

(MFI) France and Britain, which are among Africa's principal donors for both historical and political as well as economic reasons, are both claiming the rôle of advocates of the poorest countries. They intend to act as "locomotives" on their behalf inside the European Union (EU), now enlarged to 25 members.

When it comes to helping Africa, France and Britain usually overcome their differences. And, in this context, they have found a significant ally in the new European Commissioner in charge of development and humanitarian affairs, Belgium's former Foreign Minister Louis Michel. This general mobilisation in favour of supporting sustainable development has coincided with this year's British chairmanship of the G8 and, for the second half of the year, of the EU, and with the launch by the European Commission of a *New Strategy for Africa* (NSA) for the decade up to 2015.

The NSA lays down a framework for action by the 25 EU member states and the Commission with a view to backing Africa's efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Louis Michel has said the adoption of the NSA *"marks a real turning point in efforts to help Africa pull through by itself; one of the main challenges facing the EU in development cooperation is to ensure a coherent and efficient approach by 26 different actors."* The approval of the strategy, in October 2005, was followed by a joint meeting of all the European Commissioners with their African opposite numbers in the African Union Commission, chaired by Mali's former Chief of state Alpha Oumar Konare.

The NSA was drawn up following the European Council's decision to increase the EU's official development assistance (ODA), to speed up its delivery, and to focus it mainly on Africa. The council also adopted a new European intermediate ODA target: achieving 0.56 percent of the EU's combined Gross National Income (GNI) by 2010, in order to attain 0.7 percent by 2015. There was also agreement that at least half of the additional resources would go to Africa. The Portuguese European Commission president, Jose Manuel Barroso, has stressed that *"the problem of immigration, of which we see the dramatic consequences, can only be resolved efficiently in the longer term within the framework of an ambitious and coordinated cooperation that will help us tackle its underlying causes."*

The cooperation on Africa between Paris and London, which was given a fresh boost by the Franco-British summit at Saint Malo in 1998, has been reflected both by joint action in the UN Security Council, by joint efforts to find new sources of financing for development, and by common support for micro-finance. In November 2004, the two countries adopted an action plan for development cooperation, highlighted in February 2005 by a joint visit to francophone Niger and anglophone Zambia by Xavier Darcos, French Cooperation Minister at the time, and his British colleague Hillary Benn. The action plan gives priority to a partnership aimed at strengthening African education policies, including the schooling of girls. In this context, London decided to make a financial contribution to the development of education in Niger, which will be channelled via French cooperation projects in the country.

Marie Joannidis

Three questions to...

Nemat Shafik, Director General, Regional Programmes, Britain's Department for International Development (DFID)

MFI: What is the situation as regards franco-british cooperation on Africa?

Nemat Shafik: Good! The Ministers are in regular contact and work closely together on a wide range of African issues - bilaterally, in the European Union (EU) and in the UN Security Council. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has also had a staff exchange with the Quai d'Orsay for about five years, with a French secondee in the FCO's Africa Directorate and an FCO official working at the Quai in Paris.

The UK and France worked closely to secure the new EU aid volume agreement in May and at the G8 Summit at Gleneagles (Scotland). Let's also point to the joint Action Plan on Development Co-operation and the associated Declaration on Africa that the UK and French Development Ministers signed in November 2004 and their joint visit to Africa earlier this year... The UK and France both agree that more finance and innovative financing mechanisms are urgently needed to help partner countries meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Both countries have announced timetables to increase their development assistance budgets to 0.7% of gross national income (GNI). Over recent months there have been intensive discussions on the UK proposal for an International Finance Facility (IFF) to leverage money from international capital markets by raising bonds based on long-term commitments by donors; and a proposal from France for an international solidarity levy on air travel. On 9 September 2005, the UK and French Finance Ministers launched the International Finance Facility for Immunisation (IFFIm), which will frontload \$4 billion to help save 5 million children's lives before 2015. They also agreed to implement an air ticket solidarity levy. Part of the revenues will finance health development projects, in particular the purchase of drugs against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

How does all this fit in with EU development policy and EU enlargement?

The year 2000 European Commission development policy stated that the principal aim of the EU's development assistance is to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty, and the broad consensus among Member States is that poverty reduction and the MDG should remain the main focus. The EU statement to the Millennium Review Summit (New York, September 2005) said "*The EU is committed to providing more and better aid, including through multilateral debt relief and innovative sources of finance, to help meet the MDG as well as other existing commitments*". All Member States, old and new, signed up to this.

What is the DFID's position on aid conditionality as regards such countries as Zimbabwe?

DFID's primary aim is to ensure that UK aid is used effectively to reduce poverty and is not misused through weak administration or corruption. Conditions that are applied are there to ensure that if things do go wrong we can adjust our support – they are not about forcing certain policy choices on governments. We know.. that efforts by donors to impose policy choices on them are greatly resented and rarely work. Aid is more effective when used to support governments' own plans. We also need to make aid more predictable and are trying to do this by providing longer term commitments so that governments can better plan their budgets.

Effective partnerships need to be based on a shared commitment to three objectives – reducing poverty and reaching the MDG; respecting human rights and other international obligations; and strengthening financial management and accountability in order to make sure that aid is effective. We do not enter into aid partnerships with governments which do not share these commitments. DFID is not giving any aid to the Government of Zimbabwe; however, we are providing humanitarian assistance through UN agencies.

Interview by M. J.

Three questions to...

Louis Michel, European Commissioner in charge of development and humanitarian aid

MFI : Which are the main advances of the new "Strategic Plan for Africa"?

Louis Michel: The most important step forward in this new strategy for Africa is no doubt the fact that it will provide the European Union with a "*single, global and long term*" framework for its relations with Africa. Relations between the EU and Africa have been fragmented for too long: both in policy-making and implementation, between the action of member states and that of the European Commission, between the approaches to Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa, and between the traditional social and economic development efforts and the strategic guidelines. Neither Europe nor Africa can afford to allow this situation to continue. The Plan will indeed allow us to conduct a genuine continent-to-continent dialogue.

It will focus on the points considered as key elements for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and will require us to improve our sectoral policies, improve our efficiency and increase our financing effort. It is based on three pillars. The first aims at promoting peace and good governance, the pre-conditions for development, with increased attention to political and juridical institutions or to the African Union's Peer Review mechanism. The second has a bearing on the basic framework for sustainable development: economic growth, thanks to integrated regional markets, the private sector and infrastructure. The third pillar is directly concerned with the achievement of the MDGs at the heart of development: health, education and environment.

What is the EU's ambition in adopting this plan?

Forecasts show that in the absence of a substantial increase in the present financial resources, some parts of Africa will not be able to achieve one or several MDGs even by 2050. As a neighbour and long term partner – and as the biggest international donor of aid – the EU has a crucial role and responsibility in the world-wide effort to help Africa attain these goals. I do hope and believe that the EU through this strategy may contribute to turn the decade up to 2015 into a decisive moment for development in Africa.

What room does this plan leave for the national cooperation policies of the EU member states?

This strategy for Africa is not aimed at eliminating the various national aid policies. On the contrary, these policies have their own strengths. The idea of the strategy is to make sure that they will be reinforced, through increased coordination among themselves and with the Community's effort. This is the reason why the strategy for Africa creates a *single, global and long term* framework. In an enlarged European Union, there is indeed a need for increased coordination: the impact of EU policies will be greater if the 25 member states and the Commission all pull in the same direction and speak with a single voice.

Interview by Fanny Pigeaud