



Berlin Declaration lacks concrete measures on fighting poverty

Germany's EU presidency has pledged to "drive back poverty, hunger and disease" in a terse statement to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome. The Berlin Declaration, issued by the Union's heads of state and government at a meeting in the German capital last weekend, stated that the EU "will fight terrorism, organised crime and illegal immigration together", while respecting civil liberties. And it said that Europe intends "to lead the way" in protecting the climate. While the declaration attached some importance to the need to combine "economic success and social responsibility", it fell far short of demands by non-governmental organisations.

The EU Civil Society Contact Group, which bands together environmental, cultural, human rights, anti-poverty and public health organisations, had argued that the declaration should commit the Union to a range of concrete measures. These included boosting both the quality and quantity of aid to ensure that the UN's Millennium Development Goals of drastically reducing extreme poverty by 2015 are attained, and reform of the EU's agricultural and trade policies by 2009.

Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, called on EU governments to put the process of ratifying the Union's constitution back on track by Christmas. Not doing so, she said, would be a "historic error".

Merkel urged that an intergovernmental conference should agree a new treaty by the end of this year to replace the constitution rejected by French and Dutch voters. The new treaty would then have to be ratified by 2009.

But the Polish President Lech Kaczynski described her timetable as unrealistic, while his Czech counterpart Vaclav Klaus made it clear that he is no hurry to usher in a new EU treaty.

Sources: www.eu2007.de

www.ft.com

www.act4europe.org

Clamour for sanctions on Sudan

Politicians and celebrities have called for the EU to impose fresh sanctions on the Sudanese government over its refusal to stop the violence in Darfur. Chris Patten, the former European commissioner for external relations, has noted that EU foreign ministers have expressed "profound concern" about Darfur since 2004. "Instead of expressing concern a 54th time, European foreign ministers should use their April meeting to follow the European Parliament's call on sanctions against Khartoum," he said.

Campaigners are urging a travel ban on government officials, a freeze on the foreign assets of business figures linked to the National Congress Party and an embargo on Sudanese oil exports.

Last weekend both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and British Prime Minister Tony Blair said that new sanctions are needed against Khartoum. The Irish rock star Bob Geldof and Hollywood actor George Clooney also urged punitive measures in

response to a crisis that has claimed at least 200,000 lives and caused 2 million people to flee their homes.

While Oxfam has estimated that 4 million people – half of Darfur's population – are in need of humanitarian assistance, the Sudanese authorities have severely restricted the mobility of aid workers. Agencies have had to scale back their activities in Darfur for security reasons. In December, for example, aid workers were raped and beaten by armed men in Gereida, Darfur's largest camp with 130,000 displaced people.

Sources: www.euobserver.com

www.hrw.org

www.oxfam.org

www.sudantribune.com

Michel's need for flexibility on human rights

Louis Michel, the European commissioner for development and humanitarian aid, has admitted that he does not always insist on high standards of human rights in his dealings with countries outside the EU.

Michel was quizzed by non-governmental organisations last week (20 March) about why some of his declarations on development omit references to human rights. He replied that he cannot always demand respect for human rights if he is to act as a mediator in difficult situations. Doing so, he contended, would impede communication.

Michel also defended his decision to appoint Etienne Davignon as an adviser on the role of the private sector in Africa. A former Belgian commissioner, Davignon is a major shareholder in the water and electricity firm Suez, which is promoting privatisation of resources in developing countries.

Michel claimed he was unaware of Davignon's connection to Suez and that he had never discussed water issues with him.

Michel said he would be open to having occasional meetings with organisations interested in the EU's development policies and activities. Yet he argued that such meetings should be based on consultation, rather than a more structured dialogue.

EU 'aggressive' in trade talks – Oxfam

Oxfam has accused the EU of taking an "aggressive approach" to the free trade agreements it is negotiating with a range of developing countries. Both the Union and the US are using bilateral and regional free trade and investment accords to win concessions that they cannot secure at World Trade Organisation (WTO) level, Oxfam says in a new report.

While the EU has claimed that it has no commercial 'offensive' interests in the Economic Partnership Agreements it is seeking with 75 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, its far-reaching proposals suggest otherwise. Oxfam says that the EU's calls on the ACP bloc to reduce a large number of its tariffs on imports to zero would threaten the livelihoods of small farmers in many poor countries.

It also says that tactics being pursued by the Union could drive local firms out of business.

The EU's draft negotiating markets for trade accords with India, Central America, the Andean countries, South Korea and south-east Asia would allow foreign companies to take control of water, potentially reducing the poor's access to vital resources.

Sources: www.oxfam.org

www.ipsterraviva.net

Funds for neighbours must shield environment, lessen poverty

Aid to the EU's neighbouring countries should be used to protect the environment and human rights, rather than for pursuing narrower political and economic goals, campaigners have said.

This weekend (30-31 March), the EU's foreign ministers will discuss the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) at a meeting in Bremen. This policy covers relations with Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Moldova, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.

Ahead of the meeting, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) said that the countries concerned face potentially irreversible ecological problems such as climate change, forest degradation, water pollution and a dearth of freshwater. It called on the EU to promote energy efficiency and generation from renewable sources in its neighbouring countries, as well as ensuring that infrastructural projects are subject to thorough environmental impacts.

One of the funding schemes the EU is proposing for this countries would be a €1 billion Governance Facility and Neighbourhood Investment Fund.

Florent Sebban, a policy adviser with Eurostep, said that this money "should not be used to grant additional funding to countries that implemented reforms serving short-term EU economic and political interests, such as trade liberalisation and [migrant] readmission agreements or commitment to the fight against terrorism." Instead, it should promote the implementation of international commitments on tackling poverty, eliminating gender discrimination and respecting social and political rights.

Sources: www.wwf.org
www.enpi-programming.eu
www.eurostep.org

See also our websites:

www.ct-europe.eu
www.acp-programming.eu
www.la-programming.eu
www.asia-programming.eu
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