The European Union (EU) is a key player as regards international development aid, one of the four main strands of its external policies. The foundations of development cooperation are laid down in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (Title III). The main objective of this policy is to reduce and then eradicate poverty, targeting countries in greatest need and focussing on aspects such as social protection, health, education, jobs, business development, sustainable agriculture and energy. EU development policy has developed gradually: at the outset, it covered only overseas countries and territories associated with the EU but was then extended to include all developing countries.

See also:
- External relations
- Human rights
- Foreign and security policy