

Will the EU's spending on external action be more effective in next MFF?

by Loes Debuysere, Researcher, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, Belgium

In preparing for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), that is the EU budget for the years 2021-2027, the European Commission has proposed to integrate 11 existing financial instruments in the realm of external affairs into a unified Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). With this proposal, the European Commission hopes to both simplify its spending on external action and make it more effective.

However, with an intra-institutional power struggle playing out and with different member states prioritising different interests, it still remains a question whether the NDICI will eventually be able to deliver on its promises. Questions relating to the governance structure of the NDICI, the future of the Neighbourhood Instrument, the incorporation of the European Development Fund and the mainstreaming of migration in the instrument are still debated.

One additional question that arises is whether the NDICI can be also an instrument to facilitate the Union's 'integrated approach' as set forth by the EU Global Strategy to external conflict and crisis. The commentary – written by Loes Debuysere und Steven Blockmans of the CEPS - Centre for European Policy Studies – discusses if the new instrument can overcome the traditional budgetary fragmentation and overlap and can, as such, contribute to an 'integrated approach' to tackle external conflict and crisis.

We argue that, as the proposal now stands, there are still a number of blind spots that could undermine the NDICI's effective contribution to a multidimensional, multi-level, multilateral and multi-phased approach to address fragility and instability in third countries.

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"The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein."



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

