



Improve aid on EU's 50th birthday, say development ministers

Aid needs to be increased and improved, arms exports need to be controlled, and a fair system of international trade needs to be built, the EU's development ministers have declared.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, which led to the Union's foundation, the ministers issued the Petersberg communiqué on development policy last week (13 March).

Named after a conference centre near Bonn, the communiqué described development as "a policy area in its own right", as well as being part of a "wider set of EU external actions". The EU's other activities in the wider world should be compatible with and take account of development policy, which must have poverty eradication as its "primary and overarching objective", the communiqué said.

It also stated that gender equality must be incorporated into all aspects of the EU's development policy, that reducing child mortality is one of Europe's "foremost responsibilities" and that the root causes of migration should be addressed so that people in poor countries do not have to leave home for economic reasons.

The communiqué says that "sustainable development will not be possible without peace, and vice versa". The EU's export of arms must, therefore, be curtailed to avoid the proliferation of weapons, especially in areas of conflict.

Trade is described as "a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for economic growth and poverty eradication". The ministers argued that the Economic Partnership Agreements under negotiation between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) bloc must be geared towards benefiting the poor.

Sources: <http://www.bmz.de/en/index.html>

Aid plans lack poverty focus - Borrell

Poverty is not prioritised in the EU's aid plans for Asia and Latin America, the European Parliament's development committee has complained.

Josep Borrell, the committee's chairman, said that most of the plans that the European Commission has drawn up for Asia and Latin America "do not concentrate sufficiently on the poorer groups of the societies" concerned. Instead, most of the 35 country strategy papers prepared or under preparation "are strongly concentrating on the improvement of bilateral relations with the EU".

Borrell's criticisms are contained in a letter to commissioners Benita Ferrero-Waldner (external relations) and Louis Michel (development). He said that the Commission's approach "puts in serious danger" the realisation of the EU's stated aim of devoting at least 20% of aid to health and education. This objective is legally binding under the EU's new Development Cooperation Instrument.

Borrell also argued that some of the proposed areas of expenditure in the plans may not meet the criteria for development aid set by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris. He has asked for clarification about whether the Commission plans to use development aid money for security, scientific, cultural and economic activities that fall outside the OECD's criteria.

Mandelson spins afresh on ACP trade deals

Peter Mandelson, the European commissioner for trade, has claimed that the entire African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) bloc is committed to agreeing trade deals with the EU by the end of 2007.

But Mandelson's upbeat assessment contrasts with statements made by ACP governments over the past month. Hans-Joachim Keil, the Samoan commerce minister who is chairing the Pacific governments negotiating an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Commission, has rejected pressure to close the talks by a 31 December deadline.

Mandelson made his comments at last week's meeting of EU development ministers at Petersberg, near Bonn.

He is eager to have a series of EPAs signed this year to accommodate the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The WTO has agreed that the current terms of access to its markets that the EU has granted to ACP exporters can be exempt from WTO rules. But this waiver expires at the end of this year.

Anti-poverty activists have argued that if the Commission succeeds in pushing ACP countries into liberalising their economies swiftly, this could exacerbate, rather than reduce poverty.

The newspaper European Voice has reported that several EU governments – including Denmark, Britain, Ireland, Finland and Sweden – share those concerns.

Sources: www.ipsterraviva.net
www.europeanvoice.com

Michel takes leave for election

Louis Michel, the European development commissioner, is taking a one-month leave-of-absence to contest the Belgian general election.

Michel, a former Belgian foreign minister, is seeking a seat in his country's Senate. But he is unlikely to be elected as he is at the bottom of the list of candidates for the liberal party Mouvement Reformateur.

Michel will not be paid his Commission salary from 12 May and responsibility for his portfolio will be assumed by Olli Rehn, the commissioner for EU enlargement.

It is thought probable that he will return to the Commission after the 10 June election.

But Commission spokeswoman Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen said there is no guarantee that the institution's president José-Marie Barroso will accept him back.

Sources: www.europa.eu
www.euobserver.com

Brussels resident attacked in Zimbabwe

Grace Kwinje, the European representative of the Zimbabwean opposition party the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), has been severely beaten while in police custody.

Kwinje was taken into police custody after turning up at a banned rally in Harare on 11 March.

Although she had an ear split open and suffered several other injuries due to torture, the Zimbabwean authorities have prevented her from having treatment in neighbouring South Africa.

Kwinje is based in Brussels, where she has a two-year-old daughter. But it is unclear when she will be able to return here. Robert Mugabe's government is hindering political opponents from leaving the country. Last weekend, an opposition MP Nelson Chamisa was attacked when he arrived in Harare airport, with the intention of flying to Brussels.

Kwinje was one of 50 activists, including the MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai, tortured, following their arrest. One man Gift Tandare was shot dead by riot police at the demonstration.

Sources: www.swradioafrica.com
www.amnesty.org

See also our websites:

www.ct-europe.eu

www.acp-programming.eu

www.la-programming.eu

www.asia-programming.eu

www.enp-programming.eu

Eurostep, 115 Rue Stévin, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 231 16 59 - Fax: +32 2 230 37 80

E-mail: admin@eurostep.org

Web: www.eurostep.org

To receive this weekly newsletter, please send an e-mail to: admin@eurostep.org.