of partnerships more than in the past, they underline the need of going beyond ODA to embrace new challenges, or, by contrast, they stress EU specificity facing certain global trends.

It is difficult to think that we may find strong evidence against such relation between the global and the local, but what we could find, being the EU a compound polity, is a prevalence of intra-EU motives and drivers over global ones in the shaping of its development cooperation strategy. Indeed, a strong confirmation of our hypothesis would interestingly tell us that, despite development not being regarded as a field where EU member States really act in unity, the global trends are strong enough to prevail over internal differences in shaping it. Moreover, it is interesting to see where the EU goes along with global trends and where it tries to shape or contrast them. In sum, what we intend to prove is the strong explanatory value of our global independent variables, and we intend to do this by adopting a framework of analysis that really allows to take full account of the global-local interconnection.

To do so, the research method adopted includes documents, data and discourse analysis as well as interviews. First, as anticipated, the aim is that of substantiating the assumption that relevant changes occurred in the understanding of development cooperation at global level in the last two decades, most prominently linked to the emergence of new actors on the “donor” side, bringing to the fore new models of cooperation, and to the introduction of the SDGs. The assumption is based on existing literature, already rich. The engagement with the literature, in which attention is given to the inclusion of contributors from all over the world, as much as possible, is complemented by the consultation of official OECD and UN data on development cooperation flows and trends, in order also to see the practical effects of “rhetorical” changes, as posited by constructivism. Moreover, after having assessed and motivated the relevance of China as a relatively new and highly influential development actor, an analysis of its proposed model of development cooperation is conducted through the consultation of official Chinese documents (available in English translation), as an example to better comprehend the complexity of the global landscape and the nature of the novelty coming from new “Southern” donors in general (with all the due caution). Then, on the related topic of the emergence of the SDGs and on its consequences in the reshaping of the global understanding of development cooperation, a

comparison between the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the SDGs is set to highlight the novelties introduced by the latter, at least “on paper”. As far as more “material” changes are concerned, the chapter dedicated to the EU represents a valuable case study; for the “global” chapter, beyond a few examples, it will be sufficient to highlight how the emergence of new actors and the agreement on SDGs led to and testified about a shift of narrative and approach in development cooperation in the last two decades.

In chapter 5, the focus is shifted towards the EU. The idea, again, is to understand how the EU perceives the changes at global level, its role in them, and how it reacts by reshaping its own “local” approach to development cooperation. Our analysis at global level, as well as the literature, already give us some hints on the main trends of change witnessed in the last two decades in the EU, including geo-politicization, financialization, instrumentalization and a focus on partnerships. Such changes are traced in the diachronic analysis of EU pieces of legislation and international agreements (from Yaoundé to Cotonou to Samoa and from the 2006 to the 2017 European Consensus on Development, just to mention a few of them) on development cooperation. Then, the study of how these changes have been framed and justified is performed through discourse analysis, in order to see whether the hypothesised impact of global level changes makes sense, in which way and to what extent. Discourse analysis is conducted on texts of international treaties and EU legislation - with a specific focus on their preambles where the ratio of the document is often presented - as well as on speeches, press releases, institutional webpages, reports from events, and any other institutional communication. The idea is to go beyond the plain text both in the direction of its interpretation in terms of narrative and understanding and in the one of its practical ramifications, in line with the theoretical framework described above.

To achieve this goal, a fundamental role in the research, in both the presented chapters, is played also by a number of voices collected “from the field” through interviews. Thanks to some contacts obtained through the Permanent Representation of Italy to the EU, where I did an internship from May to August 2024, as well as to some research conducted individually on the internet and to the so-called “snowballing”, I managed to interview representatives from EU institutions (DG INTPA), NGOs (CONCORD, OXFAM), think tanks (ECDPM, ODI Europe) EU partner countries (Kenya) as well as an African CSO (AfricaPlatform) to get different perspectives on the issue. A list of the interviewees, contacted via e-mail and LinkedIn and interviewed either online or in presence in Brussels, with their respective organisation and role, is provided in Annex I of the present thesis. All participants have been informed about the content of any reference

made in this work to the position expressed by them during the interviews.

4. The global reshaping of the understanding of development

As introduced above, this section aims at explaining and substantiating the crucial assumption of this thesis, on which our hypothesis is built. The assumption is that the global understanding of development cooperation has been substantially altered in the last two decades in the direction of an increased scope of its definition, of an increasingly fragmented and contested pool of actors, of its more explicit insertion in the wider realm of foreign policy tools, of its financialization and of its movement beyond aid, towards a rhetoric of partnership and cooperation. Such shifts are analysed through the study of the rise of new actors and of the introduction of the SDGs which are assumed as fundamental drivers and testimonies of the former. It is important here again to briefly restate what is meant by understanding and by global understanding. With “understanding” we refer to the way in which a particular concept is defined and framed by the actors involved in it. Such framing is reflected on a specific narrative and rhetoric. This is not a matter of secondary importance, since such framing can have, as fundamentally argued by constructivists, meaningful impacts on action. A classical example concerns migration: if we frame it - and name it – as “the migration phenomenon”, we convey the idea that it is something natural, indeed to be dealt with but within the ordinary administration of State affairs; another thing is to talk about “the problem of migration”, with a connotation immediately suggesting the existence of a security issue and the necessity of extra-ordinary counter measures. These two different framings, the way in which they are communicated and the actions that from them are likely to be put in place, are not necessarily driven by material differences in the migration flows. In this example, to make it simpler, we have hypothesised a convergence between understanding, narrative and action which not always takes place. It is indeed usually a misalignment between narrative and action that suggests a different understanding from the one communicated.

To study the “global understanding” is not to identify an unrealistic shared way in which all actors involved in the global landscape of development cooperation frame this issue, but an attempt to make sense of the matrix of interactions between them and their own understandings, basically to see what they fundamentally agree and disagree on. A crucial aspect that is here detailed is precisely the fact that development cooperation passed from being an almost exclusive dominion of the West, to being a more contested field (Esteves & Klingebiel, 2021). Thus, with great simplification, we could say that while there has been, at least among the “donors”, something similar to a shared understanding of development cooperation (the one proposed by the West) for

some time, now it is no longer the case, due to the emergence of new actors and models. This is not something that suddenly happened from one day to another, nor we can say that this process started precisely two decades ago, but here we take into account this timeframe because we are more interested in the results than on the process itself and its causes, and it is arguably in the last two decades that the effects of such process have become more evident.

This is not the only “enlargement” witnessed in the sector that caused some sort of rethinking of the concept of development cooperation; indeed, the concept itself was enlarged to include a wide range of topics through the elaboration of the Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals, as well as through its more explicit embedding in the foreign policy toolkit. The effect of these two enlargements is well explained in Bodenstein et al. (2017), where it is emphasised the shift from an economic development- and humanitarian aid- centred discourse to an all-encompassing one cutting across many topics, previously treated separately, such as environmental sustainability, security, migration, trade, investments, etc.; as well as it is highlighted the expansion of the number of potential veto players in the global decision-making arena, in a sector that, precisely due to the enlargement in scope just described, more and more requires global solutions.

4.1 Enlargement of the pool of actors

4.1.1 Background

The origin of development cooperation, or better of foreign aid for development or development aid (a wording that makes all the difference, and whose different meaning will soon appear evident), cannot be traced back to a precise point in time. Its origin, at least in the form we got to know in the last few decades, is by many individuated in the colonial experience (Delputte & Orbie, 2020; Dimier, 2014; Hjertholm & White, 2000). In particular, although examples can be found even in the 19th century, it is commonly agreed that it was the dismantling of colonial empires and the wave of independence started in the 1940s, in the aftermath of the second World War, that gave birth in a more structural and impactful way to development aid (Browne, 1997; Dimier, 2014; Hjertholm & White, 2000). Indeed, already existing economic and trade ties with the colonizers, as well as the latter’s willingness to maintain some sort of relationship, influence or control over their former dominions, made foreign aid for development a diffused practice. In the same period, however, European colonial powers, devastated by World War II, were also recipients of what is considerable as the first large-scale foreign aid for development and reconstruction program ever put in place, namely the Marshall Plan. This Plan, launched in 1947,

provided US\$ 13 billion for the reconstruction of Europe and proved successful in putting Europe back on track. Some authors indeed underline the crucial role of the US in the “invention” of development aid (Ali & Zeb, 2016; Bracho, 2015; Browne, 1997; Rist, 2002), individuating its symbolic date of birth in the 1949 US President Harry Truman’s inaugural address, where, as fourth and last point of his program, he stated the following:

‘we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.’

(Truman, 1949)

According to Rist (2002, pp.72-73), in this occasion the very concept of development acquires a new meaning; by referring to economically backward countries as “underdeveloped areas”, Truman is, according to the author, introducing a new transitive usage of the word “development”, that had since then been used only in intransitive terms, as something that happens, but cannot be intentionally provoked.

The more the Cold War grew in intensity, the more European former colonial powers feared to lose their strong linkages with former colonies and the more the US needed to strengthen and extend its influence over the “free world”; in both cases the West needed to present itself as the best option, compared to the Soviet Empire: this all resulted in a growing and increasingly structured focus on development aid (Browne, 1997; Rist, 2002). Indeed, in the second half of the 20th century we witness the establishment of ministries and organizations at country level tasked specifically with aid allocation, including, just to name a few, the Agence Française de développement (AFD), constituted in 1941, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), founded in 1961, and the Australian Development Assistance Agency (ADAA), created in 1974 (Ali & Zeb, 2016).

These strategic interests, combined with a postwar climate of horror for the crimes committed by the Nazis, with a renewed focus on human rights, as epitomized by the 1948 universal declaration, and with the need for reconstruction in large portions of the world, created the conditions for development aid to make its appearance also at international level. The newly created UN included a United Nations relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA)⁵, the world’s first aid agency, already established in 1943, and later introduced the UN Conference on Trade and

⁵ UNRRA was the forerunner of UNHCR and UNICEF (Browne, 1997)

Development (UNCTAD) and the UN Program for Development (UNDP), launched respectively in 1964 and 1966 (Browne, 1997; Hjertholm & White, 2000). Moreover, under US initiative and steering, the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) were established in 1944, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), later named World Bank (WB) Group, with its regional branches (the InterAmerican Development Bank, the African Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank, established respectively in 1960, 1964 and 1966) and with the International Development Association (IDA) founded in 1960 (Ali & Zeb, 2016; Hjertholm & White, 2000).

In this context a process of negotiation among the donors brought to a more or less definite common understanding of development aid. In particular, the US, at the end of the 1950s, proposed the creation of a Development Assistance Group (that after the birth of the OECD in 1961 would have taken the current name of Development Assistance Committee or DAC) to scale up, coordinate and share the burden of development aid with the other Western power. This venue provided a framework for negotiating a common definition of development aid, which finally emerged in 1969 with the introduction of the concept of “official development assistance” (ODA), not fully defined before 1972. The main idea beyond ODA is that they must be public resources awarded on concessional terms, representing thus a burden for the country generating it and not for the one receiving it. Contextually, in 1970, at UN level it was decided that developed countries would have destined 0.7% of their Gross National Product (GNP) to ODA (Bracho, 2015; Scott, 2015).

In sum, at its outset, development aid was framed as something developed countries would provide to less developed or developing countries with the idea, in principle, of helping ‘the free peoples of the world, through their own efforts, to produce more food, more clothing, more materials for housing, and more mechanical power to lighten their burdens’ (Truman, 1949). In other words, since its birth, development aid was characterised mainly by North-South flows - in keeping with the classic, although contestable, distinction between a developed North of the world and an underdeveloped South - and was part of a mostly Western rhetoric and vocabulary.

The birth of the idea of South-South cooperation (SSC) is conventionally identified in the Afro-Asian conference of Bandung, Indonesia, which took place in April 1955. It is there that, in a world separated in two by the iron curtain, a new Third World took shape, and the seeds of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) were planted. The concept of SSC emerged from Bandung went well beyond aid, encompassing, at least in its intentions, humanitarian assistance and technical

cooperation as well as regional integration and the development of a common position and agenda in multilateral negotiations. More importantly, it had at its core the idea of defending the sovereignty of newly independent states from North's – mostly Western - interference, (Bergamaschi & Tickner, 2017; Bracho, 2015; Chaturvedi et al., 2012; Lee, 2009). Among the principles enlisted in the last section of the final communiqué of the conference figure the '(a)bstention from intervention or interference in the internal affairs of another country', the '(a)bstention from the use of arrangements of collective defence to serve the particular interests of any of the big powers', the '(a)bstention by any country from exerting pressures on other countries', the '(p)romotion of mutual interests and co-operation' as well as the '(r)espect of fundamental human rights and for the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations'(the Asian-African Conference, 1955). The "spirit of Bandung" materialised in the creation of coalitions and organizations, such as the G77 (now called G77 and China and comprising more than 130 countries), the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the Organization of African Unity, and the South Conference (now South Centre), just to name some, and in some successes, as the call for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) at the UNCTAD or the establishment, in 1974, within the UNDP, of a unit tasked with the promotion of technical cooperation among developing countries (UN office for South-South Cooperation since 2012) (Bergamaschi & Tickner, 2017; Bracho, 2015; Chaturvedi et al., 2012).

In the 1980s, due to a debt crisis affecting part of the Third World, to the fragmentation of the latter because of the economical emergence of East Asian "tigers", and to the neoliberal ideology of Thatcherian and Reaganian inspiration which made the West less inclined to debate on the NIEO, SSC lost momentum (Bergamaschi & Tickner, 2017; Chaturvedi et al., 2012). Nonetheless, traces of the spirit of Bandung remained visible in the debate over development, where the OECD-DAC countries partly adapted their discourse in the attempt of re-homogenising the world of development under a shared understanding. This is already visible in the wording used for the titles of some documents produced by the OECD, such as the 1995 'Development Partnerships in the New Global Context' and the 1996 'Shaping Development Cooperation in the Twenty-first Century', where the idea of aid begins to be watered down and increasingly replaced by those of "partnership" and "cooperation". At the turn of the millennium, the North, or better, the West, after the failure of the "Washington Consensus" - the liberal package of reforms adopted as main model by the WB and the IMF which had led many Southern governments to indebtedness - elaborated some new principles that are commonly referred to as the "post-Washington Consensus"; these included ownership by the recipient country, the coupling of poverty reduction and investments in education and health, and civil society participation. Such

principles were enshrined in the MDGs in the 2000s, as well as in the Monterrey Consensus (2002) on the financial resources for achieving such goals and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), that complemented the former. The Paris Declaration, in particular, although largely negotiated by Northern donors, seemed incorporating some aspects of Bandung when reaffirming the need for recipient countries' ownership and the alignment with their agenda for development, something reminding of the principles of sovereignty and non-interference expressed in Indonesia, although in practice still not that close (Bergamaschi & Tickner, 2017; Bracho, 2015).

4.1.2 The new millennium

The new millennium, the timespan we are more interested in within this research, has seen the re-emergence of the South, but in a substantially different way, with a conspicuous increase of influence in terms of volume and geographical coverage of their foreign investments (Esteves & Klingebiel, 2021). The important economic growth experienced by some countries such as China, India, Brazil and South Africa, or the Russian Federation emerged from the ashes of the USSR, or, again, East Asian (see South Korea) or Arab oil-exporter countries has started to put into question the North-South dichotomy. Indeed, the share of development cooperation covered by such new providers has been growing considerably, together with their economic and political relevance, especially at regional level, but, at the same time, the unevenness of their development, leaving per capita GDP at levels closer to less developed countries of the South than to the North, has preserved their right to receive ODA (Bracho, 2015).

For the first decade of the new millennium, developing countries grew faster than developed countries, with unprecedented growth rates on a per capita basis, and their share in global output rose sharply. As a result, between 1996 and 2009 South-South trade grew at a pace 50% faster than North-South trade (average 12% per year) and arrived at representing 20% of global trade and over 50% of developing country trade in 2009. South-South foreign direct investment (FDI) also rose rapidly, at an annual rate of 20%, reaching 10% of total FDI flows in the same year (UNCTAD, 2011). In the meantime, a severe economic crisis hit mostly the West in 2008, and this accelerated these transformations (Chaturvedi, 2012; Gore, 2013). Since 2009 the trend has not changed, in 2021 the share of South-South trade touched 28% and represented the main driver of global trade growth (UNCTAD, 2023). FDI flows too have been rising since, recently even surpassing those produced by developed countries (Figure 1), and expected to generate a third of

global FDI outflows by 2025 (Saha et al., 2020; UNCTAD, 2024).



Figure 1

To measure exactly SSC is, at present, impossible and even more so is to extrapolate from it the “development cooperation” part; this is why here we presented some of the crucial components of foreign investments and economic movements in general as a proxy for understanding the growing relevance of developing actors in the development sector. The difficulties in calculating SSC, and in particular its development cooperation component, include the different understanding that each actor has of development cooperation, the hesitations of most of such countries in sharing precise data (which indeed are often calculated approximately in the North) and the absence of an agreed system of data aggregation and evaluation comparable to that put in place by OECD-DAC countries with their ODA system or, more recently, the TOSSD (Total Official Support for Sustainable Development) (Besharati & MacFeely, 2019). What we do know about SSC is that, as explicitly mentioned, for example, in the Buenos Aires outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation (UNGA, 2017), it is not to be seen as ODA.

In fact, to consider the developing world as a cohesive and homogeneous group is very far from how the reality is. These actors more or less share some principles elaborated at multilateral level during the years, such as the ‘respect for national sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality, non-conditionality, non-interference in domestic affairs and mutual benefit’ (UNGA, 2017, para. 4), as well as some core documents including the Buenos Aires Plan of Action or the Nairobi outcome document of the High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation, but, for example, some of them have joined the DAC either as OECD

members (e.g., South Korea, Turkey) or as non-OECD participants, although not fully aligned (e.g., Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar), and their motives, practices and justifications when it comes to development cooperation varies greatly (Bergamaschi & Tickner, 2017).

Another reason why a sharp DAC – SSC divide cannot be drawn is the diffusion of the so-called “triangular” or “trilateral” cooperation (TrC), which are cooperations involving both developed and developing countries as well as multilateral organizations, whose precise meaning and definition is still object of debate. The 1978 Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (TCDC), known as the Buenos Aires Plan of Action (BAPA) first suggested a role for developed countries as catalysts for cooperation between developing countries, but the nature of such role is not understood by everyone in the same way. The very fact that some actors as the UN and the OECD refer to it as “triangular” cooperation while others, such as Brazil, China and the US prefer the term “trilateral”, lamenting the possible hierarchical nature of the former, suggests the blurredness of such concept, despite its having being object of several studies both in the academia and in multilateral organizations (Chaturvedi, 2012; Zoccal, 2021).

Moreover, the “rise of the South” should not be overstated, traditional DAC donors remain still dominant, the EU and its member states remain the larger ODA providers in the world. Nonetheless, their dominion is no longer undisputed (more than 430 initiatives related to SSC and triangular cooperation were reported by the UNDP in 95 countries in 2023- UNDP, n.d.), and also the appropriateness of ODA to account alone for developing expenditure is increasingly contested (included within the OECD, with the recent elaboration of the TOSSD) (Bracho, 2015; Gore, 2013). In addition, as underlined by our interviewee from the think tank ECDPM, compared to the past, development aid flows are no longer among the main financial flows going towards developing countries (Interviewee 1), thus also their relative role and importance is changing. As Chaturvedi, Janus, et al., (2021) argue in their 'Development Cooperation in the Context of Contested Global Governance', traditional development cooperation is being challenged by many different “sites of contestation”, including, for instance, different club governance formats as the G20⁶ development working group, the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), the IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) and MICTA (Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia); new development banks, such as the BRICS' New Development Bank (NDB) or the

⁶ The G20, formed in 1999, is by itself considerable as a contesting site, since it basically replaced the G8 as main forum of global economic governance. It is composed by the G8 countries (USA, Japan, Germany, France, UK, Italy, Canada and Russia) by the “outreach 5” (Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa) and by Argentina, Indonesia, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and Turkey (Chaturvedi et al., 2012; Goldstein, 2013).

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB); and new regional initiatives as the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor launched by India and Japan.

On top of that, the number of relevant actors has increased not only in terms of countries involved, but also in terms of types. They now include ‘subnational entities and parliamentarians, civil society, private sector, volunteer groups, faith-based organizations, philanthropic organizations, scientific and technological communities, foundations and think-tanks, and academia’ as well as ‘multilateral institutions, international and regional banks and funds, including those newly established by developing countries’ (UNGA, 2019, para 16).

When assessing the presence of new actors in this field, attention is often reserved mostly to the BRICS, or to the BICS (De Bruyn, 2013; Quadir, 2013), since Russian influence abroad is mostly felt in security (or destabilization) terms more than as a development actor⁷ (Interviewee 1), or often to China (Ahrens & Kalkschmied, 2021; Che & Bodomo, 2023; Christiansen et al., 2019; Colarizi, 2022; Grimm & Hackenesch, 2017; Hooijmaaijers, 2018; Mawdsley, 2012; Reilly, 2012; Tan-Mullins et al., 2010;) or India (Chakrabarty, 2022; Mawdsley, 2010). This does not allow to grasp the full picture (Gu & Kitano, 2018); indeed other significant actors, with their own understanding, motives and practices, as mentioned above, include Arab Gulf countries, which during the period 1973-2008 doubled the 0.7 % target and provided on average five times the ODA of OECD-DAC countries (Momani & Ennis, 2012; Tok et al., 2014); Latin American countries (Robledo, 2015), which, for example, focus very much on experiences sharing between administrations (Interviewee 1), as well as other Asian countries (Dole et al., 2021), including the OECD-DAC member South Korea, but also Indonesia, Turkey and post-socialist States (Lightfoot, 2010; Szent-Iványi, 2012). However, a closer examination at all these actors would lead us too much out of scope, so the reader can refer to the literature cited as well as to Bergamaschi et al. (2017), Chaturvedi (2012), Chaturvedi, Janus, et al. (2021), Sidiropoulos et al. (2015) for more comprehensive analyses.

4.1.3 The Chinese model

We briefly focus, instead, only on one specific actor, namely China. There are three main reasons behind this choice, one is the significance of Chinese impact in the sector in terms of volume of investment, the second is its significance in terms of proposed model, the third is its significance

⁷ This does not mean that Russia should be disregarded as an actor in the scenario, taking into account the huge influence it plays for example in Africa, as recently witnessed even more clearly in the Sahel.

in relation with the EU.

China's trade volumes between 2005 and 2020 more than tripled and their growth remained positive even in 2020 during the pandemic. At least a fifth of all South-South trade flows involve China, and in 2021 China had by far the largest trade surplus position in the world (UNCTAD, 2023). Moreover, China's FDI have been steadily growing in the last thirty years, from a value of \$3,487 million in 1990 to \$163,253 million in 2023, which in terms of share of total world's FDI means a passage from 1.7% to 12.25% (with a peak of 14.7% in 2022). Just as a means of comparison, the amount of Chinese FDI in 2023 roughly corresponded to the sum of FDI by Brazil (\$65,897 million), India (\$28,163 million) South Africa (\$5,233 million) and West Asia⁸ (\$65,220 million) (UNCTAD, 2024). On development specifically, again, there are no precise data, but the increased agency showed by Beijing in the last 10 years is made evident by the growth of its engagement in multilateralism in this field (both the BRICS' New Development Bank and the AIIB are backed by China and were founded in 2014), as well as by the launch of the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as "the Silk Road of the 21st Century", in 2013 (Mawdsley, 2021). Based on what the Chinese government itself reports, from 2013 to 2018, China allocated a total of RMB270,2 billion (roughly \$37,7 billion at the august 2024 exchange rate), in the form of grants (47.3%), interest-free loans (4.18%) and concessional loans (48.52%), for foreign assistance. Such assistance was extended to 20 regional and international multilateral organizations (recipient of 4.24% of the total funding) and 122 countries, 53 in Africa (44.65%), 30 in Asia (36.82%), 22 in Latin America and the Caribbean (7.27%), 9 in Oceania (3.71%) and 8 in Europe (3.31%). By income group, 45.73% of foreign aid in the period 2013-2018 was destined to LDCs, 34.77% to lower middle-income countries, 14.87% to higher middle-income countries, and 4.63% to international organizations and others (China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era, 2021).

In terms of model, China is considered among the main inspirators and promoters of SSC, already since Bandung, where the Chinese Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai played a pivotal role in the elaboration and approval of the principles enlisted at the end of the final communiqué (some of which we quoted above) (Garver, 2016, p.108). Chinese influence is felt to the extent that some scholars talk about a Beijing Consensus as an alternative to the Washington or post-Washington consensus when it comes to countries' choice of economic development model (Halper, 2011; Jarso, 2018; Ramo, 2005). Moreover, Beijing itself tries to

⁸ Including impactful countries like Turkey, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, as well as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Georgia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, State of Palestina, Syria and Yemen.

steer SSC not only through the already mentioned NDB and AIIB, but also through the Institute of South-South Cooperation and Development (ISSCAD) set up in Peking University, whose aim is to share China's experience in state governance and train talent from other developing countries, and the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF), which by the end of 2019 had already launched 82 projects in cooperation with 14 international organizations (China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era, 2021). This does not mean that the Chinese model, detailed below, is superimposable on the SSC, that, as we have seen, cannot be described as a specific and defined model, but its relevance should not be underestimated either. On top of that, China itself regards its own foreign assistance as part of a new model of international relations to be established and falling into the category of SSC, therefore 'essentially different from North-South cooperation' (China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era, 2021, p.5)

Finally, another reason for having a closer look at the Chinese model is its relevance for the EU, an aspect that is touched upon more in detail in the next chapter. For now, it is sufficient to underline the fact that in 2023 China was the largest partner for EU imports of goods (20.5%) and the third largest for exports (8.8%) and that EU's trade in goods deficit with China in the period 2013-2023 varied between €104 billion in 2013 and €397 billion in 2022 (Eurostat, 2024). These characteristics of EU-China relations, together with different positions on several international issues, with Chinese investments in critical infrastructures of the EU (European Parliament, 2023) and many other factors that is no use to detail here, make the EU see China as 'a partner for cooperation, an economic competitor and a systemic rival' (EEAS, 2023). According to our CONCORD Europe interviewee, it is her view that the EU began to fear competition in the development sector precisely when China, particularly with the initiation of its investments in Europe and Africa, became a more prominent player, something discussed more in detail in the next chapter (Interviewee 2). Finally, it is not by chance that the literature on development has been reserving for quite some time a special place to China, also in relationship with the EU, as demonstrated, for instance, by the giant mole of contributions produced on the EU-China-Africa triangle (Bodomo, 2019; Che & Bodomo, 2023; EUISS, 2016; Hooijmaaijers, 2018; Stahl, 2023).

The first thing to consider when it comes to the Chinese understanding of development is that China, despite now being considered a major power and having lifted approximately 800 million people out of poverty in the last four decades (CIA, n.d.), still considers itself to be 'the largest developing country in the world' (as written in the first line of China and Africa in the New Era -

A Partnership of Equals, 2021; and China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era, 2021) and has until now obtained to keep being regarded as such within multilateral organizations such as the UN. This does not mean that China does not acknowledge its role as a major country, co-founder of the UN and permanent member of the UN Security Council, and the responsibilities connected with it; but it does entail a belief in 'common but differentiated responsibilities', which make the North-South cooperation the main channel for international development cooperation and SSC its complement (China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era, 2021, p.38).

Indeed, the People's Republic of China (PRC), while revindicating its 'spirit of internationalism and humanitarianism' (p.1) already since its foundation in 1949, fully embraced its role as a major global actor and entered a "new era" starting from 2012, under the leadership of Xi Jinping (since then President of the PRC, Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party and President of the Central Military Commission of the Party). This new era started from the understanding of the unprecedented level of interconnection and interdependence among countries, faced by increasingly global challenges, sharing a similar past and similar aims and goals when it comes to development. In this context, the declared mission of China's international development cooperation is that of promoting a 'global community of shared future' (p.5). This means contributing to the narrowing of the North-South gap and to establish 'a new model of international relations based on mutual respect, equity, justice and win-win cooperation, and build an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security and common prosperity' (p.5). Other focal points of the Chinese approach to development cooperation include the pursuance of the greater good and shared interests, with preeminence of the first, as well as a focus on SSC and on helping developing countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals listed in the UN Agenda 2030 (see next section). A major platform to achieve all this is individuated in the BRI, launched in 2013 and aimed at promoting 'policy, infrastructure, trade, financial and people-to-people connectivity' among countries (p.6).

The principles informing such approach include some elements already mentioned in relation to SSC: respecting each other as equals (which also means no interference, no conditionalities, no political strings attached and alignment to the development path chosen by, and suitable to, the recipient country); doing the best to help compatibly with one's own national strength; focusing on improving people's life through tangible gains; providing the means for independent development; ensuring correct management, supervision, delivery, evaluation and sustainability; promoting exchanges and mutual learning in a spirit of openness; and introducing reforms and

innovations while remaining true to one's own principles (pp. 6-8).

Based on this approach and principles, China pursues its development cooperation objectives in various forms, including the elaboration and implementation of complete projects, with a focus on infrastructure and agriculture; the provision of goods and materials; technical cooperation; human resources development through the organization of training sessions and seminars for foreign officials and technical personnel; engagement in the framework of the SSCAF; the dispatch of medical teams and volunteers; the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance; and debt relief (pp.12-16) (China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era, 2021).

An important platform and framework for action is provided, as mentioned above, by the BRI, also known as the new Silk Road. The aim of this 'systematic project' is 'to promote the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas, establish and strengthen partnerships among the countries along the Belt and Road, set up all-dimensional, multitiered and composite connectivity networks, and realize diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development in these countries' (Action Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015, p.1). Cooperation priorities include policy coordination, infrastructural connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people to people bond. Both bilateral cooperation and multilateral mechanisms as well as international forums and exhibitions are included in the toolkit, together with a specific international summit forum on the BRI whose third edition was held in October 2023 and was joined by 23 head of states from all continents (including only Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban from the EU and the Serbian and Russian Presidents from Europe), a slight decrease of participation compared to previous editions (Action Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015; Tiezzi, 2023).

What we presented is the theory, is what China itself presents as its approach and plans for development cooperation and of course the reality is far more multifaceted and complex. It would be sufficient to cite as examples the accusations extended to China of creating "debt traps" (Schwarz & Rudyak, 2023) or the political concessions that EU countries made to China in prevision or after Chinese investments in their country (e.g., in 2017, EU's condemnation of China's human rights violations at the UNHCR Council was vetoed by Greece) that seem to contrast with the non-interference principle predicated by Beijing. Be that as it may, for what concern this research, it is sufficient, at this stage, to consider merely the rhetoric and understanding that China has of development cooperation, the model that it tries to promote and

the influence it has on SSC and on the sector as a whole.

4.2 Enlargement of scope: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

An attempt at bridging the traditional OECD-DAC model and SSC occurred in 2011 at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, Korea. There, the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-Operation was signed, establishing a Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation (GPEDC) to be run by the OECD and the UNDP jointly. The idea of GPEDC was to provide a platform for the adoption of shared standards and norms among DAC members, SSC providers and all the actors and stakeholders involved, including non-state actors. The experiment, albeit arguably representing an important paradigm shift from “aid effectiveness” to “development effectiveness” and albeit still in place, failed almost immediately in its bridging intent; indeed, at its first High Level Forum held in Mexico in 2014, Brazil, India and China left the GPEDC⁹(Bracho, 2017; Esteves & Klingebiel, 2021; P. Taylor et al., 2023). The UN Development Cooperation Forum (UN DCF), instead, maintains a global membership, but is yet not able to shape standards and norms at global level: a platform with such power is still missing (Chaturvedi et al., 2021).

On the other hand, where some congruence has been importantly reached is in the setting of some universal goals for development or, better, for “sustainable development”. The concept of sustainable development was first popularized by the 1987 report “Our Common Future”, also known as the “Brundtland Report”, elaborated by the UN-established World Commission on Environment and Development, and since then has been a stable feature of the environmental discussions (Morin et al., 2020). The concept, due to the interlinkages between environment and development discourses, also entered the latter field, even if more gradually and consecrating itself only in the years 10s of the 2000. It was the Rio+20¹⁰ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, held in 2012, with its outcome document “The Future We Want” to agree on a negotiating process to achieve a consensus on SDGs.

Actually, some common development goals, the MDGs, had already been set in 2000 by the United Nations Millennium Declaration, but while it could be said that it was still the DAC the cradle of the MDGs (Carey & Atwood, 2021; Stevens & Kanie, 2016), for the SDGs the preparation included two years of intensive public consultation with the stakeholders and civil

⁹ For more details on the reasons behind this choice it is recommended the reading of Bracho, 2017.

¹⁰ 20 years since the second international summit on the environment held by the UN in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

society, the results of which were reported by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his synthesis report “The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet” (2014) (Agenda 2030, 2015, p.3). Indeed, according to Grotenhuis (2015), the SDGs reflected the transition occurred in the sector from a post-colonial to a globalized world. In other words, as noted by one of our interviewees, the head of secretariat of the pan-African organization Africa Platform, for the first time issues around development, for long just the domain of OECD/DAC countries and specific UN agencies, really became integral to the agenda of the UN General Assembly (Interviewee 3).

The result of such broad consultation was the UNGA Resolution “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (Agenda 2030), which set 17 SDGs and 169 targets. The Agenda, as a matter of fact, built on the MDGs, addressing also the objectives the latter had failed to achieve by 2015 as programmed, and complemented them through the mainstreaming of the concept of sustainable development. This term, already present in the Millennium Declaration, although almost exclusively related to environmental sustainability, is here fully embraced in all its three integrated and indivisible dimensions (as already outlined in the Brundtland Report): the economic, social and environmental.

The Agenda was then itself complemented, in the same year, by the Paris Agreement, setting a collective goal to fight climate change, and by the Addis Abeba Action Agenda (AAAA), dealing with development finance. The outcome of these added elements was the full integration of the climate and development agendas, as well as an acknowledgement of the need of new resources beyond ODA (and the never reached and now inadequate although reconfirmed 0.7 target), both international and domestic, public and private, to finance such increasingly ambitious and comprehensive goals (Grotenhuis, 2015; Mawdsley, 2021; Orlange, 2020). Indeed, according to the European Senior Policy Analyst for ODI Europe interviewed for this research, the SDGs and the AAAA represented a turning point towards a more explicitly private sector- and investment-oriented approach, that will see, going forward, a more prominent role for development finance institutions. This was true especially for OECD countries - while other countries, as China with the BRI, had already somewhat experienced such shift - as reflected by the inclusion of some private sector operations within those reportable as ODA, occurred in 2018 through the crucial OECD agreement “Reporting Methods for Private Sector Instruments, 2018” (Interviewee 4). As noted by Mawdsley (2021), MDGs already included, as emerged from the 2002 Monterrey Financing for Development conference, various forms of public and private finance, but they were still centred on ODA, debt relief and “foreign aid”. The context is that of a process of

financialization of development, namely of a general shift from poverty reduction oriented MDGs to economic growth-focused SDGs; a context in which ODA acquire the new role of leveraging larger flows from the private sector, which predominantly means from transnational corporations and the financial sector, with implications on the distribution of aid, as well as on reporting and transparency (Mawdsley, 2021). As evidence of this shift we find an average annual increase of 12.55% in the private finance mobilised by blended finance activities from the official sector between 2012 and 2022 (UN, 2024), a growth predominantly regarding investments in developing and middle-income countries (Figure 2).

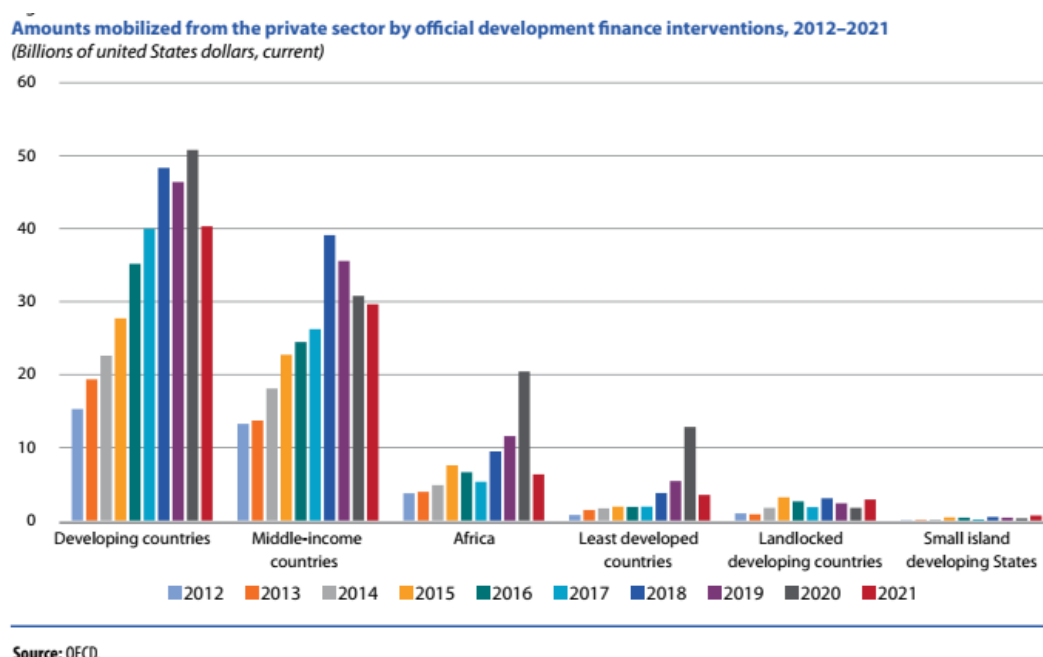


Figure 2

Not only the private sector, but, also in comparison with the Millennium Declaration, the pool of actors called to engage with the Agenda is explicitly and repeatedly enlarged. The ‘Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people’ calls for the involvement of ‘Governments as well as parliaments, the United Nations system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, the scientific and academic community – and all people’ (Agenda 2030, 2015, para 52). More importantly, the new Agenda wants to represent a shift from the donor-recipient logic to one of global objectives for everyone to reach and to work for, developed or underdeveloped. It is no longer requested to industrialised countries to ‘grant more generous development assistance, especially to countries that are genuinely making an effort to apply their resources to poverty reduction’ (United Nations Millennium Declaration, 2000, para 15), but it is stated that ‘all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan’ ensuring ‘that no one will be left

behind’ (Agenda 2030, 2015, Preamble). In other words, ‘These are universal goals and targets which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike’(Agenda 2030, 2015, para 5).

It is not only the North-South divide to be blurred, but also the domestic-international one, where, as it is the case also for the Paris Agreement, common goals are set, but responsibility rests in the single countries to elaborate their own strategy (National Determined Contributions or NDCs in the Paris wording) to reach them (Orliange, 2020). In the words of the Agenda 2030 (para 55), ‘Targets are defined as aspirational and global, with each Government setting its own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances’. Nonetheless, given the global nature of the common challenges addressed by the Agenda, it is also stressed the importance of global public goods and the necessity to step up multilateral cooperation and to revitalise a ‘Global Partnership’ to ensure its implementation (Rudolph, 2016). In sum, on the one hand the global homogenization of development goals can be remarked as a success, on the other hand the largess of the framework leaves considerable space to countries for diverging interpretations and practices (Fejerskov et al., 2016, p.8). Arguably, it was precisely the looseness of this umbrella to allow such wide agreement (Chaturvedi et al., 2021).

The global acceptance of the Agenda is testified, for instance, by the fact that, according to the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, nearly 90% of the African Union Agenda 2063 and of the African Development Bank Strategic Agenda is congruent with the Agenda 2030 (Odusola, 2017), or by the fact that explicit mention to it, to its centrality and to the commitment to it is present in the Chinese programmatic documents¹¹ (China’s International Development Cooperation in the New Era, 2021). At EU level, not only the Agenda 2030 has since then been mentioned in virtually any official document related to development cooperation, but the former is also explicitly conceived as ‘reflecting a change in approach to international development cooperation’ (EC, 2019), a crucial aspect that we further substantiate and deepen in chapter 5.

4.3 Combined effects of the two enlargements

To summarize, in the last two decades we witnessed both an enlargement of the scope of the definition of development cooperation and an increase of the number of actors involved in it. The development agenda moved beyond aid, both in terms of forms of intervention and in terms of

¹¹ It should be said that China had already fully committed to the MDGs and that its efforts, especially in terms of poverty reduction had already proven remarkable (Report on China’s implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, 2015)

focus of the latter, from poverty reduction and mainly social and economic development, to the inclusion also of environmental, security, migratory and financial concerns, due to new global challenges and increased competition (Gore, 2013). It moved beyond aid also in the contestation of the donor-recipient divide, in a movement from aid to partnership. It did so in the context of an increasingly “contested multilateralism”, to borrow the framework elaborated by Morse & Keohane (2014), characterized by “regime shifting” (with the diffusion of power among different international institutions beyond the initial dominion of the OECD and of the Bretton Woods institutions and towards a major role for the UNGA as with the GDPEC attempt) and “competitive regime creation” (with the creation of alternative norm-setting venues, as with the BRICS, and development institutions, as the NDB and the AIIB).

Some talk about a globalization of aid (Bodomo, 2017; Swiss, 2021), some about a Southernization of development (Trajber Waisbich & Mawdsley, 2022) and what they all underline is not only an increase in the number of relevant actors, but also their gradual convergence through “coalition magnets” such as the Agenda 2030 (Janus & Tang, 2021). Such convergence, however, should not be overstated. Indeed, frameworks such as the Agenda 2030 or the concept of sustainable development are loose enough to allow for very diverging interpretations or for cherry picking of the battles to fight, despite the rhetoric of indivisible goals promoted by the SDGs, and thanks also to the weakness of the international governance and monitoring systems (Grotenhuis, 2015; Ignatov et al., 2019; Orliange, 2020). Moreover, the agenda has been further enlarged to include considerations on trade, security, migration and the like, making the discourse on development increasingly linked to national strategic interests as another tool of a country’s foreign policy, thus increasingly part of a strictly national, inward-looking dominion (Chaturvedi et al., 2021). Indeed, as pointed out by our interviewee from Africa Platform (AP), the “democratization” of the sector, with the arrival of new actors from the South, has escalated the “race for visibility” with a negative consequence of the overbranding and marketization of development cooperation, especially by OECD/DAC countries which now need to “sell” themselves more to remain competitive, with the result of recipients being regarded ‘more like billboards rather than people being helped’ (Interviewee 3).

Relatedly, what may then appear a new competition field for donor countries, actually represents a diversification of supply from the perspective of their partners (formerly known as “recipient countries”) (Interviewee 1), that acquire a new role and negotiating power (Carbone, 2013; Christiansen et al., 2019; Hurt, 2020; Lundsgaarde, 2012; I. Taylor, 2014; Zoccal, 2021). Such countries now have ‘the power to question, and even reject, some forms of development

cooperation support’ (Interviewee 3). This is not the only novelty regarding such countries, indeed, according to Odusola (2017), due to the fact that developed countries are now more and more asked to deliver on SDGs, some of their actions create negative externalities on less developed countries, including ‘unsustainable consumption and production levels, carbon emissions, tax havens, a financial system that accepts illicit financial flows, weapons export, restrictions on remittances, hiking of rates of remittances, restrictions to market access, currency adjustments, and trade liberalization’ (pp.3-4). Moreover, the insertion by developed countries of development cooperation among the instruments of foreign policy facilitates the diffusion of a method of intervention based on bidding, a concept known as Request For Proposals (RFP) or as Cal For Proposals, according to which the outcome of the intervention itself is pre-determined by those who give the money and not by the community or organization receiving it (Interviewee 3). The key element of inclusivity of partner countries’ opinions in the elaboration of roadmaps and strategies of intervention in their territory emerged also from the interview to a Foreign Service Officer at the Kenya Embassy to the Kingdom of Belgium and to the European Union, where this was mentioned as an element to be improved, within a context, in any case, of very good relationship maintained by Kenya with many different parties (EU and China included) through strategic cooperation agreements, following a non-aligned approach of ‘open leadership’ (Interviewee 5).

Another crucial aspect regards who is now the “recipient”. The increased focus on trade and investment, along with the financialization and increased reliance on the private sector, poses a risk of neglecting indebted nations, countries destabilized by conflict, or those lacking functional infrastructure and governance. These are populations already burdened by inequalities—once central to development cooperation policies but now potentially seen as too risky for investment (Interviewee 2; Interviewee 4). Some worrying trends are already visible; as revealed by a report by the UN Global Crisis Response Group (UNGCRG, 2024), from 2013 to 2022 the share of ODA destined to LDCs decreased from 32.3% to 22.5%, the latter representing a decade low despite development aid reaching record high in the same year. Moreover, the tendency points more and more towards a shift from grants to loans, which increase developing countries debt burdens (UNGCRG, 2024). Indeed, the risk seems that of having more structured LDCs or developing countries capable of choosing non-alignment and of profiting from the diversification of supply, as we saw for Kenya, while other LDCs where the situation is more unstable remain objects of mere geopolitical battles of influence pursued through wars and internal disorders fomented by external parties as it has long been the case.

In sum, the global understanding of development cooperation has undergone several changes in the last two decades. It moved from being mostly regarded in terms of developed countries providing assistance to the “global south” with a focus on poverty reduction and economic and social development to being considered as a collective effort in facing global development challenges, including environmental ones, according to diverging models - usually grouped as OECD-DAC model, SSC, and triangular cooperation – and national priorities, including security and migration, and engaging more and more the private sector and financial development institutions. It passed from being a dominion of the North to becoming a contested field of competition for many different donors and of possibility of diversification for the recipients. It shifted from an optic of aid to an optic of partnership and cooperation. This is what we were able to reconstruct based on the literature and on the description of our two independent variables, now to apply such variables at EU level will allow also to deepen our comprehension of the trends just outlined here.

5. EU reshaping of the understanding of development

5.1 Connecting the dots: a comparison of the global and the EU understanding of development cooperation

This section presents a static comparison between the global understanding of development as arrived at through the analysis performed in the previous chapter and EU understanding of development cooperation as reflected by the strategy presented in chapter 2. Once outlined the similarities and differences between the two we will be able to formulate hypotheses on when, how and why specific aspects of EU strategy came into being, based on what we saw happened at global level. This will provide us a framework for better comprehending local EU dynamics, while at the same time providing valuable local and practical examples to the trends singled out at global level.

The fact that also the EU moved “beyond aid”, fully embracing the wider concept of sustainable development and SDGs is easy to prove, from the moment that the New European Consensus for Development was elaborated in 2017 explicitly as ‘the EU’s response to the 2030 agenda’ (p.5). We have also already briefly analysed the origin of the concept of sustainable development in the UN negotiations around climate, consequently, on the mere aspect of the inclusion of sustainable development in the lexicon of EU development policy it will not be devoted much space. This, obviously, does not mean that we disregard the Agenda 2030, but we focus on other changes related to it, such as the overcoming of the donor-recipient divide in name of a rhetoric of global

challenges to be collectively embraced by all relevant actors, or the financialization (see the AAAA).

Moreover, the enlargement of the scope of the definition is not only driven by the Agenda 2030, but also by what some scholars describe, when dealing with EU development policy, as the instrumentalization of development, meaning that development cooperation policy, while presented as a tool for the benefit of the recipient countries, is instead more and more exploited as a means to pursue trade, security and migration interests of the EU itself (Amadio Viceré & Venneri, 2023; Berger, 2022; Bharti, 2022; Delkáder-Palacios, 2019; Furness et al., 2020; Hadfield & Lightfoot, 2021; Holden, 2020; Rodríguez Aurrecoechea, 2022). Bergmann et al. (2019) would say that this has always been the case, except for a limited period in the two decades at the turn of the millennium where development had evolved into a self-standing policy, in so far as it has always been a ‘supplementary policy to support other EU policies’ objectives’ (p.550). Delputte & Orbie (2020) would agree with our Interviewee 3, from Africa Platform (AP), on the fact that the actual aim has always been only that of extracting resources and exerting influence over former colonies as for a Eurocentric, modernist and colonial (EMC) approach, and that those above are to be considered as second-order changes, or as changes of tactic more than of strategy or outcome. Be that as it may, whether there has been such change, of whatever order we want to consider it, this must have been justified in some way and it is very likely that it has also led to material changes, including in the allocation of resources or in the organization of the activities.

In our analysis this aspect is very much linked to the one that some scholars define as the “geopoliticization” of development (Chaban & Elgström, 2021; Hackenesch et al., 2021; Hilpold, 2017; Olivié & Santillán, 2021; Stahl, 2023; Youngs & Zihnioğlu, 2021). Indeed, we have seen how the global landscape is now characterised by the opposing forces of global challenges to be addressed collectively and the fragmentation of normative and interpretative centres of power, of models and of local priorities. We have seen how the growth of many Southern donors could be seen as a competition from traditional donors, EU included, and an opportunity for the most equipped LDCs or developing countries. We have concluded that the tendency is now towards the more explicit insertion of development in the wider toolkit of foreign policy, thus, again, its instrumentalization. At EU level, the idea of “coherence for development”, namely the idea that ‘the EU shall take account of the objectives of development cooperation in all policies that it implements which are likely to affect developing countries’ (The European Consensus, 2006) has been there for quite some time. However, the more recent idea of “principled pragmatism”, as well as NDICI cushion reserved also to ‘actions addressing Union foreign policy needs and

priorities' (NDICI - Global Europe, 2021, p.76) may suggest some more step in the direction of instrumentalization and geo-politicization as defined above. Even more relevant may be the Team Europe approach, that as we have seen was designed precisely to enhance EU's visibility, together with its coordination. Again, in the same direction, some commentators agree on the fact that the Global Gateway may represent a more or less direct response to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, something that our interviewee from the EC, sees more as journalistic claims, although recognising EU's growing consciousness of the competitiveness of the international context and of the need to defend its own strategic autonomy (Interviewee 6).

The enlargement of the pool of actors from the donors' side, this needs to be emphasised, led to a reshaping also of the recipients' side. Indeed, the latter appears nowadays relatively fragmented (compared to forty years ago), with the so-called "Southern donors" both providing and receiving aid, countries with relatively stable administrative systems that are able to benefit from donors' diversification through non-alignment and where it is easier for the private sector and development finance institutions to invest, and more unstable and less developed countries, still in need of more traditional "grant-based" aid. This reshaping, we argue in this thesis, is strictly linked with two other "beyond aid" movements witnessed at global level, namely a rhetoric more focused on partnership and cooperation than on the old donor-recipient divide, and what some scholars define as 'financialization' of development (Orbie, 2021). The two are both, once again, linked to the instrumentalization and geo-politicization described above, since they reflect a logic of exchange instead of aid, one in which both parties have interests to satisfy, as well as they suggest the need for new forms of collaboration and of alternative ways of funding to tackle a wider range of global challenges.

As far as the focus on partnerships goes, the re-naming of the European Commission DG dealing with development occurred in 2021, when it was called DG International Partnership (INTPA), may suggest an alignment with such trend, but this may not be enough: is it really new the idea of partnership for the EU in this context? While, for what concerns financialization (i.e., the shift towards new forms of financing, beyond ODA, including blended finance, the inclusion of the private sector and the increased engagement of financial development institutions), as we have seen earlier, the EU, in the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation, maintains its commitment for keeping at least 93% of its funding in line with ODA criteria. At the same time, we have also seen that many references are present on EFAD or in NDICI (see EFSD+) about the need to leverage private investment and to diversify the sources of aid.

In the following sections of this chapter we see to what extent do these aspects represent a novelty, both rhetorically and practically, and whether their emergence, as per our hypothesis, can be linked to the trends examined at global level, in particular the enlargement and reshaping of the pool of actors involved and the enlargement of the scope of development cooperation definition, through the Agenda 2030 (already in itself, as we saw, partly an effect of the reshaping of the pool of actors).

5.2 What's new? Mapping the changes

Based on our hypothesis, we would expect the elements outlined in the previous section to represent a relative novelty, emerged from the changes by which the pool of relevant actors and the scope of development cooperation definition have been interested in the last twenty years. Our analysis revealed indeed that some relevant changes had already been introduced before, but we have argued that it is in the new millennium that the detected trends have seen an acceleration. Hence, the comparison of EU institutional documents before the turn of the millennium, at the turn of the millennium and closer to our days should give us a picture of the timing of such changes. Only then we will be able to look at the justification for change to increase the robustness of our hypothesis.

The easier thing to do would be to confront strategic documents as the “European Consensus on Development”, however, there are only two such documents, one redacted in 2006 and the other in 2017, plus a smaller “Agenda for change” elaborated in 2011. We indeed use them, but we may need something for the period before the turn of the millennium. From this comes the choice of looking also at documents regulating the relationship between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, which has always been at the core of EU development policy since its very beginning. The birth of this grouping, occurred in 1975 with the Georgetown Agreement, is strictly related to the need felt by its members to coordinate their efforts in the negotiation and implementation of cooperation agreements with the European Economic Community (EEC), predecessor of the EU, as well as in the integration in the world's economy, and in the pursuit of sustainable development and poverty reduction (Gillis-West, 2016; Montoute, 2017). It was the 1957 Treaty of Rome, establishing the European Economic Community (EEC), to provide for the association to the EEC of the overseas territories of its members. In practice, this association of 18 former European colonies in Africa, resulted in the extension of a European Development Fund (EDF), established in 1957 by the Treaty of Rome, as a European aid to such territories and in the conclusion of an association convention, mostly focused on trade and financial and

technical cooperation, signed in Yaoundé in 1963. Then, with the entrance of the UK in the Community in 1973, former British colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific were included in this framework, up to the first Lomé Convention, signed in 1975 between the EEC and 46 ACP countries. Then, after three renewals of the Lomé Convention in 1980, 1985 and 1990, we arrive to the 2000 Cotonou partnership agreement, concluded between the EEC and 78 ACP countries, which introduced several elements of discontinuity with the Lomé regime (Montoute, 2017). In Cotonou the political dimension was strengthened, through the introduction of conditionalities linked to the pursuance of wider objectives, such as peace and stability, democracy and human rights; moreover, poverty alleviation became the main focus of EU development policy within this relationship, and the way to achieve it was retraced in trade liberalization and investment, through the reintroduction of the principle of reciprocity and the signing, in the following years, of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) at regional level. Finally, it is of 2024 the signing of a new Convention between the now called EU and OACP (Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries) in Samoa, the final step of our analysis. Before Cotonou we can also have a look at the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, with its relevant pillarization of EU policies, at the 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam and between Cotonou and Samoa, we can look at the European Consensus of 2006, the 2009 Lisbon Treaty, the 2011 Agenda for Change and the New European Consensus of 2017, as well as all the instruments composing the current strategy, as outlined in chapter 2, including NDICI-Global Europe and the Global Gateway, both concluded in 2021, and some of their predecessors, such as the development cooperation instrument (DCI) elaborated in 2006, merging previous geographic and thematic instruments, for the years 2007-2013, then confirmed for the period 2014-2020 and finally merged with other instruments in the NDICI.

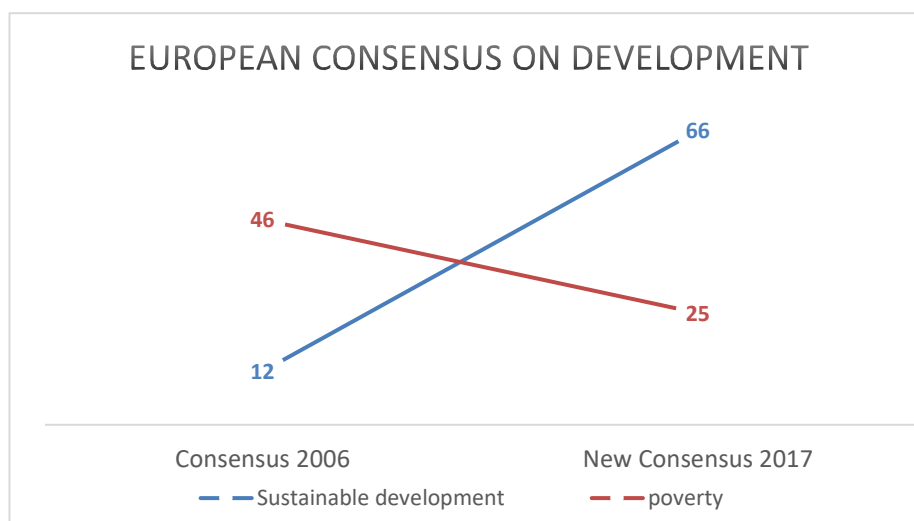
This is the framework we must bear in mind in performing our analysis, but the idea is not to proceed with an historical account of all these documents; indeed, we start from the aspects of EU current strategy that we singled out in the previous section and we proceed backwards to see whether they were already there and in what form. If we notice that they were not there, we then focus on the reasons and justification for their introduction.

5.2.1 From poverty eradication and aid to sustainable development and partnerships

From poverty eradication to sustainable development

As already anticipated, the concept of sustainable development is nowadays mainstreamed in

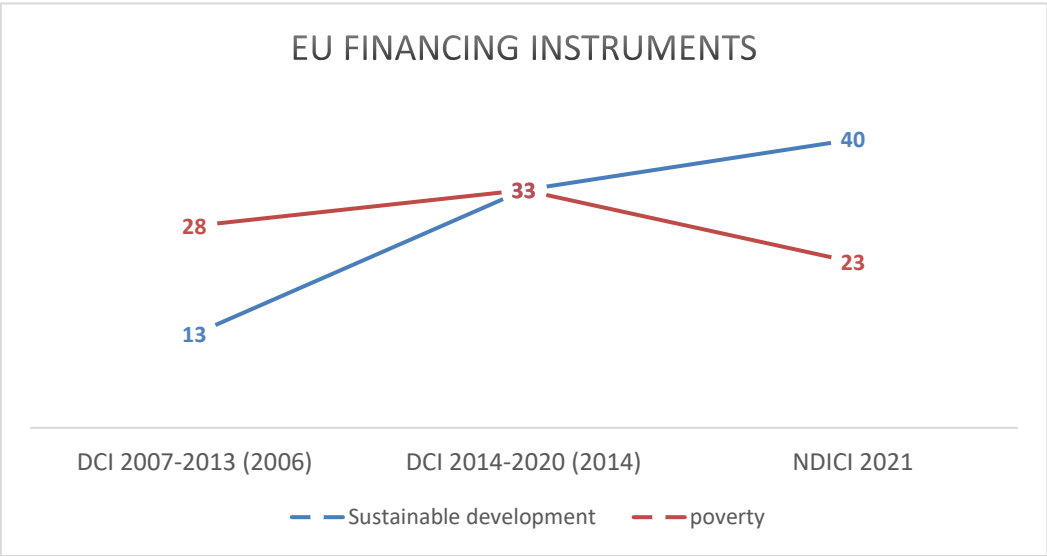
EU's vocabulary concerning development cooperation. The 2017 New Consensus on Development fully embed the SDGs in the EU strategy, but the concept of sustainable development was already present in earlier documents, although not as centrally and diffusely. We find it already mentioned four times in the Amsterdam Treaty (1999), and three times in the Lisbon Treaty (2009), although in both cases referred only to fair economic and environmental development. The 2006 European Consensus on Development too mentions sustainable development (12 times), including within its definition 'good governance, human rights and political, economic, social and environmental aspects' (para. 7); in general, with continuous recalls to the MDGs, the Consensus centers EU action for development on the 'poverty reduction, in its multidimensional aspects, in the context of sustainable development' (para. 24). The Agenda 2030 effect is nonetheless clearly visible, if we compare, for instance, the 12 mentions to sustainable development in the 2006 Consensus with the 66 of the 2017 New Consensus, or if we compare the 13 of the DCI 2007-2013, the 33 of the DCI 2014-2020 and the 40 of the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation. The pattern is clear also when it comes to EU-ACP agreements, from a Lomé Convention (1975) which understandably does not contemplate the concept at all (the Brundtland Report popularizing it was published only in 1987), to Cotonou (2000) where it appears 7 times, to Samoa (2024) where we find it mentioned 43 times. More crucially, although remaining an umbrella term welcoming different interpretations, before the Agenda we find it mostly used as a general principle of fairness, while after 2015 it clearly refers to the specific set of goals agreed on at UN level. Even more strikingly, sustainable development after the Agenda 2030 takes the main character role to the detriment of "poverty eradication", albeit the latter being confirmed as the primary goal of EU development policy, as laid down in art. 208 of the TFEU. Indeed, while the term "poverty" is mentioned 46 times in the 2006 Consensus, it is present only 25 times in the 2017 New Consensus (Figure 3).



Source: own elaboration

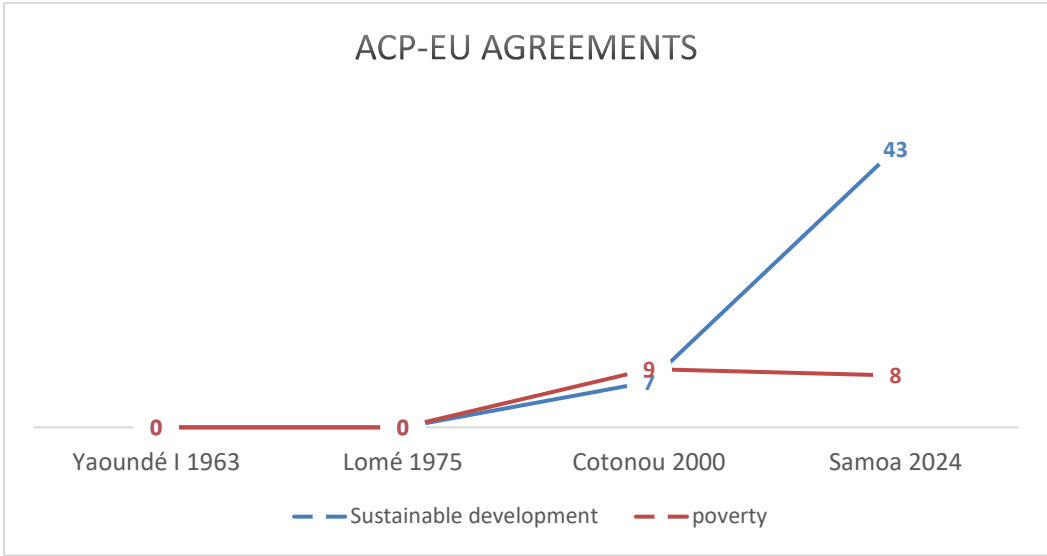
Figure 3

Moreover, where in the document from 2006 “sustainable development” is directly associated with the eradication of poverty ten in twelve times (5 times we find ‘poverty eradication and sustainable development’, 5 times we find ‘poverty eradication in the context of sustainable development’), in 2017 we witness a decoupling of the two in most of the instances, although they remain crucially next to one another in the definition of the Agenda 2030 as a ‘transformative political framework to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development globally’ (para 1). Similar patterns are visible when we look at EU financing instruments and ACP-EU agreements (Figures 4 and 5).



Source: own elaboration

Figure 5



Source: own elaboration

Figure 4

Put simplistically, it seems as if we passed from a situation in which sustainable development was the way to achieve poverty reduction and eradication, as the main objective of development

cooperation, to a situation in which poverty eradication is just one, although still crucial, among the objectives included in the sustainable development concept (indeed ‘no poverty’ is the first of the 17 SDGs). In other words, we gradually passed from an idea of multi-aspects intervention - including, health, education, gender equality, etc. – to eradicate poverty, to the reduction of poverty as one of the means to achieve development next to health, education, gender equality, environment, etc. Development and poverty reduction are no longer synonyms as they arguably, again it is a simplification, used to be. As our interviewee from Africa Platform would put it, the focus is now shifted on lifestyle rights as a development outcome rather than on social and economic outcomes per se (Interviewee 3).

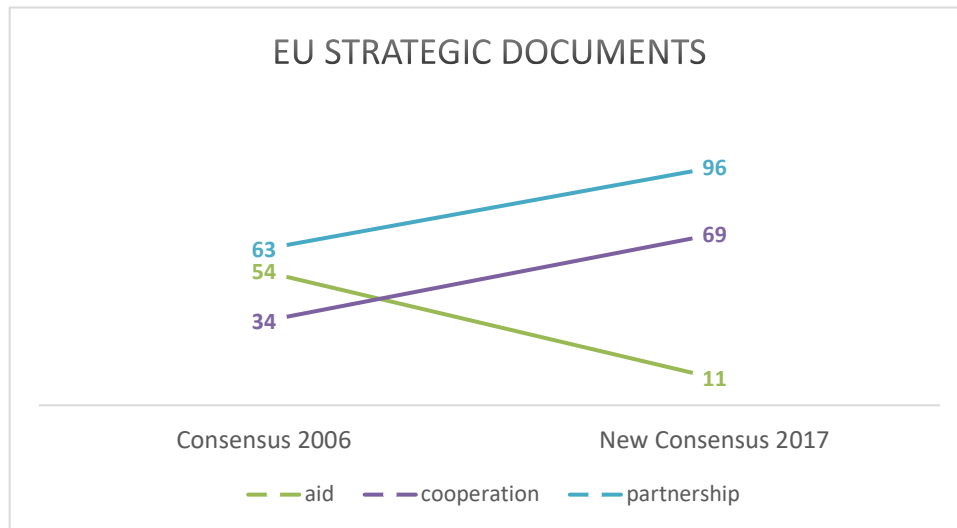
While it remains true that all the SDGs need to be promoted together and are strictly interlinked, this subtle change of perspective may indeed have an impact on fund allocation priorities. The fact that the eradication of poverty, despite remaining in the treaties and being re-stated in every strategic document as the primary objective of EU development policy, seems to have lost its centrality is indeed a reason for concern for NGOs. The Aid Watch Report 2023 elaborated by CONCORD highlighted a trend of rising inequality in the allocation of ODA, where the top 40% ODA recipient countries in terms of Human Development Index (HDI) receive increasingly more funding than the bottom 40% (from a 1% gap in 2019 to a 7% in 2022 in terms of percentage of ODA received) (CONCORD, 2023a). According to OECD data on EU institutions’ development cooperation, the share of bilateral ODA received by LDCs passed from 34.9% in 2010 (the highest point in the period) to 12.5% in 2022 (the lowest), mostly to the benefit of lower middle-income countries (LMICs) which passed from 20.4% to 46.8% in the same period (OECD, 2024). Another report, on the NDICI-Global Europe geographic component funds that pass from CSOs, revealed a preference towards the delegation of funding to ‘pillar-assessed entities’ and ‘indirect management’ (59% of the funding), which hinder CSOs access to funding (CONCORD, 2023b). The OECD, between 2021 and 2022, reported a fall from 11.4% to 8.5% in the share of bilateral ODA received by CSOs from EU institutions (OECD, 2024). Indeed, CSOs are in many cases the stakeholder that has the capacity to reach the most disadvantaged communities within countries, thus failing to engage with them may result in leaving someone behind (Interviewee 2).

For the immediate future too, there are concerns regarding the deepening of such trend. Where the previous negotiations on the MFF and NDICI-Global Europe were seen as significant achievements by NGOs—particularly in terms of the instrument’s flexibility, the gender equality, human development and climate targets, and a dedicated thematic envelope for CSOs—the shift

in focus toward Global Gateway has raised concerns within the sector (Interviewee 2, Interviewee 7). In the Council Conclusions on the revision of the MFF 2021-2027 (EUCO 2/24), Members States agreed to cut €2.6 billion from the NDICI, which our interviewee from CONCORD considers a concerning precedent for the upcoming MFF. Additionally, the decision to allocate part of the NDICI cushion to the Global Gateway for the remainder of the financial cycle (as per the NDICI Regulation Art.17 (c)) has further added to these concerns, reinforcing the need for stricter regulation (Interviewee 2). The same “Statement of estimates of the European Commission for the financial year 2025” (European Commission. Directorate General for Budget., 2024) indicates the Global Gateway as EU’s flagship policy initiative ‘to maximize the impact of the EU budget [...] and to mobilise private investments in the area of digital, transport, energy and climate, health, education and research’ (p.60); the eradication of poverty is mentioned above in the same paragraph, where it is said that: ‘The EU will also continue to support partner countries in their progress to sustainable development, stability, consolidation of democracy and tackling disinformation, socio-economic development as well as inequalities and the eradication of poverty’, but its position at the bottom of the list is emblematic of the shift described (p.60). The now central Global Gateway is not a regulation and still needs to comply to all that is written on NDICI-Global Europe, included the targets celebrated by NGOs, however, arguably due to its high reliance on the engagement of the private sector, still presents some hurdles when it comes to assessing such compliance. Our interviewee from Oxfam attended an event organized by the European Commission launching and presenting the preliminary results of the I-Marker, aimed at assessing to what extent inequality reduction is an objective of development cooperation. However, the marker had still not been applied to EFSD+ funds (which constitute the basis for the financing of the Global Gateway), besides, it focused on the design of initiatives and not on their results (Interviewee 7). The same difficulties in applying the marker and, consequently in assessing Global Gateway’s performances were registered by our interviewee from ODI, regarding the gender-marker (Interviewee 4).

From aid to partnership

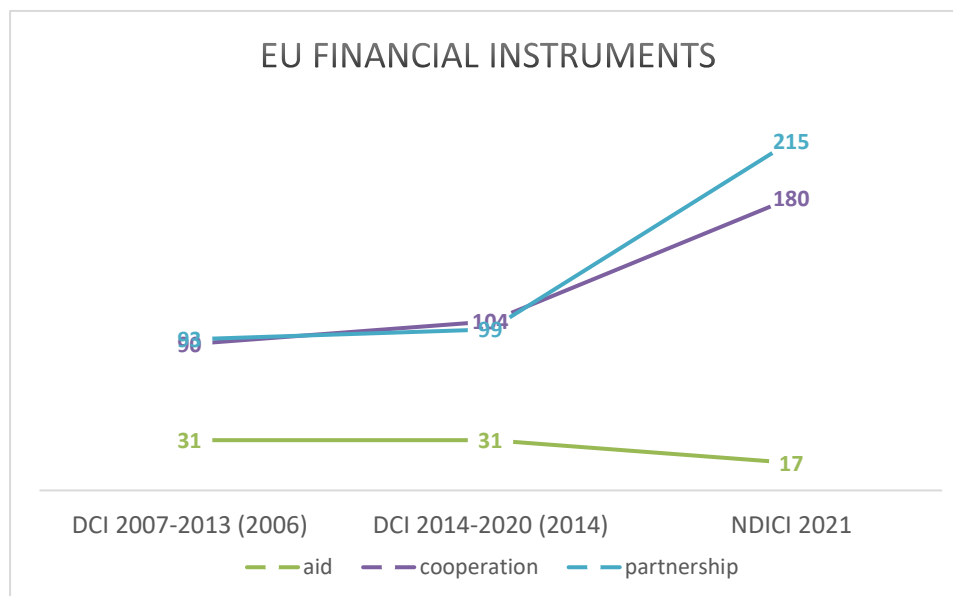
Together with ‘poverty’ also the idea of ‘aid’ seems to have lost positions, mentioned 54 times in the 2006 Consensus and only 11 times in the 2017 New Consensus, while the concept of ‘cooperation’ passed from 34 to 69 and that of partnership from 63 to 96 (Figure 6).



Source: own elaboration

Figure 6

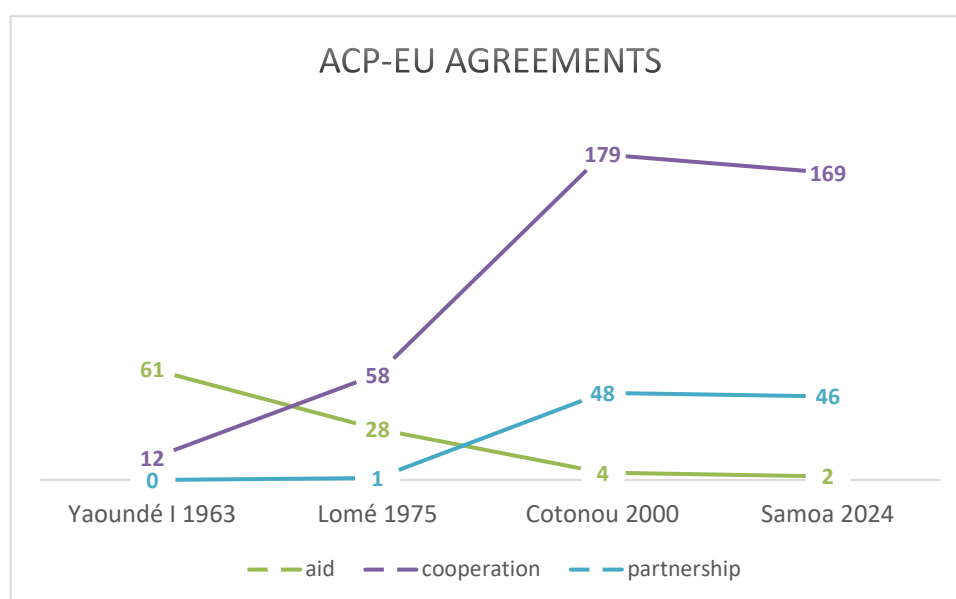
The trend is confirmed looking at EU financing instruments, with NDICI-Global Europe (2021) representing a particularly evident example (Figure 7).



Source: own elaboration

Figure 7

Interestingly, the pattern is slightly less clear for EU-ACP agreements (Figure 8), where the concept of cooperation started to prevail earlier, already in Lomé (1975), and that of aid almost disappeared already in Cotonou (2000).



Source: own elaboration

Figure 8

This is particularly curious if we consider that in Cotonou we seem to have an increased focus on development cooperation (already from the division of sections and chapters) with respect to a more trade-centered Lomé (not that in Cotonou trade lost its crucial place, on the contrary).

In any case, the emphasis on cooperation and partnership, as opposed to that on aid, wants to suggest a more even relationship, beyond a purely donor-recipient one. For the EU, “cooperation” seems to have been there since the beginning, if we look at Lomé, but what about partnership? It is from the 2000s, the Cotonou agreement is indeed a Partnership agreement and no longer a Convention as in Lomé, that we start to see a rise in the use of this word; we see the conclusion of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), the inclusion of the promotion of partnerships among the objectives of the 2016 Global Strategy, up to the recent re-naming of the EU Commission DG dealing with development, now DG International Partnerships, occurred in 2021. The word “cooperation” may still convey a message similar to aid, where, with respect to the latter, it is more emphasized the need for efforts from both sides, but the aim remains the same, namely resolving developmental issues of one party. For instance, in the Yaoundé Convention (1963), cooperation to the development of associated countries by EEC members is explicitly understood as a ‘complementary effort’ to those made by the associated countries themselves in order to promote their own economic and social development (Yaoundé

Convention, 1963, art.15¹²). We need also to take into account the fact that “cooperation” is a word widely used also in the context of trade relations and other types of collaboration within countries (hence its strong presence in all the ACP-EU agreements, which go well beyond mere development cooperation). Partnership, instead, seems to go more in the direction of mutual interests, mutual objectives and mutual gains. This is in line with what observed at global level under the influx of the “spirit of Bandung”, where the concepts of equality and ‘mutual interests and cooperation’ were opposed to the paternalism of Northern aid. ‘Equality and mutual benefit’ is also one of the 5 principles of peaceful coexistence elaborated in 1953 by the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in China (Ma & Thakur, 2004), and the concept of partnership well represents such principles (that is the reason, for example of the name of the White Paper 'China and Africa in the New Era - A Partnership of Equals', 2021). Indeed, as reported by our interviewee from ECDPM, the EU still suffers from its reputation as a paternalistic actor, and this weights even more in a context in which other alternatives are available. She mentioned this as one of the factors behind the non-enthusiastic welcoming of the Samoa agreement by some African countries (with many countries signing late) as well as the rescheduling of the EU-Africa Summit, now expected for 2025 (07/2024 – Interviewee 1). Such focus on partnerships may thus constitute a sort of re-branding by the EU, in the context of what before we defined as the marketization of development. Not by chance, we may add, the latest innovation in the EU development policy, the Global Gateway, contains the word partnership 94 times (while cooperation only 16 times and aid is never mentioned), and as an instrument is repeatedly presented as ‘a positive offer for its partners’ (p.1). Moreover, an effort towards more partnership-making can be seen in the elaboration of Economic Partnership Agreements at regional level, since the 2000s preferred to wider multilateral agreements (as proved also by the delays in the elaboration of a post-Cotonou agreement).

Not everybody agrees on the fact that, from this point of view, rhetoric is followed by concrete action, thus on concrete efforts in leveling the playing field with partner countries. Saltnes & Steingass (2021), for example, underline how a policy explicitly backed by a rhetoric of building partnerships of equals such as the NDICI-Global Europe actually represented a step in the opposite direction, due, for instance, to the budgetization of the EDF it comported. This, the authors argue, decreased the level of participation of the ACP countries (to which it was destined) in the programming related to the allocation of the fund and reduced the predictability of funding, due to increased flexibility it provided to the EU. On the other hand, a study performed by

¹² The text not being available in English, the UK not yet being part of the EEC back then, the translation from the Italian original is provided by me.

ECDPM revealed that such budgetization had different effects in different contexts (and in several cases still no effects at all) (Sabourin et al., 2023), thus the debate is still open.

How are these changes framed

In sum, we described over the last two decades (and increasingly in the last one, with evidence towards its probable continuation and deepening in the next future) a progressive shift in the EU understanding of development policy from a focus on poverty eradication to one on sustainable development, and from a framing in terms of aid to one in terms of partnership.

It is useful here to open a small parenthesis. This analysis, performed taking also into account practical reverberations of this change, allowed us to better comprehend and explain the difference between what we here define a change of understanding and a mere change of rhetoric. Rhetorically, as we saw, poverty eradication remains in several instances explicitly mentioned as the primary objective of EU development cooperation; however, almost unconsciously we could say, this concept is less and less recurrent and also the practice testifies for the partial loss of its relevance, and this, we argue, is due to the fact that the understanding of development has gradually changed to encompass a wider range of priorities and considerations: it is a systemic change that includes new actions in the remit of development policy, and new ways of performing the old ones; it goes beyond rhetoric, although being retraceable in it.

The timing of such gradual change, that we uncovered above, corresponds to what we expected based on our analysis at global level. Indeed, also there we witnessed the emergence of the concept of sustainable development, correlated with the idea to go beyond the donor-recipient logic, towards a logic where everyone must contribute to achieve development goals that concern everyone. In this direction, the Agenda 2030 strongly encourages a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, ‘with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people’ (p.2). It is this horizontality that we find in the passage from aid to partnership. If the link we traced makes sense, we would expect the logic of partnership to be accompanied by one of joint, interlinked and integrated challenges to face, as the one promoted by the Agenda.

Relatedly, at global level we also described the great modifications occurred in the landscape of actors, both donors and recipients, to the extent that this distinction has grown increasingly blurred. We have already seen, *a latere*, how the earlier stages of this evolution, especially from the recipient side, affected the EEC before the turn of the millennium: as a paradigmatic example we can cite the passage from a 1963 Yaoundé Convention of association of former colonies to

the EEC, to the 1975 convention between the EEC and the ACP group, to a veritable partnership agreement in Cotonou (2000). What we are interested in seeing is also the impact of growing competition on the donors' side, increased noticeably in the new millennium, and in particular the competition brought by the so-called "Southern donors". Again, they blurred the donor-recipient distinction, and they also very much insist, to these days, on opposing an idea of equality and mutual gain to one of paternalistic aid they attribute to traditional Northern donors. Hence, this may be regarded as another driver for the aid to partnership transition, even if one that is less likely we will find explicitly recognized by EU actors in these terms.

With the "Joint Public Statement: Adoption of the New European Consensus on Development, 2017" issued in 2017 by EU Commission, Parliament and Council, it is explicitly recognized that the New Consensus, as the name itself suggests, represent a new approach, and that this new approach is 'based on the 'five Ps' of the 2030 Agenda: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships' (p.2). On partnerships, in particular, it is there said that:

'We will reinforce innovative partnerships with all countries, involving civil society, the private sector, local authorities, international organisations and all relevant stakeholders. The challenges and opportunities of this era are immense, and none of us alone can successfully address them. Our collective action can make a real difference in addressing our common challenges and advancing mutual benefits' (p. 2).

Here, in line with what stated in the Agenda 2030 and with our hypothesis, the concept of partnership is extended to include everyone, beyond the donor-recipient divide, and its importance is motivated by the presence of global common challenges. The official EC webpage dedicated to the policies of DG INTPA (consulted in august 2024) opens with similar remarks: 'The EU addresses global challenges through international partnerships that uphold and promote European values and interests, and contribute to peace and prosperity in the world'(European Commission, n.d.-d). The same applies for the EEAS strategic communication on 'International cooperation & partnership' where in the definition of the latter is written that 'Global dynamics and trends are changing the nature of international cooperation and partnerships' and that consequently 'The European Union (EU), more than ever, needs to work closely with its partners to face these challenges'(EEAS, 2022). Another example is provided by the final communiqué "A Joint Vision for 2030", issued at the end of the 2022 6th EU-AU Summit, which opens as follows: 'Aware of unprecedented and mounting common challenges and opportunities, the leaders of the EU and AU commit to a Joint Vision for a renewed Partnership to build a common

future, as closest partners and neighbours.’ (para 1).

Such global challenges include, among others, ‘geopolitical rivalry and undermining of multilateralism’ (EEAS, 2022) and this not only in general, but also specifically in the development sector itself. This is expressed also by EC President von der Leyen in the “Mission letter” she destined to DG INTPA Commissioner Urpilainen at the beginning of her first mandate (2019), where she writes that ‘(i)n an increasingly unsettled world, where different development models increasingly compete, the partnerships of equals we build are essential for our future’ (p.4). This element of competition and rivalry was at the core of the concerns of the ‘Geopolitical Commission’ (p.2) and it seems it will be left in dote to the new Commission¹³. This, at least, is the intention of the incumbents, as revealed by a leaked document made public by the journal Politico, showing the draft of part of a briefing book destined to the next tenants of DG INTPA. Such a source, not being intended for the reading of the wider public, gives us even more an idea of the current EU understanding of development, beyond official narratives. In this document it is written that ‘(a)n increasing number of countries position themselves as rising poles of influence in a multipolar world [...] They promote alternative governance models to deliver growth, security and autonomy’(EU, 2024). At the same time, it is noted also an evolution from the ‘recipient’ side, where it is said that ‘(m)any Emerging Markets and Developing Economies are looking for partnerships that strengthen their own geo-economic role and capacity’ in the framework of an ‘à la carte world’ where they are able to ‘pick and choose from a menu as they see fit’. In such context, the briefing explicitly refers to the renaming of the DG Development Cooperation into DG INTPA as a change capturing ‘a paradigm shift in the way the European Commission approaches international partnerships’, a shift that ‘derives from a recognition that Europe needed to move away from obsolete donor-recipient dynamics and position itself more boldly in an increasingly contested international environment’ (EU, 2024, p.5).

A summary of the two elements of global challenges and increased geopolitical competition at the basis of EU recent focus on partnerships is expressed in the Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on Strengthening the EU’s Contribution to Rules-Based Multilateralism (2021):

‘In an increasingly multi-polar and interdependent environment, the EU is recognised as a stable and predictable partner and as a vocal defender and promotor of the rules-based multilateral

¹³ While this chapter is being written, Ursula von der Leyen has been selected as the renewed EC President and the rest of the College is yet to be appointed and confirmed.

system. The current context calls for a clearer and better articulated strategic approach to engagement with our international partners. The EU should seek such partnerships not only to advance its own priorities, but as a common effort to find sustainable solutions to global challenges based on the rule of law rather than the rule of the strongest' (p.13).

On the related shift from eradication of poverty to sustainable development, thus, in other words, on the relative demise of poverty among EU development concerns, we cannot expect to find official justifications, thus we will limit ourselves to the assessment of its partial disappearance conducted above. It needs to be stressed again that this does not mean that poverty is not being tackled anymore by EU policies, indeed the SDGs are understood as means to reduce inequalities and to address poverty, but the focus, we argued and tried to substantiate, is no longer there. We saw this happening also at global level and we underlined among its causes the process of financialization, which is object of the next section and allows us to shed some more light on such demise of poverty. Finally, other aspects of it will emerge from the analysis, in the last section of this chapter, of what we called the instrumentalization and geo-politicization of EU development.

For this section, we detected the synchronous shifts from eradication of poverty to sustainable development and from aid to partnership occurred in the EU understanding of development cooperation in the new millennium. In particular we saw the role played by the Agenda 2030 in mainstreaming such trends since 2015 and the role of increased competition from new actors and marketization of the development sector in provoking a further acceleration, particularly evident under von der Leyen's "geopolitical commission" (2019-2024), likely to continue in the next future.

5.2.2 Financialization

In our global analysis, we identified in the financialization of development one of the contributors and major causes of concern for what regards the decreasing share of assistance provided to LDCs, the shift from grants to loans, which risks aggravating the condition of indebtedness of some countries, and, as a result, the decreased focus on poverty eradication. We also singled out as a crucial turning point for the evolution of this trend the Agenda 2030 and the AAAA, both elaborated in 2015. Both at EU and multilateral level, the role of the private sector had already engendered reflections long before. Especially for Northern donors, EU included, another important turning point is represented by the financial crisis started in 2007 from the US, that, although representing only a momentary shock as far as the flow of ODA is concerned (OECD, n.d.-a)(Figure 9), arguably contributed to the realization of the insufficiency of public funds to achieve developmental goals.

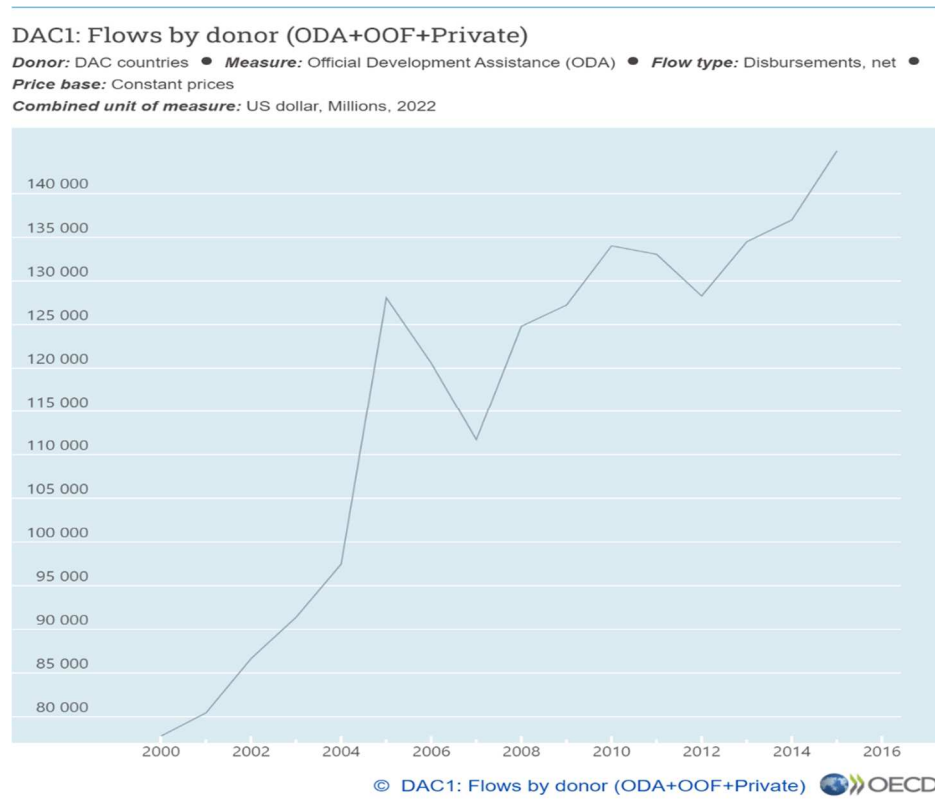


Figure 9

On the EU side, examples of such reflections include, and are not limited to, the 2011 Agenda for Change, which, to foster development effectiveness, encourages to elaborate new ways of engaging with the private sector; the 2014 Communication ‘A stronger role of the private sector in achieving inclusive and sustainable growth in developing countries’, that we already mentioned; and the “Strategic Framework for ACP Private Sector Development”(2014),

elaborated jointly with ACP countries.

Nonetheless, what we underlined in our analysis is that the increased ambition and enlarged agenda brought by the SDGs comported an acceleration of such trends, to the extent that we passed from a poverty reduction-cantered paradigm to one more development and investment-oriented. In this framework, the private sector is not only engaged at local level to grant the survival of projects beyond the expiration of the initial investment and to encourage local uptake and ownership, but more and more also to leverage funds in the first place. Hence the proliferation and increased role of financial development institutions and the growth of blended finance pointed out above (Figure 2).

Indeed, after 2015, beyond the repeated calls for the engagement of the private sector we just mentioned, we see a multiplication of actions and initiatives in this sense. It is of 2016-2017 the re-organization of existing blending facilities and the provision of an additional guarantee under a “one stop shop”, namely the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD), established through Regulation (EU) 2017/1601 after having been proposed by the Commission as part of a new European External Investment Plan (EIP), through the 2016 Communication "Strengthening European Investments for Jobs and Growth: Towards a Second Phase of the European Fund for Strategic Investments and a New European External Investment Plan". Then in 2019, the Council Decision (EU) 2019/597 established a High-level Group of wise Persons tasked with the elaboration of ‘an independent report providing a view on the challenges to and opportunities for improving and rationalising the European financial architecture for development as well as scenarios for its evolution in line with European policy objectives’ (preamble 2). Based on the resulting report, published in October 2019, the EU Council adopted Conclusions on Strengthening the European Financial Architecture for Development (EFAD) in which it invited the Council preparatory bodies, the EIB and the EBRD to provide input on two of the three scenarios proposed by the high-level group, while stressing the need for a more coherent financial architecture. This process was concluded in June 2021, with the almost simultaneous approval of the NDICI - Global Europe and of new Conclusions on the EFAD. None of the options proposed by the expert group (the most ambitious regarding the merging of EIB and EBRD in a single European Climate and Sustainable Development Bank) was fully taken on board, but it was decided to promote a restructuring of the EFAD, a “Status quo+”. Not to go too much into details, this reorganization consisted in a revision of EIB and EBRD mandates, on the creation of one Global Blending Facility out of eight previously existing and of one External Action Guarantee out of four different guarantee systems; moreover, it encouraged the European institutions,

development banks and financial institutions to work together in a Team Europe approach. As far as NDICI is concerned, the Regulation included also an EFSD+, with an enlarged geographical scope (beyond the only neighboring countries and Africa as it was the case with the 2017 EFSD), a broader sectoral focus, enhanced and innovative blending and financing instruments and an encouragement to strengthen the partnership with international financial institutions, development banks and other stakeholders. Finally, the EU flagship initiative, the Global Gateway, is funded mainly through the EFSD+, invites to take part in its Board, on an ad hoc basis, representatives from the EIB, the EBRD and Member States' national development banks to inform the strategic steering of the initiative, and includes a Business Advisory Group to engage in a more structured way with the European private sector (EC, 2023a).

This important restructuring was accompanied also by an internal re-organization of DG INTPA, where Direction E, dealing with “sustainable finance, investment & jobs; economy that works for the people”, was reinforced, and where, in pursuit of a “whole of Commission approach”, coordination with other DGs, DG Trade in particular, was enhanced (Interviewee 6). In practice, all these innovations at the level of EU institutions brought to, or at least were accompanied by, an increased reliance on loans (black line) while grants (light blue line) remained more stable, although still prevalent, while this is not a trend we find when looking at DAC EU Member States' flows (Figure 10).

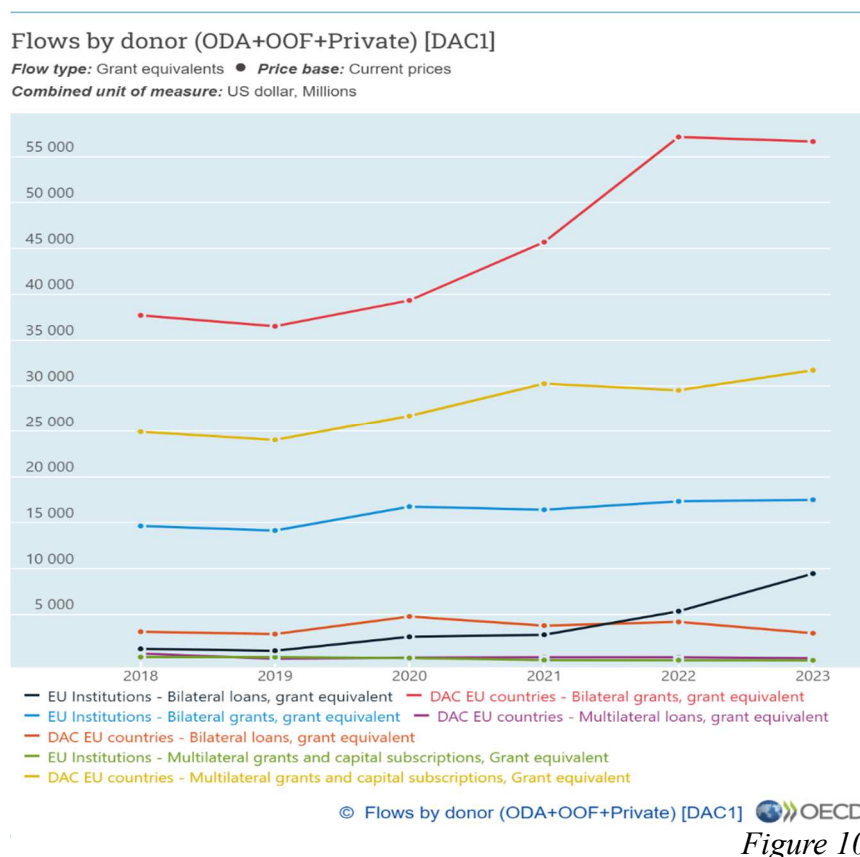


Figure 10

Consequently, the trend underlined by UNGCRG of ODA shifts from grants to loans is not as evident in the EU case. Moreover, even if that was the case, it should be considered that, since the Agenda for change 2011, the EU pledged to ‘target its resources where they are needed most to address poverty reduction and where they could have greatest impact’ (p.9), consequently not to provide grant-based aid to more advanced developing countries already able to generate enough own resources. Be that as it may, the increased engagement with the private sector, as showed above, is evident as much as it is so the focus on investments more than on grants. The flagship initiative, Global Gateway, is mainly focused on investments in infrastructure development, involving very much, as we saw above, the private sector. For the near future we expect nothing less. On her speech delivered at the European Parliament the 18th of July 2024, right before being confirmed for a second mandate as President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen stated that ‘this mandate has to be the time of investment’ and indicated as first priority that of ‘prosperity and competitiveness’, while never mentioning, as worriedly pointed out by our interviewees from NGOs, nor development cooperation, nor the aim of eradicating poverty nor, explicitly at least, sustainable development goals (Interviewee 2, Interviewee 7). Even more concerningly, not even the political guidelines for 2024-2029 mention any of the above. When it comes to the section ‘A global Europe: leveraging our power and partnerships’(pp. 25-28), the focus is all on enlargement, a more strategic approach to EU neighborhood and a ‘new economic foreign policy’ based on economic security (competitiveness, assertiveness and de-risking), free and fair trade (with a focus on critical minerals and raw materials, on trade defence instruments) and on a renovate investment in ‘long-term mutually beneficial partnerships’ through Global Gateway (von der Leyen, 2024).

Given this context, we expect this financialization to be driven, and mostly justified, again by the increased ambition and challenges tackled by the Agenda 2030 and by the increased competition from stronger investors, which require stepping up the funds invested in the sector beyond the possibilities of the sole public resources.

How is financialization framed

In the Agenda for Change (2011), the need for a favourable business environment is stressed to allow developing countries, especially the poorest, ‘to harness the opportunities offered by globally integrated markets’ (p.8). In the 2014 EC Communication on a stronger role for the private sector, the latter is described as an essential partner in the reduction of poverty (through job creation), in sustainable agricultural production and in the innovation and investment in the

green economy in developing countries, in other words, in contributing to an inclusive and sustainable growth. The 2016 External Investment Plan (EIP) is aimed at addressing ‘the Sustainable Development Goals, and [...] the multiple challenges faced both in the EU Neighbourhood and in Africa’ (p.6) as well as at promoting ‘sustainable development, jobs and growth in partner countries and addressing root causes of migration’ (p.2). The focus is similar to that of the previous documents, although more strategically related to EU interests; this is showed by the specific geographic focus and by the link with migration, but is also explicitly recognised where it is said that the new targeted approach ‘will also provide opportunities for private enterprises through trade and investment, including from Europe, thus also supporting European Economic Diplomacy and contributing to European economic growth’ (p.8). Reference to the Agenda 2030 and to the AAAA is explicit and the focus on investment is indicated as one of their key elements, in a context in which ‘(w)hile official development assistance remains essential for the poorest and fragile countries in their efforts to fight poverty and achieve sustainable development, other means of financing of our partner countries gain much additional weight’ and in which ‘private sector investment is needed, in order to generate investment on a scale necessary to address economic, social, and environmental challenges’ (p.7). With EFAD (2019) to these considerations are added the need for the EFAD to promote the Union’s values and strategic priorities (preamble 5), the recognition of ‘increasing risks emerging from geopolitical and geo-economic competition and the need to strengthen the EU architecture for sustainable financing of investment and connectivity in close cooperation with our partners’ (preamble 6), and the acknowledgement of belonging to ‘a global development finance system in which multilateral, regional and bilateral financial institutions work together towards global goals’ (preamble 9). All these aspects, including ‘the need to integrate the EFAD in EU external policy in light of the increasing geo-economic and political competition [...]’(preamble 2) and ‘the relevance of mobilizing both the public and private sectors and of targeting investments where the needs are greatest and to the most vulnerable regions, notably the Least Developed Countries and countries in situation of fragility or affected by conflict [...]’(preamble 3) are reconfirmed in EFAD 2021, and in NDICI, where the aim of EFSD+ is indicated as that of supporting investments as a means of contributing to the achievement of the SDGs, with a particular focus on the eradication of poverty. In sum, in the overall, while it is true that the Agenda 2030, the AAAA and the global challenges they set to face entered the picture as protagonists after 2015, as well as it is true that considerations on geopolitical and geoeconomic competition or competitiveness were introduced, there seem to be no sign of paradigmatic change, but a gradual evolution, coupled with the increased focus on investments and on engaging the private sector that we described above. What worries most NGOs and commentators seems rather

to be what lies ahead. Again we refer to von der Leyen's political guidelines for 2024-2029, but also to the leaked briefing book unearthed by Politico, in which emerging markets and developing economies are seen as 'geopolitical and geoeconomic players that should be invested in', and in which the new College is invited to engage with strategic partners 'with a policy mix driven by economic interest, and less so by more traditional and narrow development and foreign policy approaches' (p.1).

To summarise, we witnessed a financialization of EU development in line with what we had observed at global level, and we verified that the Agenda 2030 and the AAAA indeed represented crucial reference points for an acceleration and a systematization of this trend at EU level. We also assessed the impact of such financialization on the shift from poverty to development described above. On this, we saw that the role of the private sector as a tool to address market failures and facilitate investments in more disadvantaged and risky environments has always been acknowledged and has always remained among the central reasons for engaging with it. Thus, the two aspects may not be immediately connected, for the moment, nor in terms of official rhetoric nor in terms of practice. However, we also started to foresee, from the eyes of NGOs, the potential risks of this financialization when coupled with a stronger geo-politicization and instrumentalization of development, two trends whose relevance at EU level we dedicate to describe and prove in the next section and that may indeed inscribe financialization within a broader change of understanding occurred in EU development cooperation as observed at global level.

5.2.3 Instrumentalization and geo-politicization: development cooperation as a tool of foreign policy

At global level we described the rise of new actors and how they represent a challenge for traditional donors, the EU and its Member States included, not only in terms of new models of development they propose, but also, and most importantly, in terms of influence they exercise in foreign countries through development policy and beyond. A multipolar world is the new reality in which the EU is but a pole whose economic and demographic relevance is relatively shrinking. According to our interviewee from CONCORD, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the ensuing energy crisis worked as wake-up calls for Europe, that came to fully realise its vulnerability vis-à-vis global competitors (Interviewee 2). Even before that, Covid-19 had evidently showed the necessity of coming together among EU Member States and institutions to face global challenges such as this one (Interviewee 6). This new context, it is here argued, in the last two decades, but with an acceleration in the last five years, contributed to a change in the EU

understanding of development cooperation in the direction of a full integration of this policy sector into the wider realm of foreign policy action. In theory, development cooperation has always been part of this realm, and its objectives have always been conceived ‘within the framework of the principles and objectives of the Union's external action’ (art. 208 TFEU). At the same time, the idea of ‘coherence for development’, meaning the attention to the effects of EU policy from whatever sector on developing countries, has long been a concern. However, arguably, while it was the case that development policy had to be in line with wider external action principles and objectives, its goal remained solely that of reducing, and then eradicating, poverty and contributing to the development of partner countries. The fact that such cooperation would have provided benefits to the EU in terms of trade relationships and influence, when acknowledged, was not described as the purpose of such cooperation. As we said before regarding the distinction between cooperation and partnership, cooperation was intended as a joint work to improve a situation concerning one party, while partnerships involve mutual gains. The shift that is described in this chapter, based on what we expect from our global analysis, is in the direction of a development cooperation policy that is ‘instrumentalised’ to more or less openly pursue EU security and migration interests¹⁴ as well as ‘geo-politicised’, namely used as a tool for contending economic and political influence to other competitors. Again, some argue that the economic, extractive and ideological interests of EU Member States have always been at the core of the latter’s concern, even when dealing with development cooperation, in a quasi-colonial relationship perpetuated with former colonies after their independence. Keeping with this view, the trends described would be no more than rebranding operations, or a mere show of cards once the trick has been revealed. However, the reason why we nonetheless mark such trends as a change of understanding, is that even rebranding and showing the cards may have roots and, at the same time, transformative potential in the way resources are allocated, in which actors perceive themselves and are perceived, in the relationship between countries and in their identity formation that from such relationship derives. This is why we look for the justification provided for certain reforms or measures. Whether a certain degree of instrumentalization and geo-politicization has always been there does not deprive of meaning a research that proposes to highlight the full acknowledgement, normalization and acceptance of such trends, which is *per se* a change in the way the EU sees itself, the sector and itself within the sector, with all the transformative potential that this bears as consequence.

¹⁴ In the literature it is possible to find reference also to the trade-development nexus (Amadio Viceré & Venneri, 2023; Bharti, 2022), however, this nexus has arguably always been present both at global level, not by chance in 1964 was founded the UN Conference for Development and Trade (UNCTAD), and at EU level, where, for example, trade has been central in EU-ACP relationships even before the emergence of more explicitly “developmental” concerns in Cotonou 2000.

Instrumentalization: Migration

The 2023 AidWatch report underlined a relation between ODA and immigration flows between 2019 and 2021. Indeed, the top four recipients of bilateral ODA from European institutions in each of these years were Turkey, Afghanistan, Syria, which figured also at the top in terms of asylum applications, and Ukraine, from where a massive inflow of refugees arrived in Europe as a consequence of the Russian war of aggression and were granted temporary protection without the need to undergo the regular asylum procedure, thanks to a EU Council directive (CONCORD, 2023a, p.24). Moreover, the report also noted the increase of funds destined to the management of immigrants by donor countries within their own territories, and accounted among the ODA flows. Such funds, it is there contended, are spent to fulfil countries' obligations towards refugees and asylum-seekers under international law, thus should not be counted as ODA; in practice, though, they arrived at representing 13,1% of the total ODA reported by EU Member States in 2022 (CONCORD, 2023a, pp.18-19).

In the last decade, migration appeared more and more frequently in EU development discourse: in EU-ACP agreements, while completely absent in Yaoundé (1963) and Lomé (1975), it is object of a short paragraph in Cotonou (2000) (6 mentions) and then is mentioned 49 times in Samoa (2024). The 2006 European Consensus mentions migration 12 times, against the 35 of the 2017 New Consensus. In DCI 2007-2013 we find it mentioned 33 times, in DCI 2014-2020 44 and in NDICI 2021-2027 81 times. NDICI also includes the target of 10% expenditure on fighting illegal migration and forced displacement, as well as addressing the root causes of migration.

In 2017 the EFSD is created, as the first of the three pillars of the European External Investment Plan (EIP), with the aim of supporting investments primarily in Africa and the Union's Neighbourhood to achieve the SDGs and the commitments enshrined in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Through such investments the aim is 'to address specific socioeconomic root causes of migration, including irregular migration, and to contribute to the sustainable reintegration of migrants returning to their countries of origin and to the strengthening of transit and host communities' (preamble 2). Indeed, the Fund is not created solely to address migration, but the latter is undoubtedly the main focus, as suggested by the limited geographical focus and as exemplified by several other passages of the preambles, including preamble 3:

'Investments under the EFSD should complement and strengthen efforts carried out in the context of the Union's migration policy with third countries, including, where appropriate, the

implementation of the New Partnership Framework with third countries under the European Migration Agenda’.

The migration concern has for longer been related to Neighbourhood policy more than to development cooperation, and the progressive effort of coordination between the two, as exemplified by the NDICI, may have led to the mainstreaming of migration into development policy too. Yet, to address the roots of migration is not mentioned among the objectives development policy is set to pursue according to the Lisbon treaty. The same is true for the more recent New Consensus of 2017, where, although is mentioned in several parts, more than being conceived as an additional objective, that of migration is considered as a complex topic, cutting across development policy as well as ‘good governance, security, human rights, employment, health, education, agriculture, food security, social protection and environment, including climate change’ (preamble 40). In this sense, development is somewhat put at the service of migration, hence the claims of instrumentalization. Indeed, development cooperation has always contributed to addressing the root causes of migration, in particular those dire conditions that force people to leave their countries of origin, however, the fact that this link has been made progressively more explicit and has been enlarged to comprehend all dimensions of migration, including immigration management in donor countries, may be seen as an overstretch of the traditional focus of development.

We can expect the broadening of the Agenda brought by the SDGs to have played a role in the integration of migration within the development discourse, and this seems to be suggested also by the fact that after 2015, as we saw above, migration has been finding more and more space in development cooperation documents. We shall not forget, however, that in 2015 an influx of refugees well above the average of past years interested Europe, in what was defined as a ‘migratory crisis’ (UNHCR & IOM, 2015). This, together with the (arguably connected) rise of more right-wing and populist parties witnessed in Europe in the last decade (Barone et al., 2016; Greco, 2019), is undoubtedly another strong driver of this trend that should complement our independent variables, which alone would probably fail to grasp the full picture. The impact of our other main variable, namely the transformations witnessed in the pool of donors, seems not immediate to retrace. We now analyse how migration, and the need to tackle it through development policy, is framed by EU officials, to try to catch the relative importance of all these factors and see to what extent our framework of analysis and independent variables allow for a better comprehension of this trend.

How is this change framed

In the 2006 European Consensus on Development, we see the establishment of a link between migration and development mostly justified in two ways. Firstly, development is seen as ‘the most effective long-term response to forced and illegal migration and trafficking of human beings’ (para 40). Secondly, it is stated as an aim that of including ‘migration and refugee issues in country and regional strategies and partnerships with interested countries and to promote the synergies between migration and development, to make migration a positive force for development’ (para 110). The latter objective is sought through ‘the promotion of concrete measures aimed at reinforcing their contribution to poverty reduction, including facilitating remittances and limiting the 'brain drain' of qualified people’ (para 38); moreover the Commission proposes its support to developing countries ‘in their policies of management of migratory flows, as well as in their efforts to combat human trafficking, in order to make sure that the human rights of the migrants are respected’ (para 110).

The 2011 Agenda for Change mentions explicitly the development-migration nexus, stating that ‘the EU should assist developing countries in strengthening their policies, capacities and activities in the area of migration and mobility, with a view to maximising the development impact of the increased regional and global mobility of people’ (p.12).

The New European External Investment Plan of 2016 starts from the acknowledgement of the fact that ‘(i)n 2015, more than 60 million people left their places of origin in search of a better life’ (p.7). The realization of this ‘shared challenge for the Union and its partner countries’ (p.7) makes the EU focus on smart and sustainable investment to contribute to the development, stability and improved conditions of Africa and EU Neighbourhood countries. According to the regulation instituting the EFSD (2017) the link between development and migration is provided by the Agenda 2030, ‘which recognises international migration as a multi-dimensional reality of major relevance for the development of countries of origin, transit and destination, requiring coherent and comprehensive responses, while underlining the potential for migrants to contribute to inclusive growth and sustainable development’ (preamble 5). As stated in the Consensus 2017, the Agenda 2030 also ‘clearly recognises the positive contribution of migration and mobility to inclusive growth and sustainable development’ (p.19).

Thus, the reference to the SDGs is clear and explicit, as expected, however not much seems to have changed in the understanding of the development-migration nexus as a result of it. The only

slight, but not insignificant, difference that is noted between the 2006 Consensus (and the Agenda for Change) and the 2017 New Consensus is the major weight accorded in the latter to the needs of the host populations and not only to the countries of origin and to the rights of the migrants. In 2006, in addition to addressing the root causes of migration, we see references to combating human trafficking and to developing countries' policies of management of migratory flows, but no mention is made neither to integration in the host countries, nor to migrants' return to their country of origin. These aspects, instead, can be found repeatedly in the New Consensus, as, for instance, in para 41:

'Through development policy, the EU and its Member States will address the root causes of irregular migration and will, inter alia, contribute to the sustainable integration of migrants in host countries and host communities and help ensure the successful socioeconomic integration of returning migrants in their countries of origin or transit [...].'

It is possible to find references to these aspects also in the Samoa agreement (2000), however they are included in the 'political dimension' of the partnership and not in the 'development strategies' one. Migration is not even mentioned among the 'thematic and cross-cutting issues' of development. Be that as it may, such additional focus on host countries and return is more reasonably ascribable to the impact of the 2015 migratory crisis than to the SDGs. Such focus is maintained also in NDICI, where it is described as essential the building of comprehensive partnerships for

'ensuring access to international protection, addressing the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, enhancing border management and pursuing efforts to prevent irregular migration and forced displacement, fighting against trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling, and working on dignified and sustainable returns, readmission and reintegration where relevant, on the basis of mutual accountability and full respect of humanitarian and human rights obligations under international and Union law, and by engaging with diasporas and supporting legal migration pathways' (preamble 50).

This new element is coherent with the shift from the more outward-looking approach of aid to the more inward-looking one of partnership that we individuated above. It is another sign of the more explicit emergence of EU strategic interests in the making of development cooperation policy. The enlargement of the development agenda encouraged by the SDGs, coupled with the need to enhance its effectiveness and visibility due to increased competition and criticism, has

been transforming development cooperation more and more from a specific element of external action into an instrument of the wider foreign policy toolkit. This instrumentalization is strongly interlinked with the geo-politicization further elaborated on in the next section. Indeed, as discussed in our analysis at global level, the combination of the strongly intertwined phenomena of a reshaped pool of actors and of the new global challenges that the Agenda 2030 incorporated in the development domain produced two opposite trends, one towards coordination (both at the level of partnership-building and at level of internal policy coherence) and the other towards more assertive, geopolitical, marketized and inward-looking approaches. In sum, while the path of this trend would not appear totally clear without considering the 2015 refugee crisis and internal party dynamics, our analysis conducted so far and our framework allow for a better comprehension of the wider context in which this change is to be inserted.

Instrumentalization (security) and geo-politicization

With the nexus security-development we here make reference to various aspects of security, not only to the issue of migration examined separately above, but also to the so-called “security of supply”, the strategic autonomy in terms of crucial value chains, energy production, and the like, as well as the security more *strictu sensu*, related to the defence of the territory, which resurfaced forcefully at the top of EU concerns since Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. The link with the geo-politicization is more immediate than with other trends, that nonetheless, as showed, presented such connection, and this is the reason why they are treated in the same section. In many aspects, the two can be juxtaposed. Geo-politicization can be understood, in some way, as an instrumentalization of development in as much as it means to use the latter for pursuing strategic interests and relationships and expanding one’s influence. In any case, the result is the same, namely the fact that development cooperation, it is here argued, has gradually “lost its innocence”, becoming another tool in the foreign policy toolkit.

In 2022, the top 10 recipients of gross bilateral ODA from EU institutions, to which 51.7% of the total ODA was allocated, were mainly countries located in EU Eastern and Southern neighbourhood, in line not only with migration concerns, but also with other policy priorities such as the enlargement¹⁵ and the war in Ukraine (OECD, 2024). In 2014-2015, the top 10 recipients were still mainly Neighbouring countries, but their share of the total gross bilateral ODA accounted only for 36% (OECD, 2017). In 2007-2008 the percentage was of 30% (OECD,

¹⁵ Enlargement is indeed considered, in von der Leyen’s political guidelines for the next Commission, as a ‘moral, political and geostrategic imperative’ (p.25), and a new Commissioner is going to be appointed with a specific focus on it (von der Leyen, 2024).

2010).

Indeed, in 2022 EU policy was steered by a “geopolitical Commission”, aspiring to a strategic and effective European model of development able to create value for money and to contribute to EU wider political priorities, paraphrasing from President von der Leyen’s mission letter to DG INTPA Commissioner Urpilainen. The very name of NDICI-Global Europe given to the main financial instrument for development for the 2021-2027 period indicates a greater focus on EU’s role in the world. To have a stronger and more impactful voice at global level is also the objective of Team Europe, as we have seen in chapter 2, an initiative that, more than aspiring to create a common development policy among the different member states, institutions and European investment banks, aims at enhancing EU visibility through flagship initiatives and a joint management of communication (Interviewee 6). In other words, the idea is that it is not enough to be effective in development cooperation if this is not translated in good “publicity”, and that fragmentation between EU member states’ policies does not help in conveying the message of the EU as a global player in its own right, beyond its Member States. Up to that time, the focus had been more on policy coherence and effectiveness and less on visibility, and this is the gap that Team Europe explicitly set to fill.

Going further beyond we can see an anticipation of this trend, and indeed a crucial moment in its inception, in the 2016 Global Strategy for the EU’s foreign and security policy. There it is said that ‘development policy will become more flexible and aligned with our strategic priorities [...] Development funds must be stable, but lengthy programming cycles limit the timely use of EU support, and can reduce our visibility and impact.’ (p.48). Again, we can also refer to the ‘principled pragmatism’ explored in chapter 2, that the Global Strategy indicates as a guide for EU external action.

The idea is in general of a more assertive Europe, more strategically oriented, more “geopolitical” and more visible. This is something also observed and confirmed by our interviewee from DG INTPA, which reports also of some internal resistance to this paradigm shift within the Commission (Interviewee 6), as well as from all our interviewees, most of which indicate the Global Gateway as a clear example of it. For this reason, this chapter will be concluded by a focus on the Global Gateway. This will allow us to better understand what do this instrumentalization and geo-politicization mean and to see how are changes in line with these trends framed at EU level. As we already anticipated, some commentators see the Global Gateway as a response to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, thus a comparative analysis of the two may indeed end up

providing some more practical evidence of the effect of new actors (China in particular, in this case, also due to its relevance we repeatedly underlined) in shaping EU understanding of development cooperation, specifically in the direction of greater instrumentalization and geopoliticization.

In line with what analysed so far at global and EU level, here again we expect these trends to be framed as a response to the challenge brought by new actors not only in terms of different models of development cooperation, but also in terms of other critical strategic interests that, also due to the Agenda 2030, were gradually integrated into the development agenda, including strategic autonomy.

A practical example: the Global Gateway and the Belt and Road Initiative

One of the main fruits of the trends just outlined is considered to be the Global Gateway (see section 2.1.4). In the Communication establishing it, it is very clear that the aim of the initiative consists in providing a “positive offer” not only to partner countries, by enhancing their infrastructural development, but also to the EU itself, by contributing to the pursuance of its strategic priorities. This is well expressed by sentences like ‘[...] work with host countries, financial institutions and the private sector to scale up infrastructure investment to boost our competitiveness, deliver benefits and protections for our partners [...]’ (p.1); or ‘(w)e will cooperate with partner countries to enable their just energy transition and to diversify our clean energy supply at the same time’ (p.5); or, even more explicitly, ‘Global Gateway is Europe’s offer to help connect the world and boost resilience for the EU and partner countries alike. It allows us to support countries who seek to enhance their resilience (vis-à-vis our competitors/rivals) in a sustainable manner, while strengthening partnerships that are important for Europe’s own strategic autonomy’ (p.6), or, again, ‘It (ed: the Global Gateway) will be driven by the needs of our partner countries and the strategic interests of the European Union’(p.13). Such strategic interests are mostly related to competitiveness, connectivity, diversification of supply (in the energetic sector in particular), and securing of value chains.

As already mentioned above, some see such initiative as a more or less direct response to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. There are two main elements behind this argument, the first is the supposed similarity of the two initiatives, the second is the fact that most of the strategic autonomy and security challenges currently faced by the EU, also through this initiative, involve China in one way or another. Here we briefly try to substantiate these two elements, then we look

at considerations on how the EU framed this initiative. This may indeed prove to be a useful example of how the rise of new donors (and of China in particular) impacted on EU policy.

First of all, both the initiatives play a central role in the respective development cooperation strategy of the two actors: the BRI is inscribed in the Statute of the Chinese Communist party (Sellari, 2020) and indicated as a major platform in the white paper China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era (2021), while the Global Gateway is defined as a flagship initiative in development related webpages and documents (European Commission, n.d.-d). Then, by comparing the communication launching the Global Gateway (2021) with the Chinese Action Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative (2015), we see that both are focused on physical infrastructure, although both also emphasize the need of a wider approach integrating also education, research and "people-to-people connections". The five major goals identified by the Chinese Action Plan are 'policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds' (p.2); in terms of facilities connectivity, described as 'a priority area for implementing the Initiative' (p.2) the focus is on low carbon land and water transportation channels, energy infrastructures, and international communication. These somewhat resonate with the investment priorities of the Global Gateway, namely people-to-people connections, digitalization, health, climate, energy and transport sectors, as well as education and research. The concepts of unimpeded trade and financial integration are also prioritized by the Global Gateway, encouraging the use of innovative financial instruments and aiming at the creation of 'an enabling environment to make sure projects deliver, by offering attractive investment and business friendly trading conditions, regulatory convergence, standardisation, supply chain integration and financial services' (p.2). In both cases equal partnership, joint programming and mutual gains are emphasized: 'The Initiative will enable China to further expand and deepen its opening-up, and to strengthen its mutually beneficial cooperation with countries in Asia, Europe and Africa and the rest of the world' (p.1); 'Global Gateway projects will be designed, developed and implemented in close cooperation and consultation with partner countries. Infrastructure projects will be based on the needs and opportunities that they identify for their local economies and local communities, as well as the EU's own strategic interests' (p.3). These similarities signal some sort of convergence at least in the rhetoric adopted and in the understanding of what effective development cooperation and its priorities should be. Interestingly, to connect with what uncovered above, poverty reduction and eradication does not feature among the objectives and is not even mentioned in the two documents, if not once in the Chinese Action Plan, where it figures among the topics to be discussed during public interest activities to be promoted among NGOs.

When it comes to the second element, namely the role of China with rapport to strategic challenges faced by the EU, we have already seen in chapter 4 the increased relevance of China in the development sector, in FDI flows, and trade relations, especially with the global South. We also briefly underlined the relevance of Central and Eastern Europe in the Chinese strategy, included the BRI, epitomized by the cooperation 16+1 inaugurated in 2010 (then become 17+1 with Greece) with these countries (Sellari, 2020). Another crucial field of potential, and in part already ongoing, conflict is the one of the green transition, when it comes, for example, to Chinese export of battery electric vehicles (BEV) and the accusation of unfair subsidization that recently led the EU to impose countervailing duties on their import (Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2024/1866 of 3 July 2024). Relatedly, again concerning the green but also the digital transition and the critical raw materials necessary to their accomplishment, the fact that China produces 86% of the world's rare earth supply and that nearly 90% of the processing and refining of critical raw materials is concentrated in China is very concerning for EU strategic autonomy (EU, 2024; van Wieringen & Marcos Fernandez, 2022). In general, EU relationship with China is often defined as one of cooperation, competition and systemic rivalry, and other differences include the 'position on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, human rights, market access and investment, environment issues, and key foreign and security policy issues', without forgetting EU-China trade imbalance (EEAS, 2023).

In sum, the two initiatives operate in roughly the same sectors, which are sectors in which China and EU often face themselves as competitors, as well as potential cooperators. These and other elements by no means entail a "copy and paste" operation by the EU, but indeed may show how common challenges are faced with similar but competitive initiatives by different actors, that continuously interact in the global arena. This analysis does not even bring us to say that only China had an impact in the elaboration of the Global Gateway initiative, far from it, but it does indicate a relevant role for Beijing's rise. Another quick and "easy" example is represented by Russia, not only for the war of aggression on Ukraine and the energy crisis ensued by the cut of Russian supply of gas to the EU, but also its huge influence in several foreign countries, such as in the Sahel region, where several countries have recently cut relations (mostly those concerning security and military issues) with the EU or some of its Member States, while at the same time strengthening their ties with Russia.

Now we turn to see how the Global Gateway is framed, to verify whether the "justification" provided for it, and the reasoning behind the instrumentalization and geo-politicization of development it furthers, indeed reflects the concerns raised above. To answer to this question we

first look again at the communication launching the initiative, then we complement with the reading of the final speech delivered by the HR/VP Josep Borrel at the Global Gateway Forum in October 2023, and finally we look at the leaked briefing book (EU, 2024) to see whether some more elements emerge from a document not intended for the wider public.

First of all, the Global Gateway is presented as a ‘positive offer’, a terminology that clearly implies the existence of alternative offers, from which the EU one is implicitly said to differ for its positiveness. In the paragraphs where this concept is introduced, it seems that an implicit comparison with China, in particular, is set, when all the main elements of which Chinese development cooperation strategy is commonly accused of (see the end of chapter 4.1.3) are presented as what EU ‘positive offer’ will not be:

‘The EU will offer its financing under fair and favourable terms in order to limit the risk of debt distress. It will help build sustainable infrastructure with the support, skills and the finance needed to operate it. Without proper transparency, good governance and high standards projects can be badly chosen or designed, left incomplete or be used to fuel corruption. This not only stunts growth and deprives local communities but it ultimately creates dependencies which can limit countries’ ability to make decisions’ (p.1).

‘To forge links and not to create dependencies’ (p.1) is indeed one of the mottos of this initiative, and may well respond both to the accusations the EU has always been moved against and to the critics attracted by China. As HR/VP Borrel puts it, ‘We are not only in a “battle of narratives”; we are in a “battle of offers”. Not only the nicest stories, but the best actions.’ (Borrel, 2023). This terminology can be found also in the leaked document where it is said that ‘Africa, conscious of its potential, is in the market for (non-exclusive) partnerships to pursue the objectives outlined in its African Union Agenda 2063. This translates into a battle of narratives and offers’ (p.10). In terms of narratives, ‘(o)thers did less, but marketed better’ (EU, 2024, p.6), thus it is suggested that ‘(t)he new College should move to a full political campaign approach [...] This also requires a serious investment in political engagement in partner countries backed up by investment missions with the private sector’(p.10). In terms of offers, ‘(i)n a more contested world we can no longer afford the luxury of overreach, fragmentation and duplication’ (p.7) and ‘(w)ith the economy now serving as the battleground for geopolitical competition, the new College should redefine the focus of EU external action. The new College should therefore develop a cohesive investment, trade, macro-economic and policy offer for Emerging Markets and Developing Economies that can effectively compete with the offers from others [...]’ (p.9).

The demand that this offer sets to satisfy is the ever-growing global infrastructure investment deficit, clearly exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, but long predating it. Facing these global challenges ‘Democracies - and the values that underpin them - must demonstrate their ability to deliver’ (The Global Gateway, 2021, p.1). The label “Democracies” again implies a contrast with non-democratic countries in a competition on who delivers better on the common goals set by the Agenda 2030. The demand, however, is also an EU one, ‘Our Global Gateway should [also] contribute to our economic security strategy. We need more security and for that we have to “de-risk” our economy by diversification of our supply chains.’ (Borrel, 2023)

As a valid summary of all this, we report the first paragraph of the executive summary of the leaked briefing bok:

‘The EU’s economic security and competitiveness as well as our capacity to stand up for our values, norms and standards are inextricably linked to developments in the rest of the world. In order to diversify supply chains, ensure access to energy and raw materials, link up with today’s and tomorrow’s growth markets and enhance our political standing in the world, we cannot neglect Emerging Markets and Developing Economies in Asia, Africa and Latin America’.

In sum, the Global Gateway, the current EU development cooperation flagship initiative, presents an image of development cooperation as a tool of foreign policy, to be used to face EU challenges related to competitiveness, security and strategic autonomy. NGOs mostly fear the disappearance of the ‘eradication of poverty’ and denounce it as a violation of the treaties (Interviewee 2, Interviewee 7); nonetheless some “recipient countries”, at least this is reportedly the position of the EC, seem to appreciate the fact that the EU is now more explicit in presenting its own interests behind development cooperation (Interviewee 2). Be that as it may, these elements appear to confirm that new concerns – including migration and security - are now steadily part of the agenda, since the SDGs, and a renewed pool of actors has shaped EU understanding of development cooperation and of its role in it.

6. Findings

After having described two major changes occurred at global level in the development sector, namely a progressive reshaping of the pool of actors involved (blurring the donor-recipient divide) and the elaboration of the UN Agenda 2030, having identified some changes in the global understanding of development cooperation engendered by them, having statically compared the resulting “global understanding” with the current EU one and having traced the origin of the

points of contact found and the framework in which they were introduced, it is possible to conclude what follows.

Both at global and EU level, a synchronous shift from eradication of poverty to sustainable development and from aid to partnership occurred, somewhat encouraged by the Agenda 2030 and by the enlargement of the definition of development cooperation it entailed, and then accelerated by the instrumentalization and geo-politicization of the development agenda derived from enhanced competition among “donors” and possibility of diversification for “recipients”. Full realization of such enhanced competition arrived for the EU in correspondence of major crises including the COVID-19 pandemic, Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the ensuing energy crisis, resulting in a considerable acceleration of the instrumentalization and geo-politicization trends in the last five years. The latter trends have been accompanied, again both at global and EU level, by an increasing resort to private capital and development financial institutions, in a process known as “financialization”, systematized by the Agenda 2030 and by the Addis Abeba Action Agenda of 2015 and then grown together with the growth of the ambition and scope of development cooperation, as well as with EU concerns about economic competitiveness vis-à-vis actors such as China and the US. All these changes, we have argued, comported an almost complete integration of development cooperation into the wider EU foreign policy toolbox, as an instrument to face global challenges in a competitive environment, while also openly pursuing strategic interests, including in the fields of migration, security and strategic autonomy.

In sum, EU understanding of development cooperation changed, in line with what observed at global level, in several respects in the last two decades (but even more clearly and deeply in the last decade). Development passed from being a dominion of the EU and its OECD-DAC partners to become a contested field, increasingly marketized and where the EU needs to compete with new Southern actors for the promotion of its values and models. Accordingly, development cooperation shifted focus from an optic of aid and poverty eradication to one of mutual gains, partnership and sustainable development. This happened in a context of enlarged agenda and increased ambition, with development cooperation put at the service of global challenges such as the climate and health crises, as well as of migration, security and strategic autonomy. Such enlargement rendered public funding largely insufficient and triggered a process of engagement of the private sector.

Our global level independent variables, namely the elaboration of the Agenda 2030 and the

reshaping of the pool of actors, proved indeed to be very relevant drivers behind the evolution of EU strategy and understanding of development cooperation in the direction described. Indeed one would make a huge mistake in neglecting the internal dynamics of the EU compound polity or the impact of events such as the financial and migratory crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian aggression against Ukraine and the energy crisis, by attributing to our independent variables the capability to provide a fully comprehensive explanation; however, the wider perspective embraced by this piece of research by playing on the interconnection between the global and the local levels, starting from the former, allowed us to free the EU from the isolation it is often confined in when analyzed in the progressing of its policy strategy, when the global appears only from small windows, in a distant, external and separated horizon.

7. Conclusions

This research started from the description of the current EU strategy for development cooperation, here intended as a system of principles, objectives, plans and tools elaborated through the years by different actors of the EU compound polity. We outlined the basic principles of such strategy, enlisted in the treaties, as well as operational ones, such as the “principled pragmatism”, “policy coherence for development”, “development effectiveness” and “working better together” principles. We then presented the current main operational and planning instruments, namely NDICI-Global Europe and the Global Gateway Initiative.

A look at the literature gave us an idea of what has already been studied about the EU policy for development cooperation. We have seen as several authors discussed the extent to which the current strategy represented a novelty compared to the past, or described some recent trends, including geo-politicization, instrumentalization, and financialization of EU development cooperation. Much work has already been done also on the main drivers behind such trends, including inter-institutional or intra-institutional changes within the EU, shifts of balance between EU member states, changing international norms and actors and the related emergence of mutated requests from aid-recipient countries.

Being interested in furthering this research on the drivers of the current understanding, as per our research question, we decided to focus predominantly on the impact of changing international norms and actors, and this decision came from a specific theoretical framework, inscribable within the constructivist stream, that arguably represent the actual novelty and added value of this piece of research. Such theoretical framework started from the conviction that actors operate

based on identities, narratives, institutional norms and interests that they do not form in complete isolation, but in constant dialectic with other actors. From this derived two consequences: one is that the way in which the idea of development cooperation is framed by international actors is not merely a rhetoric superstructure put in place by them to justify actions in pursuit of their own material interests (as it may sound from a realist perspective), but it is a framework for action constituted by the intersection of different interests with which it is in a relationship of reciprocal influence; which means that to study narratives and “understandings” can indeed reveal much about a policy. The second consequence is that we can distinguish a global “battlefield” where and with whom several different “local” understandings interact, shaping one another, and shaping and being shaped by the resultant of such interactions, what we here defined the “global understanding”.

Based on such framework, we deemed it impossible to really understand the “local” level, in this case the EU understanding of development, without taking into account the “global” level. Moreover, we considered that to properly take into account the “global level” one need to start from it, in order not to read it automatically from the “local perspective”, but to fully acknowledge the partiality of such reading and comprehend its meaning. Therefore, we were also able to hypothesise that global level changes, namely a progressive reshaping of the pool of development actors and the elaboration of the Agenda 2030, were indeed to be considered two crucial drivers behind the current “local” understanding of EU development cooperation. This framework also allowed to achieve two simultaneous results in one research: while uncovering two crucial drivers that led to the EU understanding of development cooperation as reflected by its current strategy, we were able to use the EU case as an example to better explain changes enchainned by our variables also at global level, that we had just outlined in the “global understanding” chapter (chapter 4). In other words, while answering to our main question of what were the drivers that led to the current EU understanding of development (or better, of whether our independent variables had relevant explanatory value for what concerns the current EU strategy), we were also able to situate such understanding in an environment of continuous relation with that of other actors and with the global multifaceted resultant of the continuous interaction among the former and the latter, thus to insert it in the environment in which it actually formed and is continuously reshaped, and to describe such environment.

In practice, what we did was to start by describing such global level changes and outlining the transformations they brought to the sector and they testified, namely the blurring of the donor-recipient divide and the end of the North dominion, a shift from aid and poverty eradication to

partnership and sustainable development, and processes of financialization, instrumentalization, geo-politicization and full integration of development cooperation in actors' foreign policy. The sum of such transformations composed a sketch of the new "global understanding of development". We provided also an example of an alternative model to the EU one, namely the Chinese one, to better grasp the complexity of such "global understanding".

Then, all the consequences just outlined at global level were retraced in the EU strategy first through a static comparison of the "global understanding" just derived in chapter 4 and the "local understanding" derived from the description in chapter 2, identifying the possible points of contact between the two. After that, we explored the diachronic evolution of EU strategy to see whether such points of contact were indeed, as we supposed, fruit of some recent turn and not a stable feature of EU development cooperation policy. Finally, we looked at the rhetorical and narrative framework in which such changes had emerged, to retrace the global drivers we had hypothesized and evaluate their relevance.

At the same time, both at global and EU level, we also highlighted the connections between changes of narrative and understanding on one side and practical changes in the actions performed (e.g., in the allocation of funds or in the conclusion of agreements) on the other, to further prove the validity of our theoretical claims.

What we found out at EU level was that indeed the Agenda 2030 represented a turning point for the shift from an optic of aid and eradication of poverty, to one more centered on partnerships and sustainable development (i.e., more focused on mutual gains and on common efforts for common global challenges). Complemented by the Addis Abeba Action Agenda (AAAA), the Agenda 2030 also contributed to stimulate an acceleration and a systematization of the financialization of development and to widening the scope and enhancing the ambition of development cooperation. In the meantime, the reshaping of the pool of actors, with new "donors" emerging (while remaining also recipients) and a renewed negotiating role for recipient countries, provoked changes both from the side of the offer and from that of the demand. This contributed to further accelerate the processes mentioned above and to fuel two opposing trends, one towards attempts at joining forces and homogenizing policies and objectives between different donors (e.g., GPEDC, but, more successfully, the SDGs) and another, at least from the point of view of traditional OECD/DAC donors, EU included, of competition. Such competition component and the importance it held for EU strategic autonomy was fully acknowledged and addressed starting from crises including the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian aggression against Ukraine, with

the ensuing energy crisis, but the latter, we argued, mostly functioned as wake-up calls, evidencing already existing flaws. The combination of all these changes, for which the Agenda 2030 and the reshaping of the pool of actors were crucial drivers, brought to the progressive instrumentalization and geo-politicization of EU development cooperation and to its transformation from being an instrument of external action with its own objectives and borders, to be almost completely embedded in EU foreign policy.

It is important to stress again that one of the strengths of our framework of analysis is that such results found at EU level, given the relevance of the EU as an actor in development cooperation and given the great interconnectedness between the EU and the global understanding of development we underlined, tells us something significant, with all due caution, on what the sector as a whole is experiencing.

This research not only aimed at furthering our understanding of the current EU strategy for development cooperation and of its origin, but also intended to indicate a path for future research. We tested our model on multiple trends of change and on multiple variables due to the unique opportunity offered by it to take stock of the complexity of such a huge topic, but also to prove that its relevance is not limited to specific events or changes. Now the same process, from global to local (and back, in some way, as argued) and the same framework of analysis could be used to further the study of each one of the elements analysed, namely on single tracks of change, on the relationship between specific actors (e.g., EU and China, EU and Africa, etc.) or on specific variables. The key message, exportable also in other fields of research on the EU policy, is the opportunity and necessity to look at the EU starting from the global and not vice versa. Then, research should also start to focus more on the effects that such changes (that we mostly saw from the “donors” perspective) bear on recipient countries, something we referred to in several situations, but without the possibility of diving deeper. Just to make some examples, we could ask ourselves whether the African private sector is ready for the financialization that is taking place, or the extent to which long term partnerships as those more and more in vogue constrain the decision-making autonomy of future recipient countries’ governments. Another venue for future research, starting from the constataion of the fact that EU’s influence in many countries (e.g., in the Sahel) is decreasing, would be that of trying to calculate the economic, trade, and strategic loss that this entailed or entails for the EU, enlightening, by this means, the two-way interconnectedness of donor-recipient relationships. Since this thesis focused specifically on the EU, these suggestions, elaborated starting from the findings of this work, are mostly related to EU studies or, in any case, gravitate around the EU, but indeed other actors are still

underrepresented in the literature, in many cases also due to the difficulties in accessing the data that we came across also during our analysis.

As we have seen in this research, development cooperation's interconnections with other fields of external action have grown to the extent that its borders are no longer distinguishable, and classic categorizations of the actors involved are in crisis since at least two decades. To enhance our comprehension of such a complex landscape we need to couple wider multifactor approaches as the one presented here with deeper diving on specifying aspects and/or actors, but in no case we can anymore pretend to ignore the global-local intertwining.

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ANNEX I - Interviewees

Interviewee 1: Associate director of the ECDPM think tank’s “Europe and Africa in the world” cluster. Her work focuses on EU foreign and development policy, Africa-Europe relations, finance and gender. She has more than 10 years of experience in the sector.

Interviewee 2: Senior Policy and Advocacy Advisor for Financing and Funding for Sustainable Development at CONCORD, a European Confederation of NGOs working on sustainable development and international cooperation

Interviewee 3: Head of the Secretariat of Africa Platform (ACP), a pan-African organization working on the Social Contract and State-Society Relations. He currently represents Africa Platform on the EU Global Gateway Civil Society Advisory Board, where he also sits in the Steering Committee. He is a former Steering Group Member of the Global Civic Charter, Member of the UNDP Program Advisory Board for Africa as well a former Advisory Board Member of the German Government Global Multi-stakeholder and collaborative Dialogue Platform on Implementation of Sustainable Development-Partners for Review (P4R), among the many other roles covered in over 30 years as a development practitioner.

Interviewee 4: Senior EU policy analyst at ODI Europe, a think tank focused on EU policy and Europe’s role in the global arena. She has almost 20 years of experience working on policy and advocacy work on sustainable development policies and development finance with civil society organisations, the trade unions and feminist organisations.

Interviewee 5: Foreign Service Officer at the Kenya Embassy to the Kingdom of Belgium and to the European Union. She was part of the team which negotiated the Kenya-EU Economic Partnership Agreement concluded in June 2023. She worked for Kenya’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs for around nine years.

Interviewee 6: Italian Seconded National Expert, first at the EU Commission for 6 years, then at the Italian Permanent Representation in Brussels for 8 years and then again in the EU Commission, at DG INTPA, where she has been working for the last two years. In all these cases, the secondment regarded the development cooperation sector.

Interviewee 7: EU Aid Policy and Development Finance Advisor at the Oxfam EU office.

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