

## The Post-2015 Agenda for Development and the Mediterranean: a European perspective

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The post-2015 Agenda for Development has the ambitious goal of "transforming our world by 2030". The cornerstone of the Agenda is the document that will be adopted by the UN Assembly on 25-27 September. The text includes the Sustainable Development Goals, also known as SDGs<sup>[1]</sup>, the most "mediatised" element in the debate. In a wider scope, however, the post-2015 Agenda is taking shape through various events of global relevance at least.

One of these, for instance, was the International Conference on Financing for Development, concluded on 16 July 2015 in Addis Ababa. In fact, along with the SDGs, i.e. the "contents" of the Agenda, the debate on post-2015 is on the implementation of the SDGs and the financial means to support it. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda, agreed on 16 July 2015, establishes the financial pillars to support the implementation of the SDGs. These pillars are:

- The domestic revenue mobilisation
- The "traditional" Official Development Assistance (ODA)
- A greater involvement of private sector
- International trade

The important roles of migration, and science, technology and innovation for sustainable growth are addressed in the agreement as well.

This brief paper will focus on the issues at stake in other two upcoming and crucial events. The first one is the already mentioned UN Assembly to be held at the end of September in New York; the second, is the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference Of the Parties (COP21) on climate action that will gather in Paris, also known as the 2015 Paris Climate Conference. The text will examine some of the general issues discussed in the debate on Post-2015 Agenda. The second part of the text focuses on the EU perspective. The final paragraph outlines the value of Post-2015 Agenda for the Mediterranean Region, both in terms of necessity and opportunity.

### Background and some open questions

The challenging commitment to "transform the world" originates from the achievements accomplished in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are eight targets for development that the UN launched in 2000 along with a set of indicators to be measured in a time span of 25 years, from 1990 to 2015. The final report of the UN on MDGs invites to celebrate, explicitly: "Thanks to concerted global, regional, national and local efforts, the MDGs have saved the lives of millions and improved conditions for many more"<sup>[2]</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Zero draft of the outcome document for the UN Summit to adopt the Post-2015 Development Agenda, United Nations Organization, downloadable at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>

<sup>2</sup> The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015

This is true especially for Goals such as the number 1: "Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger". The sub-target of Goal 1 was to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1.25 a day and to halve, in the same period, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. For the first goal the result was impressive: the number of people living in extreme poverty has declined by more than half, falling from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015. On food security, the target was almost reached: the proportion of undernourished people in the developing regions has fallen by almost half since 1990, from 23.3% in 1990-1992 to 12.9% in 2014-2016.

Though the UN report states that "the work is not complete", the MDGs are considered to be a success. Thus, the UN proposed to raise the level of ambition in development policies after 2015, calling for eliminating poverty by 2030. This message does make sense in political perspective rather than in economic one. The end of poverty and hunger is something we should not give for granted<sup>3</sup>, but the UN call for action is nonetheless a meaningful move in order to take on the challenge.

Actually, the experience of the MDGs stands out as a proof that setting ambitious and universal targets is paramount to mobilize resources and galvanize public opinion. This can produce impressive results, provided that the call at global level matches the determination of governments and other stakeholders at local level.

In order to accomplish the universal mission of defeating poverty by 2030, 17 goals with 169 associated targets have been proposed. Those are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are the core of the post-2015 Development Agenda, covering a wide range of issues: food and nutrition security, health and education, gender and social equality, management of land, water and sanitation, working conditions, infrastructures, consumption and production patterns, access to energy and innovation.

The SDGs proposal is the outcome of a widespread public consultation carried out through the UN Open Working Group (OWG). The SDGs scheme, moreover, no longer intends development as an issue of exclusive interest of poor countries but as a global issue instead. Stating that "development" must be "sustainable" means going beyond traditional indicators, such as the measurement of poverty reduction and infant mortality, to make environmental sustainability and societal equality global targets that also apply to developed economies.

Some scepticism has been voiced on the sheer number, targets and indicators of the SDGs. Maybe MDGs did not take sufficiently in account sustainability, but they were just eight, easy to communicate to public opinion and their achievements were relatively simply to measure. The MDGs were monitored through 48 indicators, whereas the SDGs provisional indicators are 304. On 11 August 2015 the UN Statistical Commission started a public consultation – with the participation of Governments, international agencies, civil society, academia and the private sector – on those indicators. The conclusions will be drawn in March 2016. There is concern because providing data on all the 300 indicators could be complicated, especially for those countries whose statistical capacity is limited. The SDGs are a challenge not only in terms of the Goals themselves but also in terms of providing data on their progressive achievement. In other words, they could require supplementary investments in knowledge and data collecting and management.

The dynamics between global and local dimension of the post-2015 Agenda, the degree of inclusivity it can deploy and the reciprocal influence between means and goals are other open questions on the fulfilment of the SDGs.

Regarding the first element, the final result of the UN Assembly will unveil whether the comprehensiveness of the Goals will twin the effectiveness of the message. Secondly, MDGs experience taught that tackling poverty and hunger requires simultaneous efforts in different policy areas. Economic growth is key factor, but the domestic policies must be coordinated to ensure a fair distribution of the benefits of increased wealth to the population. The SDGs are even more interlinked than MDGs and so should be the policies – agriculture, food, education, health, trade, climate, migration and environmental and social policies – aiming to transfer the principles into practices.

Concerning the third element, i.e. the participation of civil society, the question is how much this involvement can become action on the ground. The pledge that "nobody will be left behind"<sup>4</sup> is a moment of truth for the capacity of dialogue between institutions at every level and grassroots organizations.

The debate on financing, finally, cannot avoid reckoning the global financial crisis impact, which accelerated the decline of traditional patterns of funding development projects. In recent years, new players have been coming to the foreground and technology gives stimulating opportunities for funding development projects in poor countries, even on a micro-scale. The effectiveness of those resources in promoting "bottom-up" development dynamics, however, has still to be proven.

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<sup>3</sup> The results of a simulation carried out by the Brookings Institution, for instance, show that as in 2030 the number of people in extreme indigence "could be between 100 million and more than a billion". See <http://devinit.org/report/prospects-ending-extreme-poverty-2030-need-know>

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<sup>4</sup> Zero Draft, cit.

In this scenario, food and nutrition security (namely intended as food production and consumption patterns) on one hand and climate change on the other can play a key role to enable countries with different levels of prosperity to find a common ground. Focusing on food and nutrition security means looking at the core of the primary needs of the human being and, as such, revise the old fashioned dichotomy between rich countries, prone to prioritise environmental aspects of sustainability, and least developed ones, more inclined to emphasise the economic performance. This polarity can be overcome with a robust dose of innovation. Through the lens of innovation, SDGs should be interpreted as "an urgent need to reconcile the two approaches in a common movement"<sup>5</sup>.

There is symmetry between the contrast of views of countries on food security and the dispute on how to act on climate change. On climate change, also, we can see differences between economic *versus* environmental aspects of sustainability. Many expectations to go beyond this dichotomy rely on the outcome of the 21<sup>st</sup> Conference Of the Parties (COP21) on climate change to be held in Paris at the end of the year. The hope is that the COP21 will open a new era of global cooperation on climate change. The declared objective of the conference is to achieve a global legally binding agreement on climate.

In past months, various French ministers said that they are convinced of the interdependency between agricultural diplomacy and climate negotiations and have highlighted the importance of food production in this regard. Agriculture, land use and impact on the planet of the increasing food demand in presence of more and more pressing environmental constraints are "The other inconvenient truth" of our times<sup>6</sup>.

The EU will take part into Paris COP21 conference with the commitment on a binding, economy-wide, greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of at least 40% by 2030, in terms of "Intended Nationally Determined Contribution" (INDC). The EU gives great relevance to the Paris climate conference in shaping a new Agenda for development.

The credibility of any possible agreement reached in Paris will be measured also in terms of financial commitments. The Paris Climate conference aims to mobilize \$100 billion per year by developed countries, from public and private sources, from 2020, in order to enable developing countries to combat climate change whilst promoting fair and sustainable development.

The current carbon market systems show a desperate need to be reinvigorated and the main expectations are on the attitude of the 15 countries of the G20 – that will have a summit in Turkey in mid-September – accountable for 70% of greenhouse gases emissions.

This is the broad picture in which EU expects a renewed approach to development policies to take off.

### The EU and European Parliament contribution

The debate in the EU advanced through different stages in a time span of three years. The initial step was the public consultation "Towards a Post-2015 Development Framework", opened by the European Commission from 15 June to 15 September 2012.

Since then, various official documents on many aspects concerning the Post-2015 Agenda framework followed. Among them there are two Communications from the European Commission ("A decent Life for all: from vision to collective action", 2 June 2014, and "A Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development after 2015", 2 February 2015), just as many Conclusions of the EU Council ("A Transformative post-2015 agenda", 16 December 2014, and "A New Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development after 2015", of 6 May 2015) and the Resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 25 November 2014 "The EU and the global development framework after 2015".

The latter document<sup>7</sup> is useful to illustrate the debate that took place in the EU: a diffuse reflection on post-2015 framework for development policies that strives to keep together the means and the goals, along with the overriding challenge of sustainability and the cross-the-board issue of climate change.

As regards of the means, the MEPs stress the need for a renewed "global partnership" able to implement the principles that will be ratified by the UN Assembly. In order to accomplish this task, the EU Parliament calls for an "appropriate institutional architecture" to address "the complexities and the inter-linkages between the different parts of the future framework". Concerning the financial part, European Parliament confirms the importance of ODA and reminds to the EU Member states their commitment to allocate to it at least 0,7 % of the Gross National Income (GNI), also calling for "the EU to facilitate public-private partnerships, where possible" and "to make combating corruption, money laundering, tax evasion and avoidance, tax havens, illicit flows of capital and harmful tax structures an overriding priority in financing development".

<sup>5</sup> Lacirignola C., Abis S., "Post-2015 Development Agenda", <http://www.diploweb.com/Post-2015-Development-Agenda.html>

<sup>6</sup> The definition is by Jonathan Foley and makes reference to the "Inconvenient truth" on climate change unveiled to the US audience by Al Gore in the known 2006 documentary.

<sup>7</sup> The EU and the global development frame work after 2015 - 2014/2143 (INI) <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2014-0059+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

Regarding the SDGs, the MEPs welcome the human rights-based approach emerged in the OWG and suggest the clustering of the goals according to the following "priority areas": poverty eradication and fight to inequality; peace-building (conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery); climate-change mitigation, protection of the environment, and disaster-risk reduction; food security, nutrition, sustainable agriculture, combating land degradation, water and sanitation; health and education; inclusive and sustainable growth, employment and decent work creation.

Other recommendations from the plenary of Strasbourg are the support to social entrepreneurship initiatives in development and the creation of "novel tools that support better cooperation between small and medium-sized enterprises in developed countries and developing countries".

On a more general level of the debate, however, is the relevance given to a new common international framework on climate change action that characterizes the EU position more than other global players. The commitments that countries' representatives are expected to take in the already mentioned Paris Climate Conference are a crucial point for the EU. The feeling is that the lack of significant advancement from the international community on the issue of the combat to global warming could jeopardise the full and complete implementation of post-2015 Development Agenda. This feeling may be exaggerated, but a failure in Paris would not only threaten the implementation of SDG no. 13 ("Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts"), but also be a "false start" in the first significant event after the UN Assembly adoption of the Post-2015 Agenda.

### **The post-2015 agenda for development and the Mediterranean Region**

The Mediterranean area, including Member States of the southern and southeastern part of the EU and MENA (Middle East and North Africa) countries, is a region in which all the challenges identified in the SDGs framework are well visible. Social equality, environmental resources management, food and nutrition security, peace building, climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity and even energy issues: the Mediterranean basin is a microcosm of the development issues at global level.

On the shores of the "mare nostrum" and in Middle East we can find prosperous countries, thriving economies, regions devastated by conflicts and menaced by endemic instability and, finally, least developed countries.

In the perspective of sustainable management of resources, the Mediterranean is one of the biodiversity "hot spots" of the planet, hosting 10% of endemic plants in only 1.6% of world's surface<sup>8</sup>. This biodiversity is at risk because of urbanization and inefficient use of land and water.

According to the estimates of UNPCC, the climate change will hit hard in the region: the "Scenario A1b" of the IPCC predicts an increase in average temperature between 2-4° C for the period between 1980/89 and 2080/99, and defines the regions of non-tropical drylands characterized by higher temperatures and lower rainfall as especially vulnerable<sup>9</sup>.

The war that is devastating countries like Syria and Iraq represents a new typology of armed confrontation that calls for a new approach to conflict prevention and recovery. The destruction of physical and social infrastructure increases inequality, health risk, food insecurity and land and water degradation.

The upheaval known as "Arab Awakening" has demonstrated that social inequality, high level of education and food insecurity caused by a fatal dependency on the global markets for the supply of staple food<sup>10</sup> can be an explosive mix, with consequences on migration flows.

The concentration of all these problems in such a small portion of land and the variety of the conditions in which they occur can be interpreted as a ruinous and disintegrating factor.

But diversity means availability of many possible solutions, also. In the last 20 years, the environmental, social and political diversity in the Mediterranean Region has been viewed as an insurmountable problem. Post-2015 Agenda for Development will make sense for Mediterranean regions if it will give the opportunity to look at this heterogeneity as an opportunity.

The possibility of such an approach is visible in the Mediterranean food consumption pattern. The worldwide-acknowledged "Mediterranean diet" is actually based on heterogeneity, both in terms of nutritional principles and in social and political perspective. Mediterranean food consumption pattern in fact is nothing comparable to an immutable tradition, expression of the hegemony of one country or culture on the others. Actually, it originates from continuous economic, environmental and cultural exchange. Mediterranean diet history tells about innovation more than tradition.

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<sup>8</sup> Medail F., Quezel P., Hot-Spots Analysis for Conservation of Plant Biodiversity in the Mediterranean Basin, *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden* Vol. 84, No. 1 (1997)

<sup>9</sup> IPCC report 2007

<sup>10</sup> De Castro P. et al, *The Politics of Land and Food Scarcity*, Routledge 2012

Mediterranean is the basin where the interchange of various habits, commodities, foods, schools of thought, even plant varieties, parasites and the remedies to defeat them has been taking place in centuries. The Mediterranean diet is an epitome of all this diversity. Still, it is acknowledged to be unique and, as such, is protected by UNESCO. The educational organization of the UN emphasises the social and "political" component of Mediterranean diet: "a moment of social exchange and communication, an affirmation and renewal of family, group or community identity. The Mediterranean diet emphasizes values of hospitality, neighbourliness, intercultural dialogue and creativity, and a way of life guided by respect for diversity"<sup>11</sup>.

Considering – as we suggested at the beginning of this brief – food and nutrition security as a key challenge for development, interlinked with all the others, the connection between Mediterranean and Post-2015 Agenda can be of mutual benefit. On the one hand the Mediterranean Region needs an actual implementation of the SDGs and, on the other, can be a laboratory for all the dimensions of sustainable development.

The Mediterranean Region is passing through a "nutritional transition" in which problems of under-nutrition coexist with overweight, obesity and food-related chronic disease<sup>12</sup>. In this context, the SDGs can play a dual role: as a push to the regain of Mediterranean consumption pattern, that is facing a declining trend in the region; and as contribution to recover the political dimension of food in the Region, establishing a sort of "food diplomacy" in order to reconcile the shores of the basin and the different policies related to sustainable development. As much as the countries of the basin are diverse as strong should be the efforts in the coordination of food and development policies, i.e. the only ways to tackle challenges such as climate change.

Can all the issues and problems of Mediterranean Region transform into opportunities thanks to the post-2015 Development Agenda? The answer could be yes, at some conditions. The call for a genuine commitment from international community should be based on inspiring principles, develop attainable goals and match the determination of governments and other stakeholders at regional and local level.

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<sup>11</sup> UNESCO, Mediterranean Diet, <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/RL/00884>

<sup>12</sup> *Mediterranean food consumption patterns, Diet, environment, society, economy and health* FAO-CIHEAM White Paper 2015