The Inclusion of Non-Governmental Organisations in EU Development Policy: a Neo-Gramscian Perspective.

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Abstract

To counter the critique on the presumed democratic deficit of its policy-making, the European Union has designed several mechanisms allowing interested stakeholders to participate in the policy-making processes. Nevertheless, inclusion in the policy-making processes does not necessarily result in influence on the outcome of that policy. For instance non-governmental organisations in the EU trade and environmental policy domains have encountered major difficulties in influencing policy outcomes, even though they were offered the opportunity of participating in the policy process. From a neo-Gramscian perspective it has been argued that consultation and participation are strategies of the ruling class to silence critical alternatives by coopting them. Based on a case study on the consultation process of the ‘Green Paper on Development’, launched by the European Commission in 2010, this article will address two questions. Firstly it will assess the influence of development NGOs on the development policy of the EU. This allows to conclude whether the lack of influence of non-governmental organisations is limited to specific policy domains, or whether it is a more general feature of the EU policy environment. Secondly, the paper will use the empirical results to answer a more theoretical question: how relevant is the neo-Gramscian framework for the contemporary study of EU development policy. In conclusion, the article proposes modifications to this theoretical framework as well as practical suggestions to deepen existing participatory mechanisms.
Introduction

The presumed democratic deficit of the European Union (EU) has been widely debated, especially since the referenda on the Maastricht Treaty in the 1990s (Eising and Lehringer 2010: 194). Although prominent academics have contested that EU policy-making suffers from a structural democratic deficit (Moravcsik 2002, Majone 2000), the opposite view has gained much following in academic literature (Follesdal and Hix 2006, Decker 2002, Tsakatika 2007, Luksic and Bahor 2010) and has resonated in political discussions on the future of EU governance (Commission 2001). In trying to remedy this deficit, the EU has increasingly turned to civil society participation in different stages of the policy process, as a way of realizing the ideal of participatory governance and of ‘bringing the citizens back in’ (Zittel and Fuchs 2007). In the multilevel governance environment of the EU, specialized agencies, often non-majoritarian, as well as internationally organized interest groups contribute to policy making in a dispersed and fragmented arena, but no agreement has of yet been reached on the influence of interest groups on the formulation and implementation of EU policy (Beyers, Eising and Maloney 2008: 1114). Nevertheless, recent research has demonstrated that the inclusion of NGOs in the EU policy process, in the case of trade policy and the regulation on chemicals and environmental policy, has not led to significant impact on the policy outcome (Dür and de Bièvre 2007, Persson 2007). The question arises whether these observations can be extrapolated to other areas of EU governance.

The finding that the inclusion of civil society in the policy process does not necessarily lead to influence on the policy outcome (Dür and De Bièvre 2007, Huybrechts and Peels 2009) has led to different interpretations. In a mild critique, Friedrich (2008: 67) labels the EU’s plea for participation a rhetorical commitment. More profound critiques maintain that the discourse on civil society participation is used by EU institutions to support their own interests (Smismans 2003, Hurt 2006). Saurugger’s (2008: 1286) observations that citizen participation “remains linked to the mastery of European forms of interest representation, which is strongly influenced by the EU institutions’ need for expertise and legitimacy, and less by the idea of creating new forms of political representation at EU level,” must be interpreted in a similar way. This author adds that participation is still based on an elitist and functional basis (ibid.). From a radical point of view, the ostensible participation of civil society is a disguise to limit the involvement and responsibilities of
these organisations to the implementation phase of state policies (Dagnino 2008: 57). The latter critique is often formulated in neo-Gramscian terms as the deliberate penetration and cooptation of civil society by the hegemonic bloc, in which case “constitutional guarantees (rights) and political expression (parliamentary representation) are window-dressing for bourgeois rule” (Cohen and Arato 2004: 146).

The aim of this article is twofold. First, it will assess the influence of non governmental organisations (NGOs) on the development policy of the EU, to map whether the lack of influence of NGOs in EU decision making in trade and environmental policy can be extrapolated to other domains, which would make it a more general feature of EU policy. The ‘neo-Gramscian perspective’ of this article (Bieler and Morton 2001)\(^1\) encourages us to ask not only if NGOs have influence, but also what form that influence takes.\(^2\) In other words, do NGOs use their influence to propose alternatives to the existing mainstream development paradigms, or do they merely assert those policies? In the latter case, might their inclusion be a mere EU-strategy to silence critical voices?

The empirical data generated to answer these questions will help to address a second, more theoretical aim, namely: how relevant is the Neo-Gramscian framework for the contemporary study of EU-policy making? How can Neo-Gramscian concepts, nearly a century after their initial development, contribute to the contemporary study of EU policy-making?

Methodologically, this article opts for a case study on the consultation process on the 2010 ‘Green paper on EU Development Policy’. Due to the approaching 2015 Millennium Development Goals deadline along with the discussions on the 2014-2020 Multiannual financial framework and the overall “new global challenges” the Green Paper and the resulting Agenda for Change mark a “critical juncture” for the future of EU development

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1 A neo-Gramscian ‘perspective’ is to be understood in Morton’s (2001: 37) sense as an alternative to the more rigid concept of neo-Gramscian ‘school’ or ‘-ism’ to emphasize the “diversity and heterogeneity” of the intellectual tradition to which Gramsci’s work has lent inspiration.

2 This article will follow Dür’s (2008: 561, citing Nagel 1975: 29) conceptualization of influence as “an actor’s ability to shape a decision in line with her preferences, or, in other words, ‘a causal relation between the preferences of an actor regarding an outcome and the outcome itself.’” The causal relation is no triviality since goal-achievement does not equal political influence due to the possibility of decisions being influenced by the intervention of other actors, by externalities or by autonomous evolutions (Arts and Verschuren 1999: 413).
policy (Commission 2011: 3). An in case process-tracing method (Dür 2008: 562) based on a critical discourse analysis of the contributions to this consultation will allow to uncover potential causal relationships between NGO contributions and the policy outcome, in this case the ‘Agenda for change’.

The article proceeds as follows. In the first paragraph, as a foundation of the rest of the text, some terminological issues will be clarified. After a definition of the central concepts in this text, such as ‘civil society’, ‘non-governmental organisations’ and ‘non-state actors’, the role of these organisations in EU development policy will be discussed in the second paragraph. In the third paragraph a neo-Gramscian perspective on the transformatory potential of civil society will be presented. The case study on the Green Paper on development policy will serve to empirically test the theoretical framework in the fifth paragraph.

1. Terminological Clarification

The debate on the participation of civil society in designing EU policy has its roots in a more theoretical discussion on different models of democracy (Held 1987). Participatory democracy emerged as a critique of the liberal vision of democracy in the late 1960s, early 1970s as part of a wider movement aimed at promoting democracy and more social equality (Zittel 2007: 9-10). In response to the liberal tradition that viewed democracy as a “competition for political power among responsible elites”, participatory theory pleaded for the involvement of large numbers of citizens in the political-decision making processes (ibid.). The quality of political participation of citizens depends on several factors such as the mobilization of resources, the openness of decision-making, the political communication and the responsiveness of policy makers (Von Homeyer 2006). Participation is not a one-dimensional concept. Some authors discern a dichotomy in the concept of participation between participation as a means, meaning an alternative service provider that can deliver more effective and more cheaply than state institutions, and participation as an end, namely the ownership of a group or community of its own development (Nelson and Wright 1995, McGee 2002: 104). This dichotomy has later been refined to arrive at a distinction between instrumental and transformative participation “whereby getting people to buy into a donor’s project (to share the costs and ensure commitment and project sustainability) is instrumentalist, and facilitating people to
decide on their own priorities is transformative” (McGee 2002: 104). White (1996) introduces more categories to arrive at nominal, instrumental, representative and transformative participation. Others present a continuum or a ladder of participation of which the different steps correspond to differences in intensity of participation, ranging from “information-sharing through consulting and joint decision making to the initiation and control of action by stakeholders themselves” (McGee 2002: 104 and 2003: 136-137, McGee and Norton 2000).

Participatory democracy aims at involving civil society in the decision-making processes. Understood in its contemporary sense, civil society is an essentially and “necessarily” (Edwards 2011) contested concept of which an undisputed definition is impossible but even so undesirable to achieve. Freise (2008) proposes a backbone of three elements on which the majority of contemporary civil society definitions can be pinned down: civil society organisations (CSOs) act in the societal sphere, through non-violent representation to reach a normative goal.

First of all, civil society is located in the societal sphere between three other social actors, namely state, market and the family or private sphere (Freise 2008: 11, Lewis and Kanji 2009: 121). CSOs transcend the privacy of the family, but do not form part of an institutionalized state agency and do not have as a primary aim the participation in the market with the intention of making profit. Still, this sphere is very broad and encompasses a variety of actors, while grey areas, intersections and partial overlaps between them are inevitable. No impenetrable barriers separate CSOs from other societal actors, for instance, the boundaries between the governmental, civil society and business spheres are often obscured by employees who move back and forth between them, thus transferring concepts and building bridges (Bebbington, Hikey and Mitlin 2006: 6).

Secondly, CSOs make use of non-violent, “peaceful forms of protest, self-organisation, deliberation and discourse” (Freise 2008: 12). Regarding this second component, civil society is sometimes portrayed as a transmission belt (Steffek and Nanz 2007) functioning in one way to communicate the views of citizens and transmit their interests upwards to lawmakers (Fung 2003: 523) and to translate individual opinions and objectives into collective ones (Ahmed and Potter 2006: 31) and in the opposite way to
channel the decisions of those lawmakers back into society (Rodekamp 2010: 4). However, this conception of civil society as a transmission belt has recently been criticised as too limited (Rodekamp 2010, Kohler-Koch 2010, Mosher 2002). More than a transmission belt, in the domain of development studies, civil society can be viewed as “an arena within which ideas about the ordering of social life are debated and contested” (Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin 2008: 6). This arena of debate is not an exclusively reserved for the promotion of democracy and cooperation, as it can also take the form of a “bad civil society” where liberal democracy is weakened by the presence of, for instance, racist and discriminatory ideas (Chambers and Kopstein 2001). However, Ahmed and Potter (2006: 31) base themselves on the research of Putnam (1994) to demonstrate that the inclusion of civil society in the democratic policy-making process contributes to a better functioning democracy by creating an independent public sphere and can even enhance the economic performances of a certain region.

This observation provides the link to the third element or the inherent normative and ideological-theoretical aspect to the debate. Depending on the position a theorist takes in the broader debate on democracy and societal justice (Freise 2008: 12), this theorist will have a different opinion on the place of civil society (Keane 1998). At this ideological and theoretical level, Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin (2008: 6) distinguish a neoliberal approach from a post-Marxist or poststructural one as most influential views. From a neoliberal point of view, civil society is considered positively as an arena of organised citizens that can act as a counterweight to both state and market to reduce the involvement of the state and to keep it to its responsibilities, while from a radical post-Marxist and post-structural Neo-Gramscian perspective civil society is the sphere of conflict and of the struggle for power and for alternative visions on the existing social, economic and political order (Lewis and Kanji 2009: 127). A value-free, non-ideological definition of civil society is impossible to reach since the theoretical position of the author will always ‘frame’ the vision on civil society. Hurt (2006: 109-110) draws attention to the political component in civil society and adds that the discourse of EU development policy is misleading in that civil society “is portrayed in a non-political or technical manner.” Hurt even goes a step further in maintaining that the EU is deliberately constructing a civil society that fits the neoliberal economic objectives of the EU. In other words, the non-political portrait is a political construct. The kind of civil society that is promoted and the role that is assigned to this civil society thus depends on who is promoting it and what
interests those actors have. Hurt’s view reveals a neo-Gramscian inspiration, centering on the role of dominant ideas in society, a perspective that will be elaborated upon below. Although frequently depicted as its preeminent exponent, NGOs cannot be equated with civil society as a whole since they only constitute one type of CSOs. Academic literature usually distinguishes between a broad and a narrow definition of NGOs. The broad definition amounts to a literal interpretation of the term as private organisations that are not controlled by government, irrespective of their profit making, and thus including both corporate actors, professional associations as well as voluntary associations and charities (Lewis and Kanji 2009: 10). However, the narrow definition, more widely accepted, excludes profit-making organisations and sees NGOs as organisations trying to generate social, political and economic change, frequently associated with development (Lewis and Kanji 2009: 11). The broad definition of NGOs can be equated with the term ‘non-state actors’, which we will discuss below since the introduction of this term by the European Commission generated considerable debate. To contrast them with other CSOs, NGOs can be thought of as “self-governing, private, not-for-profit organizations that are geared to improve the quality of life for disadvantaged people” (Vakil 1997: 2060). Taking a positive view on NGOs, leaning towards the liberal tradition, Maran (2008: 222) sees it as the function of NGOs “to fill in societal gaps and failures” centering on diverse issues as sustainable development, inclusive growth, environmental protection, women’s rights,...

NGOs broadly take up two distinct functions in international development. Some NGOs limit their attention to the implementation of projects and the delivery of goods and services as delineated and contracted out by the government, others perform the role of catalysts and are situated on the level of the design of development policy and try to “inspire, facilitate or contribute towards development change” (Carbone and Lister 2006: 7). Blair (1997) nuances this dichotomy of NGOs as he reserves the category of CSOs for those NGOs that try to influence public policy. Think-tanks and certain pressure groups would fit this criterion, but self-help groups and NGOs engaged in service provision would be excluded. From this point of view, NGOs solely engaged in service delivery cannot be considered CSOs since they act as a continuation and executor of public policy without calling into question the policy goals driving it. This dichotomy corresponds to the divide in the conception of participation either as a means or as an end. According to Blair (1997: 36), donors can only contribute to the construction of civil
society by supporting “these NGOs which are concerned with public policy goals, such as those seeking policy influence, rather than those doing service delivery.” To ensure their survival, (southern) NGOs will frequently combine a watchdog role with a service delivery role.

The above definitional issues are not limited to academic debate, but have implications for concrete policy-making and for the functioning of civil society. In the middle of the 1990s, the European Commission aimed at a clear-cut definition of NGOs, which, in turn, should lead to better cooperation between NGOs and development agencies and that would at the same time streamline aid administration, thus saving money (Ahmed and Potter 2006: 107). The reluctance from the NGO-side was explained by their fear that a stricter definition would lead to a decrease in the number of NGOs eligible for funding (ibid.). In the 2002 Communication on the ‘Participation of Non-State Actors in EC Development Policy’ the Commission preferred the newly launched term ‘non-state actors’ to non-governmental actors. The former included civil society groups, social actors, but also private organisations such as businesses. This new concept of non-state actors was seen as misleading and confusing and generated protests by NGOs (Carbone 2006: 204). In later communications (e.g. Commission 2006) the concept of non-state actors has been modified and does not include private corporations anymore.

An aspect of development NGOs frequently emphasized by political scientists and activists alike, is that they can formulate alternatives for the development programmes proposed by public authorities. While some NGOs decide to join public programmes and accept governmental subsidies to implement projects designed by governments, others deliberately refuse to take part in this industry, for instance by refusing governmental subsidies (Lewis and Kanji 2009: 12). An important function of NGOs consists of contesting the dominant social, political, economic,… realities in a given historical period (Corsino 1997: 36). In contesting this dominant social reality, NGOs expose the structures that generate and maintain poverty and try to offer alternatives for them in “technological, methodological, pedagogic, institutional, research and promotion” areas.

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3 I am grateful to dr. Debusscher for pointing out this argument.
Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008) have dedicated several articles to the issue of NGOs as alternatives. These authors assert that

In being “not governmental” they constitute a “space” in which it is possible to think about development and social change in ways that would not be likely through government programmes. In being “nongovernments” [...] they constitute instruments for turning these alternative thoughts, and alternative forms of participation into alternative practices and hard outcomes (Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington 2005: 1).

NGOs can constitute alternatives in several areas, often in service delivery (Henderson 2002), frequently organised by the local population (Fisher 1993) through collective action (Liebmann 2000), but also in empowering the local population and in raising awareness of development issues, gender and participation (Lewis and Kanji 2009: 88).

Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington (2006, 2007, 2008) have tried to assess the success of NGOs in formulating alternatives for dominant paradigms in development policy. These authors elaborate upon the distinction between ‘little d’ and ‘big D’ development, as developed by Hart (2001). ‘Little d’ development refers to the spread and evolution of capitalism “as a geographically uneven, profoundly contradictory set of historical processes” or to the global spread of the free market economy with functional specializations and regional disparities as a consequence. ‘Big D’ Development, on the other hand, is used to designate the post-second World War intervention projects “in the ‘third world’ that emerged in the context of decolonization and the cold war” (Hart 2001: 650). Big D Development projects are thus the deliberate interventions in internal state-affairs to raise living standards of the citizens.

Much attention has been paid to the ability of NGOs as alternative Development actors, in other words to assess their capacity in proposing reformist alternatives of intervening (Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington 2007: 1701). In this sense, NGOs operate in a pre-determined development framework and try to optimize the effects of intervention strategies, without calling into question the overarching development ‘paradigm’. NGOs

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4 My translation of: “Elles naissent comme une réponse contestataires à la réalité sociale dominante et contribuent aux changements des structures qui engendrent la pauvreté, en offrant des alternatives technologiques, methodologiques, pedagogiques, institutionnelles, de recherche et de promotion” (Corsino 1997: 46-47).
have lived up to this challenge of providing alternatives in this sense (see for instance Henderson 2002) but these are considered by Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington (2007: 1701) as “exercises in reform having little effect.” The formulation by NGOs of structural and systemic alternatives to the dominant development paradigms has aroused less interest.

The capacity of NGOs to formulate alternatives, in both development and Development, has come under pressure by authors who contend that NGOs are getting “too close for comfort” with donors and governments to provide genuine alternatives (Hulme and Edwards 1997). From a neo-Gramscian perspective arguments are made that radical alternative development paradigms were absorbed and depoliticized in mainstream development discourse and practice, by governments, international institutions, the World Bank, UNDP,.... in some cases leading to a perverse confluence between the participatory project and the neoliberal development paradigm and a displacement of meanings originally proposed by NGOs (Dagnino 2008). This has led some authors to the observation that NGOs behave as instruments to implement public policy, rather than social agents taking refreshing views on it (Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington 2007: 1713).

2. Framework for NGO participation in EU development policy

Since the 1970s, civil society is consulted in designing EU policy. The Treaty of the European Union confirms that representative democracy is still the foundation of the EU, but immediately adds that the different institutions shall “give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action” and that civil society will be given a voice in the debate through an “open, transparent and regular dialogue.” In its White Paper on European Governance, the Commission (2001: 10) proposed principles to enhance the democratic legitimacy of EU policy, including a greater attention to participation in all stages of the policy chain to enhance citizens’ confidence in the resulting policies and in the institutions delivering them. Certain societal groups, that have difficulties being heard through standard election procedures, such as ethnic or other minorities, are provided with the opportunity to express their interests vis-à-vis the European institutions which contributes to transparent

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and accountable governance, which, in turn, is expected to promote related public goods as political freedom, social equality and human rights in general (Huybrechts and Peels 209-210). To streamline policy-making it is recommended to take into account the opinions of groups affected by the proposed measures in the preparatory stages of the law-making process, to prevent those groups from blocking the proposals in later stages (Eising and Lehringer 2010: 193). Functional representation by CSOs can furthermore remedy the imperfect legitimacy of EU policy by adding a third element to the representation of citizens’ interests in the European Parliament and of territorial interests in the Council (Eising and Lehringer 2010: 194). Next to this democracy-promoting rationale, acquiring information can be costly, especially through scientific research, while information provided by economic actors can be biased (Ruzza 2011: 50). The information provided by civil society, with its own scientists and grassroots bases, compensates the limited in-house resources of EU institutions (Eising 2007: 207-208) and counterbalances lobbyist information (Ruzza 2011: 50). The power of civil society is thus greatest in those areas where the EU institutions have a limited civil service at their disposal (Eising 2010: 194). Ruzza (2011: 50) adds a political component:

the ideological and administrative fragmentation of the European Commission makes scientific and technical expertise traditionally highly controversial (Michelmann 1978). It is then not infrequent that different directorates general (DG) will prefer to use civil society expertise that they can trust as being sympathetic to their values and policy orientations.

Foreshadowing the topic of the next paragraph, this kind of instrumentalisation of CSOs has been criticised by NGOs who considered the relationship between the Commission and civil society as amounting to consultation and the dissemination of information, rather than as a genuine dialogue (Carbone 2006: 204). In addition, this consultation was frequently ill-prepared, inconsistent and based on an arbitrary selection of CSOs (Carbone 2006: 205).

Despite the above, it is worth noting that no explicit reference to civil society is made in the articles of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union setting out the guidelines of EU development cooperation. This role is elaborated somewhat more in
“The European Consensus on Development”, that lays out the objectives of EU development policy. In the Consensus, poverty eradication, sustainable development and the Millennium Development Goals are designate as the main objectives of EU development cooperation and as the common denominator linking together the secondary objectives (European Parliament, Council and Commission 2006: 2).

In its 2002 communication on the participation of non-state actors in EU development policy, the Commission (2002: 4) emphasizes partnership and ownership of development projects by the local population, by “economic and social stakeholders” and by civil society. In 2006 the Commission published a new communication: ‘The Thematic Programme “Non-state Actors and Local Authorities in Development”’ setting out the broad policy guidelines that were concretized in two strategy papers for 2007-2010 and 2011-2013, complemented in turn by annual action programmes. The thematic programme is actor-oriented and reaffirms the centrality of CSOs in both aid delivery and in the policy-formulating stages (Commission 2006: 4). More specifically, it wants to strengthen the capacity of CSOs (with the exclusion of corporate actors) to facilitate their participation in the stage of policy formulation and to allow them to play a role in poverty reduction by delivering basic services in the field (Commission 2010: 12). The thematic programme recognises the right of initiative of CSOs and proposes to cofinance the own activities of non-state and local actors (Commission 2006: 4, 2010: 4). Under this programme, European NGOs are asked to focus their attention on awareness raising and development education in Europe.

There is, however, a discrepancy between this ‘rhetorical’ commitment to participatory democracy and the inclusion of civil society in the policy process and the policy process as it unfolds itself ‘on the ground’. For instance, in the context of the EU enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe, Hallstrom (2004: 190-191) found that

EU officials have tended to reinforce a technocratic and top-down perspective, where environmental NGOs should either provide technical expertise, or improve the legitimacy of EU policies by spreading information to the public. Viewing contact with environmental groups that do not meet these two goals as positive has been rare, and as a result only limited steps have been taken
encouraging the participation of civil society actors from CEE countries.

The influence of NGOs is thus situated on an expert and technical level, mostly in the implementation phase. Hallström (2004:189) concludes that the influence of NGOs on strategic policy decisions remains limited, since “the flow of policy information remains largely top-down.” Similar conclusions have been voiced by Dür and De Bièvre (2007, 24-25) who argue that despite changes in the decision-making process of EU trade policy and despite their active lobbying, “NGOs have gained little influence on policy outcomes.” Before empirically investigating whether these conclusions can be extrapolated to the EU development policy domain, the next paragraph will present a neo-Gramscian framework that will guide the empirical research.

3. Neo-Gramscian Perspective

This paragraph presents a neo-Gramscian perspective on the role of civil society in EU development policy. Starting from a discussion of the work of Gramsci and its most authoritative interpretation by Cox (1981, 1983, 1999), it proceeds via a contemporary application on the role of civil society in EU development policy to conclude with its resonance in mainstream development literature. From a radical neo-Gramscian point of view, the consultation of civil society might be seen as an EU strategy to silence critical NGO voices. However, Gramsci developed his concepts during the interbellum period. The question therefore arises whether they are still relevant for the study of twenty first century EU development policy.

Civil society in a Gramscian sense is opposed to the political society or the state in a strict sense (the institutions of government), and forms the basis or the ethical content of that state (Portelli 1972: 17). Civil can thus be seen as the totality of non-state organisms. Gramsci’s view on state versus civil society hinges on a double dichotomy, one between necessity and freedom, corresponding to a structure-superstructure dichotomy and “one between force and consent, which corresponds to the dichotomy between institutions and ideologies” (Bobbio 1979: 36). According to Bobbio (1980: 36) Gramsci sees ideologies as preceding state institutions and ideologies might be “a posthumous justification of a power which has been formed historically by material conditions, [or on the contrary]
forces capable of creating a new history and of collaborating in the formation of a new power, rather than to justify a power which has already been established."

According to Gramsci, working in the interbellum, in some European countries, mostly in northern Europe where capitalism had established itself most firmly, the bourgeoisie manifested itself as the dominant class and established a hegemony over other classes (Cox 1994: 51). Hegemony can be understood in two senses. Firstly as “the consensual basis of an existing political system within civil society” in contrast with ‘domination’ which implies the possible recourse to force and the monopolization of the means of force in the hands of the state (Adamson 1980: 170). In a second sense, it is “an overcoming of the “economic corporative”’ advancing toward a “class consciousness” where class is understood not only economically, but also in terms of a common and intellectual awareness” (Adamson 1980: 170). Hegemony can be understood as the prevalence of a certain way of life, the societal diffusion of a conception of reality “informing with its spirit all taste, morality, customs, religious and political principles, and all social relations, particularly in their intellectual and moral connotation” (Williams 1960: 587).

To make the bourgeois hegemony acceptable for subordinate social classes, most importantly the workers, concessions were made, ultimately leading to forms of social democracy, but initially with a twofold aim, namely to make capitalism acceptable to subordinate classes like the workers and the petty bourgeoisie and to preserve it in function of the ruling class (Cox: 1994: 51). As such, the hegemony of this dominant class was entrenched in the structure of civil society (Cox 1994: 51). In this view, the state is more than merely the institutions of government since the dominant class must ensure its hegemony via a foundation in civil society. Hegemony of a class is not gained by force and is not imposed, but is achieved by the intellectual and moral penetration of society (Buci-Glucksmann 1982: 120). Gramsci (1992: 263) thus equals the state to “political society + civil society, in other words, hegemony protected by the armour of coercion.”

The Gramscian concept of civil society is inherently dialectic as it is the realm both of the foundation of the existing social order as of the emergence of new social orders (Cox 1999: 4-5):
In one aspect, the educational and ideological agencies that are sustained ultimately by the state’s coercive apparatus shape morals and culture. Yet in another aspect civil society appears to have autonomy and to be more fundamental than the state, indeed to be the basis upon which a state can be founded. Civil society is both shaper and shaped, an agent of stabilization, and a potential agent of transformation.

Cox (1999: 10) has ‘updated’ the concept of civil society in a Gramscian sense at the turn of the twenty-first century and sees a distinction between “dominant power over society shared by corporations and states” versus the civil society which encompasses more popular forces and where autonomous groups can stage their emancipatory alternatives for that dominant power. Cox’ (1999: 10) view is reminiscent of Gramsci’s when the former refers to the dialectical nature of contemporary civil society, with on the one side the potential for transformation and emancipation and on the other the dominance of state and economic corporations. Cox (1999: 10-11) speaks of a “bottom-up” as well as a “top-down” sense in which civil society is respectively the realm where the disadvantaged of economic globalization “can voice their protests and seek alternatives” and where states and corporations try to exert their influence “towards making it an agency for stabilizing the social and political status-quo.” Cox (1999: 11) still discerns attempts of penetration and co-optation of those protest voices from the dominant hegemonic forces in order to bring about conformity with the established order and enhancing its legitimacy. In the top-down process of co-optation and penetration incremental gains are granted to subaltern groups that are trying to construct alternatives societal models or “counter-hegemonies” in order to destabilise those attempts (Cox 1994: 53). This mechanism is what Gramsci called trasformismo or a method of co-opting “potential leaders of subaltern social groups. By extension trasformismo can serve as a strategy of assimilating and domesticating potentially dangerous ideas by adjusting them to the policies of the dominant coalition and can thereby obstruct the formation of class-based organised opposition to established social and political power” (Cox 1994: 55). An example of these gains are government subsidies, opportunities to participate in the policy process,...
The concepts discussed in this paragraph have recently been echoed in the work of researchers working from a neo-Gramscian perspective. In his discussion of the role of civil society in EU development policy, Hurt (2006: 111) reiterates the neo-Gramscian view that civil society is used by dominant elite groups to propagate their values to the level of common sense. Hurt (2006: 111) gives credence to the mechanism of trasformismo in EU development policy since the promotion of civil society goes hand in hand with pushing back the role of the state and promoting a liberal society, based on individual liberty and freedom of association, both of which firmly reflect the hegemonic neo-liberal development strategy. Hurt (2006: 109) agitates against an apolitical or technical conception of civil society as frequently portrayed in official EU development discourse and urges instead for taking into account the political aspect of civil society, which, in the case of the EU is based on the values of liberal pluralism. He thus uncovers the normative element of the kind of civil society that is promoted by the EU and argues that the development policy of the EU is essentially market-led and that the dominance of neo-liberal development policies of the 1980s is still reflected today (Hurt 2006: 110). In this conception of development policy, civil society is instrumental in promoting a “political culture closely aligned to the ideas of liberal pluralism” with an emphasis on pushing back the state, on the empowerment of groups and individuals and on the promotion of a specific view on citizenship as a precondition for developing liberal democracies (Hurt 2006: 110-111). This is reflected in the type of CSOs that are supported by the EU and other donors, notoriously excluding workers associations, trade unions and cultural organisations (Hurt 2006: 111). Hurt (2006: 113) even goes one step further in claiming that the stimulation of the participation of certain CSOs in EU development policy is instrumental in pursuing the hegemonic view on its external relation:

Co-option of civil society can be used to support these mainstream views on development. [...] By encouraging the development of civil society there is the potential for groups, who are opposed to the European view of democracy and economic liberalisation, to be given an influential voice. Therefore, to complement its overall approach, the EU has been keen to support the development of civil society in a limited and strategic way. That is to say, it has concentrated on assisting those elements of civil society who are
most supportive of a continuation of the EU’s neoliberal development strategy.

It has been repeated by other authors that NGOs are particularly well placed, in the hegemonic neoliberal view on development, to decentralise the state and privatise social assistance (Corsino 1997: 16). Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington (2007: 1708) sketch the contemporary neoliberal environment in which development NGOs are currently carrying out their activities and which is constituted by the “WTO, the neoliberalization of social democracy, the end to global Communism, and the increasing tendency toward military enforcement of liberal democratic process.” In this framework, NGOs are encouraged to engage in hegemonic projects of “little d” development by two mutually reinforcing incentives: on the one side, these hegemonic projects have incorporated terminology originally designed by NGOs, such as empowerment and participation and on the other, as discussed above, NGOs are offered opportunities to take part in government funded development projects, which are tied to conditionalities, which can make NGOs “vehicles of neoliberal governmentality” (Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington 2007: 1703-1708).

As noted above, Dagnino (2008: 56) speaks of a perverse confluence of meaning that deliberately impedes the capacities of NGOs to formulate alternatives. Gramscian terminology has not left academic debate, as some authors still speak of this neoliberal project in terms of the “social project of a bourgeoisie who succeeded in building the material bases of its existence on a global scale” (Corsino 1997: 15), and who sees development cooperation as its mechanism. This vision was later echoed by Tvedt (2004: 104) who viewed the aid channel as a method of transmitting western notions of development. NGOs are thus seen as inscribing themselves in a neo-liberal paradigm, partly driven by calls for professionalization, institutionalization and accountability that hamper informal organizational structures (Corsino 1997: 18-19), which can be interpreted as attempts at penetrating and co-opting civil society from the part of states and international organizations. Furthermore, and more specifically in the area of big D development, the transnationalizing of development interventions in the form of structural adjustment and poverty reduction strategy papers “reflects structural transformations in the workings of national and international capitalisms and the nature of organizations in

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6 My translation of: “le projet social d’une bourgeoisie, qui a réussi à construire les bases matérielles de son existence à l’échelle mondiale.”
capitalist society” (Mitlin, Hickey and Bebbington 2006: 24). Katz (2006: 335) concludes that the mechanism of cooptation is still at work to gain acquiescence of the civil society of the hegemony of the dominant class.

The neo-Gramscian perspective has also found resonance in mainstream development literature. Friedrich (2008: 68) speaks of the “maximisation of minimal participation […] highly biased towards economic interests.” Harder critiques blame NGOs for maintaining ineffective development practices. Hubbard and Dugan (2009: 86) argue that the centrality of service delivery by NGOs in the current development paradigm helps maintaining the system of aid, without bringing genuine development. Their critique goes deeper when they claim that “the aid system endures […] for its own self-interest. Thousands of professionals in government and NGO agencies depend on the current aid system for their careers” (ibid.), a critique that is echoed by Moyo (2009: 54).

4. Case study Green Paper

The questions raised at the beginning of this article will be answered through a case study on the consultation process on the future of EU development policy launched by the European Commission (EC) at the end of 2010. The ‘Green Paper: EU Development Policy in Support of Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development: Increasing the Impact of EU Development Policy’ was published with the intention of generating a debate on EU development policy and more specifically to guide the EC in proposing modernisations to the existing EU development policy. The consultation process resulted in the publication of the document ‘Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: an Agenda for Change’ as the guideline for future EU development policy. Mapping the preparatory steps resulting in the publication of this Agenda allows to discern the input of each individual contributor. By critically reconstructing and analysing the ‘causal process’ (Dür 2008: 562) from the point of departure (Green Paper) over the intermediary steps (the contributions of NGOs to the consultation process), to the resulting Agenda for Change and the comments on that Agenda, we can reconstruct which actor has contributed what to its drafting. This process-tracing method will be carried out on the basis of a critical discourse analysis (CDA). The case study approach allows to circumvent several obstacles hampering the assessment of an actor’s influence on the policy process. Dür (2008: 561) mentions the three most important ones. First of all, interest groups can gain access to the policy chain through different channels, such as
direct lobbying of policy makers, outside lobbying to shape public opinion, the selection of
policy-makers and the exercise of structural power. The second element is the
occurrence of counteractive lobbying while the third factor results from the different
stages of the law-making process at which interest groups come in: the agenda-setting
phase, the decision-making or the implementation of those decisions (Dür 2008: 561). In
response to these obstacles, this article limits its analysis to the direct, public lobbying by
NGOs through the consultation process. The analysis is thus focused at the decision-
making stage and will not consider implementation or agenda-setting phases. Since all
contributions of interested stakeholders are made public on the Commission’s website,
this process is relatively transparent and counteractive lobbying can be partly accounted
for. Arts and Verschuren (1999) have developed an “EAR-instrument” (Ego perception,
Alter perception and Researcher’s check) as a qualitative measuring instrument to
assess the influence of several actors in a complex policy making process. In the EAR-
instrument the reputation and self-perception of key actors (Ego) in the decision-making
process is combined with an analysis perceptions of other key players (Alter), combined
with the researcher’s analysis of relevant policy documents (Arts and Verschuren 1999).
This ego and alter perception carries similarities to the ‘attributed influence’ model in
which groups are asked to assess their own influence, or that of peer groups, in the
policy chain (Dür 2008: 565, Egdell and Thomson 1999). As an extra check this article
will assess the degree of preference attainment (Dür 2008, Schneider and Baltz 2004) by
comparing an actor’s ideal outcome and the actual policy-outcome, the closer the two lie
together, the greater the influence of the actor concerned.

In CDA, language is considered a social practice, determined by the context it is used in
and by a web of power relations (Wodak 2005: 1-2, Meyer 2005: 17-18). Discourse is the
representation of social life that inherently reflects and reconfirms the position of the actor
in social life. The object of study of CDA is the expression, legitimation and anchoring of
social inequality in language (ibid.). In this vein, critical discourse analysts frequently
draw upon Habermas’ claim that “language is also a medium of domination and social
force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power” (Habermas, 1977: 259, cited in
Wodak 2005: 2). CDA starts from the basic insights that relations of dominance structure
discourse and that discourse is always produced and interpreted historically, or situated
in time and space (Wodak 2005: 3). Furthermore, ideologies of powerful groups
contribute to the legitimation of dominance structures (Wodak 2005: 3). Reminiscent of
the concept of hegemony (cfr. Fairclough 2005) in Gramsci’s work CDA maintains that language is instrumentalised by dominant structures to “stabilize [societal] conventions and naturalize them, that is, the effects of power and ideology in the production of meaning are obscured and acquire stable and natural forms: they are taken as ‘given’” (Wodak 2005: 3). In CDA, texts are seen as sites of struggle for power, where differing ideologies and the resulting discourses are contending to gain dominance (Wodak 2005: 11).

Instead of a solid and homogenous theory, CDA can best be considered as a cross-discipline encompassing a variety of subdisciplines distinguished from each other by their own theories and methods (Van Dijk 2005: 98). The subcategory of CDA applied here bears strong resemblance with Fairclough’s version of CDA, in the tradition of Foucauldian theories on society and power (Fairclough 2005: 122). In his study of language and power, Fairclough (2001: 2) tries to uncover ‘common-sense’ assumptions of which people are generally unaware and which are implicit in the conventions that underly linguistic interaction. He (Fairclough 2001: 2) calls these assumptions ideologies and stresses the links between ideologies and power. Fairclough (2001: 2) asserts that “the exercise of power, in modern society, is increasingly achieved through ideology, and more particularly through the ideological workings of language.” Ideological assumptions reflect themselves in societal conventions, which, in turn, are shaped by underlying power relations (Fairclough 2001: 2). Fairclough (2005: 123-124) stresses the dialectical relationship between semiosis (including language) and other elements of social practices. […] Social practices networked in a particular way constitute a social order […] One aspect of this ordering is dominance: some ways of making meaning [a.o. through discourse] are dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse; others are marginal, or oppositional, or ‘alternative’.

Part of the analysis of hegemony therefore consists of an analysis of the production of as well as the resistance against that hegemony in discursive practices.
In his relational approach to CDA, Fairclough (2010: 35-36) distinguishes between ‘external’ and ‘internal’ relations of texts, the former including both the relations with social events, social practices and social structures as well as the relations with other texts (Fairclough 2010: 36). The internal relations of texts can be analysed by paying attention to semantic, grammatical, vocabulary or lexical and phonological relations (Fairclough 2010: 36-37). Van Dijk (2001: 84) enlarges the scope of CDA to include a notion of ‘social power’, or the control of one group over the actions and, more profoundly, the thinking of other groups resulting in influence upon the “knowledge, attitudes, or ideologies” of the subordinate groups. To describe how this social power manifests itself through discourse, it is necessary to map the conditions of access to (the production of) discourse. To exert this social power, control over the creation of public discourse and communication helps to “influence the structures of text and talk in such a way that, as a result, the knowledge, attitudes, norms, values and ideologies of recipients are - more or less indirectly - affected in the interest of the dominant group” (Van Dijk 2001: 85). The access to methods of communication and the opportunities to produce discourse must be taken into account, since this access determines the topic, timing, context and so forth of discursive events (Van Dijk 2001: 85-86). Access to discourse can be ‘measured’ through several dimensions. Van Dijk (2001: 87-88) lists planning, setting, control of communicative events, scope and audience control. From this point of view, it must be assessed where the right of initiative lies to organize a communicative event, who controls the setting and the access of participants, who moderates the event,... With these reflections in mind, the following paragraph will present the results of the CDA analysis of the contributions on the ‘Green paper on Development Policy’.

Green Paper on EU Development Policy

The Green Paper launched a consultation period running from November 15 2010 to January 17 2011, revolving around 26 questions on the future of EU development policy and open to all interested stakeholders provided they agree that their contribution is published on the Commission’s website (Commission 2010: 5). The public consultation on the Green Paper did not stay limited to the questionnaire in the paper itself. Guiding this paper was a High Level Panel discussion on “New Policy Challenges” at the European Development Days in December 2010 and a “seminar with non-state actors”, organised with the European Economic and Social Committee in January 2011 (HTSPE
Next to this events, two complimentary papers were launched at roughly the same time: the ‘Green Paper on the Future of EU Budget Support to third countries’ and the public consultation: ‘What Funding for EU external action after 2013?’.

Reminiscent of Van Dijk’s observations, the Green Paper framework limits the leeway of interested stakeholders from the outset. Interested parties are not expected to formulate their opinion on EU development policy from scratch as the paper is decisively framed in terms of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) remaining “Europe’s first and overriding priority” and of the eradication of poverty, the latter of which is inscribed in the Lisbon Treaty (Commission 2010: 4). To achieve these goals, the European Consensus on Development will remain the guiding principle (ibid.). Next to this, the questions are formulated in a way to steer the responses in a certain direction. 18 of the 26 questions start with the inquisitive adverb “How”, next to four of them starting with “Which”. This generates the impression that stakeholders are prompted to give their solution as to how some predetermined goals are best achieved. The questions in the Green Paper center on four main objectives:

- how to ensure high EU impact development policy,
- how to facilitate more, and more inclusive, growth in developing countries,
- how to promote sustainable development as a driver for progress, and
- how to achieve durable results in the area of agriculture and food security (European Commission 2010: 5).

The Green Paper repeats that in EU development policy and in a spirit of good governance, “partner countries bear primary responsibility for defining their own development strategies” (Commission 2010: 3). In this regard, a donor-beneficiary relationship gives way to a partnership relation "based on policy dialogue" (Commission 2010: 3). The Commission adds that to ensure long-term financial commitment, the relevance of EU development policy to EU citizens must be demonstrated (Commission 2010: 4). On the issue of high impact development policy, the Commission requires a “strong added value” and “value for money” of EU aid. Therefore, the long-term impact of development programs must be demonstrated as a method to achieve the MDGS
Four underlying values are essential in this regard: “human development and security [...] growth and social inclusiveness” (ibid.). Under the heading of “growth for human development”, it is argued that food security, education and health are prerequisites for the eradication of poverty and that economic growth has to be socially inclusive (ibid.). The priority of poverty eradication and socially inclusive economic growth is not to be called in question (ibid.). According to the Commission, good governance helps to increase the impact of development aid and dialogue between partner countries and result-oriented reforms, for which aid can be a catalyst, continue to be main principles of EU development policy (Commission 2010: 8). The relationship between development and security is reaffirmed. Security in a broad sense, including rule of law, healthy public finances etc is a prerequisite for development and this is also enshrined in the European Security Strategy and the European Consensus on Development (Commission 2010: 9). The coordination of aid, compatibility of EU aid and wider external action, Policy Coherence for Development and the improvement of the impact of budget support are further points of attention in the Green Paper (Commission 2010: 9). Modeled on the success of the EU itself, the EU proposes to stimulate regional integration as a fertile basis for trade, growth and development (Commission 2010: 14). Under the rubric of “Sustainable development, a new driver” the Green Paper posits that “the developing world is expected to be one of the main drivers of global growth in the next decades, both in economic and population terms” (Commission 2010: 15). The achievement of the aforementioned goals is partly dependent on food security, but “agriculture also holds great potential in stimulating widespread income growth in developing countries” with multiplier effects on other economic sectors (Commission 2010: 19). The Commission (2010: 20) underlines the importance of agriculture by making “agriculture and food security a test case of its capacity to deliver high-impact cooperation and promote inclusive and green growth.”

In this regard, the Green Paper offers more than just a platform for consultation. The above analysis demonstrates that the main themes of existing development policy are not to be called in question. The Commission stimulates responses on how best to achieve these goals. Furthermore, the Green paper suggests that growth is the main driver for the eradication of poverty.

Analysis of the contributions
Among the 240 responses received in reaction to the questionnaire, 97 came from NGOs. Among them, no more than three came from partner country NGOs. More generally, contributions from partner country governments as well as academic (1) or research (1) institutions are largely outnumbered by EU-based contributors. Partner country private sector contributions are notably absent. A partial explanation for this lack of contributions from Southern NGOs might be that they were somewhat ‘taken by surprise’ by the timing of the consultation period. In the end of year period, when NGO administrations, but also governmental and business administrations more generally, are functioning at reduced speed due to holidays, Southern NGOs have had a hard time drafting their own responses, unlike EU-based NGOs which can still draw upon more extensive administrations and can mobilize people and resources more easily.

Although the remainder of this article will focus on the subcategory of NGO-responses, let us first observe that Member State contributions do not divert fundamentally from NGO contributions. This is due to the fact that governments frequently consult NGOs and their experts before submitting their own contribution, a procedure that has been stimulated by the relatively limited time frame of the consultation process.

Some general conclusions on NGO responses can be drawn. First of all, most NGOs have considered the questionnaire as a guideline and, as a consequence, have presented their contributions not as answers to the questions, but rather as statements, centered on their own area of expertise. In addition, the consultation procedure in the form of an open invitation to interested stakeholders, is intended to generate an open dialogue which “serves primarily to generate views and ideas that can then be fed into the normal, representative decision and policy making process of the Union” (HTSPE 2012: 6). As regards content, relatively few NGOs are calling into question the current development policy focus, consisting of several complementary arrangements, most prominently the MDGs, together with the European Consensus on Development and the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda. In line with the general acceptance of current EU development policy, no new objectives are proposed. Depending on the area of expertise of NGOs, they argue for an increased emphasis on that specific domain, for instance gender equality, climate change,… Returning in the vast majority of contributions is the recognition of economic growth as the driver of the creation of employment, however, NGOs argue for a broad interpretation of economic growth, frequently conceptualised as
inclusive and sustainable growth to include other indicators such as human development, decent work, international labour standards, aimed at eradicating poverty (HTSPE 2012: 14). Investments of the private sector are welcomed, but in a regulated environment and in order to generate inclusive growth. Small and medium enterprises are seen as ideal to generate this kind of economic development. A criticism often made is that terms like ‘high impact’, ‘inclusive’ and ‘sustainable’ growth are not clearly defined. NGOs therefore argue for an elaboration of these key concepts, as for ‘added value’, ‘influence’ and ‘impact’ of ‘development policy’ (HTSPE 2012: 15). Unsurprisingly, NGOs argue for a broader involvement of CSOs in aid planning and for respecting the rights of aid recipients.

Much of the contributions of NGOs can be labelled reformist, in the sense discussed above. The general guidelines of the Green Paper are confirmed and NGOs do not radically call into question existing policies. This is not surprising since they have been consulted in designing EU development policy since the 1970s, which makes them one of the ‘co-designers’ of current development policy. From another point of view, progress towards reaching the MDGs has been made although some objectives require accelerated commitments (United Nations 2013). This contributes to focusing development initiatives on those particular topics, rather than presenting a complete overhaul of existing policy.

Agenda For Change

Unsurprisingly and reminiscent of the Lisbon Treaty, the Agenda for Change reaffirms poverty eradication not only as the primary EU development policy objective, but more broadly as “a priority for EU external action in support of EU’s interests for a stable and prosperous world” (Commission 2011: 3). Development policy is not limited to these objectives, but helps to fulfill the EU 2020 strategy (ibid.). The Commission argues that the results of the consultation process serve to confirm the continued relevance of the existing policy framework, while aiming at an increased impact (Commission 2011: 4). In a context of ensuring “best value for money”, EU Development policy will in the future concentrate on “human rights, democracy and other key elements of good governance [and] inclusive and sustainable growth for human development” (Commission 2011: 4). To achieve these goals, EU policies should be more coordinate and more coherent and development partnerships should be differentiated to accommodate differences among
partner countries (ibid.). The envisioned results of the Agenda for Change boil down to the reformulation of existing aims and their corresponding budgets and shifting accents of existing policies. In this line, existing principles of partnership and ownership and the guidance of partner countries in development strategies are reaffirmed (Commission 2011: 5). Contrary to what its title suggests, the ‘Agenda for Change’ does not advocate a break with past EU development policy or even a reorientation of that policy. The majority of the contributions welcomed the consultation process as very timely and it might even have been launched too early. The MDGs have of yet not been reached as is the case for poverty eradication. This continues to guarantee the relevance of these frameworks until 2015 (for the MDGs). Since the Agenda for Change does not offer a post MDG development orientation, this consultation might have been somewhat superfluous. That a green paper has been launched might then have to do with the appointment to office in 2010 of the new Commissioner for Development, Piebalgs, who wanted to give his own ‘touch’ to EU development policy.

Good governance takes a central position in the Agenda for Change because “in its political, economic, social and environmental terms, [good governance] is vital for inclusive and sustainable development” (Commission 2011: 6). Furthermore, the Agenda confirms that growth should be inclusive and sustainable in order to structurally reduce poverty and that growth rates are on an equal footing with growth patterns (Commission 2011: 7). In this regard, people should be able to participate in and reap the benefits of inclusive growth, in the form of decent jobs, wealth, social protection and dialogue (ibid.). Sustainable development must furthermore take into account respect for the natural environment and biodiversity, which is why a green economy is being promoted by EU development policy. Nevertheless, combating climate change is situated only at the background. Main areas of attention for sustainable growth are “social protection, health and education […] a stronger business environment and deeper regional integration […] sustainable agriculture and energy” (ibid.). This is where corporate social responsibility and partnerships between public actors on the one side and “private companies and local communities come into play. By creating a “favourable business environment” including support for “competitive local private sectors” development policy wants it beneficiaries to reap the benefits from global markets (Commission 2011: 8). This can be achieved through promoting private investment, domestic as well as international and blending
financial incentives, such as loans and grants are both seen as mechanisms to leverage private and public sector activities (ibid.). Next to this and modeled on the EU itself, regional cooperation is seen as a platform for the creation of both business and security opportunities. Taking part in “Aid for trade activities, Economic Partnerships Agreements and other free trade agreements” will be promoted by EU development policy. After a “comprehensive political and policy dialogue with all partner countries” (Commission 2011) the allocation of EU development assistance will be based on “country needs […] capacities […] country commitments and performance [and] potential EU impact.” In this light, the EU neighbourhood and Sub-Saharan Africa receive most attention. Policy Coherence for Development should be reinforced as should the EU’s joint approach “to security and poverty” (Commission 2011: 11).

Reactions to the ‘Agenda for Change’

The Agenda for Change was itself subjected to a number of reactions, praise and discussion as well as criticisms. In line with the self-evaluation discussed in the methodological part, it is revealing to take a look at the reaction of Concord, the main European association of development NGOs. Concord acknowledges that the Agenda has moved forward with reference to the Green Paper, in contrast with which it is both broader and more nuanced and it welcomes the focus on poverty eradication, governance, human rights and “on coordinated EU action at country” (Concord 2011: 1). However, Concord expresses some reservations and argues that this Agenda might fall short of this ambitions. More specifically, Concord urges the EU to “recognise that growth in unregulated markets does not always translate into inclusive growth without specific policy interventions.” A limited focus on private sector economic growth without accompanying regulations to ensure sustainability, inclusiveness and protection of the environment fails to fulfill the stated development goals (ibid.). Furthermore, Concord regrets the lack of “focus and concrete commitments” in the Agenda. The implementation of this new strategy and its coherence with existing institutions not clear and new approaches lack evidence of their efficiency (2). On the role of global civil society, Concord has an important point to make, which reminds us of previous observations: “The strategy rather sees civil society in a limited way - as watchdogs- when governments fail on human rights and democracy.” In other words, without concrete policy proposals and objectives to create a stimulating environment for civil society in
developing countries, the commitment to civil society participation remains mere rhetoric. The Agenda for Change should be seen as the guiding document on EU development policy and does not provide off-the-shelf, country-specific proposals. Without an exhaustive definition of key terms, such as ‘inclusive’ or ‘sustainable’ development, much leverage is attributed to the implementation phase of EU development policy. This opens up the risk of a gap between policy goals and their practical realization (Concord 2011: 4). Additionally, this risks subordinating development policy goals to other objectives of EU policy, such as security, the achievement of the 2020 strategy, trade policy,… To counter these risks, policy coherence for development will prove essential in the implementation phase of this Agenda for Change, all the more since in the first phase of the implementation process, the Council Conclusions on the Agenda for Change have inevitably altered some proposals of the original text.

Conclusion

The ‘Agenda for Change’ is not an agenda for change in this regard that it does not radically differ from the EU development framework currently in place. The principles of existing EU development policy are reaffirmed. Reconstructing the drafting process of the Agenda has revealed that the suggestions made by NGOs during the consultation process were taken into account in the policy outcome. No significant counter-lobbying has been noted. On the contrary, contributions by EU Member States and other interested stakeholders show striking similarities with NGO-contributions, partly because NGO-experts were consulted by those Member States prior to submitting their contributions. Nevertheless, NGOs have expressed their fear that the ‘Agenda for Change’ remains too broadly framed. Significant room for maneuver exists in the interpretation and implementation of central concepts such as ‘inclusive’ and ‘sustainable’ development, for which no clear definition has been presented. As most NGOs warn against, it is in the implementation phase that EU development policy can encounter opposition if development projects pursue objectives contrary to other EU policy domains, most notable trade and security. Despite their considerable influence on the drafting of policy documents, it is therefore too early to conclude if this influence survives the implementation phase, especially if development projects are in conflict with security or trade policy. A first illustration is that the conclusions of the ‘Agenda for Change’ have
inevitably been somewhat watered down during the discussions in the EU parliament and the Council, as illustrated by the Council Conclusions (European Council 2012) on the Agenda for Change (Maxwell and Gavas 2012). It might be an interesting project to research how the actual implementation of this Agenda for Change resembles this original document. Reflecting on the neo-Gramscian theoretical framework, the opportunities to participate in policy preparation can be said to result in genuine influence. Once NGOs have gained access to the consultation process, their contributions are taken into account. However, the difficulty lies in gaining that access. The right of initiative to launch a consultation process still resides with the European Commission and it is the Commission that decides upon the modalities of that consultation procedure. Next to a lack of resources, this partly explains why Southern NGOs have been notably absent from this consultation process. In a relatively short time frame, during the end of the year holidays, Southern NGOs had difficulties in mobilizing people and resources to draw up a contribution, in contrast with EU-based NGOs which could draw upon an extensive network of resources. It is somewhat ironic that EU development policy, aimed at promoting partnership and dialogue, is drafted with negligible contributions from Southern civil society. Further research should thus be devoted to the question: who decides whom to consult, when and through which modalities?

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