

ORIENTATION after the MDG Review Summit (20-22. September 2010)

Background

From an EU perspective the summit was a disaster! The direction expressed by the weak outcome document, of which 90 % was repeating already existing agreements and recalling promises, was reconfirmed by the statements made in the summit. These were not at all enhanced by the EU statement or those from EU member states. The EU statement was a farce. Barosso did nothing more than to look backwards at what has been achieved (of which there was very little) among all the failure of the MDGs and promise the recycling of some unspent € 1 billion from the European Development Fund. There was no apparent recognition of the scope of the EU's responsibility for achieving the MDGs, while pressing developing countries to take on theirs – what they need to do (take charge of their own development) and what that means (domestic resource mobilisation). The EU offered no plan for achieving the MDGs except to re-pledge its existing commitments, already tarnished by the EU's failure to fulfil existing promises.

The performance of the EU and its member states was more than disappointing. There was no or very little engagement in side events focusing on MDG 8 – global partnership for development – the goal through which the EU's commitments towards the MDGs, in common with other developed economies, are focused. The roundtable on global partnerships, which was part of the official programme, saw no relevant EU players taking the floor or even being present – although at least one new member state found their way to the room.

While there was some momentum in the run-up to the summit around the Spring package and the Council conclusion on the MDG summit in June (e.g. Commissioner Piebalgs' participation in the UN Development Cooperation Forum: "Turning the Millennium Development Goals into Millennium Development Achievements."), the final outcome in terms of agreements and performance is unacceptable. In not showing any other profile than pointing to the responsibilities of other countries, particularly developing countries, (although it can be assumed that much of the activity of the EU was taking place behind closed doors) the EU's leadership role as a global actor is surely questionable.

Where to go?

There were some positive aspects to the agreed outcome of the summit. The notion of a social protection floor was included, and some importance was given to universal access to social services, for instance. But all in all entire outcome is not encouraging. There are potential implications too for civil society with the outcome being seen by some as the beginning for cs to become an endangered species... Civil society is mentioned very little in the adopted conclusions, and the language on policy space is weaker than in previous outcome documents. This trend also goes hand in hand with recent developments in the funding environment for global civil society – for instance the Ford Foundation has closed its global civil society portfolio. In contrast to this diminishing focus on the role of civil society, more emphasis is given to the role for the private sector. More than ever before we need to be clear about how we see our relationship with the private sector, its role, and its different components.

The task for civil society is now to review its own efforts and to critically analyse the outcome. There needs to be more targeted engagement and collaboration to influence the EU position - not only with regards to the council conclusions and in particular with regard to the performance of the EU in the actual negotiations of outcome documents.

The human rights as the basis for our approach to development, including the right to access to social services, needs to be emphasised and strengthened. Policy space and the role of civil society also need to be re-asserted and reinforced.

With only five years left to the 2015 deadline for achieving the MDGs, it is very unlikely that they will be met. Nevertheless, the outcome of this summit in the approach towards development cooperation by industrialised countries, including the EU. As part of our

strategy we should be identifying further key events up to 2015 – such as the UN's Conference focusing on LDCs in 2011, and the Rio UN conference on sustainability in 2012 – and engage in the preparations of the EU towards these events. The EU must be held accountable for their promises and on being true to the provision of the Lisbon treaty. In this context we also need to ensure that the EU's orientation towards its cooperation with developing countries is firmly grounded on human rights obligations – including social, economic and cultural – and sustainability.