

# **Piecing Together the Mosaics:**

The ‘Team Europe approach’ and multilateral  
development cooperation in Europe’s Southern  
Neighbourhood

Benjamin Nicola Bracciano

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of Master of Arts in  
Transnational Governance of the European University Institute

Florence, 15 May 2024



European University Institute

Florence School of Transnational Governance

## **Piecing Together the Mosaics:**

The ‘Team Europe approach’ and multilateral development cooperation in Europe’s Southern Neighbourhood

Benjamin Nicola Bracciano

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of Master of Arts in Transnational Governance of the European University Institute

Supervisor

Prof. Georgios Papaconstantinou, European University Institute

© Benjamin Nicola Bracciano 2024 This work is licenced under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC-BY 4.0) International license.

If cited or quoted, reference should be made to the full name of the author, the title, the series, the year, and the publisher.



## **Student declaration to accompany the submission of written work**

### **Florence School of Transnational Governance – Master's Programme**

I, Benjamin Nicola Bracciano certify that I am the author of the work *Piecing Together the Mosaics: The 'Team Europe approach' and multilateral development cooperation in Europe's Southern Neighbourhood* presented for examination for the Master of Arts in Transnational Governance at the European University Institute. I also certify that this is solely my own original work, other than where I have clearly indicated, in this declaration and in the thesis, that it is the work of others.

I warrant that I have obtained all the permissions required for using any material from other copyrighted publications.

I certify that this work complies with the Code of Ethics in Academic Research issued by the European University Institute (IUE 332/2/10 (CA 297)).

The copyright of this work rests with its author. Quotation from this thesis is permitted, provided that full acknowledgement is made. This work may not be reproduced without my prior written consent. This authorisation does not, to the best of my knowledge, infringe the rights of any third party.

I declare that this work consists of 10,465 words.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Bracciano', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Date: 15 May 2024

## **ABSTRACT**

In an increasingly geopolitical global order, Western-dominated multilateralism faces an existential crisis. Interlocking crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, have strained multilateral processes, prompting a shift towards more strategic development cooperation in Europe's Southern Neighbourhood. The Team Europe approach emerges in this context. This new framework for increased coordination between European development actors constitutes the pooling of resources of the EU, its member states, national development finance institutions (DFIs), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). This research seeks to investigate the effectiveness of this new approach in enhancing multilateral development cooperation in Tunisia. By employing a new intergovernmentalist lens and examining qualitative data from expert interviews, this study finds that the Team Europe approach is only marginally effective at delivering a more coordinated European development policy that enhances multilateral development cooperation in Tunisia and the Southern Neighbourhood.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Professor George Papaconstantinou for all his support and guidance throughout the course of this study.

Special thanks go to both Professor Nathalie Tocci and Professor Fabrizio Tassinari for their advice during the research phase of this study.

To my friends. Thank you for your companionship and emotional support throughout this process.

I would like to thank my parents, Paolo and Laura Jane, and my siblings, Charlotte and Oliver, for their unconditional support. I could not have done this without you.

*Questa tesi è dedicata a Jacopo. Mi manchi amico mio. Riposa in pace.*

# Table of Contents

<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>I. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>II. LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>11</b>
THE EMERGENCE OF ‘TEAM EUROPE’ .....	11
THE TEAM EUROPE FRAMEWORK .....	13
i. Visibility .....	13
ii. Integration .....	14
iii. Partner ownership .....	15
FRAGMENTATION WITHIN MULTILATERAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION .....	16
THE EU-TUNISIA DEVELOPMENT RELATIONSHIP .....	18
<b>III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>20</b>
NEW INTERGOVERNMENTALISM .....	20
<b>IV. METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>22</b>
DATA COLLECTION .....	22
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK .....	23
POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS OF THE METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH .....	24
<b>V. ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>25</b>
APPLICATION OF THE WIESER REPORT CRITERIA TO TEAM EUROPE .....	25
TEAM EUROPE AND MULTILATERALISM.....	28
TEAM EUROPE WITHIN MULTILATERAL COOPERATION IN TUNISIA AND THE SOUTHERN NEIGHBOURHOOD .....	30
<b>VI. CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>VII. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>IX. APPENDIX .....</b>	<b>44</b>



## **List of Abbreviations**

BR1	China's Belt and Road Initiative
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EEAS	European External Action Service
EFSD+	European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus
EIB	European Investment Bank
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
EUGS	European Union Global Strategy
FAC	Foreign Affairs Council
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGII	G7's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment
SDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
TEIs	Team Europe Initiatives
TEU	Treaty on European Union
UfM	Union for the Mediterranean
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WHO	World Health Organisation

## I. INTRODUCTION

*‘We are here as Team Europe’*. These were the first words of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen’s press statement during her symbolic visit to Tunisia on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2023 (European Commission, 2023a). Alongside Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, the Commission President witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the European Union and Tunisia for a new aid package, structured around migration, green energy, trade cooperation, macroeconomic stabilisation and people-to-people contact (ibid). Von der Leyen called for this agreement to become a ‘blueprint for future partnerships’ with countries in the Mediterranean (European Commission, 2023b). In fact, the presence of three European leaders exhibited the EU’s acute intentions to harmonise the divergent development policies of member states towards the Southern Neighbourhood, which have been primarily driven apart by national politics (Dworkin, 2024). In doing so, this collective spirit seemingly showcased the ‘Team Europe approach’ in action, the EU’s new framework for increased coordination between EU development actors that aims to deliver a coordinated European development policy.

First introduced as the EU’s global coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Team Europe approach constitutes the pooling of resources of the EU, its member states, European national development finance institutions (DFIs), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Originally, Team Europe mobilised over €38.5 billion in repurposed planned development interventions, guarantee funding and grants to support the response to the pandemic in developing countries (Jones and Teevan, 2021: 1). The Council of the EU later expanded the scope to include broader international development purposes and goals (Council of the EU, 2023). This expansion complemented the Commission’s reform ambitions for its development policy, evidenced in the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021–2027 with the creation of the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) and the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). In practice, Team Europe is now embodied by two main activities: most concretely, through Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs), which are country-level or regional thematic flagship initiatives where interventions and financial contributions of Team Europe actors are bundled under an agreed Joint

Intervention Logic; and secondly, through Joint Programming (JP), which entails strategic engagement under the ‘Working Better Together’ agenda between Team Europe and other partners to develop joint responses to development priorities in a partner country based on EU values and interests (EU, 2024; Jones and Sergejeff, 2022).

Fundamentally, the Team Europe framework aims to tackle issues of fragmentation in European development policy. This study follows Klingerbiel et al. (2016: 1)’s understanding of fragmentation as the ‘phenomenon of a multiplication of actors and growing atomisation, affecting goals, modalities, instruments as well as the numerous operational and non-operational activities.’ The EU Treaties grant parallel competencies to the EU and member states in development policy (EU, 2009: Art. 208), which has *de facto* delivered a system of institutionalised fragmentation. In addressing this complex issue without any political appetite for treaty reform, Team Europe represents an attempt to respond to calls for greater complementarity and coordination that date back to 2016 in the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) and Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) conclusions on stepping up Joint Programming (EEAS, 2016) (Council of the EU, 2016). Paradoxically, it also represents a rejection of the proposals of the Wieser Report, an independent report commissioned by the Council of the EU in 2019 to explore options of streamlining the European development finance architecture (High-Level Group of Wise Persons, 2019). The report had outlined alarming levels of fragmentation between development actors and proposed replacing the EIB and EBRD with a single development finance entity, a European Climate and Sustainable Development Bank (ibid). The Team Europe approach, therefore, portrays an intricate navigation of the institutional realities of the EU.

At the same time, Team Europe emerges in the backdrop of an increasingly geopolitical international system. The rise of non-Western countries such as China has shifted the global order. Consequently, the influence of the EU and its member states is fading as Western hegemony is increasingly challenged. In addition, interlocking global crises, from conflicts, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the conflict in Gaza, to global challenges, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis, have accelerated and complicated these geopolitical trends. Given this new reality, multilateral development cooperation, which has been guided by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) over the past 63 years, is under pressure (Dworkin, 2023). The EU is the world’s largest

Official Development Assistance (ODA) donor. EU development policy, therefore, plays a distinct role in its foreign policy as a significant means to increase visibility and promote European values (Jones and Teevan, 2021: 02; Burni et al., 2021: 525). Importantly, the EU's development policy is guided by the notion that the EU is a committed protector of a rules-based and multilateral global order (ibid). However, the EU has had to re-evaluate its position within the growing complexities of the multilateral system (Dworkin, 2023). In fact, the Council conclusions framed the Team Europe approach as the 'necessary precondition' to the effective execution of the Global Gateway Strategy, which is viewed as the EU's response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Council of the EU, 2023). The Global Gateway Strategy uses development finance to leverage private investment to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Rodríguez Prieto, 2024). This reveals that, although the Team Europe approach materialised during the pandemic, the approach emerges in an age of an increasingly strategic attitude to development cooperation which departs from the traditional multilateralism and ODA approach.

This notion of an increasingly strategic approach to development cooperation is reflected in Team Europe's approach to Tunisia and the Southern Neighbourhood. Democratic backsliding, a worsening socio-economic situation and a debt crisis are all issues currently plaguing the small north African country (Dworkin, 2024). As President Kais Saied strives to consolidate political power following his 2021 'constitutional self-coup' and continues to reject a bailout program with the IMF, Tunisia finds itself struggling with dire socio-economic issues and on the brink of sovereign default. However, European countries have failed to adequately respond to the crisis as they struggle coordinate their Tunisia policies due to conflicting national interests (ibid). For example, questions were raised over the accountability of using Team Europe branding for the MoU, following internal divisions over the implications on migration management (Pijnenburg, 2023; Fox, 2023). In turn, this has allowed Saied to be more assertive in negotiations with the EU, reversing leverage between the European continent and Tunisia (Dworkin, 2024; Ezzamouri et al., 2024). Critics argue that the Team Europe approach in Tunisia has simply entailed a continuation of the transactional approach the EU has been pursuing since the 2015 migration crisis under new branding (Vasques, 2024; Dworkin, 2024). This would imply Team Europe solely as a rebranding exercise without any meaningful improvement to European development policy. However, existing literature lacks exploration of current Team Europe activities in Tunisia beyond the Team Europe branded MoU.

The scope of this study is to shed new light on the application of the Team Europe approach through multilateral development efforts in Tunisia. Given the regional focus of some TEIs relevant to Tunisia, this study will also deliberate broader analysis of the Southern Neighbourhood region. This area refers to countries located in the southern Mediterranean region which the EU politically and economically engages with. The focus of this study is to move beyond the visibility perspective of the approach and unpack the effectiveness of this new system of coordination between European development actors. In this light, this research asks: *Can the Team Europe approach enhance multilateral development cooperation in Tunisia?* To address this research question, this study will be divided into three sub-aims. Firstly, this study aims to understand whether the current Team Europe framework has increased the capacity of the Team Europe actors to work together to address global challenges. Secondly, this research seeks to understand the extent of Team Europe's promotion of multilateral processes for development, given its mandate embedded in the Council conclusions. Finally, this study aims to fill a gap in current literature by shedding new light on the application of the Team Europe approach in Tunisia and the Southern Neighbourhood more broadly. Overall, this study argues that the Team Europe framework can only be considered marginally effective in these endeavours.

This thesis is structured in the following manner. Section II considers relevant existing literature. This section delves into the emergence of Team Europe, three main components of the Team Europe framework, an overview of current fragmentation in the multilateral system, and a background on EU-Tunisia relations. Section III introduces the conceptual framework. This study employs new intergovernmentalism to theorise the Team Europe approach. Section IV outlines the methodological approach. This study draws upon qualitative data from a combination of 12 elite interviews, official documents, and press releases. The data will be applied to the Wieser Report's criteria for an effective European development system, which this study repurposes as an analytical framework. Section V will then provide an analysis of the three sub-aims of the study. This includes the application of the Wieser Report criteria to Team Europe data, developing an understanding of Team Europe's role within multilateralism and applying these findings to the Tunisian case study. Section VI concludes this study by discussing key findings. Finally, Section VII offers policy recommendations for the European Commission.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is divided into four sections to reflect the themes of the sub-aims of this study. The first section examines the limited literature on the emergence of the Team Europe approach, in order to provide background analysis of the origins of the approach. The second section explores the existing preliminary analysis of the practical components of the Team Europe framework, specifically visibility, integration, and partner ownership. Thirdly, this study reviews literature that theorises fragmentation in the multilateral system, while also considering current debates on the effectiveness of the multilateral solutions to development. The last section explores existing literature that analyses past and current European development initiatives in Tunisia and the Southern Neighbourhood more broadly. Overall, this study identifies a gap in existing literature where there is no exploration on the Team Europe approach's contributions to multilateral development channels in Tunisia.

### *The emergence of 'Team Europe'*

Although existing literature can only provide a preliminary analysis of the Team Europe approach given its recent formal conception, scholars have analysed the emergence of this coordination strategy and challenged initial developments. Overall, scholarship acknowledges the need for closer European coordination in development policy and that the Team Europe approach has the potential to be an appropriate vehicle to deliver this, given the reality of institutionalised fragmentation within the EU treaties (Burni et al., 2021; Hodson and Howarth, 2023; Koch et al., 2024). However, some scholars are critical of the vagueness behind this branding's mission and purpose (Jones and Teevan, 2021).

A common theory used by scholarship to explain the emergence of Team Europe is new intergovernmentalism. This theory of European integration emphasises the dominance of member states over supranational authority in EU decision-making processes (Bickerton et al., 2015). The salient hypotheses of this theory will be explored further in Section III. Through this new intergovernmentalist lens, Hodson and Howarth (2023) explain the materialisation of the Team Europe approach by the European Commission's endeavour to rationalise the roles of the EIB and

the EBRD. Given issues of fragmentation within the European financial architecture for development coined the 'battle of the banks' by Gavas (2021), Hodson and Howarth's (2023) analysis focuses on the hesitancy of the Council of the EU to adopt the recommendations of the Wieser Report of replacing the EIB and EBRD with a single centralised European development bank. Using core new intergovernmentalist propositions, they argue that the Team Europe approach is, therefore, a product of member states' 'willingness to cooperate but reluctance to delegate' within the EU's sensitive development finance domain (ibid: 17). This is combined with a strong determination by EU institutions to 'protect their turf' (ibid: 17). Gavas (2021) takes a less optimistic view of this arrangement by labelling it 'status quo plus'. This label suggests that the reluctance to adopt the recommendations of the Wieser Report and subsequent adoption of Team Europe indicates a business-as-usual attitude, only through a more standardised and branded manner (ibid). This analysis also reflects new intergovernmentalist propositions because it presents the strategic move of Europe attempting to increase its visibility as a coordinated development model without engaging in propositions of further integration.

Departing from intergovernmentalism, Koch et al. (2024) analyse the emergence of Team Europe through historical institutionalism, drawing upon the notion of critical junctures. They use this term to explicate policy evolution as a product of timing and order of decisions being made, on top of changes to structures of decision-making (ibid). Critical junctures are crises or moments of turbulence that generate opportunities for policy change because they expose prevailing policy limitations (Capoccia, 2016). Koch et al (2024: 16) contend that the Covid-19 pandemic was a critical juncture for European development policy as it created necessary conditions to improve coordination between European development actors.

They also suggest four factors to explain the creation of Team Europe. Firstly, they point to the role of the European Commission as a 'policy entrepreneur' (ibid). Utilising Hermansen's (2015) and Mintrom's (1997) conceptions of policy entrepreneurship, Koch et al. (2024: 5) assume that if an institutional setting is not appropriate to handle an emerging crisis, then institutions can emerge as policy entrepreneurs to identify the need for changes in the status quo. They argue the Commission 'played a leading role' in advancing the formation of Team Europe by mobilising ample human and financial capital to bring the idea forward (ibid: 6). Secondly, they indicate that the interest of EU member states was a key factor. Although they acknowledge that member states

tend to resist further integration in development policy, they sustain the pandemic increased the desirability for closer coordination among member states (ibid: 7). Similarly, they consider low levels of politicisation around helping developing countries with their COVID-19 responses as a critical explanation (ibid: 15). Given the general acknowledgement of the sheer scale required to tackle the global nature of the pandemic, the Commission convinced member states that closer coordination of development funds was needed with little debate or controversy (ibid). A fourth driver they deliberate is the geopolitical landscape (ibid). The contention is that the Commission presented Team Europe as a strategic instrument to increase Europe's geopolitical resilience by strategically mobilising humanitarian and development assistance (ibid).

Similarly, Jones and Teevan (2021) focus their explanation of the emergence of Team Europe as a response to longer-term geopolitical conditions and the EU and its member states' unease about a lack of visibility on the global stage. Given the urgency created by the pandemic to better coordinate the mobilisation of resources, they argue that the COVID-19 crisis brought 'a new political impetus' to develop swifter and less bureaucratic decision-making processes in EU development cooperation (ibid: 03). This impetus therefore allowed the EU and its member states to address longstanding 2016 commitments from the EUGS and FAC conclusions to increase coordination and complementarity (ibid). Moreover, they contend that the Team Europe approach represents a 'creative workaround' of the EU's legal framework to address EU institutions' limited competencies over foreign and development policy while avoiding debates over integration (ibid).

### *The Team Europe framework*

In addition to analysing the emergence of Team Europe, current scholarship also provides a preliminary examination of the framework used to coordinate European development actors. The following sub-sections will cover current academic coverage of the key themes of visibility, integration, and country ownership.

#### **i. Visibility**

Visibility, including the external communications aspect of the Team Europe framework, is the theme most explored by current scholarship. By visibility, this study refers to the extent to which partner countries and their stakeholders perceive EU support. According to Wilkins (2018: 51),



aid donors expect to be ‘recognised and appreciated for their resource allocation’ as they strategically brand their interventions to garner public and partner attention. This argument follows Pamment’s (2015) notion of nation branding as a way for donors to grow their soft power through publicising aid programs. The Wieser Report emphasised the need to increase European visibility through branding and a new narrative (High-Level Group of Wise Persons, 2019). In response to such calls, paragraph five of the Council conclusions in 2023 explicitly reaffirms the importance of Team Europe ‘for coordinated strategic communication and for the visibility of EU joint actions’ (Council of the EU, 2023). Likewise, in a letter signed by members of the Council of the EU directed to EU delegations, Team Europe is categorised as a ‘brand’, suggesting the instrumentality of the concept (Keijer et al., 2021: 22). This implies that the Team Europe communication strategy acts as a ‘branding of EU foreign policy’ (ibid).

Team Europe literature understands the drive for increased visibility in the backdrop of shifting geopolitical realities, with the EU seeking to position itself as a ‘geopolitical power’ (Keijer et al., 2021: 21; Koch et al., 2024: 15; Jones and Teevan, 2021). Keijer et al. (2021: 22) find that European development actors were becoming increasingly frustrated with the lack of recognition received for the role and financial share of the EU in global development, despite being the world's largest ODA donor. However, their study also indicates the possibility of a contradiction in the operationalisation of this branding, as member states, particularly those with sizable development portfolios, would be required to trade national visibility in favour of a collective European brand (ibid). New intergovernmentalists would, therefore, expect member states to insist on continued recognition for national development finance regardless of their openness to development cooperation on the European level (Hodson and Howarth, 2023: 6). Moreover, Jones and Teevan (2021: 7) point out that the Team Europe brand requires more clarity, particularly with regards to how the Team Europe mission differs from other players, in order to convince local private and public actors in partner countries.

## **ii. Integration**

There is a widespread acceptance in current scholarship that the main challenge in combatting fragmentation in European development policy is the parallel competencies in development policy that are granted to the EU and member states in the EU treaties (Keijer et al., 2021: 29; Hodson and Howarth, 2023: 12; Koch et al., 2024: 17). However, as alluded to in the previous section,

debate emerges on whether the coordination attempts of the Team Europe approach can be considered a significant step towards greater integration of European development policy. Koch et al. (2024: 17) consider Team Europe as ‘integration by stealth’, suggesting that, given continued momentum, it creates the conditions to increase the probability and desirability for integration. However, they concede that it cannot yet be considered a significant step towards greater European integration (ibid).

Contrastingly, Hodson and Howarth (2023: 18) take an optimistic view of what they consider the ‘coordination without delegation’ method. They conclude that Team Europe reflects a tendency for ‘integration without supranational decision-making’ (ibid). Thus, it should be understood as a significant step in European integration (ibid). In its current form, however, Jones and Sergejeff (2022) consider Team Europe *de facto* ‘just a club’ composed of the European Commission, the EIB and a few influential member states with their development agencies. Nevertheless, scholars widely accept that the jury is still out on the full extent to which the Team Europe framework can enhance coordination and coherence between Team Europe actors to successfully leverage collective resources.

### **iii. Partner ownership**

A more challenging matter picked up by current scholarship is the concern over partner ownership and consultations with partner countries. As a necessary requirement for an effective development architecture, the Wieser Report stressed the need for recipient country ownership, particularly for countries in the MENA and sub-Saharan regions (High-Level Group of Wise Persons, 2019: 12). In fact, the Council conclusions from 2020 emphasise country ownership and partnerships with local civil society and private sector as ‘essential’ (Council of the EU, 2020). Three years later, the Council reaffirmed this intention, stating that TEIs must account for ‘partner countries priorities and ensuring their ownership’ (Council of the EU, 2023). Through this approach, the EU seeks to modernise its development cooperation strategy by promoting equality between parties and pursuing a more demand-driven and transnational methodology. This notion is evidenced by the Von der Leyen Commission shifting terminology from ‘donor-recipient relationships’ to ‘partnerships’ (Keijer et al., 2021: 25). Besides, the EU's ability to restore and build trust with its partners and promote country ownership is a ‘*sin qua non* for the success and impact of TEIs’ (Jones and Sergejeff, 2022: 12). EU delegations therefore become essential in this process. By

establishing a dialogue with partners and relaying partner prospects to Brussels, the effectiveness of EU delegations as coordinators will undoubtedly impact this issue.

However, scholars have not been convinced thus far. In fact, there is widespread consensus in scholarly analysis that the Team Europe approach appears ‘inward-looking’ and the elaboration of TEIs has so far been ‘Eurocentric’ (Keijer et al., 2021: 26; Jones and Sergejeff, 2022: 11; Pleeck and Gavas, 2023). Keijer et al. (2021: 26) criticise the order of priorities presented in the Council conclusions, arguing the strategy seeks to first prioritise promoting European ownership of TEIs and then, only in a second instance, among non-EU actors. Furthermore, their study finds the EU’s limited understanding of country ownership rests on two key assumptions: (1) there is sufficient political stability to ensure long-term commitment to adopted strategies, and (2) partner governments and their national development strategies are adequately representative of their electorate (ibid). While acknowledging these limitations, Jones and Sergejeff (2022: 12) warn that the EU’s evident prioritisation on visibility must not come ‘at the expense of impact and delivering results for partner countries.’ Moreover, Keijer et al. (2021: 26) call for the EU to engage in more efforts to ensure the buy-in of national governments, regional institutions and other local stakeholders, as they maintain that the current formulation of TEIs is entirely led by European stakeholders.

### *Fragmentation within multilateral development cooperation*

Team Europe emerges in the backdrop of an increasingly geopolitical international system. The global pandemic, war, political polarisation, increased geopolitical competition, and deep mistrust are all factors dividing nations and challenging the multilateral system (Dworkin, 2023). Burni et al. (2022: 520) illustrate the EU’s view of itself as a leader in the multilateral liberal order, an understanding that is embedded in Article 21 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU). They reason that this commitment was exemplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the EU maintained their backing for the World Health Organisation (WHO) even when the United States withdrew from the organisation in May 2020 (ibid). At the same time, the nature of these interlocking crises, from pandemic to increases in energy and food prices following the war in Ukraine, has made demand for development assistance soar (ibid). Progress on the SDGs has also backtracked (ibid). In this context, scholars have begun to question whether the current ODA

system, which has largely remained unchanged since the creation of the DAC in the 1960s, is capable of addressing current global challenges (Janus et al., 2024; Elgar et al., 2023).

Klingerbiel et al. (2016: 6) group the different circles of global development actors into three distinct camps: firstly, the DAC donor group that consists of a majority of Western countries that have dominated multilateralism since the creation of the World Bank or the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); secondly, a group of new donors, including China, India and Brazil, who refrain from political dialogue or adopting DAC aid logic and instead pursue their own economic interest by tying development assistance to commercial instruments; and thirdly, private actors and philanthropists who have increased their share of international development significantly since the 1990s. This grouping of actors would imply that the DAC donor group is firmly committed to multilateralism. However, scholars such as Dworkin (2023) would argue that this is no longer the case as some European countries are reevaluating their contributions to multilateral development following the onset of the interlocking crises.

Dworkin (2023) observes a ‘growing complexity of the multilateral system’ as growing distrust has led to a convergence of the foreign and development policies of many European countries. This has also entailed an increasing scepticism towards the traditional ODA approach that multilateral channels rely on (ibid). While some European leaders are returning to more bilateral approaches, others are looking to reform current modes of multilateral development cooperation to incorporate broader strategic goals (ibid). However, Janus et al. (2024: 10) expect the profoundness of reforms to international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the World Bank and the IMF, to depend on ‘the formation and articulation of interests’ of non-OECD states. This is because OECD countries currently lack incentives for change (ibid). However, Dworkin (2023) points to the establishment of the G7's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) as a more strategic approach to multilateral development cooperation in response to China's BRI. The Global Gateway represents the European contribution to this partnership.

This proliferation of actors and coalitions implies fragmentation in the multilateral system. As previously established, this study understands fragmentation as a multiplication of uncoordinated development actors, which leads to conflicts, duplication and inefficiencies, and ultimately, the ineffectiveness of development aid. Klingerbiel et al. (2016: 5) highlight the unintended consequences of fragmentation in development cooperation. They argue that there is a transaction

cost per aid relation that impacts the administrative capacity of development agencies (ibid). Therefore, the higher the concentration of aid relations, the greater the complexity for coordination between actors. This increases possibility that ‘sectors and countries are neglected, efficiency suffers, and policy incoherencies are intensified’ (ibid).

In spite of current global trends, multilateral development cooperation is broadly accepted by the literature as the more efficient way to direct development assistance to where it is needed (Gulrajani, 2016: 20; Dworkin, 2023). Gulrajani’s (2016: 20) study found that multilateral aid channels are ‘less politicised, more demand-driven, more selective in terms of poverty criteria and a better conduit for global public goods’ in comparison to bilateral efforts (ibid). Moreover, Dworkin (2023) argues that multilateral processes have shown value during recent crises as ‘vehicles for a coordinated response’. Klingerbiel et al. (2016: 11) maintains that greater coordination and integration of development actors, including partner countries and multilateral institutions, is necessary to overcome fragmentation. Although Team Europe is seen as a response to ‘well-documented problems of fragmentation’ in the European context (Hodson and Howarth, 2022: 01), current scholarship finds that there have been very few meaningful interactions between Team Europe and multilateral organisations such as the World Bank Group or the UN (Jones and Sergejeff, 2022: 12). Although the prioritisation of multilateral solutions to global development was a fundamental commitment of Team Europe promise, Jones and Sergejeff (2022: 22) argue there needs to be more efforts to involve multilateral organisations in the Team Europe approach.

### *The EU-Tunisia development relationship*

The EU and member states have struggled to maintain consistent and coherent bilateral relationships with the small North African country since the 2011 Jasmine Revolution. Following 23 years of close ties between Europe and former dictator Ben Ali, scholars track a change in narrative from the first revisitation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) at the height of the Revolution in late 2010 and early 2011 (Badarin and Schumacher, 2020: 65). In an attempt to upgrade bilateral relations with Tunisia, the EU was already engaged in negotiations with the Ben Ali regime when the revolution commenced. Consequently, the revised ENP for the Southern Neighbourhood failed to accommodate the promises of the Arab Spring and adequately support emerging processes of democratisation and political liberalisation (ibid). A second revision of the

framework occurred in during the 2015 European migration crisis. Scholars argue that this second revisitation saw the EU effectively abandon its value-based agenda of democracy promotion in favour of transactional and short-term approaches to pursue national interests (ibid) (Dworkin, 2024) (Ezzamouri et al., 2024). Furthermore, Dworkin (2024) highlights the divisions between Italy, France, Germany and Spain in their Maghreb policies that have transpired since 2015. He attributes these divisions to national politics and their differing reactions to developments in the region (ibid). These constant policy revisitations can be seen as early attempts to incorporate the resilience-building approach of the 2016 EUGS, which Badarin and Schumacher (2020: 66) contend unsettled the ENP. In fact, it initiated an ever-evolving process of revisitation and recapitalisation of European policies towards the region.

In essence, the Team Europe approach provides a fresh *modus operandi* for a coordinated European approach in Tunisia. However, existing literature has been critical of the realisation of this approach in the country thus far. The criticism mainly focusses on the MoU signed by the Commission and President Saied, which, although branded as a Team Europe activity, does not reflect a true manifestation of the Team Europe framework. Ezzamouri et al. (2024: 4) sustain that this agreement brought ‘institutional and reputational damage’ to the EU's moral standing as a defender of human rights and international law, particularly after Saied *de facto* paused the implementation of the MoU by reimbursing a €60 million grant. Due to the transactional nature of the deal, the EU effectively funded a repressive regime with a poor human rights reputation to manage migration while utilising the Team Europe brand (Ezzamouri et al., 2024: 4). In fact, following Saied’s reimbursement, current literature argues that the MoU brought a leverage shift away from Europe in favour of the Tunisian leader (Ezzamouri et al., 2024; Pijnenburg, 2023). Moreover, Team Europe pushed the legal boundaries by ‘freestyling and sidestepping of treaty-making procedures’, which caused confusion and fissures among member states over the accountability of the branding according to Ezzamouri et al. (2024: 4). Pijnenburg (2023) also questions Team Europe’s human rights standards while expressing concern over what she calls the ‘cash for migrant’ deal.

This sub-section illustrated existing literature has focussed on the Team Europe branding of the MoU signed between the EU and Tunisia. A gap in current scholarship can therefore be identified as there is currently limited existing analysis on the practical manifestation of the framework.

### III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The previous section provided an overview of existing research and scholarly analysis of the Team Europe framework, the current state of multilateral development cooperation and the European development approach towards Tunisia. This section introduces the conceptual framework of the study which will build on the insights gained from the literature review and provide a theoretical underpinning to approach the aims of this study. This study draws upon new intergovernmentalism to provide a theoretical understanding of the relationships between European development actors within Team Europe.

#### *New intergovernmentalism*

From network theory (Elgström, 2017) to neo-Gramscianism analyses (Hurt, 2003), a wide range of theoretical frameworks that study European integration are utilised by scholars to theorise EU development policy. However, as established in Section II, one of the most common approaches to analyse more recent developments in this policy area is new intergovernmentalism. Developed by Bickerton et al. (2015), new intergovernmentalism observes integration in a post-Maastricht period occurring ‘in the absence of supranationalism’, whereby institutions are created to accommodate the powers and activities of member states.

This study will draw upon three salient hypotheses offered by this conceptual framework that are helpful to explain the decentralised approach offered by Team Europe. Firstly, the view that EU institutions are no longer hard-wired to increase levels of integration. This perspective suggests that institutions like the European Commission will not necessarily support deeper integration of European development policy. Secondly, the notion that member states have a preference for coordination over delegation, especially in areas relating to foreign policy. This can be traced to the institutionalised parallel competencies outlined in the EU Treaties and the notion that coordination is seen as a marker of a member state’s ambition in a particular policy area (Hodson and Howarth, 2023). Thirdly, the notion that deliberation and consensus-making in European decision-making has become an end rather than a mean. This hands-on approach by member states is particularly evident given the role of the Council of the EU in the Team Europe context.

This approach moves beyond other intergovernmentalist understandings of European development policy that pay little attention to this topic area. For example, Moravcsik's (1998: 148) liberal intergovernmentalism argues that member states would only be open to supranational delegation in development policy where national commercial interests overlap, while European institutions maintain strong preferences for further EU integration (ibid). Accordingly, liberal intergovernmentalists treat development policy only as a side expenditure.

Therefore, this study will follow Hodson and Howarth (2023) by adopting new intergovernmentalism as salient conceptual framework to theorise the Team Europe's decentralised approach to development policy.



## IV. METHODOLOGY

Having examined relevant existing literature and outlined the conceptual framework used to generate the hypotheses, this section will address the study's methodological approach. This study was designed to provide a qualitative analysis of the Team Europe approach by applying empirical data to the Wieser Report's 'requirements for a system that deliver' which is used as an analytical framework.

### *Data Collection*

The data collected for this study is derived from 12 semi-structured elite and expert interviews as well as an analysis of accessible information from official documents, press releases and the Team Europe Initiatives and Joint Programming Tracker (EU, 2024).

The interviews were conducted with varying Team Europe stakeholders between February and April 2024. This includes current and former officials from institutions participating in Team Europe, including the European Commission, the EIB, the European External Action Service (EEAS), and European Development Finance Institutions (EDFI), officials from multilateral organisations, including the UN and the World Bank Group, and other industry experts, including journalists and academics. All interviews were conducted online. This study considers both on-record and off-record interviews to ensure the participation of higher-profile officials. Interviews 1-8 provided their full consent to utilise the data they provided and thus were held on-record. However, interviews 9 –12 were held off record in line with the preference of the interviewees. Assurances of anonymity encouraged the interviewees to show greater sincerity when answering the questions on-record. An anonymised record of the date of the interviews and agreed job descriptions of the interviewees can be found in Appendix 1.<sup>1</sup>

The semi-structured interview format allows for a combination of structured questions based on the three specific aims of this research and unstructured questions tailored to the interviewee. This permitted a deeper exploration of the personal experience and expertise of the interviewee

---

<sup>1</sup> Anonymised transcripts for on-record interviews only are available upon request.

concerning Team Europe, the EU development policy more broadly and its application to the Southern Neighbourhood. This flexibility allowed for greater insights into the interviewee's experience, producing more valid data (Halperin and Heath, 2020: 313). Furthermore, the interview data is triangulated with data sourced from the Team Europe Initiatives and Joint Programming Tracker and official policy documents. Data triangulation increases reliability and allows for identifying agreements or discrepancies (ibid: 175).

### *Analytical framework*

In order to comprehensively analyse the effectiveness of the Team Europe approach in reducing fragmentation and improving development outcomes, this study repurposes the Wieser report's 'requirements for a system that delivers' as an analytical framework. The Wieser Report was produced by the High-Level Group of Wise Persons, composed of eight independent experts and chaired by Thomas Wieser, former chairman of the Eurogroup Working Group. The Council of the EU commissioned the Group to investigate discrepancies within the European financial architecture for development. The Report outlined five requirements for an effective European financial architecture for development in order to set standards to base their proposals on (High-Level Group of Wise Persons, 2019: 12).

The first requirement is development impact. The report outlines that an effective European financial architecture for development must be based on the long-term effects of interventions, in pursuit of the SDGs and the UN 2030 Agenda. There is also a specific emphasis on recipient country ownership and the necessity for continuous dialogue with partner countries and relevant stakeholders. Secondly, policy coherence is deemed a necessary requirement, indicating that European values and priorities should be transmitted through establishing and implementing global development objectives and strategies. This requires the EU to be a global leader with a 'clear yet pluralist voice' (ibid). A third requirement is an institutional design that optimises European capacity to mobilise resources to support its development agenda, avoiding overlaps and fragmentation. An ideal system, therefore, allows access to the complete set of financial instruments to tailor financial support to issues at stake and crowding in private investment. Fourthly, effective coordination through an appropriate governance framework is necessary to amplify Europe's global and multilateral system influence. Lastly, the report considers that

European actors must have access to technical expertise in development, specifically in risk management.

This study, therefore, utilises this framework to formulate a structured understanding of the effectiveness of the current European development system with the Team Europe approach. The empirical data derived from the interviews was coded to the specific requirements outlined. This study then assesses the Team Europe's progress using the Report's guidelines for an optimal development system. The advantage of using the Wieser Report's criteria is that it provides an established framework that is expert-endorsed and specific to the context of European development policy. Therefore, it allows this study to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the EU's decision to pursue the Team Europe approach as a vehicle for its international development policy.

### *Potential limitations of the methodological approach*

Although efforts were made to gather a wide range of expert perspectives, a potential limitation of this methodology is interviewee bias. Given the sample of interviewees closely linked to European and multilateral development processes, their responses may prove subjective and influenced by their personal and institutional biases. This study uses data triangulation from multiple sources to validate interviewee perspectives and thus minimise this limitation.

There are also limitations to using the Wieser Report's criteria as an analytical framework. Firstly, the Wieser report was published in 2019, before global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Therefore, this framework was conceptualised without accounting for the nuanced factors and emerging geopolitical trends that have impacted international development over the past five years. This could impact the applicability and relevance of the requirements. Moreover, the scope of the Wieser Report is limited to the European financial architecture for development and thus does not embed the linkage with multilateral development cooperation. Although considering these limitations is necessary, applying the Wieser Report criteria provides a valid analytical framework for the data collected from the interviews.

## V. ANALYSIS

With the methodological groundwork laid out, this section will delve into the analysis and evaluation of the qualitative data collected from the interviews and official documents following the research question and three aims of this study.

### *Application of the Wieser Report criteria to Team Europe*

The Team Europe framework was designed to respond to concerns highlighted by the Wieser Report that suggested the lack of strategic coordination between EU development actors was detrimental to the effectiveness of their development activity. By applying the same criteria for an effective European development system utilised by the Report, this study can derive a sense of the effectiveness of the Team Europe approach.

Firstly, the Wieser Report emphasised that the definitive aim of mobilising development resources is to achieve a noticeable and lasting development impact, stressing ownership of recipient countries as a necessary component. Determining the precise development impact of the Team Europe approach remains challenging, particularly given the wide variation of thematic and geographic scopes of different TEIs and JPs. However, interviewees suggest the Team Europe approach has revealed itself as an extensive repackaging exercise of ongoing and pipeline European development projects with Team Europe branding, particularly in the Tunisian case. This reflects existing criticism in the literature that considers Team Europe as a more branded representation of the status quo. A pitfall highlighted by an interviewee was that the EU's communication strategy within the context of increasingly geopolitical discourse tends to anticipate development impact before results materialise (interview 5). Additionally, recipient-country ownership remains a concern (interviews 1 and 8). Team Europe, as an intra-donor coordination effort, engages in policy dialogues with partner countries and stakeholders to announce new TEIs or JPs (interviews 3 and 4). These are structured interchanges with concrete actions and present the opportunity for recipients to express views (ibid). However, these policy dialogues have yet to embody the desired collaborative and strategy-driven process that engages local and regional partners throughout the policy formulation and implementation processes

(interview 8). The approach remains far too Eurocentric and inward-looking, lacking the demand-driven attitude to deliver concrete development impact in partner countries.

With regard to policy coherence, this study offers a more encouraging analysis. As previously mentioned, this study finds that Team Europe has so far entailed repackaging development projects under the Team Europe umbrella. This process has allowed for a European-wide mapping exercise to occur, which has uncovered the wide variety of present and future European development projects. With this improved internal visibility and communication, Team Europe offers a platform for complementarity and consistency within European development policy (interview 3). A platform of this nature unlocks opportunities for greater acknowledgement of priorities between member states to ensure development projects are aligned with their common strategic objectives (interview 2). Furthermore, the design of Team Europe implies a more strategic pooling of resources between Team Europe actors. This enhances European leverage and bargaining power because collective strength provides better conditions in project agreements and increased access to co-funding opportunities (interview 2). Notably, the opt-in nature of TEIs has increased the inclusivity between European development actors and member states, as every member state, including smaller member states with shorter histories as donors, have been involved in at least one TEI at the thematic level or at the country or regional level (EU, 2024). Also, there is a sense that the approach has generated greater interest from DFIs, which has brought greater access to financial resources and instruments (interview 4). This demonstrates an improved harmonisation and alignment across the 27 member states and their DFIs since the emergence of the Team Europe approach and, consequently, greater policy coherence as a coordinated European approach.

As a third criterion of the Wieser Report, an effective European development system must have the right institutional design that optimises the capacity of European development actors and avoids overlaps and fragmentation. This benchmark implies greater integration, as the Report recommended rationalising European development policy around a singular development bank. Concerning Team Europe, interviewees reasoned that the design was not optimal given its lack of formal institutionalisation (interviews 1, 5 and 8). As recent efforts have concentrated on mainstreaming the Team Europe brand (interviews 1, 4 and 8), no substantial structural changes or improvements to the institutional design of European development policy have occurred. This is mainly due to the lack of political appetite for revisiting the EU treaties (interview 1). One

interviewee took a more critical view, suggesting Team Europe represented a ‘band-aid for a dysfunctional treaty that is desperately in need of reform’ (ibid). The contradiction highlighted in the interview data suggested that member state foreign and development ministries are disincentivised from negotiating treaty reforms to further integrate of European policy because it would imply a loss of their ministerial sovereignty (ibid). There were also suggestions that the branding exercise, with its boosted visibility, could open the door to the possibility of further integration and a more unified European development policy (interviews 1 and 8). However, until the political opportunity for further integration arises, the development processes between member states and the institutions remain relatively unchanged with the emergence of Team Europe.

Moreover, the theme of increased coordination between European development actors is central to the approach. The Wieser Report stipulates that effective coordination should be achieved with a suitable governance framework that increases European influence in the global development financing system with a common strategy that includes as many European development actors as possible. It also calls for partnerships with multilateral financial institutions to ensure that European actors are integrated with the global system. There was consensus among interviewees that, although sufficient integration has not occurred, Team Europe has improved coordination between European development actors since its conception, including between the EIB and EBRD (interviews 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8). Given the lack of institutionalisation and thus lack of obligation to coordinate, Team Europe relies on development actors opting into the framework to create multi-stakeholder coalitions. Therefore, the approach cannot guarantee reductions in fragmentation and overlap. However, one interviewee finds there is now an acknowledgement between Team Europe actors that the Team Europe framework is an opportunity to showcase the EU as a collective bloc (interview 3). Within this logic, there was also agreement with the new intergovernmentalist view that Team Europe represented a coordination without delegation approach (interviews 1, 4 and 8). The Commission was highlighted as the key coordinator of the approach (interviews 1, 2, 4 and 8). However, this is not necessarily always the case, as member states have taken the initiative on TEIs or JPs (interview 4). For example, Italy, France, Spain and Germany initiated the regional TEI on ‘Jobs through Trade and Investment in the Southern Neighbourhood’ during a Council of the EU development meeting (ibid). It was also noted that the Team Europe approach has successfully bridged all sides of the political spectrum (ibid). This reduction in internal politicisation implies better ground for coordination and cooperation.

Lastly, technical expertise in development and experience on the ground in partner countries are the concluding requirements stressed by the Wieser Report. Undoubtedly, more coordination between European development actors brings together the entire European development toolbox, including financial and technical resources (interview 3). By design, Team Europe increases development actors' access to the European development toolbox, which can scale up European development investments. Team Europe actors can, therefore, benefit from the widespread network offered by fellow actors. In particular, EU delegations can offer invaluable networks of local technical experts in partner countries (interview 4). Additionally, multilateral organisations can act as important knowledge partners for TEIs and JPs as there is significant complementarity between the Global Gateway and UN missions, particularly regarding the SDG agenda (interviews 2, 6, and 7). Although the UN and World Bank advise and provide technical expertise to TEIs, there is room to improve these partnerships. Therefore, the Team Europe approach could increase its access to technical expertise by opening up to non-European partners.

Overall, this analytical framework sheds new light on the question of effectiveness of the Team Europe approach. Although policy coherence and the visibility of coordination between European development actors have improved since the emergence of the Team Europe brand, this study contends that overall effectiveness can only be considered marginal. With a lack of integration, Team Europe's reliance on development actors to opt-in to the framework does not guarantee reducing fragmentation and overlap in European development policy. The institutional design and its Eurocentric approach to ownership remain clear pitfalls of the approach.

### *Team Europe and Multilateralism*

Having established the marginal effectiveness of the Team Europe approach in bridging fragmentation in the European context, this section will draw upon this analysis and apply it to evaluate Europe's role in the multilateral setting.

The transnational impact of the COVID-19 pandemic brought widespread acknowledgement that multilateral solutions are required and should be enhanced to resist future global crises. Paradoxically, multilateral institutions have become stuck, given the increasing geopoliticisation and a return to more realist approaches to national foreign policies (interview 8). As the literature

indicates, the EU sees itself as a global leader and a staunch promoter of multilateral solutions. In this light, some interviewees discussed the growing realisation between European development actors that multilateral organisations remain stuck and do not reflect the current geopolitical climate, with outdated methodologies unchanged since the Second World War (interviews 1 and 8). This realisation between European countries has enhanced the impetus for reforms in the multilateral system, particularly of IFIs. European countries are backing a capital increase and an operational revamp of IFIs to make them more inclusive. However, solutions are not imminent (interview 8). In the meantime, Team Europe, as a vehicle of the Global Gateway within the G7's PGII, has demonstrated a shift towards strategic multilateralism (interviews 1 and 5).

This sense of multilateral impasse has also forced Europe to focus on its own strategic route. Therefore, this notion outlines an inherent implication that, in reducing fragmentation within the European context, the EU and its member states could facilitate multilateral development cooperation through a unified European development voice (interviews 1 and 2). However, one interviewee argued that Team Europe represents only a 'second best' alternative to the multilateral system for the EU and member states (interview 8). IFIs, such as the World Bank, offer Team Europe actors significant co-financing opportunities, allowing for greater risk mitigation and wider pooling of financial and knowledge resources beyond Team Europe. At the same time, interviewees stressed that reducing internal fragmentation is critical for the EU to avoid marginalisation in the global system. It should also be emphasised that the Team Europe framework offers the possibility of a coordinated European development policy, not a unified one.

These conflicting notions place Team Europe at a decision point in its timeline when contextualised. Team Europe emerged at the start of the debate on the EU's MFF for 2021 to 2027. Data from the interviews indicates that Team Europe has involved a widespread mapping exercise of Team Europe actor activities and subsequent project repackaging under the Team Europe brand. The mid-term review of the MFF could signify the conclusion of this internal mapping exercise and opens opportunities for Team Europe to widen its Eurocentric scope and embrace multilateral partnerships. Interviewees showed optimism in this regard.

This study, therefore, finds that Team Europe emerges in an era where multilateralism is in a crisis. Although Team Europe must first navigate its own internal complexities, failure to open up to



multilateral organisations will undermine the multi-stakeholder approach embedded in Team Europe's mandate and consequently weaken the effectiveness of the approach.

### *Team Europe within Multilateral Cooperation in Tunisia and the Southern Neighbourhood*

As established in the literature review, the Team Europe brand in Tunisia is primarily analysed through the MoU between the EU and Tunisia. However, interviewees stipulated it is unhelpful to analyse Team Europe activity through the MoU as it is *de jure* only an agreement between the EU and Tunisia, omitting other Team Europe actors. Instead, this study focussed on qualitative data on other Team Europe activities, particularly TEIs, relevant to Tunisia.

Team Europe actors boast the largest ODA contributions in the region, accounting for 37% of total disbursements in 2021, followed by Turkey at 22% (EU, 2022). At the same time, Team Europe branded activity in Tunisia has so far only consisted of two country-level TEIs, focused on investments and water management, a regional TEI on jobs and trade and JP established in 2016 involving 11 member states, the EIB, and the United Kingdom (EU, 2024).

**Table 1: Geographical spread of TEIs in 2024**

Country-Level TEIs by Region			Regional TEIs by Region	
Region	Number	(%) Share of total country TEIs	Number	(%) Share of total regional TEIs
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	69	52.7%	17	53.1%
<b>Latin America and the Caribbean</b>	26	19.9%	6	18.8%
<b>Middle East, Asia and Pacific</b>	17	13%	6	18.8%
<b>Eastern Neighbourhood</b>	8	6.1%	2	6.3%
<b>Southern Neighbourhood</b>	11	8.4%	1	3.1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	132	100%	32	100%

**Data source: Team Europe Initiatives and Joint Programming Tracker (consulted 26 April 2024).**

As shown in Table 1, only 8.4% of country-level TEIs and 3.1% of regional TEIs operate in the Southern Neighbourhood. At country-level, Tunisia benefits from just two out of the 11 TEIs in the region (EU, 2024). In comparison, sub-Saharan Africa, which represents a much larger geographic area and more populous region, has the largest share of 52.7% of total country-level TEIs and 53.1% of total regional initiatives. As a matter of fact, the table indicates that generally Europe's Neighbourhood is one of the least prioritised regions in terms of volume of TEIs, particularly with regional TEIs. Although a rational explanation would point to differences in demand for development assistance between the regions, this study has already established that Team Europe is primarily not a demand-driven approach. In fact, the Wieser Report explicitly draws attention to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), alongside sub-Saharan Africa, as

an affected area with the most pressing needs and thus the highest demand for assistance (High-Level Group of Wise Persons, 2019: 12).

Interviewees offered two main internal explanations to explain this TEI disparity in Tunisia and the region. Firstly, the levels of politicisation of European external action are much higher in the Southern Neighbourhood than in other regions across the globe (interviews 4 and 8). For Tunisia, the policy area of migration is driven by divergent national interests and domestic political pressures (interviews 1, 4 and 8). Although a priority policy area for many southern European countries, the politicisation of the European migration debate has made it challenging to forge consensus for other development priorities. This fragmentation, therefore, rescinds the coordinative spirit of the Team Europe approach. Consequently, none of the 14 TEIs with a thematic focus on migration are situated in Tunisia or the Southern Neighbourhood region (EU, 2024; interview 4).

A second explanation is the internal lack of congruence between the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA). As the primary coordinator of the Team Europe approach, discrepancies within the Commission will naturally impact the implementation of the approach. Interviewees view DG INTPA as the vital impulse for Team Europe from within the Commission (interviews 1, 2, 4 and 8). This policy department is mandated to formulate the EU's international partnerships and development policy, providing the natural home for the Team Europe approach. However, DG NEAR, whose mandate focuses on implementing assistance actions in both the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhoods, has yet to embrace a comparable impulse of the Team Europe approach, as reflected in Table 1 (interviews 4 and 8). This explanation is intertwined with the high levels of politicisation in the region, which consequently affects the department's envelope.

On a multilateral level, interviewees pointed out that a critical component of Team Europe's activity in Tunisia and the Southern Neighbourhood region is the Union of the Mediterranean (UfM) as a platform for technical and policy dialogue. The UfM is an intergovernmental organisation of 43 member states that provides a forum for multilateral cooperation in the Mediterranean region through ministerial or other governmental representative meetings. The EU provides 50% of the funding for the UfM's secretariat, validating European commitment to

regional development cooperation (EEAS, 2023). Interviewees highlight this multilateral forum as the fundamental channel for Team Europe to communicate both country level and regional TEIs to recipient countries (interviews 3, 4 and 8). This cooperative attitude of Team Europe within the UfM forum would suggest Team Europe as a promoter for multilateral development in the region. In fact, the UfM secretariat announced a new Euro-Mediterranean development agency coordination initiative in April 2024, aiming to develop a formalised voluntary network of development actors from across the region (UfM Secretariat, 2024). The UfM *communiqué* explicitly mentions Team Europe as the inspiration for creating this initiative (ibid). This announcement reveals a coordination contagion effect, indicating the Team Europe brand as an indirect enhancer for multilateral cooperation in the region.

Nevertheless, multilateral development cooperation in Tunisia and the Southern Neighbourhood predominantly adheres to European leadership and direction. Although an effective forum, Team Europe uses the UfM to announce rather than formulate its initiatives to its southern Mediterranean partners, further reflecting the absence of a demand-driven methodology. As mentioned, Team Europe also dominates the list of ODA flows to the region, which are primarily channelled bilaterally. Out of the €9.9 billion of Team Europe's total ODA contributions to the Southern Neighbourhood, only €447 million accounted for Team Europe's multilateral core contributions to the UN and the World Bank Group, with the remaining €9.4 billion in bilateral ODA with partner countries in the region (EU, 2022). Of these bilateral funds, €1.6 billion was implemented through multilateral institutions, mainly through the UN (ibid). These statistics indicate the significant gap between bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the region. It can therefore be determined that Team Europe has only marginally enhanced multilateral development cooperation in Tunisia and the region.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis endeavoured to shed new light on the Team Europe approach in enhancing multilateral development cooperation in Tunisia. Due to the regional dimensions of TEIs, this research also considered Team Europe's broader activity in the Southern Neighbourhood in the analysis. Three sub-aims were considered to facilitate answering the research question. Firstly, to understand whether Team Europe increases the capacity of the EU, its member states and relevant development agencies, the EIB and the EBRD to work together to address global challenges effectively. Secondly, to investigate the extent of Team Europe's promotion of multilateralism. Thirdly, to explore the application of the Team Europe framework in the Southern Neighbourhood, with a specific focus on Tunisia. Drawing upon hypotheses offered by a new intergovernmentalist conceptual framework, this study analysed qualitative data derived from 12 elite interviews and relevant official documents to fill the gap identified in the existing literature.

This study repurposed the Wieser Report's 'requirements for a system that delivers' as an analytical framework to generate a sense of the effectiveness of Team Europe in reducing the fragmentation of European development policy. By applying the interview data to the framework, this study concludes that the efficacy of the Team Europe framework in increasing the coordination and effectiveness of European development policy can only be considered marginal. By conferring with the Report's criteria, this study contends that Team Europe remains overly Eurocentric and inward-looking regarding policy formulation and partner ownership. The absence of a demand-driven approach negatively impacts Team Europe's development impact. Also, this Eurocentrism reduces access to non-European technical expertise from potential local or multilateral knowledge partners. The lack of integration also conveys a system that does not compel Team Europe actors to coordinate. This unchanged institutional design implies the continuation of an unsustainable status quo of fragmented development actors.

However, positive light can be shed on two of the Wieser Report's criteria. Policy coherence has been improved given the greater involvement of actors and harmonisation of Team Europe actor priorities. Moreover, this study found that Team Europe has enriched coordination between European development actors despite the lack of integration. Interview data suggested a realisation between development actors that the Team Europe framework provides an opportunity to

showcase Europe as a collective bloc. Consequently, Team Europe offers a less politicised forum and better ground for cooperation and collaboration than the previous European development policies.

Moreover, this study investigated Team Europe within multilateral development cooperation. It was established that the Team Europe approach emerges in an increasingly geopolitical world order, whereby the proliferation of non-DAC development actors puts pressure on the current multilateral system. Despite the increased demand for multilateral solutions which stems from existing interlocking crises, multilateral institutions are stuck due to increasingly strategic approaches to development cooperation. The emergence of the Global Gateway strategy and the G7's PGII in response to China's BRI validates this notion. Although the Council conclusions embed the promotion of multilateralism in the Team Europe mandate, this study finds that Team Europe has primarily acted as a visibility strategy to ensure that Europe is not marginalised in the global system.

This research also considered Team Europe activity in Tunisia and the Southern Neighbourhood. The findings illustrate that the region was the least prioritised by Team Europe in terms of the volume of TEIs, despite being one of the regions identified by the Wieser Report with the most pressing needs and highest demand for development assistance. Interviewees explained this by the high levels of politicisation over the region within European politics, particularly regarding the migration debate in the Tunisian case. This study also identified the lack of congruence between DG NEAR and DG INTPA as another critical factor. The interview data suggested that DG NEAR has not exhibited the same level of Team Europe impulse as DG INTPA. As a consequence, DG NEAR's Team Europe envelope is comparatively reduced. This investigation also finds that, although the UfM has provided a forum that promotes multilateral cooperation in the region, multilateral channels represent only a marginal proportion of Team Europe's ODA contributions to the region.

## **VII. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The policy implications of this study are consequential. The pitfalls identified underscore that the Team Europe approach in its current form must represent a means to an end. This research recommends the following policy proposals for the European Commission to increase the effectiveness of the Team Europe framework, which in turn, would enhance multilateral cooperation in the Southern Neighbourhood:

### **1. Establish an independent oversight committee**

Establishing an independent oversight committee that oversees and reports on Team Europe activities will provide greater scrutiny and accountability for using Team Europe branding. Independent international development experts and former politicians should be appointed to include the necessary technical and political expertise required to analyse the implementation of development projects that utilise the Team Europe brand. The presence of an institutionalised committee provides a greater incentive for Team Europe actors to maximise their development impact. In addition, committee reports and regular bulletin updates on Team Europe activities would increase transparency for Team Europe actors, further mitigating fragmentation and overlap.

### **2. Embrace partnerships with multilateral institutions**

This study recommends that Team Europe must embrace partnerships with multilateral institutions. By strengthening these partnerships, Team Europe actors can benefit from a more comprehensive pooling of knowledge and financial resources beyond the capacities of Team Europe actors. This multi-stakeholder approach will provide further opportunities to scale up the development impact and reach of TEIs and JPs. Increasing these partnerships will also increase the credibility of the self-prescribed notion of Europe as a promoter of the multilateral system and the SDG agenda. Opening to multilateral partners, would therefore, address concerns of Eurocentrism.

### **3. Prioritise the Team Europe approach within DG NEAR**

DG NEAR should amplify its promotion of the Team Europe framework. With increased proactive leadership from DG NEAR, the Team Europe approach would provide greater scope for depoliticised European development cooperation for the Southern Neighbourhood. By increasing the volume of TEIs and JPs in the region, European development actors can accelerate cooperation and development progress. This improved cooperation creates better ground to address more politicised issues such as migration management.



## VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Badarin, E. and Schumacher, T. (2020). *The EU, resilience and the southern neighbourhood after the Arab uprisings*. Projecting resilience across the Mediterranean, pp.63-86.

Bickerton, C. J., Hodson, D., & Puetter, U. (2015). *The New Intergovernmentalism: European Integration in the Post-Maastricht Era*. Journal of Common Market Studies. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198703617.003.0001>

Burni, A., Erforth, B., Friesen, I., et al. (2022). *Who Called Team Europe? The European Union's Development Policy Response During the First Wave of COVID-19*. European Journal of Development Research, 34(2), 524–539. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-021-00428-7>

Capoccia, G. (2016). *When Do Institutions Bite? Historical Institutionalism and the Politics of Institutional Change*. Comparative Political Studies, 49(8), 1095–1127. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414015626449>

Council of the European Union. (2016). *Stepping up Joint Programming - Council conclusions (12 May 2016)* [PDF]. Retrieved from <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8831-2016-INIT/en/pdf> [Accessed: April 3, 2024].

Council of the European Union. (2020). *Council conclusions on Team Europe Global Response to COVID-19* [Press release]. European Council. Retrieved from <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44347/team-europe-ccs-200608.pdf> [Accessed 15 March 2024].

Council of the European Union. (2023). *The Council approves conclusions on the Team Europe approach* [Press release]. European Council. Retrieved from

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/11/21/the-council-approves-conclusions-on-the-team-europe-approach/> [Accessed 15 March 2024].

Dworkin, A. (2023). *Multilateral development in flux: Strengthening European Cooperation with the global south*. European Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved from <https://ecfr.eu/publication/multilateral-development-in-flux-strengthening-european-cooperation-with-the-global-south/> [Accessed 15 March 2024].

Dworkin, A. (2024). *The Maghreb Maze: Harmonising Divergent European Policies in North Africa*. European Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved from <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-maghreb-maze-harmonising-divergent-european-policies-in-north-africa/> [Accessed 15 March 2024].

Elgar, K., Ahmad, Y., Bejraoui, A., Carey, E., De Paepe, G., & Choudhury, M. (2023). *Development cooperation and the provision of global public goods (OECD Development Cooperation Working Papers No. 111)*. OECD Publishing. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1787/aff8cba9-en>

Elgström, O. (2017). *Norm advocacy networks: Nordic and like-minded countries in EU gender and development policy*. Cooperation and Conflict, 52(2), 224–240. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716652429>

European Commission. (2023a). *Press statement by President von der Leyen, Italian Prime Minister Meloni, Dutch Prime Minister Rutte [Press release]*. European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. Retrieved from [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/press-statement-president-von-der-leyen-italian-prime-minister-meloni-dutch-prime-minister-rutte-and-2023-06-11\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/press-statement-president-von-der-leyen-italian-prime-minister-meloni-dutch-prime-minister-rutte-and-2023-06-11_en) [Accessed 14 March 2024].

European Commission. (2023b). *Speech by President von der Leyen at the International Conference on Development and Migration [Speech transcript]*. European Commission. Retrieved

from [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech\\_23\\_3981](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_3981) [Accessed: April 3, 2024].

European External Action Service (EEAS). (2016). *The European Union Global Strategy (EUGS)* [PDF]. Available at: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs\\_review\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf) [Accessed: April 3, 2024].

European External Action Service (EEAS). (2023). *Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and EU*. Retrieved from [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/union-mediterranean-ufm-and-eu\\_en#51499](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/union-mediterranean-ufm-and-eu_en#51499) [Accessed: April 3, 2024].

European Union (EU). (2009). *Treaty on the functioning of the European Union*. Retrieved from <https://eurlex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12008E&from=EN>

European Union (EU). (2022). *Team Europe's Official Development Assistance to Neighbourhood South - 2021* [PDF]. Retrieved from <https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/media/252309/download/a48565c6-073c-49c2-acdc-8de1e577fc97>

European Union (EU). (2024). *Capacity4Dev: Team Europe Initiatives and Joint Programming Tracker* [Web page]. Retrieved from [https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/resources/team-europe-tracker\\_en](https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/resources/team-europe-tracker_en)

Ezzamouri, A., Powers, C., & Cohen-Hadria, E. (2024). *Charting the Course: European Perspectives on EU-Tunisia Relations*. Istituto Affari Internazionali. Retrieved from <https://www.iai.it/it/pubblicazioni/charting-course-european-perspectives-eu-tunisia-relations>

Fox, B. (2023). *The brief: The magical mystery of Team Europe*. Euractiv. Retrieved from <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-institutions/opinion/the-brief-the-magical-mystery-of-team-europe/>

Gavas, M. (2021). *The Battle of the Banks? "Status Quo Plus" Emerges as the Winner*. Centre for Global Development Briefing.

Gulrajani, N. (2016). *Bilateral versus multilateral aid channels: Strategic choices for donors*. ODI. Retrieved from <https://cdn-odi-production.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/10492.pdf>

Halperin, S., & Heath, O. (2020). *Political Research - Methods and Practical Skills*. Oxford University Press.

Hermansen, A. (2015). *Policy Window Entrepreneurship: The Backstage of the World's Largest REDD+ Initiative*. *Environmental Politics*, 24(6), 932–950. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2015.1063887>

High-Level Group of Wise Persons. (2019). *Europe in the world: The future of the European financial architecture for development*. Brussels: Council of the European Union. Retrieved from [https://www.consilium.europa.eu//media/40967/efad-report\\_final.pdf?utm\\_source=dsms-auto&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=Report%20by%20the%20Wise%20Persons%27%20Group](https://www.consilium.europa.eu//media/40967/efad-report_final.pdf?utm_source=dsms-auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Report%20by%20the%20Wise%20Persons%27%20Group)

Hodson, D. and Howarth, D. (2023). *From the Wieser report to team Europe: explaining the 'battle of the banks' in development finance*. *Journal of European Public Policy*, pp.1-25.

Hurt, S.R. (2003). *Co-operation and coercion? The Cotonou Agreement between the European Union and ACP states and the end of the Lomé Convention*. *Third World Quarterly*, 24(1), 161–161. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1080/713701373>

Janus, H., Keijzer, N., & Koch, S. (2024). *Tomorrow's Global Development Landscape: Mapping Trends and Reform Dynamics*. German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS). Retrieved from [https://www.idos-research.de/uploads/media/PB\\_4.2024.pdf](https://www.idos-research.de/uploads/media/PB_4.2024.pdf)

Jones, A. and Teevan, C. (2021). *Team Europe: Up to the challenge*. ECDPM Briefs, (128).

Jones, A., and Sergejef, K. (2022). *Half-time analysis: How is Team Europe doing?*. ECDPM - The Centre of Africa-Europe Relations. Retrieved from <https://ecdpm.org/application/files/3916/6383/1497/Half-time-analysis-How-Team-Europe-doing-ECDPM-briefing-note-2022-bn-149.pdf>

Keijzer, N., Burni, A., Erforth, B. and Friesen, I. (2021). *The rise of the Team Europe approach in EU development cooperation: assessing a moving target* (No. 22/2021). Discussion Paper.

Klingebiel, S., Mahn, T. and Negre, M. (2016). *Fragmentation: A key concept for development cooperation* (pp. 1-18). Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Koch, S. Keijzer, N. and Friesen, I. (2024). *COVID-19 as a critical juncture for EU development policy? Assessing the introduction and evolution of “Team Europe.”* Journal of European Integration. [Online] 1–21.

Mintrom, M. (1997). *Policy Entrepreneurs and the Diffusion of Innovation*. American Journal of Political Science, 41(3), 738–770. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111674>

Moravcsik, A. (1998). *The choice for Europe: Social purpose and state power from Messina to Maastricht*. Cornell University Press.

Pamment, J. (2016). *Towards a New Conditionality? The Convergence of International Development, Nation Brands and Soft Power in the British National Security Strategy*. Journal of International Relations and Development. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-016-0074-9>.

Pijnenburg, A. (2023). *Team Europe’s Deal: What’s Wrong with the EU-Tunisia Migration Agreement?* Verfassungsblog. Retrieved from <https://verfassungsblog.de/team-europes-deal/>

Pleeck, S., & Gavas, M. (2023). *Team Europe Initiatives: Three Years On*. Centre for Global Development. Retrieved from <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/team-europe-initiatives-three-years>

Rodríguez Prieto, S. (2024). *Global Gateway's Moment of Truth*. European Democracy Hub. Retrieved from <https://europeandemocracyhub.epd.eu/global-gateways-moment-of-truth/>

UfM Secretariat (2024). *UFM paves way for first-ever Euro-Mediterranean Development Agency coordination initiative*. Union for the Mediterranean. Retrieved from <https://ufmsecretariat.org/ufm-paves-way-for-first-ever-euro-mediterranean-development-agency-coordination-initiative/>

Vasques, E. (2024). *EU-Tunisia Memorandum of Understanding: State of play*. Euractiv. Retrieved from <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/eu-tunisia-memorandum-of-understanding-state-of-play/>

Wilkins, K.G. (2018). *The business of bilateral branding. Communicating National Image through Development and Diplomacy*. *The Politics of Foreign Aid*, pp.51-71.

## IX. APPENDIX

### Appendix I: Interview Record

<b>Interview Number</b>	<b>Role/Organisation</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>1</b>	Former Director General at DG Communication and DG Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection	26/02/2024
<b>2</b>	Former Director General at DG International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO)	6/03/2024
<b>3</b>	Team Europe Specialist at European Development Finance Institutions (EDFI)	1/03/2024
<b>4</b>	Official at DG NEAR	29/04/2024
<b>5</b>	Senior Reporter at Devex	27/02/2024
<b>6</b>	Official at the United Nations	15/04/2024
<b>7</b>	Official at the United Nations	15/04/2024
<b>8</b>	Research Associate at Centre for Global Development (CGD)	29/04/2024
<b>9</b>	Official at the World Bank Group	12/03/2024
<b>10</b>	Fellow at European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)	8/04/2024
<b>11</b>	Official at the European External Action Service (EEAS)	12/04/2024
<b>12</b>	Former Official at the EIB	4/03/2024