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Abstract

Among the most important actors of the development project has been the European Union and its predecessors which continues to proud itself as one of the largest donors of Official Development Assistance (ODA). However, the concept of 'development' has since come under increasing criticism (among which the post-development school of thought has been especially important), not only in terms of its policies, but also the discourse surrounding it. The existing EU development discourse faces criticism regarding its supposed unequal character which has significant implications for the enormous hegemonic power it has through its years of repetition. To shed light on the nature of the relations, which have been and continue to be constructed by a Eurocentric, asymmetric and modernist character of the discourse, a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was conducted. By relating Gramsci's theory of hegemony to Foucault's theory of discourse it is argued that through certain discursive mechanisms, power relations between the different actors involved are postulated.

Abstract (deutsch)

Zu den wichtigsten Akteuren des Entwicklungsprojekts gehört die Europäische Union (und ihre Vorgänger), die sich nach wie vor als einer der größten Spender Öffentlicher Entwicklungszusammenarbeit (ODA) rühmt. Das Konzept der "Entwicklung" ist jedoch seither zunehmend in die Kritik geraten (vor allem von Seiten der Post-Development-Schule), und zwar nicht nur in Bezug auf seine Politik, sondern auch auf den Diskurs, der sie umgibt. Der bestehende EU Entwicklungsdiskurs wird wegen seines angeblich ungleichen Charakters kritisiert, was erhebliche Auswirkungen auf die enorme hegemoniale Macht hat, die er durch seine jahrelange Wiederholung hat. Um die Art der Beziehungen, welche durch den eurozentrischen, asymmetrischen und modernistischen Charakter in vergangenen und gegenwärtigen Diskursen konstruiert worden sind, wurde eine Kritische Diskursanalyse durchgeführt. Indem die Hegemonietheorie von Gramsci mit der Diskurstheorie von Foucault in Beziehung gesetzt wird, wird argumentiert, dass durch bestimmte diskursive Mechanismen Machtverhältnisse zwischen den verschiedenen beteiligten Akteuren postuliert werden.

On my honour as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

Cilla Rottensteiner

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Literature Review	3
2.1	Development Discourse	3
2.2	Criticism as to the European Union development discourse	6
3.	Theoretical framework	8
3.1	Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis	8
3.2	Discourse and Power	9
3.3	A Post-Development Perspective	10
3.4	Discursive Power and the Development Discourse	13
4.	Research Strategy and Design	15
5.	The EU as a ‘development actor’	18
5.1	Historical overview of European development policy and its discourse	18
5.2	The EU as a ‘Development Actor’ today	20
6.	The core discourse and texts	23
6.1	New European Consensus on Development	23
6.2	The Commission of the European Communities’ Communication to the Council and the European Parliament “The European Community’s Development Policy”	25
6.2	The Commission’s DG International Cooperation and Development Strategic Plan 2020-2024	25
6.3	The Commission’s DG International Partnership’s Management Plan 2021 of the DG International Partnerships	26
7.	Analysis	26
7.1	General Observations	26
7.2	Hierarchy through Othering	27
7.3	Agent-patient relation	28
7.4	Responsibility	30
7.5	Legitimation of intervention	31
8.	Before the New Consensus – COM(2000) 212	32
9.	The 2020/1 update	34
10.	Analysis’ Findings	37
11.	Conclusion	39
11.	Bibliography	41

Glossary:

AAAA: Addis Ababa Action Agenda

ACP countries: Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

CFSP: Common Foreign and Security Policy

DAC: Development Assistance Committee

DG DEVCO : Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development

DG INTPA: Directorate-General for International Partnerships

EAMA : États africains et malgache associés

EEAS: European External Action Service

EEC: European Economic Community, predecessor of European Union

EUPF: European Union Peacebuilding Framework

MDGs: Millennium Development Goals

NDICI: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe

OACPS: Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States

ODA: Official Development Assistance

OECD: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

PCD: Policy Coherence for Development

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

SSA: Sub-Saharan Africa

TEU: Treaty on European Union

TFEU: Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalised world, where all the places in the world are in some ways becoming more similar day by day, and at the same time becoming more distant from each other, the seed of equality could have been planted and blossomed by now. While the opportunities of globalisation could, in a utopian version of it, have rendered obsolete the necessity of writing this thesis, it has only exacerbated the disparities between the different parts of the world.

The decision of the World Bank to take a first step in eliminating the use of the term ‘developing country’ in their undertakings during the past decade did incite some overthinking of the categories in which we facilitate our thinking and evaluate the events surrounding us. However, this decision was limited in its scope and did not comprehensively affect the perception of the relations between the Global North and South as perceived. As of to date, the idea of development as an applicable concept to describe humanity’s march to progress continues to shape the way the majority of the people understand international cooperation.

The European Union prides itself to be the biggest contributor to Official Development Aid (ODA) in the world, and thereby underlines the importance of what they are doing on a grand scale. However, the discussion of the *development* of today’s global interdependencies remains a topic only taken up by the West’s leftist technocrats willing to respond to the enchaining responsibility, or the Global South’s most influential voices achieving to even be heard in the North. I would therefore like to stress the power of the discourse which has been constructed by the different actors offering development aid and how it may amplify and add to the unequal relation already existing in the current international order. I would like to argue, then, that the European Union development discourse is until today Eurocentric, modernist and asymmetric in character and that through certain discursive mechanisms, unequal power relations between the different actors involved are postulated.

The first chapter aims to introduce the subject area and to address the subject of development discourse, as well as to sketch out the problems and implications, which are inherent to its terminology. At the core of the issues are the focal terms of developing vs developed countries as well as the key term development.

The second chapter shall explain the theoretic considerations which have impacted on the conviction that it is important if not indispensable that attention is paid to the way international cooperation is depicted and verbalized. It is necessary in this context to refer to

discourse theorists like Michel Foucault to highlight in what terms language influences power dynamics and its creative capabilities with regards to reality. This chapter will further provide an insight into the perspectives of scholars of the post-development school of thought which gave rise to the main arguments of my thesis. Basically, post-development considers development as an instrument of Western hegemony over the rest of the world and thus criticizes both the development project as well as development theory. Connecting these considerations to Gramsci's idea of hegemony it will be sketched out how discourses can construct hierarchical relations and thereby exert power over its subjects.

In the third chapter, the chosen methodological approach will be outlined and the research strategy of a Critical Discourse Analysis introduced, which will examine three main assumptions expected to be found in the official European Union development discourse through which the hegemonic character of the discourse is reiterated. These are (i) the processes of Othering reinforcing inherent and reiterated hierarchy in the terminology, (ii) the induced agent-patient relation between the different actors, and (iii) the attempts of generating legitimation to intervention through, among other tools, omitting Europe's colonial past and thus neglecting any entailing responsibility.

For full disclosure on the topic at hand, the fourth chapter touches upon the European Union as a development actor, thereby providing insights into the history of the current European development discourse. At the core of this research, then, will be a Critical Discourse Analysis based on official European Union documents, chosen for their typicality in terms of their significance for the European Union development discourse and their topicality. The focus will lie on the categories outlined before, aiming to support the hypothesis that the current Union's development discourse represents a Eurocentric, modernist and asymmetric paradigm that continues to exclude actors of the Global South, not realising their discretion to act, but rather marginalizes them to remain passive recipients of international efforts to *progress*.

Lastly, final remarks will then draw conclusions on the analysis' findings and evaluate their significance on a critique on the dominant European development discourse. A picture of the current and future European development discourse landscape will be sketched out.

2. Literature Review

Take up the White Man's burden --
The savage wars of peace --
Fill full the mouth of Famine
And bid the sickness cease;
And when your goal is nearest
The end for others sought,
Watch Sloth and heathen Folly
Bring all your hope to nought.¹

What is the responsibility that Europe has taken upon itself in terms of their work in international cooperation, and why have they done so? As Kipling makes clear in this poem on the occasion of the American intervention in the Philippines, the West is called upon to fill the mouths of hunger and to heal the diseases of this earth even or especially where the people themselves are unable to do so. But is this really the case? Or better, does it really have to be? In the context of this work, it is first necessary to establish what the term "development" is all about and what dimensions it can assume.

2.1 Development Discourse

Common ground when discussing the topic of development discourse seems to be considering its initial aim to eradicate poverty. As far as this very broad and general objective may be shared among discussants, the actual definitions vary widely and cannot be understood as a static concept. This shows a need to be explicit about exactly what is meant by the word 'development'. In general, the concept of development is primarily focused on economic terms which are based upon the idea that an entity 'evolves' from a state of economic poverty of the people to one where people have more choice in the different aspects of their life. For the purpose of this research project, a definition by Gilbert Rist shall serve as the starting point in order to avoid confusion as to what is implied in the term under scrutiny:

'Development' consists of a set of practices, sometimes appearing to conflict with one another, which require – for the reproduction of society – the general transformation and destruction of the natural environment and of social relations. Its aim is to increase the production of commodities (goods and services) geared, by way of exchange, to effective demand.²

The dominant Western development discourse is based on a capitalist idea of continuous economic growth allowing for a more affluent society and it implies a purposeful and natural change over a period of time, the objective of which is known in advance: a state

¹ Rudyard Kipling, *The White Man's Burden*.

² Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*, 4. ed, London: Zed Books, 2014, 13.

of maturity. Authors such as Nnimmo Bassey argue that the idea that the same path has to be followed in order to achieve ‘development’ inherits an essentially imperialist notion, and has been used in order to justify not only colonialist endeavours but also its successors, neo-colonialism and neoliberalism.³ The concept of neo-colonialism has been strongly shaped by the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah and refers to the idea that although a state, which is in theory and on paper independent, is in reality directed from the outside with regards to its economic system and consequently also its political policy.⁴ Even today there are some scholars comparing trade and development relationships between the European Union and countries of the Global South as neo-colonialist.⁵

From a postdevelopment perspective there are a number of issues with the term ‘development’ and the implied idea of having both ‘developed’ countries as well as ‘developing’ countries which are on their way there. The analogy of a natural development leading to maturity such as the one of children growing up, *developing*, used for the purpose of describing a state entity or a region evolving, tries to attach the appearance of a natural process to a social phenomenon.⁶ In this context, Rist determines four characteristics of development which are inherent to a naturalistic understanding of development. Firstly, it implies a direction or purpose to development which lifts the topic into the sphere of necessity leaving countries with no choice whether they want to follow this (the) path of development. This connects to the implied continuity of such a process, given that in nature it is not in abrupt terms that an organism changes but in gradual transformation where the subject remains the same. Another feature of natural processes is the idea that development happens accumulative in the sense that each succeeding stage is closer to completion than the one before. It thus inserts a certain hierarchy into these different stages of development. Lastly, once an organism has developed to a given stage, there is no means of going back to a preceding stage, the process is irreversible.⁷ Classifying thus a country as either developed, developing or underdeveloped implies the application of this allegory of natural development to social phenomena and ranking them on a certain position on the path to ‘complete evolution’.

Another implication of the allegory of development as children do as discussed by Nathalie Karagiannis is the inherent polarization between those actors who are considered

³ Nnimmo Bassey, *Breaking the Chains of Development*, 3-5, 3. in: Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta (ed.), *Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary*, New Delhi: Tulika Books and Authorsupfront, 2019.

⁴ See also: Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*, London: Thomas Nelson&Sons, Ltd., 1965.

⁵ Michael E. Odijie, Unintentional neo-colonialism? Three generations of trade and development relationship between EU and West Africa, *Journal of European Integration*, 2021, DOI: 10.1080/07036337.2021.1902318.

⁶ Rist, *The History of Development*, 26.

⁷ Rist, *The History of Development*, 26-27.

‘developing’ or ‘underdeveloped’ which are equated to children and those making the differentiation as parents.⁸ It can be argued that the parents-children metaphor has been effectively used to allow for the parents/‘developed’ to supervise the children/‘developing’ progress and model their paths as to their own, presupposing that their own history was the correct one and would have to be applied to their counterparts. Furthermore, it puts the ‘developing’ actors in the role of having to live up to the expectations of the others and act as predefined in order to receive financial contribution.

The term ‘underdeveloped’ has its own implications insofar as it represents an even harsher opposition to the idea of ‘developed states’ than ‘developing’ ones. It was first publicly used by United States President Harry Truman in Point 4 of his Inaugural Speech in January 1949, as some might argue as a representational gimmick in favor of the United States on the global stage. President Truman expressed the need to “embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of *underdeveloped* areas”⁹ (emphasis added). As a result, the noun was introduced to the adjective and it changed the way the concept of development was understood too: In line with the naturalistic allegory of development, it was considered to be an intransitive phenomenon, in the sense that it was natural to happen, indifferent to actions of the subject. However, the idea that there could be states which were not (yet) going through these natural stages of development allowed for the possibility of choosing the direction of a final state and the possibility of having an influence on such change. Consequently, the term development received a transitive meaning allowing for anticipated action to bring about development whilst underdevelopment remained being perceived as a state of things without an apparent cause. Rist underlines this observation with the fact that while it is common to use ‘to develop’, there is no possibility of using ‘to underdevelop’ in its active form.¹⁰ This, however, excludes any reasoning as to why one state might be in a state of ‘underdevelopment’ as well as any relation to those which enjoy the state of ‘development’.

Although the initial motives of offering development assistance may be benevolent, Karagiannis argues that the discourse along with its terminology around it is paradoxical and not fruitful to closing the economic gap between the Global North and South:

⁸ Nathalie Karagiannis, *Avoiding Responsibility. The Politics and Discourse of European Development Policy*, London, Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2004, 105.

⁹ *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Harry S. Truman*, Year 1949, 5, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1964.

¹⁰ Rist, *The History of Development*, 73.

The paradoxical situation of development discourse is that as long as it condones itself, in the view of achieving equality of conditions in this unequal community (in the form interminable stages to be reached), it condemns the members of that community to perpetual inequality.¹¹

The power remains with the powerful of the discourse to the extent that it remains difficult for the impoverished states to act from a marginalized position. For a long time, the discourse on the international stage has been dominated by the Global North, by the European powers/empires as well as Russia, later by the United States especially in opposition to the Soviet Union. However, these recent years have shown other important powers on this stage, mainly China and Japan, but also the countries of the Arab Gulf which have made their stance through large amounts of oil found in the gulf. Nevertheless, the power in the discourses and especially the positions of power are still divided unequally among the international actors, usually to the detriment of those countries which are to this day considered ‘developing countries’ by a classification provided by the OECD.¹² A similar terminology is also used by the United Nations, which provide a list of “least developed countries”¹³ of 46 countries, most of which are located in Africa.

2.2 Criticism as to the European Union development discourse

The European Union development discourse, as a part of the western development discourse, is criticized by some post-development scholars as being Eurocentric, modernist and colonial, implying that their model of development is to be regarded as typical and aimed at.¹⁴ The paradigm referred to here as EMC, Eurocentric, modernist and colonial, shall not be accepted as such in the later discussion, but rather be adapted to an attempt of more objectivity, merely referring to the asymmetry of the discourse. The paradigm is considered Eurocentric in the assumption that the discourse is strongly focused on knowledge on development produced by and in Europe and ignoring contributions of, bluntly put, the rest of the world. Furthermore, and perhaps even more important, there is the assumption that parameters can be derived from the history and development of Europe, its economy, industry and society, which are equally applicable to the recipient states. Especially with regards to economic development, Ozay Mehmet argues that mainstream economic development theory

¹¹ Karagiannis, *Avoiding Responsibility*, 3.

¹² The OECD has a list of all the countries they consider ‘developing’, the DAC List of ODA Recipients comprising ‘Least Developed Countries’, ‘Low Income Countries which are not LDCs’, ‘Lower Middle Income Countries and Territories which are not LDC’s’ and ‘Upper Middle Income Countries and Territories which are not LDC’s’. The list is based on gross national income (GNI) per capita, i.e. on solely economic criteria, excluding G8 members, EU members, and countries which already have a fixed entry date into EU. See: “DAC List of ODA Recipients for reporting on aid in 2021”, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/daclist.htm>, last accessed on 26/05/2022.

¹³ UNCTAD, *United Nations list of least developed countries*, available at: <https://unctad.org/topic/least-developed-countries/list>, last accessed on 26/04/2022.

¹⁴ See also: Sarah Delputte, Jan Orbie, Paradigm Shift or Reinventing the Wheel? Towards a Research Agenda on Change and Continuity in EU Development Policy, *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 16 (2), 2020, 234-256: 236-237 <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v16i2.1084>.

is, in essence, a branch of Western economics and thus strongly culture-biased.¹⁵ In additional support of this claim, the authors of the Pluriverse, the Post-Development Dictionary, have come up with this dictionary for the fact that alternatives to the Eurocentric concept of development which is inherent to its mainstream discourse are mostly or even in its entirety missing from it.¹⁶

Secondly, in the existing literature there is criticism on the inherent asymmetry in the discourse which usually excludes the receiving end of development policies and holds on firmly to the division between different stages of development. As previously discussed, this rigid division holds important consequences on the relationship between the two, given the assumed maturity of *developed* actors and accompanying dominance over *developing* ones. As these complex matters have been analysed thoroughly before, it shall be refrained from reiterating it once more at this point.

Lastly, the European Union development discourse is based on an essentially modernist and neoliberal notion. This relates to the Eurocentricity of the discourse in the sense that the European development model is ingrained in the ideals of modernization which holds the European economic structures as well as its society as universal models for others to imitate. Dominique Moïsi argued in his work on the impact of emotions on geopolitics, that the West holds on to the idea that impoverished countries must follow the same path they used to ‘develop’ because that was what worked for them and therefore, was the only way to go.¹⁷ More concretely, studies have shown that although the discourse is rapidly changing, the European Union development discourse continues to be neo-liberal by default, albeit adapting to inputs and international tensions.¹⁸ With regards to the EU peacebuilding framework (EUPF), there seem to be similarities between EU development projects and projects to enhance peaceful societies: In the process, the EU “continues to equate building a just and durable peace with building liberal/neoliberal states”¹⁹ and thus reiterating economic and administrative structures according to neoliberal principles.

The discussed literature presents a wide and comprehensive overview of the development discourse and especially the criticism it is facing. However, it is kept rather broad and more in-depth insights on actual practical examples are expected to bear fruitful.

¹⁵ Ozay Mehmet, *Westernizing the Third World: The Eurocentricity of Economic Development Theories*, Taylor & Francis Group, 1999, 7.

¹⁶ Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta, Introduction. Finding Pluriversal Paths, xxi-xl, in: Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta (ed.), *Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary*, New Delhi: Tulika Books and Authorsupfront, 2019.

¹⁷ Dominique Moïsi, *Kampf der Emotionen. Wie Kulturen der Angst, Demütigung und Hoffnung die Weltpolitik bestimmen*. München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2009, 41.

¹⁸ Patrick Holden, Neo-liberalism by default? The European Union’s trade and development policy in an era of crisis, *Journal of International Relations and Development* 20, 2017, 381-407.

¹⁹ Oliver Richmond, Annika Björkdahl & Stefanie Kappler, The emerging EU peacebuilding framework: confirming or transcending liberal peacebuilding?, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 24:3, 2011, 449-469, 458.

This is why this work aims to pinpoint concrete discursive statements in order to allow for relevant observations and conclusions from the analysis. What is more, as the discourse on development is a dynamic rather than a static construct, it only makes sense to update academic discussions on it to depict a topical reflection of the current European Union development discourse. Only then shall it have meaningful value with regards to the power implications of the discourse on the international order.

3. Theoretical framework

Having outlined the central points of contention concerning the traditional terminology around development and also underlined why there are a number of problems related to the repeated use of this terminology, it is important to trace these in a practical implementation. In order to faithfully criticize the current EU development discourse in a manner which pays respect to the adjustments which recently have been made to it, a Critical Discourse Analysis shall allow to systematically analyse the Union's official discourse. In the following, some theoretical insights shall illuminate why this method is applicable and from which perspective a critical stance shall be taken.

3.1 Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis

Firstly, the choice of analyzing the discourse itself rather than development policies and practices is grounded in the assumption that the discourse's power, realized through linguistic practices, is generally underrated by the public. However, its relevance and power have been discussed by many and enjoy considerable acknowledgement in many social sciences which is why it will not be extensively discussed and explained hereafter. Reference shall be made briefly, however, to Michel Foucault and his major contributions to the understanding of the discourse and its implications on power, interpretive authority (*Deutungshoheit*) in discourses and fields of 'sayability'. A discourse, then, is a collective practice sui generis, material and practical like the construction of a house and is expressed through its linguistic-written form. The discursive practice comprises the ensemble of a certain production of knowledge and constitutes not only of institutions or procedures of knowledge collections but also authoritative authors or speakers, regulations for verbalization, textualization or mediatization. It is important to note here that Foucault also argues that historic-social things do not simply exist prediscursively and subsequently get recognized exactly or blurry, but rather that the discursive practice shall be considered as a material instrument of production thanks to which historic-social things would only be produced in a

controlled manner.²⁰ Society as we know it has certain procedures of exclusion, as Foucault puts it, which allow some people to say some things in certain situations and forbid others.

Resulting from this understanding of the discourse are also implications on the relations between discourse and power. Link and Link-Heer conclude that if a discursive formation is considered a limited, 'positive' field of statement-accumulations, then this implies inherently that possible other statements, questions or perspectives etc. are excluded.²¹ These fields of 'positive' accumulations of statements are considered to define the fields of 'sayability' (Sagbarkeit) and presuppose the possibility of saying or thinking some things, while others, those excluded from this field, are to a certain extent delegitimized which does not necessarily mean that it is per se forbidden to use them, but rather that by doing/saying/thinking these things one would break with social taboos. Hence, in terms of discourse-power relations, it does not preclude forms of resistance against the prevailing power constellation, but merely rules out the plausible derivation of a struggle against it. And, lastly, the simple existence of 'the' power is questioned, in the sense that it exists positively only as the respective historically-concrete interweaving of all positive-empirical power relations (the 'hegemonic' network).

As a theoretical framework to embed the previously discussed topic of the (EU) development discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) shall serve as a guiding concept. It has been claimed as both a theory as well as a method by many scholars and there exist convincing arguments for both sides. In the following, some considerations shall outline the fundamental theory, upon which the discourse analysis will be based.

CDA seeks to unpack those meanings of textual enunciations which may not be obvious to readers and other forms of audience and thereby outline how such discourses impact on social practices. Among its aims, then, it is not only to engage with but also criticize existing power relations in the form of written or spoken texts. It can thus be used to problematize the (re)production of asymmetrical power relations between a dominant group and the others.

3.2 Discourse and Power

In this context, there are some especially important concepts that are examined through the lens of CDA, among which the political implications of hegemony and common sense after Antonio Gramsci seem to be of special relevance to the discussion of power relations in the development discourse. Matthew Donoghue argues that emphasizing Gramsci's influence on CDA allows it to give a more accentuated picture on "state and

²⁰ Michel Foucault, *Die Ordnung Des Diskurses*. Erw. Ausg., 7. Aufl., Frankfurt Am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl., 2000, 11.

²¹ Juergen Link and Ursula Link-Heer, "Diskurs, Interdiskurs Und Literaturanalyse." *LiLi, Zeitschrift Für Literaturwissenschaft Und Linguistik* 20, no. 77, 1990, 88-99.

power maintenance through power relations between state, citizen and society”²². Gramsci’s contributions to the concept of hegemony have elaborated it from simply using it for the predominance of one nation over others, to understanding it as the formation and organization of consent.²³ What is more, Donoghue connects these findings with what many academics have published on CDA and the interdependences between language and power such as Norman Fairclough (among other 1989, 1992, 2003, 2013), Teun A. van Dijk (1993, 2004, 2006) or Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (1995). Notably, he refers to van Dijk when comparing language to power given its basis on a framework of rules and their guidance of people in understanding the social and political worlds, and, so he follows, therefore also their interaction within these worlds.²⁴ He relates this to the Gramsci’an position that often ideas and positions seem to be unchangeable given their embedding within “concrete material relations of time, framing our understanding of those relations”²⁵ which in a continual process allow for the production of dominant discourses, seldomly subject to questioning by the public and primary frames for people to understand social relations as well as material conditions. Ulrich Brand argues that although there exist relatively independent structures outside such dominant discourses, the corridor of action in them is usually limited and there hardly is a meaningful reality for actors.²⁶ As a result, dominant discourses may be compared to or understood as an ideology, and regardless of the fact that social reality transcends discourse, it is a central component and an essential power factor of society.²⁷

3.3 A Post-Development Perspective

In relation to the dominant development discourse, authors like David Moore argue that development is ideological itself and conceals actual relations of exploitation, referring once more to the concept of hegemony of ‘developed’ countries over recipients of development.²⁸ Post-development, in general, considers the post-war period until the disintegration of the Soviet Union as the age of development and, being disillusioned with the project, highlighting the failure development to address the inequality between rich and poor and rather widening the gap between the two.

From a post-development position, it can be argued that the whole development ideology is in essence constructed around Western ideas of progress and represents an imposition of power of social minorities, i.e. the Global North, over the interests of the social

²² Matthew Donoghue, *Beyond Hegemony: Elaborating on the Use of Gramscian Concepts in Critical Discourse Analysis for Political Studies*, *Political Studies* 66, no. 2, May 2018, 392–408, 392, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321717722362>.

²³ Peter Ives, *Language and Hegemony in Gramsci*, London: Pluto Press, 2004, 2.

²⁴ Donoghue, *Beyond Hegemony*, 394.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 395.

²⁶ Ulrich Brand, *Order and regulation: Global Governance as a hegemonic discourse of international politics?*, *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 12, No.1, 2005, 155-176, 157, DOI: 10.1080/09692290500049748.

²⁷ Stephan Habscheid, *Text und Diskurs*, Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink GmbH&Co. Verlags-KG, 2009, 75.

²⁸ David Moore and Gerald Schmitz, *Debating Development Discourse*, London: Macmillan, 1995, 1.

majorities in the Global South.²⁹ Central in this line of thinking are those scholars around Wolfgang Sachs who have forged the *Development Dictionary*³⁰ almost thirty years ago, essentially criticizing the concept of development and its discourse due to its Eurocentric and hierarchical character and thus defining non-industrialized, non-modern and non-Western lifestyles as inferior and potential recipients of development aid. What is more, the criticism also encompasses points towards its economic rationality and steady growth as well as the (ab)use of the concept to legitimize “interventions into the lives of people defined as ‘less developed’ as justified in the name of a higher evolutionary goal or simply the common good defined by people claiming expert knowledge”.³¹ Post-development as formulated by Arturo Escobar in his constitutive work *Encountering Development*, rather than looking for alternative development concepts, searches for an alternative to development, with special “interest in local culture and knowledge; a critical stance towards established scientific discourses; and the defense and promotion of localized, pluralistic grassroots movements”³². In addition, monumental in defining a post-development perspective is *The Post-Development Reader* by Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree, whose authors outline the problem of the concept of development as follows:

Development, as it imposed itself on its ‘populations’ was basically the wrong answer to their needs and aspirations. It was an ideology that was born and refined in the North, mainly to meet the needs of the dominant powers in search of a more ‘appropriate’ tool for their economic and geopolitical expansion... the ideology helped a dying and obsolete colonialism to transform itself into an aggressive – even sometimes an attractice – instrument able to recapture new ground... The hidden – yet clear – message that every development project carried to the people at the grassroots has been that their traditional modes of living, thinking and doing have doomed them to a subhuman condition...³³

Aram Ziai points out the most important aspect of post-development as being the implication of categories and strategies of ‘development’ implying a certain perspective: That means, that comparing countries and societies according to their ‘level of development’ and that, as a result, some are in need of ‘development’ and other may provide them with aid in this regard, is not self-evident, but rather constitutes a “historically specific way of looking at

²⁹ Trevor Parfitt, *The End of Development. Modernity, Post-Modernity and Development*, London, Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2002, 7.

³⁰ Wolfgang, Sachs, *The Development Dictionary: a Guide to Knowledge as Power*, 2nd ed., London; New York, N.Y.: Zed Books, 2010.

³¹ Aram Ziai, Post-development 25 years after The Development Dictionary, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 12, 2017, 2547-2558, 2547, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2017.1383853.

³² Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development. The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, 215.

³³ Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree, ‘Towards Post-Development: Searching for Signposts, a New Language and New Paradigms’, in Rahnema and Bawtree, *The Post-Development Reader*, London: Zed Books, 1997, 377-403, 384 and 397.

different societies and global inequality, naturalizing the norms and historical processes of the European Self³⁴.

There exist a number of critiques of the post-development position which relate to different aspects of the theory; however, by criticizing for example the heterogeneity of post-development theorists or others, Aram Ziai argues that they seem to have implicitly acknowledged the two main arguments on which post-development theory is based: Namely, that the traditional concept of 'development' is Eurocentric, implying that the 'own society' is perceived as an ideal norm and that other societies are merely deviating from it and are thus inferior versions of itself. The concept is based on colonial discourse which was its direct predecessor as a Northern perspective of the South. Although the North may well have a superior standard of living in terms of material affluence, concluding from this a general superior way of living is highly questionable, not only because it neglects numerous other indicators of a good life, but also it "neglects the necessary economic relations between the affluent and poorer parts of the world"³⁵.

Secondly, they also seem to accept the assumption that the concept of development in its traditional sense has both authoritarian and technocratic implications: Whoever gets to define what 'development' is as well as the ways and means to achieve it, is necessarily in a position of power, given that 'development' usually is understood as positive social change. The violence those who supposedly should have benefitted from 'development' had to endure was directly related to their disempowerment with regards to whether they actually wanted to receive this form of 'development'. Thus, having knowledge about 'development' not only means defining others' deficiencies but also the necessity of change, what an appropriate means to bring about such change is as well as generating legitimacy for all of it.³⁶

To connect these thoughts now with the detrimental power such concepts may have, reference shall be made to the hegemonic depth of a discourse, i.e. its intensive regulatory power, as Richard Peet defines it.³⁷ Hegemonic depth of discourses, then, usually stems from political and economic command centres and allows discourses to achieve a regulatory space through coercion, persuasion and power over spatial fields of influence. These dynamics of hegemonic discursive formations usually colonize subhegemonic discourses and allow to continue to exclude the latter from impacting on power relations and thus on social reality.

³⁴ Ziai, Post-development 25 Years after The Development Dictionary, 2551.

³⁵ Aram Ziai, Development discourse and its critics. An introduction to post-development, 3-17, 8, in: Aram Ziai (ed.), *Exploring Post-development. Theory and practice, problems and perspectives*, London, New York: Routledge, 2007.

³⁶ Ziai, Development discourse and its critics, 8.

³⁷ Richard Peet, Ideology, Discourse, and the Geography of Hegemony: From Socialist to Neoliberal Development in Postapartheid South Africa, *Antipode* 34, no. 1, 2002: 54-84, 57.

In addition, in reference to another important proponent of Critical Discourse Analysis, Ruth Wodak argues that discourses contribute to the structuring of power (im)balances in a given society, and that “discourse socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it”³⁸.

3.4 Discursive Power and the Development Discourse

Using Critical Discourse Analysis as a tool to analyse discourse makes sense with regards to the creative power discourses possess. Discourses determine reality, albeit always only mediated through the subjects in their social-discursive contexts as co-producers and co-agents of discourses and the transformation of reality.³⁹ As carriers of historically and spatially valid knowledge, discourses exercise power and are themselves a power factor in that they are capable of inducing behaviour and (other) discourses. To be even more concrete, discourses, since they do not actually carry knowledge, transport people's knowledge to other people.⁴⁰ They thereby contribute to the structuring of power and domination relations in the respective societies. Through this ability to take influence on the structuring of power, it is possible for some (those in political command centres) to “persuade or coerce others across broad swathes of territory, where practices would otherwise be conditioned by narratives, discourses and theories deriving from greatly different interpretive traditions applied to diverse regional experiences”⁴¹. Through discourses’ regulatory power, and in mutually reinforcing combinations of it which comes with its own regulatory space, areas of states and institutions exercising power through globally hegemonic discourses are created. Peet lists a number of discursive dimensions which structure the disciplinary or regulatory effects from the ‘universal’/hegemonic to the regional:

the imposition of theoretical legitimacy, in terms of linking formalized systems of ideas with a recognized interpretation of a dominant, regional experience, set down in a hegemonic textual tradition, and widely accepted as proven and universally applicable; the establishment of a more directly realistic legitimacy in terms of a prevailing sense of technical viability as adjudicated by expert opinion; several kinds of institutional legitimacy, in terms of the labeling [sic!] of ideas as “mature and responsible” in a social accounting process controlled by conventions derived from dominant “proven” practices of wealth accumulation;

³⁸ Ruth Wodak, Aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis, *Zeitung für Angewandte Linguistik* 36, 2002, 5-36, 8.

³⁹ Siegfried Jäger, *Kritische Diskursanalyse. Eine Einführung*, Edition DISS, Münster: Edition des Duisburger Instituts für Sprach- Und Sozialforschung im UNRAST-Verlag, 2015, 35.

⁴⁰ Jäger, *Kritische Diskursanalyse*, 38.

⁴¹ Peet, *Ideology, Discourse and the Geography of Hegemony*, 57.

and popular processes of the carrying of conviction from experts to people through cultural practices developed by established media that marshal broad patterns of consent⁴²

By doing so, hegemonic power is exerted on more peripheral countries, as Robert Cox puts it, as sort of a passive revolution. These countries, namely the Global South in the context of development discourse and policy, have had a different history with regards to their social (r)evolution or economic *development*, but are trying (and are expected to) incorporate elements from the hegemonic model without disturbing old structures.⁴³ In these areas of hegemony then, so Jon Harald Sande Lie holds, “development’s mindset and world-view are continuously reproduced by development agents and agencies – having the effect of strengthening the already established discourse and thus reducing the relevance of other knowledge formations”⁴⁴. It thus becomes even more difficult for other forms of practice and knowledge to challenge the prevailing discourse: Through the reproduction of the development discourse, its hegemonic position is perpetuated as well as its power of formation and normalization over those affected by it, while at the same time diminishing room for manoeuvre for alternatives.

It is important now to apply these theoretical considerations onto the topic of the development discourse and how the discourse postulates power relations between the different actors. Following the dimensions listed here and taking into account discourse strategy tools, categories have been established which will guide the Critical Discourse Analysis of this work. The European Union development discourse is being criticized for its Eurocentric, modernist/neoliberal and asymmetric character, which shall be traced by highlighting informative parts of selected texts. Power relations are being established as well as sustained by basing the development cooperation in clear terms of who is the active partner and who is merely at the receiving end, inducing an agent-patient relation between the actors. This necessarily deprives the dedicated patients of their scope of action and thus exerts power of those more powerful in the discourse on the others. Moreover, the hegemonic development discourse also makes use of legitimation tools for example through referring to the expertise the Global North has accumulated and thus justifying the necessity of interfering through aid projects with the Global South, solidifying their power in the discourse. Additional legitimacy is also strived for through the use of modern buzzwords in order to enter and locate given

⁴² Peet, *Ideology, Discourse and the Geography of Hegemony*, 57.

⁴³ Robert W. Cox, *Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method*, 49-66, 61. in: Stephen Gill (ed.), *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. <https://doi-org.uaccess.univie.ac.at/10.1017/CBO9780511558993>

⁴⁴ Jon Harald Sande Lie, *Post-development and the discourse-agency interface*, 47-62, 54, in: Aram Ziai (ed.), *Exploring Post-development, Theory and practice, problems and perspectives*, London, New York: Routledge, 2007.

texts in an/the existing discourse, because expressions and practices not reflecting the existing one are generally excluded from the beginning.

It herewith should now be sufficiently sketched out why it is important to study the discourse on development more closely and to draw conclusions from it so that in the future, not only could there be a more egalitarian approach to North-South relations but also equal access to and impact on the hegemonic discourse and why CDA is ideal for the elaboration for the problem at hand.

4. Research Strategy and Design

On the basis of these conceptual considerations, the discourse analysis shall be undertaken. Critical Discourse Analysis takes textual statements under scrutiny and is an approach or attitude towards a textual analysis rather than a step-by-step method. Differently to other analyses, its highly context-sensitive and tries to unite different levels of analysis in its undertakings: the text, the discursive practices around it as well as the larger social context. CDA is concerned with societal issues and its practitioners usually take an ethical stance meaning that they use CDA not only to describe power imbalances but rather to criticize them and to underline the ways “in which the dominant forces in a society construct version of reality that favour the interests of those same forces”⁴⁵.

Thematically, official EU documents shall be under scrutiny in order to sketch out how the terminology around development is used and preliminary reasons for the use shall be attempted. Among these shall be the New European Consensus on Development (2017), the Joint public statement on the Adoption of the consensus by the Council of the European Union, but also official documents by the European Commission DG *International Partnerships*. Special attention will be with the Strategic plan 2020-2024 by the DG International Cooperation and Development as well as the Management Plan 2021 of the revamped DG International Partnerships. The focus lies with Commission documents for its central role in development policies, given that it serves as a primary agent and interlocutor with outsiders.

The analysis will therefore look in more detail at different categories according to which the difficulty of the EU development discourse can be identified.

The problematic at hand, then, is that the European Union development discourse, similarly to the Western development discourse more generally, is to this day Eurocentric, asymmetric with regards to agency and hierarchy as well as deeply modernist and/or neoliberal in its approach. This means that against the background of these characteristics of

⁴⁵ Thomas N. Huckin, Critical Discourse Analysis, 78-92, 79, in: Tom Miller (ed.), *Functional Approaches to Written Text: Classroom Applications*, Washington, D.C.: USIA, 1997.

the discourse, there is still an imbalance between the participants of the international partnerships today.

Some scholars consider the development project essentially an instrument of domination which has at its disposal three main mechanisms of operation: the division between development and underdevelopment, the professionalization of development ‘problems’ and the rise of ‘development experts’, and the institutionalization of development through a network of national, regional and international organizations⁴⁶, which relate to the afore-mentioned characteristics in many ways. By referring to Ziai, Delputte and Orbie hold that the main arches of the western development paradigm are “the definition of the problem in terms of global poverty, the promise that this problem can be solved today through technical solutions and economic growth”⁴⁷ and, lastly, “the credo of harmonious objectives amongst all parties involved, developed and developing countries”⁴⁸.

In order to argue more comprehensively for this assumption, some categories have been established which are expected to be indicative of the way the power imbalances between the actors are constructed. First and foremost, it will be argued that by formulating and drafting the given documents the way they are, the EU implicitly acknowledges traditional and, arguably, outdated power relations by reproducing categorizations as well as the marginalisation of receiving countries and regions as inferior to itself or its member states. Especially with regards to the continued use of terms such as ‘developing countries’ in opposition to the self-designation as a ‘developed’ region, it is presupposed that the actors are seen and accepted in a hierarchical manner and omits the possibility of a change in this respect. As has been mentioned earlier, critical discourse analysts have referred to the Gramsci’san school of thought when revealing hierarchical and asymmetrical power structures in international relations through discursive action. Similarly, by repeating the traditional development discourse, the European Union implicitly agrees with these connotations and implications and thus contributes to the on-going exclusion of those marginalized in the development discourse.

Furthermore, I would like to argue that inherent to all EU documents on development policy is an agent-patient relation which puts the Union in a position of agency and leaves receiving countries or regions in a position which merely allows to take action themselves. The European Union, then, is recurrently depicted as the one exerting power while other important actors, or, in this case, patients, are expected to passively agree to these policies or,

⁴⁶ See also: Maristella Svampa, *The Latin American Critique of Development*, 18-21, in: Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta (ed.), *Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary*, New Delhi: Tulika Books and Authorsupfront, 2019.

⁴⁷ Delputte, Orbie, *Paradigm Shift or Reinventing the Wheel?*, 239.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

in some cases, to implement actions and changes decided on above. The previously mentioned documents shall provide insights and data for this assumption.

This silent approval of hierarchy through designating stages of ‘development’ also relates to another very important and debatable aspect of the European Union development discourse. It concerns the fact that although the Union prides itself with being the single largest development assistance donor, it continuously omits the reason why it can take up such a task, namely why it is possible for them to assist the Global South in ‘developing’, or rather, why the Global South is facing challenges which are related to different standards in terms of industrialization, economic performance or also infrastructure (among others). Authors like Philip McMichael⁴⁹ or Nnimmo Bassey⁵⁰ suggest that through the ‘development project’, the role of colonial exploitation in the rise of the West was erased, which allows actors such as the EU to present themselves today as benefactors. Others argue that the whole idea of ‘development aid’ “reflects concerted strategic efforts among the western industrial powers to sustain the economic and political privileges of empire within a radically transformed post-colonial world order”⁵¹, while the official discourse on development merely depicts it as efforts of good will by the Global North to help those ‘left behind’ on humanity’s path to progress and modernity.

The consequent omission of the colonial past, however, disguises the reasons for intervention and opens up the question of responsibility. Why, if not for reasons of coming to terms with the past, does the Global North feel the need to participate in development projects? It is insinuated that there exists a certain responsibility to ‘give’ mainly because of the claim to expertise on ‘development’ for the simple reason of having undergone it before. In a way, the European Union (because it is her that is examined in this work, but it can be assumed that this holds true for other ODA donors as well), self-authorize themselves to intervene in foreign affairs due to this assumed responsibility. This, however, is problematic in and of itself, given that it establishes an insincere interdependency of receiving countries with regards to those countries providing assistance.

Lastly, in order to generate additional legitimacy to the development project, it is assumed that certain buzzwords such as ‘sustainability’ have been used or reference been made to important principles and values guiding the project. At the risk of circular argumentation, it should be pointed out once again that through the legitimisation of the

⁴⁹ Philip McMichael, The Development Project, 12-18, 12, in: Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta (ed.), *Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary*, New Delhi: Tulika Books and Authorsupfront, 2019.

⁵⁰ Bassey, *Breaking the Chains of Development*, 4.

⁵¹ Jeremy Gould, Development Aid, 34-37, in: Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta (ed.), *Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary*, New Delhi: Tulika Books and Authorsupfront, 2019.

discourse and its practices, which apparently reproduce unequal power structures, every supporting discourse fragment also participates in a perpetuation of the existing hegemony of the Global North over the Global South.

On the basis of the discourse analysis which will be carried out, a description of the modern European Union development discourse will be presented and, by relating the findings on terminology to previously mentioned theory on the power of discourse and conceptual considerations on hegemony as found in Gramsci, argued that today's discourse, in its being essentially Eurocentric, modernist and asymmetric in character, continues to postulate hierarchical power relations between the EU and their partners in the Global South.

5. The EU as a 'development actor'

The European Union, or at least many of its current member states, was among the first contributors to the development project and remains so today. Representatives of post-development locate the birth of the development project in the post-war period and the phase of decolonisation and thus strongly influenced by the U.S.' desire to export its economic system. It was not then that the Europe has been the most influential in development policies, however, it has partaken from early on. Over the years, and especially after the initial post-war years which have been focused on European reconstruction rather than outwards action, the Europeans reclaimed their role on the international scene and are now among the most important actors regarding cooperation projects.

5.1 Historical overview of European development policy and its discourse

European development policies have undergone different phases and numerous structural changes. In the past, it was marked both by internal institutional changes as well as external agreements with international actors of the Global South. In terms of the internal changes three periods of European approaches to what is referred today as 'development policy' stand out:

The first period can be considered the time from the signing of the Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community in 1957 until 1973 when the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark joined the community. The Treaty of Rome had an extra provision for an 'association' between EEC countries and those countries which had a 'special relationship' to member states of the community, i.e. which used to be colonies of Belgium, France, the Netherlands or Italy. Given the geographical allocation of these colonies it is not surprising that here the first disagreements concerning the focus of aid to the Global South emerged: While Italy, Belgium and France supported the idea to allocate aid only to countries of the African continent, Germany and the Netherlands were in favor of a global policy. However, the Treaty of Rome did not specifically mention a development policy but only

referred to this ‘special association’ which provided assistance to newly independent African countries.⁵² Of special importance during this period was the signing of the Yaoundé Convention, which was a trade agreement envisaging free trade between the European community and African and Malagasy States (EAMA). In the preamble of the said treaty, some values are outlined with regards to the objectives as well as the form of the convention:

désirant manifester leur volonté *mutuelle de coopération sur la base d’une complète égalité* et de relations amicales dans le respect des principes de la charte des Nations-Unies, [...] résolus à poursuivre en commun leurs efforts en vue du *progrès économique*, social et culturel de leurs pays, soucieux de faciliter la diversification de l’économie et l’industrialisation des Etats associés en vue de leur permettre de *renforcer leur équilibre et leur indépendance économiques*, conscients de l’importance que revêt le *développement de la coopération et des échanges* intrafricains ainsi que des *relations économiques internationales*[...].⁵³ (emphasis added)

While there is mentioning of economic progress and industrialization of the associated states, it is with the aim of strengthening their economic balance and independence and there is special emphasis on mutual cooperation on the basis of complete equality. What is also worth noting, the importance of developing regional cooperation and exchange is stressed as well as international economic relations.

The second period accounts for the time after 1973 until the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 during which the first Lomé Convention was signed in 1975 between the EEC and the 46 ACP countries. With the EEC enlargement of, most importantly but not exclusively, the UK, the scope of international development policy widened which was verbalized also in the preamble of the Lomé convention, introducing the polarization of ‘developing’ and ‘developed’ countries. At the time, the convention was considered groundbreaking, both in terms of the introduction of a new form of relationship between the Global North and South, as well as its big scale. Additionally, with new members now part of the EEC, the French influence was considerably limited, amongst other things noted in the new term of ‘partnership’ as opposed to the earlier wording of ‘association’ and ‘cooperation’.⁵⁴

However, criticism concerning the first and second Lomé convention of 1975 and 1980 was widespread because of its ‘neo-colonial’ nature. There were numerous bones of contention in this regard, for example the fact that instead of weakening the ties between the former metropolises and their former colonies, it fostered them. The parameters of the new and celebrated relationship of the Global North and South were, so critics hold, to a huge extent dictated by the Community; the provisions of the convention also did little in order to act

⁵² Karagiannis, *Avoiding Responsibility*, 9.

⁵³ European Economic Community and African and Malagasy States, Yaoundé Convention, *Official Journal of the European Union*, 20/07/1963, available at: https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/dd10d6bf-e14d-40b5-9ee6-37f978c87a01/c303f9ae-1356-4fd2-ad61-b650f07f10ec/Resources#52d35693-845a-49ae-b6f9-ddbc48276546_en&overlay, last accessed on 26/05/2022.

⁵⁴ Karagiannis, *Avoiding Responsibility*, 10-11.

against the dependence and the consequent economic weakness of the ACP countries; and also that the convention was forged among the elite levels of the partners to it and did not include the respective populations.⁵⁵ There exists significant research which argues that without the EEC's (later EC's intervention) intervention in African politics through trade partnerships, local ruling elites would have had to come up with alternative strategies to promote economic change instead of colonial continuity and thereby would have allowed for more fruitful economic transformation on the continent.⁵⁶

Although the third Lomé convention saw significant amendments to the relationship, in particular concerning the newly introduced 'acquis Lomé' which established general provisions such as the right of each member to determine its own policy options, respect for every state's sovereignty as well as the equality of partners, the real changes were only introduced during the third period.⁵⁷

The third period, then, is the time from 1992 to 2000, the year the Cotonou Agreement was signed. The Treaty of Maastricht inserted development cooperation for the first time into the Treaty⁵⁸, and the period also saw the fourth revision of the Lomé Convention which included for the first time the basic principles of European development policy. Most prominently among these were poverty alleviation, respect of human rights and democracy as well as sustainability of development, rule of law and good governance. Lastly, the development of commerce was envisaged decidedly in the place of the former system of preferences. These changes aimed at moving the European Community's position from a neutral political to one which takes its stance. Throughout the period, the EU made a somewhat ambitious balancing act between constant emphasis on the special historical link with the ACP countries on the one hand and insistence on the politically neutral nature of the agreements on the other hand.⁵⁹

5.2 The EU as a 'Development Actor' today

As far as the European Union as an actor in development assistance is concerned, its role is a special one in terms of historical inclinations to the continent and aspirations regarding (potential) colonies in places outside of Europe but also in terms of contemporary positioning. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) documents, the European Union, that is the EU institutions as well as the EU

⁵⁵ Karagiannis, *Avoiding Responsibility*, 12.

⁵⁶ See for example: Michael E. Odijie, Unintentional neo-colonialism? Three generations of trade and development relationship between EU and West Africa, *Journal of European Integration*, 2021, DOI: 10.1080/07036337.2021.1902318.

⁵⁷ Karagiannis, *Avoiding Responsibility*, 12.

⁵⁸ Pieter Jan Kuijper, *The Law of EU External Relations. Cases, Materials, and Commentary on the EU as an International Legal Actor*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 461.

⁵⁹ Karagiannis, *Avoiding Responsibility*, 14-15.

Member States, accounts for the biggest share in total Official Development Assistance (ODA). The competence in managing the USD 76.1 billion which were contributed by the EU in 2020 lies with the European Commission and the European Investment Bank, while the European External Action Service (EEAS) is in charge of co-ordinating foreign policy. The latest common strategic vision adopted by the European Union and its member states has been the New European Consensus for Development with the aim of better coordinating external as well as internal policies.⁶⁰

Apart from the Common Foreign and Security Policy, development work is an important part of EEAS, as held in Article 21(2), which holds the Union's vision to common policies and actions and, more concretely, its objectives with regards to development policies in subparagraph (d): "[to] foster the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of developing countries, with the primary aim of eradicating poverty"⁶¹. According to Art. 4(4) TFEU, the Union shall have competence concerning development cooperation and humanitarian aid "to carry out activities and conduct a common policy; however, the competence shall not result in Member States being prevented from exercising theirs". That means that in these matters, both the EU and the EU countries have the ability to legislate and adopt legally binding acts and the Member States exercise their own competence whenever the Union does not exercise its competence or has decided not to exercise it. More detailed information on the EU's general commitment to 'development' can be found in Title III Chapter 1 on "Development Cooperation" TFEU, in Articles 208, 209 and 210 which outlines its framework and objectives. Its policies in the matter lie both with the Union and the Members States and mutually complement and reinforce each other.⁶² Also important in this regard is that although the Union itself is not a member of the United Nations but all of its Member States are, both of them set their standards and commitments according to the United Nations' objectives as well as, although this is rather unspecific, other international organizations.⁶³

The Union has two main instruments through which it can act, which are *multiannual cooperation programmes* with receiving countries or *programmes with a thematic approach* which are implemented through the adoption of necessary measures by the European Parliament and the Council. Another possibility is to conclude agreements with other actors with the view in mind to achieve the objectives set out in Art. 21 TEU and Art. 208 TFEU.⁶⁴ In terms of financing the measures, the European Investment Bank shall contribute to their

⁶⁰ OECD (2021), "European Union institutions", in: *Development Co-operation Profiles*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c0ad1f0d-en>.

⁶¹ European Union, *Treaty on European Union*, Article 21(2)(d).

⁶² European Union, *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*, Article 208(1).

⁶³ European Union, TFEU, Article 208(2).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Article 209.

implementation under the terms laid down in its Statute⁶⁵ whereas Member States shall “contribute if necessary to the implementation of Union aid programmes”⁶⁶.

For the 2021-2027 period, the EU has committed to the “Global Europe: Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument”-programme (NDICI) with a budget of EUR 79.46 billion for cooperating with third countries which are not part of the European Union. This represents an increase of 12% in comparison to the preceding long-term external action budget of the 2014-2020 period. Especially important in terms of effectiveness of actions of foreign policy by the Union and its Member States is policy coherence and complementarity and has been anchored in Article 210 TFEU. Its value has been emphasized once more in Article 6 of Regulation 2021/947, which highlights its centrality with regards to development policies and their effects on developing countries in the framework of the establishment of the NDICI, especially in view of policies’ sustainability.⁶⁷ Paul Hoebink defines the goal of policy coherence as that “the objectives of policy in a particular field may not be undermined or obstructed by government actions or activities in the same field”⁶⁸ as well as in other policy fields. With regards to development policies, Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) has been an important concept since the Maastricht Treaty, and has been revitalized in the New Consensus on Development’s Article 109: “The EU and its Member States reaffirm their commitment to Policy Coherence for Development (PCD), which requires taking into account the objectives of development cooperation in policies which are likely to affect developing countries.”⁶⁹

Since the beginning of the 21st century and even more during the last decade, the EU as well as many other international actors has shifted its focus from goals and aspirations defined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the revamped 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are political goals which cover a number of different aspects, starting with the eradication of poverty and world hunger, but also focus on good health, education or gender equality.⁷⁰

Delputte and Orbie assume in 2020 that the dominant development paradigm is questioned to a certain extent in the way the EU’s relations with the Global South are being led but have yet to be seriously challenged. Although there has been ‘second order changes’

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Article 210.

⁶⁷ European Union, Regulation 2021/947, *Official Journal of the European Union*, 09/06/2021.

⁶⁸ Hoebink, Paul, ed., *European Development Cooperation: In Between the Local and the Global*. Amsterdam University Press, 2010. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46msvd>.

⁶⁹ European Commission, Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, *The new European consensus on development 'our World, our Dignity, our Future' : joint statement by the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament, and the European Commission*, Publications Office, 2018, 52, available at: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2841/694595>.

⁷⁰ Providing an overview of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals would exceed this work’s scope. For the sake of completeness, the full list can be found here: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>, last accessed on 26/05/2022.

with regards to policy instruments, the underlying goals have not been altered and the western model is being recurrently promoted, legitimizing intervention for the purpose of development.⁷¹

6. The core discourse and texts

Along the lines of the afore mentioned categories which have been set up as a framework, a critical discourse analysis shall be executed with the aim of shedding light on some of the power relations which are being reproduced and reinforced through exemplary European Union documents such as presented below.

In a first step, a short overview of the context of the documents shall be provided and thereby the importance and expected impact highlighted. In analysing change in the discourse, this analysis focuses on distinct discourses (vocabulary, connotations, logics, backgrounding and assumptions) and how they change and interrelate. As a core reference, the landmark text of the New European Consensus on Development will be examined and put into perspective by framing it with both older and younger documents representing European development discourse. The other texts have been chosen because of their temporal dimension in order to allow a perspective to the past and how the discourse has changed since the early 2000s and, since the world changes in a fast pace these days, two very recent texts have been chosen for an updated version of a stance on the current EU development discourse. They are ideal examples of the discourse since they allow statements on the contents as well as the representations and underlying structures of it.

6.1 New European Consensus on Development

The core reference and corpus for the analysis of the European Union Development Discourse shall be European Commission documents, most importantly the New European Consensus on Development ‘Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future’. It is a joint statement by the Council and the Representatives of Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission and thus represents a document which has been approved by not only the intergovernmental part of the Union represented by the Commission, but also by the Member States through the Council and the people of the Union through the elected representatives in the European Parliament. It can therefore be considered a concerted effort mirroring a shared vision for development policy for the European Union. Since it is the main official document representing the European Union’s approach to development, it sets the framework for its discourse on development and can therefore be considered a typical text. It is for this reason that it has been chosen as the grounding for the analysis of the EU’s development discourse.

⁷¹ See: Delputte, Orbie, Paradigm Shift or Reinventing the Wheel?

The New European Consensus on Development was published on 7 June 2017 and intends to guide the Union in its contribution to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA). The document was forged in 2017 when the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, signed in 2000, was still duly in place and covered the relationship between the European Union and the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries. As the name suggests, there was another Consensus on Development established before, in 2005, in order to allow for a common basis and coherence between development policies of both the Member States and the Union, given their shared competence in the matter.

The text itself is a strategic text which positions the EU's stance to the 2030 Agenda and frames the intended future action. It thus represents a non-legally binding document but rather sketches out the good-will intentions of the Union. According to the genre of the text, the text is organized in many different policy approaches and defines separate fields in which the EU shall operate in. It is important to outline the structure and genre of a text in a discourse analysis as, especially in the case of strategy papers, there is little general agreement on how their nature impacts their effects.⁷² In terms of the language register, strategy documents can be expected to aim at convincing the audience of not only the necessity of a strategy paper, but also of its methods and objectives: Special respect should also to be paid to the vocabulary used. On various occasions, objectives and means in the Consensus were verbalized in slightly military terms, such as “mobilizing efforts”, “fighting poverty” or to “combat inequalities”, which takes a specific stance on the crucial importance of European action with regards to development. In the beginning, the EU's general commitment is described not only to explain the necessity of the creation of such a document, but also to locate it in the discourse. The framework, then, focuses on four different aspects of the ways in which the EU envisions to assist and intervene in global development, that is by focusing on 4 ‘P’s, People, Planet, Prosperity and Peace. A fifth ‘P’ relates to Partnership between the actors of development policies and highlights the quality of the relationship between the donor countries/institutions with the receiving ones. By using these keywords as titles of different chapters, these specific aspects are foregrounded, and the importance is emphasized. At the same time, the focus on these specific points clearly omits other points and thus neglects their importance.⁷³

⁷² Eero Vaara, Virpi Sorsa and Pekka Pälli, On the force potential of strategy texts: a critical discourse analysis of a strategic plan and its power effects in a city organization, *Organization*, 17(6), 2010, 685-702, 688.

⁷³ This is not to say that the choice of thematic points is to be criticized, it is rather to raise attention for the fact that such a list can never claim completeness. Rather, the choice for including some topics while excluding others is a deliberate one and should not be left out of a thorough examination.

It is important to note at this point, too, that clearly this is a unilateral document by the European Union and its Member States, framing their work and implications on the international scene. It is thus not surprising that the Union presents itself as the initiating and benevolent actor.

Other documents under scrutiny in order to allow for a temporal perspective on the topic will be the Commission's Communication to the Council and the European parliament on the European Community's Development Policy (April 2000), the Strategic plan 2020-2024 of the (then still called) DG International Cooperation and Development as well as the Management Plan 2021 of the DG International Partnerships.

6.2 The Commission of the European Communities' Communication to the Council and the European Parliament "The European Community's Development Policy"

The said Communication is a document which was published in April 2000 and thus prior to the milestone treaty of the Cotonou Agreement. The time of the publication of the Communication was at the end of the 90s, a decade when neoliberal policy-making was still on the height of its success. In contrast to the other documents analysed, it is imprinted by its time through a more economic focus and only in passing do the first debates on climate change arise. The Communication is structured into the role of Europe, a comprehensive approach to development and poverty reduction, strategic activities, partnerships and implementation. This Communication provides an overview of the adaptations of European development policy for the Council and the European Parliament and thus serves as an informational text rather than a strategic document or policy-making.

As early as 2000, the general objective of development cooperation was to tackle poverty, however, while today the aim is to fundamentally eradicate poverty, it was only to reduce poverty back then.

6.2 The Commission's DG International Cooperation and Development Strategic Plan 2020-2024

The Strategic Plan is a Commission's department's multi-annual strategy and sets out the vision for the term of office. For one, the Strategic plan 2020-2024 has offered valuable insights in these changing perspectives on international cooperation. It is structured along 7 themes and 16 specific objectives contributing to the general objectives of the European Commission, in particular to the general objective of "a stronger Europe in the world".

It is expected that, although only a few years have passed since the publishing of the New Consensus, there will be some terminological changes in the way external action will be denominated in the more recent documents of the Commission DG. The reason for which this is supposed lies with the change in the name of the concerned Directorate General, which has

been changed from “International Cooperation and Development” (DEVCO) to “International Partnerships” (INTPA) in January 2021. In the Commission’s statement on the matter the change is intended to “reflect the important role of international partnerships in shaping a stronger role for the EU globally, in eradicating poverty, advancing towards the Sustainable Development Goals and promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law”⁷⁴. One of the reasons for which this change in position may be explained is that in 2019, a new Commission has taken office for their 5-year term and thus the personal impact and objectives may have influenced the focus and execution of the concerned documents.

6.3 The Commission’s DG International Partnership’s Management Plan 2021 of the DG International Partnerships

Similarly to the Strategic Plan, the Management Plan is a younger document than the New Consensus and, owing to its exposure to a more recent discourse, therefore expected to be an updated version of the Consensus. First published in March 2021, it is a product of the same DG as the Strategic Plan although, given its later drafting and publication, the DG has gone through a rebranding. There exists a connection between the two in the sense that, given the larger time frame of the Strategic Plan, the Management Plan describes its most important yearly outputs which should contribute to achieving the objectives defined in the DG’s strategy for the given year.

The document is structured in two main parts focusing on the Commission’s priorities and modernizing the administration, thereby fulfilling a management plan’s objective of formalizing an enterprise’s management structure and operations. Among the priorities listed in the plan are Partnerships; Climate Change, Environment, Energy; Digital and Data Technologies; Sustainable Growth and Jobs; Migration; Human Development; and Governance, peace and security, democracy, human rights, civil society. The ranking of priorities cannot be expected to be random and therefore also carries a level of meaning. The focus on partnerships, rather than *development* aid (or similar), seems to be of particular interest here.

7. Analysis

7.1 General Observations

Before going more concretely into the analysis of the text, some observations can be made which apply to the discourse in general. In the totality of the Consensus, the concept of sustainability is referenced on almost every page, the frequency of occurrence depending on the thematic focus of the part of the Consensus. According to the topic, the term is used in a

⁷⁴ European Commission, *DG International Cooperation and Development becomes DG International Partnerships*, Brussels, 15 January 2021, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/news/dg-international-cooperation-and-development-becomes-dg-international-partnerships_en, last accessed on 27/04/2022.

different way, referring to changing concepts of sustainability: once it is about “sustainable growth”, or “sustainable development”, “sustainable and equitable social protection” or “sustainable management of chemicals and waste”. This reflects not only a change in the approach to development, but (arguably) also a more general change in awareness. The time of the creation of the New Consensus is of importance here: The 2010s saw a significant change of zeitgeist with regards to sustainability: Multiple movements have called upon society, governments and individuals to overthink their practices and regulations for the preservation of earth in order to allow for future life on planet Earth. It has since become a fashionable tag added to all kinds of projects to generate more legitimacy in their favour.

Another document in direct link to the New Consensus on Development has been published on 7 June 2017 as well by the Council of the European Union, namely the Joint statement on the adoption of the new European Consensus on Development⁷⁵. Differing in terms of the text type, it may use a different language register, however, given that it is an official Council press release document, it does draw from the same EU jargon and is closely connected to the New Consensus. Given its close connection and its link to the same discursive event, which is the decision on the contents of the New Consensus, the documents shall be examined together hereinafter.

7.2 Hierarchy through Othering

One important aspect of the way the discourse is shaped through documents such as the Consensus as well as the additional joint statement is how it is insinuated that there exists a hierarchy between the producers of the text and those which are talked about. To be more precise, in the first article and paragraph of the Consensus it is stated that one of the aims was to “leave no-one behind and [...] to reach the furthest behind first”⁷⁶. Although the first part of the phrase will be discussed below in more detail, it shall be held here that it assumes that there is some kind of finish line to be reached in the future, while the second part of the phrase contains more far-reaching implications, namely that there are different actors on the way to the finish line: those who have already covered different distances and are therefore already closer to the finish line, while others are still struggling to attain this state.

This relates directly to the way the concept of ‘development’ is understood, in the way that some countries are closer to what is expected to be ‘fully developed’ and others which are failing to get there. By denominating these different stages, a process similar to what is called “Othering” is triggered, given that it draws a concrete line between the own, and the other, insinuating that the own is good and desirable, while the other, simply for being different, is not as good (in this case for being less developed). Categorizing countries according to their

⁷⁵ Council of the European Union, *Joint statement on the adoption of the new European Consensus on Development*, Press Release 339/17, 07 June 2017.

⁷⁶ European Commission, *The new European consensus on development*, Article 1, 3.

status of development necessarily ignores other characteristics or aspects and is therefore used as a simplification of understanding the world. The focus here is very apparently on Europe as a model ‘developed’ actor.

Underlying this kind of categorisation is a non-articulated evaluation of the individual categories and given that those who consider themselves ‘developed’ maintain the authority of interpretation (*Deutungshoheit*) in the discourse, they set the terms and standards of ‘development’. Similarly, the Consensus holds that both the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs are universal and apply “to all countries at all stages of development” but that merely suggests again that there are some having transcended from one stage of development to the next, higher stage and have some kind of superiority over those have not managed to do so (yet). Yet, because it is, once more, expected that those who have not done so, will want to follow these pioneers, since “no one is left behind”. As Rist points out, the concept of natural development happens accumulatively in the sense that each succeeding stage is closer to completion than the one before, putting the different stages of development into a certain order of achievement of completion. Implicit in phrases such as “the furthest behind” is thus a hierarchy of actors where some, those already having ‘undergone development’, whereas others are in need of help because they have fallen behind.

What is left unsaid, is the way in which these countries are expected to ‘develop’: It is simply insinuated that all of them will want to follow the same path to prosperity, growth, etc. as have taken the self-proclaimed ‘developed’ countries. It remains unsaid, though, that these countries are ‘developed’; the way the Global North understands ‘development’ and the mere existence of “developing countries”, however, insinuates that there must exist those presenting the opposite, otherwise where would the line be drawn of what ‘developing countries’ were trying to achieve? In addition, as referred to earlier to Karagiannis work, the allegory of social progress as natural development relates to the coming of age of the humankind, putting ‘developing countries’ in the unfavourable position of children, having to act according to their ‘parents’ and therefore necessarily following the path of those before them by and large.

What concludes from this, then, is a hierarchical order, where the same actors reproduce their positions of power in the given discursive formation to their favour and others are continuously marginalized, kept down and left out.

7.3 Agent-patient relation

Also, if some do not have the knowledge from which the capacity to ‘develop’ stems, it is only understandable that someone else has to take over action, which connects to the afore mentioned imbalanced agent-patient relationship between the EU and its partner countries. On more than occasion, the Consensus refers to the previously discussed phrase

that “no-one is left behind”. This passive structure grammatically erases the possibility for those concerned to act, since they are left no syntactical agency. This could be understood exemplary for the role given to the recipients of Official Development Assistance, merely marginalized as patients in this relationship (and it could perhaps also be argued that this very specific manner of portraying the involved actors reflect the circumstance that those responsible for the drafting of the document do not necessarily envision this to be changed).

At the same time, the strong agency of the EU is highlighted through phrases such as “[...] our cooperation with all developing countries, bearing in mind the need to design tailor-made approaches that reflect the growing diversity of our partner countries”⁷⁷. This statement clearly shifts the task of finding a solution for the ‘developing countries’ to the European Union - and thus away from the often-referenced grassroots projects. It is the EU that needs to act, and it follows that it’s the ‘developing countries’ which cannot act: By referring to the “need to design tailor-made approaches” it is presupposed that this need exists in the ‘developing countries’ and insinuates that only those having already undergone development can help to design tailor-made approaches and bring about progress for the growing diversity of their partner countries. The relationship between the need of tailor-made approaches and the EU’s responsibility to share its expertise on the matter shall be discussed below.

It can be noted that although the document acknowledges the recipient countries as partners in the endeavour of development, the grammatical structure of the text does not allow a position of agency for these partner countries of the EU. They are “the partner countries” or “the developing countries” and are structurally put in the end of the sentence, graphically backgrounding it in comparison to the EU. Again, this is a unilateral document by the Union and its Member States and the recurrent use of the EU as the subject in a sentence is not itself surprising. Yet the contrast to the use and application of the receiving countries and regions in grammatical terms is what may have an impact on the reader of a given document. At the same time, the document refers to the actor(s) in two different ways, namely on the one hand side as “the EU and its Member States” and on the other hand as “we”. Arguably, while the former represents the institutions and the national governments and thus keeps it rather impersonal, the introduction of a common position through the use of “we” changes the perspective of the reader and establishes a relationship between the reader, the text and the EU institutions plus Member States. Additionally, it might even enhance the opposition to those contrasted to the “we”, namely those who are to benefit from development policies and thus reinforcing a stronger identification with the designated ‘agent’ of the discourse.

⁷⁷ Council of the European Union, *Joint statement on the adoption of the new European Consensus on Development*, Press Release 339/17, 07 June 2017.

7.4 Responsibility

In the document referred to, it is never mentioned why actors such as the European Union could ‘develop’ earlier and why others could not. There is no mentioning of the colonial relationship between those who are to be assisted in their ‘development’ and those willing to support them; rather, the EU is “proud to lead global efforts as the world’s largest development actor”⁷⁸ and thereby solidifies their image of a benevolent donor. Whether it is their responsibility to take a stance and position themselves is omitted, given their century-long interference in matters of the African or more generally the Global South leaving them seldomly possibilities to develop their own practices and solutions for common problems. Now whether this should have a place in such a strategy document is not presupposed by this comment, however, the choice of excluding any stance on the imperial and colonial past is, again, a deliberate one. The Consensus also refers to the EU and its Member States supporting the “poorest communities”⁷⁹ in the world, how and why they came to be the poorest communities is left untouched⁸⁰. It seems important here to note that this is not to say at all that the EU is responsible for all the poverty in the world, rather that it leaves the topic untouched and thus conceals any responsibility in the matter whatsoever. Also, it has to be highlighted here that, after all, the EU has an important role to play in international partnerships, and its crucial role of leadership in development has been underlined by authors like Martin Holland.⁸¹

In the context of development and its discourse there seems to be another kind of responsibility more widespread and also discussed more thoroughly among scholars which concerns the assumed responsibility of actors of the Global North on ‘development’. There are two aspects of responsibility which shall be examined in this context: For one, there is the responsibility connected to the Christian concept of ‘giving’ and the almost moral obligation to give. Karagiannis relates this early Christian concept to the “White man’s burden”⁸², a metaphor though originally invented to describe the American’s self-imposed civilization project in the Philippines, is still found in today’s development discourse. The previously discussed implications of the concept of development on the perception of the recipients of development aid as child-like also takes the donors into the responsibility of supporting them,

⁷⁸ Council of the European Union, *Joint statement*.

⁷⁹ European Commission, *The new European consensus on development*, Article 25, 10.

⁸⁰ Additionally, poverty is a construct which has been shaped by Western norms and interpretations of what is considered poor. The most common understanding of poverty is in economic terms- and although the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index does indeed include today more indicators of poverty, the concept itself remains a “construct and the invention of a particular civilization”. Majid Rahnema, *Poverty*, 174-194, in: Wolfgang, Sachs, *The Development Dictionary: a Guide to Knowledge as Power*, 2nd ed., London; New York, N.Y.: Zed Books, 2010.

⁸¹ Martin Holland, *The EU and the Global Development Agenda*, *European Integration*, 30:3, 2008, 343-362.

⁸² Karagiannis, *Avoiding Responsibility*, 66.

“helping them facing the challenges of globalisation”^{83,84}. What is more and closely connected to the first aspect of responsibility is the one related to knowledge, more precisely concerning the claim to expertise on development. This expertise is considered to stem from the fact that they have already undergone development, naturally, because they themselves have set the standards for development and modelled them to their expectations. Through media like the given Consensus, the European Union as an international actor in development responds to this self-imposed responsibility and, in a way, makes its mark and shapes its image in a positive way all the while it continues to cover up responsibility with regards to the colonial relationship between part of its Member States and the Global South.

7.5 Legitimation of intervention

Furthermore, in the given text there are also parts which contribute to the self-authorization of, in this case, the European Union, which stands exemplary here for other powerful actors in the development discourse, legitimizing their own right/responsibility to interfere in external affairs. They do so by referring to the grandeur of their efforts (“we [...] come together to mark a milestone achievement”) or also by using the term ‘sustainable’ for every envisioned project to create more legitimacy. In the Consensus, for example, article 7 states that “The EU and its Member States must respond to current global challenges and opportunities [...]”⁸⁵ or that “migration has become an ever more pressing issue for both developing and developed countries”⁸⁶, moving their action into the realm of necessity due to current issues. In this context the question shall be raised whether it would not be more appropriate to relate this necessity of engagement to historical ties which have been in their totality in favour of the now benevolent donors rather than connecting them to the outcomes.

The Consensus offers another way in which the EU might have envisioned to enhance their moral and ethical stance on development policies, namely by referring repeatedly to all the values and principles which should guide their actions. Apart from the UN 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, to which the document itself is a response to and therefore clearly is committed, article 4 refers to the EU and its Member States being committed to a “life of dignity for all”⁸⁷, not only those who are already leaving such. But also other values are foregrounded such as their “commitment to protecting and promoting the right of everyone to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, so as

⁸³ African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, European Community and its Member States, *Partnership Agreement*, Preamble, Cotonou, 23 June 2000.

⁸⁴ Karagiannis, by referring to John Palmer’s *Europe without America?* (1987), puts it as follows: “The childhood metaphor of colonial discourse is based on exactly this intimate relation between autonomy, knowledge and responsibility. To put it differently, only the adult depicted as autonomous because of his/her knowledge can be called developed. Conversely, the child – the colonized or the ‘underdeveloped’ – does not know what s/he does and depends, for reversing this ignorance, on the parent’s intervention.” Karagiannis, *Avoiding Responsibility*, 69.

⁸⁵ European Commission, *The new European consensus on development*, Article 7, 5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, Article 39, 17.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Article 4, 4.

to promote human dignity, well-being and prosperity”⁸⁸, the “commitment to implement the Paris Agreement”⁸⁹ as well as their commitment to “promote gender equality and social inclusion across our policies, foster opportunities for young people and improve people's well-being everywhere”⁹⁰.

On other occasions, reference is made more directly on essentially European values or “our guiding principles” through which they are claiming these values to be theirs. Embedded in an Enlightenment understanding of Europe along with its values and principles, and above all the spirit of progress, lies the assumption that other rational modernisation, education and secularisation movements did not exist outside the European continent.⁹¹ On the one hand, however, this is problematic, since non-European societies had a completely different understanding of progress and in some places, for example, did not need secularisation at all, since religion did not have the same powerful status as in Europe. On the other hand, many movements were prevented or destroyed simply because European elites were appointed locally to exploit the country and run it according to European standards. Any alternative approaches to progress were thus denied.

8. Before the New Consensus – COM(2000) 212

The Commission Communication analysis aspires to put into perspective the changes which have found their way into the New Consensus since the (very) early 2000s. The observations as to the Communication document have been undertaken along the lines of the criticism which guides the analysis of the more recent documents. However, some preliminary impressions shall headline the more concrete analysis. The general language register differs to some extent from later documents, as topics seem to have been raised more directly. The *zeitgeist* is reflected, too, but alternative approaches to the development project only started being heard by the speakers of the discourse (e.g. “A fresh strategy for the Community’s development policy has to be established [...] which reflects the evolving international debate on development issues”⁹²). Although the principle of local ownership as a guiding concept of the *development* process is present already, the document shows evidence that among the concept has only just entered the recognition of the *donors* (“Partnership,

⁸⁸ Ibid., Article 27, 11.

⁸⁹ Council of the European Union, *Joint statement*.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Dag Nikolaus Hasse, *Was ist europäisch? Zur Überwindung kolonialer und romantischer Denkformen*, Ditzingen: Reclam Universal-Bibliothek, 2021, 25.

⁹² Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, The European Community’s Development Policy*, Brussels 26/04/2000, COM(2000) 212 final, 6.

ownership of development processes by the population [...], are all principles which are now *largely* shared by donors”⁹³ (emphasis added)).

In 2000, the Community still claims on a comparative advantage in development projects in their dealings with the Global South such as support in transport and infrastructure due to them being the major donor in the area for many years and thus having acquired the necessary experience and expertise.⁹⁴ Supporting evidence of the Community’s claim to *knowing it better* is the manner in which development shall happen, that is in a “framework, best practices, as identified with the DAC”⁹⁵. In such a statement, several of the previously determined categories can be found, on the basis of which the critique of the development discourse is to be recorded. On the one hand, a clear process of othering happens here and at the same time the agency is claimed directly by an actor. This apparent agent (we tell you what to do and how to do it)-patient (and you implement it) approach is also found in the way the Global South is imagined to be included in the world economy by the European Communities: They want to help integrate these countries in their system of economic transfers and trade, as (free) trade is expected to lift the burden of underdevelopment from their shoulders. In a way, the development project does remain being a project modelled to European standards.

In general, there is a significantly stronger focus on economic indicators, especially on trade and economic growth. To the drafters of the Communication, sustained growth is a *sine qua non* requirement for poverty reduction and *development* is built upon globalisation, liberalisation policies and technological advance, while the importance of trade for its process is highlighted repeatedly. These indicators point to the often referred to neoliberal character of the EU development discourse which not only praises the advantages of free trade and such, but also is deeply intertwined with the idea that progress is needed for development. The reason for which this strong focus is to be questioned is that it barely considers any other forms of change in the Global South’s societies and thus rules out any impact of alternative approaches to the future of the countries concerned.

Lastly, a strong imprint of the perceived difference between the ‘us’ and ‘them’ is identifiable throughout the text. Especially through classifying countries in their own terms, be it on the basis of economic, social or structural indicators, and thus putting them in the box of *developing* countries is indicative of this understanding, as the different levels according to which they are classified are all based on Western standards of it. By naming the perceived difference, the afore-mentioned phenomenon is triggered which only enlarges the difference

⁹³ Commission of the European Communities, *Communication*, 28.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

between them, instead of closing the gap. This asymmetric relation is perceptible as well through the reiterated position of having the ability to “enable developing countries to fight poverty themselves”⁹⁶ and the implied notion that without the Global North’s they would be inapt to do it. What is more, the reason for which the European Communities interact with and intervene in the Global South is merely connected to the “European citizens expect[ing] the Community to become a partner in solidarity with the developing countries”⁹⁷. By neglecting any responsibility in why these countries are in a position where the European citizens feel they need to manifest their solidarity, an image is depicted of the Community as a benevolent donor acting out of good will to help those in need to progress. However, the European colonial past has had undeniably significant influence on the state of being of the receiving countries of ODA.

To conclude, there are parallels between the way the European development discourse is reflected in the New Consensus and how it was in 2000. However, notable changes have been made with regards to the strong economic touch of the former development discourse which might consider alternative development model, although development as a project itself has not and is not yet questioned. An overall refurbishment has been applied to the discourse’s verbal output which leads to a levelling out of the blatant contradictions between those who have a particularly strong influence on the international discourse and those who are merely at its receiving end.

9. The 2020/1 update

Due to some significant changes in the vocabulary, several adjustments would have to be made in order to apply the categories and research interests of the previous analysis directly onto the latest DG DEVCO Strategic Plan as well as the Management Plan. However, linkages between the texts and the categories applicability to the texts shall be outlined as well as important differences highlighted in the following. Being texts of their time, both documents have been impacted strongly by the Covid-19 pandemic and include specific responses to the crisis. This might have influenced the language register, however this topic will not be further discussed here, as it would go beyond the scope of the thesis.⁹⁸

Firstly, it is important to see how an awakening awareness for the problems around the development project seem to find their way into the EU discourse. As mentioned before, the

⁹⁶ Commission of the European Communities, *Communication*, 5.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁸ Nevertheless, it might be interesting to take a closer look at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the development discourse, as the handling of the virus in many (most?) countries of the Global South was different from that in the Global North, as was the extent of the restrictions, and whether the transfer of knowledge might not also be possible in the other direction.

Commission's name has been changed for that reason, and the Strategic Plan explicitly mentions it, too: "This should be pursued in the spirit of a partnership of equals, based on universally agreed SDGs, which apply both in the EU and in our partner countries. They provide a shared global background that underpin the continuing evolution of the development narrative, away from the donor-recipient perspective."⁹⁹ Plus, in the spirit of partnership of equals, developing a comprehensive strategy with Africa is seen as a key factor in the success of deepening EU-Africa relations.¹⁰⁰ Of particular interest here is the sentence structure, as the strategy is to be developed with Africa, not by the EU for Africa. This clearly shifts the focus of afore mentioned "need to design tailor-made approaches" by the EU for the recipients to the prospect of creating a future relationship *together* and on mutually satisfactory terms and there thus seems to be a realization of the asymmetric relation between the different actors which has been criticized by many.

However, with regards to the supposed agent-patient relation, there are some remarks to be made relating to remaining aspects of unequal agency. Numerous times, the agency is put on the European Union through referring to the support they are providing for any sort of undertakings, implying the beneficiaries of it simply *receiving* the support. What is more, in the discourse there is no room for agency for them, as well as an insinuation that they are unable to do it without said support. This is also reflected in the EU's approach of intervening "through the design of the next generation of international partnerships"¹⁰¹ which clearly underlines the role of the EU in forging new treaties on partnerships in contrast to the partners, given that it seems to be them *designing the next generation of partnerships*. On another reference, it is the DG INTPA which seeks to continue working on building fair, inclusive and sustainable societies¹⁰², and again, by claiming the capacity and ability to build societies in the concerned areas agency is taken away from the receiving countries. Similarly, the EU also states among their objectives that they "will seek to align with and reinforce country priorities"¹⁰³ with regards to global health and education initiatives, which leaves the impression that should it not be possible to align the initiatives with the country priorities, will the same course be driven without considering whether the programme is compatible with the respective country. Overall, there is still a strong Eurocentric imprint on the way these international partnerships *of equals* are understood in the EU development discourse.

All these references mark a strong agency of the European Union in the given discourse, although it has to be acknowledged here that the examined texts are EU documents

⁹⁹ European Commission, Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, *Strategic Plan 2020-2024*, 2020, 11.

¹⁰⁰ European Commission, *Strategic Plan*, 12.

¹⁰¹ European Commission, *Strategic Plan*, 6.

¹⁰² European Commission, Directorate-General for International Partnerships, *Management Plan 2021*, 2021, 7-8.

¹⁰³ European Commission, *Management Plan*, 20.

and thus the European imprint is strong. It does, however, also reflect the way the competence distribution is perceived and therefore lived by the European actors. Focusing so strongly on one actor, though, necessarily affects the residual agency for the other actors.

Moreover, there have also been changes in the way the asymmetry between the actors has been presented in the given documents. Most obvious here seems to be the marked decline in the use of *developing country* terminology¹⁰⁴. Although the concept of development is by no means completely outdated, it is used less to describe the process itself and more to describe the nature of cooperation (as opposed to, for example, trade relations). By continuously referring to the afore-mentioned *partnership of equals* the known hierarchical image is strongly put into question. Nevertheless, in some cases the hierarchy or distance covered to the goal of full development from the perspective of the Global North is kept alive by classifying countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, “namely the most fragile with weak health systems”¹⁰⁵ as “years backwards in their fight against poverty”¹⁰⁶. Seemingly, there is no chance to outrun the prescribed path to development.

Looking back on years of development projects in the Global South, Europe calls upon acquired knowledge on ‘how to develop’ and based on these claims’ legitimization of intervention. By coordinating “our diverse European resources and expertise in support of greater development impact”¹⁰⁷ or also opportunities “for the EU to leverage its own experience in core areas such as the European Single Digital Market”¹⁰⁸ not only remains the steering of the development process in the hands of European actors but also the character of it deeply rooted in the European (neoliberal) idea that progress and modernization will lead to development. By referring to their, if not primacy then at least leading role as a donor, the objective of legitimizing the EU’s intervention in given matters seems to be served too.

At the same time, there is still no responsibility assumed as to the reasons for which wealth (and the supposed knowledge) is so unequally divided among the hemispheres. Rather, the texts give the impression that the EU might see their commitment to development projects also as a prestige object to “showcase the EU’s global influence”¹⁰⁹ and to project the EU as a strong player and thus solidify their position on the international stage.

¹⁰⁴ Although they still come up occasionally. See for example European Commission, Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, *Strategic Plan 2020-2024*, 2020, 8.

¹⁰⁵ European Commission, *Management Plan*, 20.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

10. Analysis' Findings

Based on the critique that the EU development discourse is to a certain extent Eurocentric, asymmetrical and modernist, the present texts were examined in order to determine whether and in what way power relations were established through it. Special attention was paid to the extent to which different categories of analysis apply to the respective texts or to what extent they can be found in them. The texts were selected for their meaningfulness about the discourse and their temporal component.

In the course of the research on the topic of the European Union development discourse changes in the way relations between the EU and the Global South are perceived and lived by actors of the Global North could be traced. The aim of this thesis has not only been to formulate a sound critique of the dominant, and supposed Eurocentric, asymmetric and modernist EU development discourse, but also to acknowledge expected changes to a more egalitarian relationship between the actors.

Most importantly with regards to the oldest of the documents and in contrast to the other texts, is the apparent economic notion of it, which seems to have been updated in the course of the new century. The spirit of renewal and updating might also lie with the conclusions of the Cotonou agreement around the same time which has ushered in a new era of economic trade relations between its partners. This focus, which mainly mirrors the neoliberal zeitgeist, is also fuelled by relating to economic terms such as having a comparative advantage over the development of infrastructure having been a major donor over many years. Through such statements as well as the insistence on the integration of countries of the Global South in free trade, the European actors claim expertise and authority to act dominantly in international partnerships. By claiming expertise on such matters it is insinuated that those concerned are lacking this knowledge and thus are in need of the former's help: Both the process of Othering is triggered here and a hierarchy is established to the advantage of the EU. The later texts base this hierarchy less on economic criteria since the focus is shifted in general to a more multidimensional human development as well as sustainability approach.

Keeping alive a hierarchy according to the standards of the 'developed' is traceable throughout all texts although with time to a diminishing extent. However, as has been discussed thoroughly in this work, the concept of development is a deeply hierarchical concept in itself and thus reiterating the use of the word as well as consequently the concept, too, adds to a differentiation between the concerned actors and a legitimization of the presupposed agent-patient relation between them. Supporting this legitimization is the claimed

expertise which is supposed without acknowledging the past and how they came to gather it, and no responsibility as to the colonial past is assumed. This only rigidifies further the asymmetry between and supremacy of one over the other.

Overall, the categories which have been defined pre-analysis have been found to quite some extent in the given texts and could offer valuable insights into the structures and presuppositions of the documents. Most of the categories ultimately serve the same purpose, namely, on the one hand, to consolidate the position of the speakers and the powerful in the discourse and, at the same time, subsequently to legitimise their intervention in external affairs.

With regards to the claim initially made that to this day, the European Union Development Discourse is essentially Eurocentric, modernist/neoliberal and asymmetric, there are some things to be hold. The strong focus on European ideals and modelling development projects after the European ‘development’ is a decisive characteristic of the given discourse, throughout the first examined document to the youngest of 2021. It is more difficult to establish as to actuality of the second peculiarity, because the emphasis has changed over time. The strong neoliberal colouring of the discourse in the early 2000s has certainly faded somewhat over time, and with it the strong economic focus and conviction that growth solves the problem of poverty. However, the idea that development is inherently linked to progress and modernization is still present to a certain extent and embedded in the belief that progress looks like the European way of life. Lastly, the discourse is still asymmetric with regards to agency and the representation of the actors concerned in it.

The analysis has shown, then, that through different discursive practices, an unequal relationship between the EU and the Global South has been established and is reiterated until today. That means that through continuously representing the partners of the South as recipients rather than actors, Othering them according to their deficiencies compared to the model, anchoring the difference between “us” and “them” in technical details representing modernization, and legitimizing their intervention through supposed superiority and benignity and claims to ‘development’ expertise, the power position of the EU is sustained and nourished.

11. Conclusion

By analysing a number of documents ranging from an early text from 2000 to the milestone document of the New Consensus as well as updated texts from the early 20s of the 21st century, it was possible to identify both continuities and ruptures in European development discourse. Through the identified categories on agent-patient relations in the texts as well as Othering processes to insert hierarchy into the discourse and other practices to generate legitimation to development projects, hegemonic power of the Global North, represented by the European Union in the given case, over the Global South is established. Through this, the necessity of EU external intervention and engagement is reiterated and leaves no room for alternative approaches.

By and large, the main bones of contention scholars of the post-development school have with the European Union development discourse are to a certain extent still present today. Among other reasons, due to the focus on structures which have gotten Europe to the state it is in today, and by imposing the same ideas onto the recipients of development assistance, a power relation is being postulated which is strongly in favour of the EU. This is reinforced through the division of those initiating action and those meant to benefit from it, merely allowing to include performative action and speech acts to find their way into the dominant discourse. Lastly, by omitting the colonial past, not only is there enhanced legitimacy for the European actors, but also does it take away political leverage from those previously colonized to argue for more room for action or remedy.

By largely maintaining same discourse, the already established practices are strengthened and take away room for alternative approaches and knowledge formations. As long as there is no space for equal collaboration in international partnerships the division between the Northern and Southern hemisphere cannot and will not be overcome. International partnerships can only live up to their title if they are not driven under the Eurocentric and progressive umbrella of the Western development project. The discourse in this regard, however, still shows those asymmetrical characteristics and through the continuous reproduction of this the already established scope, the hegemonic character of the discourse is maintained and nourished. While my research has shown that the goal of achieving collaborations at eye level has not yet been reached, it is important to note that necessary steps have already been taken, which are expected to positively impact on future relations.

What could be of further interest in the future is the role of global phenomena like the Covid-19 pandemic on international relations, especially in situations with an unequal starting point. Although not over yet, the pandemic has been a worldwide challenge, which has hit states

differently and to varying extents. Numbers on confirmed cases might not be reliable for countries of the Global South due to different access to testing possibilities, nonetheless, diseases caused by viruses are more common there and the public is more used to their handling in the everyday life. Whether this practical knowledge might influence a change in the approach on the primacy on knowledge of crisis management by the Global North and, crisis management constituting an important part of it, the development project, could be one of many interesting further fields of research in the area.

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