

## European Development Report

# Flagship of a global player

Several EU member states have launched an initiative to set up a European Development Report. Such a report could strengthen Europe's position as a global player. The theme is promising: a globally inclusive society based on fair multilateralism. But the Netherlands government has pulled out: no added value.

By **Frans Bieckmann**

If Europe is to position itself as a global player it will need to develop an effective alternative to the dominant global paradigm that puts the national interest first and creates polarization and tension in the world. This is the aim of a new initiative to produce a European Development Report (EDR), which has been endorsed by the European Commission and six EU member states. A draft document states that 'At the heart of the thinking behind the design of the EDR is the idea of global well-being or a "globally inclusive society" based on "fair multilateralism".' Here, implicitly, the authors envisage a departure from the 'realist' agendas of many major powers.

It seems a very promising initiative. The proposed EDR would be a European counterpart of the major 'flagship' publications such as World Development Report (World Bank), the Human Development Report (UNDP), and others produced by international institutions. The EDR would be 'an annual research-led review of development issues', written by an independent team of researchers led by a recognized expert (ideally not a national of the major EU member states, France, Germany or the UK). It is estimated that once the financing and institutional settings are finalized, it would take about two years to write a report, so the first EDR will probably be published in 2009.

The EDR initiative has had a long history. For several years European academics such as Simon Maxwell (UK), Dirk Messner (Germany), Louk Box and Paul Engel (the Netherlands) have lobbied for a Europe-wide policy on research for development. After some preparatory meetings, in November 2006 five member states (France, Germany, Spain, Sweden and the UK) and the Commission drew up a first proposal for the EDR. Although some Dutch individuals were involved early on, the Netherlands government joined the initiative only in late 2006.

In March 2007 the newly established EDR Secretariat organized a workshop, 'Mobilising European research for development policies', where researchers and policy makers from the six countries, the Commission and wider European networks reflected on the possible shape and contents of the EDR. Following extensive debate, the participants agreed on the necessity of an EDR, but offered several critical comments. In particular, many noted the importance of focusing on inequality, while others asked whether 'fortress' Europe is the appropriate entity to call for global social inclusiveness.

The proposal points out that Europe currently provides the

largest volume of overseas aid and is the major trading partner of many developing countries. Yet its political role in the global arena remains relatively weak, due mainly to the fragmentation of donors and development (research) institutes. The EDR could contribute to a more unified approach and more effective outreach. The drafting of the report, the proposal notes, would also stimulate dialogue between researchers and policy makers at the European level.

An important issue, still to be decided, is the scope of the EDR. While acknowledging that achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is the principal objective of European development policies, the proposal notes that in today's multi-polar world 'over and above the MDGs ... development issues now reach beyond aid and beyond poverty reduction'. They include the management of the 'global commons', security, migration, climate change, trade and foreign policies, competition for natural resources, transborder diseases, tensions between Europe and Islamic countries, and the rise of China as donor.

It was agreed that the envisaged series of EDR reports should address these issues critically, and that they should be reports *to* the European Union, not written *by* it. Many observed that the reports should not shy away from discussing the vital interests of member states and European institutes. That might bring the researchers into conflict with 'competing' politicians, interests and foreign policy initiatives in the European sphere – like the European Security Strategy, the unofficial European 'minister' of Foreign Affairs Javier Solana and his team, the Trade and External Affairs commissioners or Brussels-based NATO and its chief Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. So far, however, they appear to be taking little notice of the EDR initiative.

That leaves room for the EDR, for the moment. And it provides an opportunity to push for the development of an alternative global policy for Europe. But without the Netherlands, it appears. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs pulled out just before this issue of *The Broker* went to press. The official reason, according to a ministry spokesman, is that the EDR would not provide added value: 'The Netherlands is in favour of more cooperation in the field of development-related research in Europe, but wonders what the added value would be of another expensive report like the EDR, compared to the World Development Report and the Human Development Report'.

A missed opportunity. ■