



An opportunity to meet future challenges

Three important summits taking place this year present the opportunity to decide on a new blueprint to tackle climate change, create a framework for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and deliver on development financing. As such 2015 offers the opportunity to end poverty, reduce inequality and to avert the destructive effects of a global temperature rise writes Petros Fassoulas, the Secretary General of the European Movement International

One integrated and comprehensive agenda

With one important summit having already taken place (July, Addis Ababa), two remain: Sustainable Development (September, New York); and Climate (December, Paris). The conclusions of the three summits should formulate, as far as possible, mutually beneficial goals and a coherent approach on development and environmental issues, and integrate economic, social and environmental aspects, so as not to work separately on interlinking problems.

Climate change and development are interlinked, with climate change exacerbating existing threats and environmental aspects relating to all parts of the development agenda. Global leaders have set ambitious goals, which will need binding agreements if they are to be met. From a civil society perspective the main goal of the climate objectives – to keep the rise in global average temperature below 2°C – and the main goals of the SDGs – including poverty eradication by 2030 – should be central to all measures and should not be compromised.

The Addis Ababa Conference on Financing Development held in July was the first step towards a coherent approach on development and climate change, laying the financial basis for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. But the results were generally perceived as disappointing by engaged civil society organisations, thus stressing the need for more concrete and ambitious action at the summits still to come.

Stick to ambitious and binding goals

With the challenges ahead, action cannot be delayed. To start, ambitious and concrete pre-2020 climate action is essential. All countries, especially industrialised nations, should commit to step up their pre-2020 ambitions in Paris.

The same holds for the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions – national pledges to cut greenhouse gas emissions – that are falling short of the necessary cuts to keep the temperature rise below 2°C. But it is not all negative, with the G7 commitment to a decarbonised global economy by the end of this century in June, and the Clean Power Plan announced by US President Barack Obama this August. These developments create a positive momentum that hopefully

results in a combined commitment that is adequate for the set task. But it cannot end at these commitments: a regular review and strengthening of commitments (every 5 years) should be adopted, with a regular upward correction of national contributions based on evolving global economic and geopolitical circumstances.

Further to presenting a far-reaching set of binding targets to all countries, support should be given to developing countries, ensuring that each country is able to meet its targets.

Stick to priorities

With regard to development, the European Movement welcomes the sustainable development agenda with 17 goals agreed by the UN member states on 2 August 2015, to be formally adopted at the New York Summit in September. The post-2015 agenda is extensive, with no less than 169 targets to specify the overarching goals. Though this means many important elements are included in the SDGs, having 169 targets also runs the risk of having no priorities at all, and creates great challenges with regard to implementation and financing.

What should be the focus in the implementation of the SDGs – and climate agreement, for that matter – is to address the roots of poverty and inequality, with a basis on human rights. Equality,



economic, social and cultural rights, good governance, the rule of law, and peaceful and inclusive societies – that also reach the poorest and most excluded – should be central elements.

A common European position

A key tenet for success across these conferences should be the promotion of a common European position, which will consolidate the position of the EU as a global actor and leader in the international arena. In order to do this, the EU should focus on its climate diplomacy, reaching out to as many partners as possible ahead of the conferences to promote the European position and act in response to other countries' priorities.

Following the conferences, the European Commission must ensure the implementation of the agreements and propose concrete measures to increase the interlinkage and coherence of relevant EU policies, enabling Europe to contribute to the attainment of global environmental and developmental objectives. The implementation of agreed and binding measures and targets on the European level will be essential – for reaching the set aims, as well as for the credibility of the EU. Here, much will depend on the ambition of the Juncker Commission and its ability to get all member states on board, especially in reaching the energy targets for 2030, which are binding at the European level but not necessarily at the national level.

Transparent multi-level monitoring

The climate objectives and SDGs should be implemented via a global partnership between all levels of government, civil society, businesses and individuals. To ensure that participation and transparency are central elements in implementing, monitoring and evaluating both, an appropriate pressure mechanism will be needed, rather than a voluntary or state-led approach, to ensure national commitments are reached.

The genuine participation of citizens should be encouraged by ensuring the multi-tier approach proposed for SDG monitoring, including global, national, regional as well as local level accountability. Cities should be central in both implementation and monitoring of both SDGs and climate objectives. In addition, NGOs and other CSOs should be included in the design, implementation (where possible), monitoring, reporting and evaluation of specific objectives on which they are experts.

Furthermore, the inclusion of the local and regional level in the work towards all targets through the recognition, engagement

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and empowerment of local and regional governments is essential. This includes a central role for cities and urban development in the SDGs and climate objectives, as well as the 'localisation' of both to assess the impact on the local level and to increase local ownership and support for implementation. The Covenant of Mayors for local sustainable energy, or the climate pledge of the conference of mayors in July in the Vatican, are a case in point regarding the influence of local authorities, which often implement further-reaching measures than those agreed at the (inter-) national level.

Financing

Financing commitments are crucial for the implementation of the climate objectives and SDGs. The Addis Ababa Conference in July was not a promising start in this regard. The target of 0.7% of Gross National Income for Official Development Assistance spending by developed countries, endorsed in 2002 to be reached in 2015, was pushed back to 2030. The compromise on tax evasion, one of the main themes of the summit, was also disappointing without an agreement on a permanent intergovernmental tax body to lead international tax cooperation and stop illicit financial flows.

With disappointing results on two key issues, the only solution is to put the question of development financing back on the table in the context of the SDG summit. A political agreement on goals and targets with a great gap in the means of implementation would be worthless.

Climate finance is an equally important issue for the success of a new climate agreement. Developed countries agreed earlier to jointly mobilise \$100 billion per year by 2020 into climate financing through the Green Climate Fund. Adequate pledges were made to make the fund operational as of May 2015, but many governments – including European member states – are still expected to announce their contributions.

In addition to financing commitments, measures need to be taken to ensure that developing countries, especially the least developed countries, have access to finance, and receive support in terms of finance, technology transfer and capacity building, that will allow them to facilitate the implementation and achievement of the SDGs and climate objectives. An important agenda here will be to ensure that climate funding is also accessible for local and regional governments.

The development agenda further offers the possibility to set up the EU as a global leader by committing to more ambitious financial targets after 2015 and 2020. More financial resources are essential to the implementation of these agreements, and



initiatives such as creating a European carbon tax or stimulating private investment would be potential ways of achieving this.

What legacy for the future?

This year's summits offer the opportunity to address the roots of poverty and climate change, as well as the causes of crises and conflicts in Europe and around the world. The proposed sustainable development agenda goes beyond 'helping the poor' and completing the unfinished business of the Millennium Development Goals, while the draft COP21 takes an innovative approach with the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities'.

Despite this, 'real commitments' are thin on the ground, illustrated once more by the July summit in Addis Ababa.

European institutions and member states must, together with all relevant stakeholders, define a strategy showing how these interlinked agendas will be implemented in Europe, and how our continent will reach the objectives set in 2015. ■



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