



Helping to build Haiti's long-term future

Published: 30 March 2010

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/foreign-affairs/helping-build-haitis-long-term-future-analysis-395986>

The EU must significantly improve upon its "confused" performance in helping Haiti to recover from January's earthquake if it is "to live up to its claim to be strong in fostering long-term state-building" and successfully "rise to this early test for its post-Lisbon structures," writes **Julia Schünemann, a researcher at FRIDE**, a Madrid-based think-tank, ahead of an international donors' conference for the shattered country to be held in New York tomorrow (31 March).

The following op-ed was sent exclusively to EurActiv ahead of an international donors' conference for Haiti's recovery and reconstruction to take place in New York on 31 March.

"In light of the International Donors' Conference on Haiti to be held in New York on 31 March, the EU must significantly improve its performance in the earthquake-stricken country.

The theme for the conference is 'Towards a new future for Haiti'. What should be 'new' is the approach to the structural transformation of the local political economy to foster sustainable development and a dignified future for the Haitian people. If the way cannot be paved for this in New York, the verdict of failure would apply to both the Haitian state and the international community. And once more the Haitian people would pay the price. The EU must play its full role in avoiding such failure.

The devastating earthquake on 12 January – at once a natural disaster and one caused by mankind – killed more than 220,000 people and left hundreds of thousands more injured and homeless. Three million people have been directly affected, and the country's infrastructure, institutions and economy are crippled.

The magnitude of destruction brutally exposed Haiti's extreme structural vulnerability. The earthquake erased a central state lacking in legitimacy, which was already unable to provide basic social services and protection to its population, the vast majority of whom suffer abject living conditions. Over the years, billions of dollars in aid did not make a significant difference in making the Haitian state and society more resilient.

The Donors' Conference aims to mobilise international support for Haiti. Latest estimates indicate that up to \$14 billion will be needed. Sustained international commitment and support is crucial for recovery and reconstruction, an endeavour that will take decades. European donors need to step up to help design a long-term vision not only for physical reconstruction but also deepening governmental legitimacy and responsiveness – the Achilles Heel of international efforts to date.

In New York, the government of Haiti will present its vision for the country's future and how international support can best contribute. This will be guided by several mantras of current development and state-building doctrine: ownership, coordination and ultimately effectiveness; all three mostly unachieved during the last few decades in Haiti. The lack of a common strategic approach; competing and overly supply-driven donor agendas which don't address the people's needs; a dual public sector run by international NGOs; lack of transparency and widespread corruption are only some of the many constraints to increased aid effectiveness.

But there is another problem. Neither ownership nor coordination is feasible without effective leadership. The EU has made a case for the Haitian government's leadership with regard to recovery and reconstruction efforts, including donor and sector coordination and the management of the overall reconstruction agenda. But it is no secret that Haiti's government and even the state lack capacity to carry out these tasks; a dilemma for the international community.

As regards long-term strategic directions, Haiti's President René Préal will present a plan in New York. It highlights four axes of action: infrastructure, governance, vulnerability reduction and provision of basic social services and economic growth.

Critical voices point out that not paying sufficient and immediate attention to restoring and protecting Haiti's extremely deteriorated environment means a dead end for sustainable development. Other risk factors that need more attention include anarchic urban settlements, the severe rise in unemployment, the approach of the rainy and hurricane season as well as the deteriorating overall security situation.

Decentralisation and in particular the creation of regional economic development poles is vital. Indeed, the current situation might provide an opportunity to finally bridge the gap between the capital, known as the 'Republic of Port-au-Prince' and historically-excluded rural Haiti, where two thirds of the population try to make a living on the basis of small-scale subsistence farming.

But even if the government succeeded in forging a much-needed national consensus/social compact for Haiti's reconstruction and development involving political forces, civil society, the private sector and the diaspora,

the implementation challenge would remain. Sectoral policies with concrete action plans and effective donor coordination around the latter are a *sine qua non* for success.

The creation of a World Bank-administered multi-donor trust fund and an Interim Haitian Reconstruction Commission are on the agenda of the donor conference. The commission is meant to set priorities and coordinate the implementation of projects during the next 18 months. It will be comprised of Haitians and representatives of the international community, with a starring role for former US President Bill Clinton, UN special envoy to Haiti since May 2009.

In light of the cacophony of donor voices and the past lack of accountability, a central authority that channels contributions to reconstruction can only be welcomed. Several things must be ensured, though: sufficient donor buy-in; tight control of fund management arrangements; enough flexibility in the planning and operating procedures; participatory planning including civil society; allocation of funds to non-state actors and local as well as central government structures; fostering national capacity whenever possible instead of bypassing and/or competing with state institutions. And last but not least, Haiti's remaining external debt finally has to be written off.

The European role will be secondary, but important. Haiti represents a test for the EU to live up to its claim to be strong in fostering long-term state-building, merging development and political challenges. The EU reaction since January has been confused. As the focus moves beyond the immediate relief imperatives in the wake of the earthquake, the EU must rise to this early test for its post-Lisbon structures and streamline a more effective political contribution to Haiti's tragic woes."