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FINNISH PRESIDENCY MOVING TO SIDELINE PARLIAMENT OVER INTERNATIONAL AID ISSUE

The long-standing stand-off between the European Parliament and the Commission is moving into a new phase with the Finnish Presidency putting an ultimatum down to European Parliament negotiators. Stating that there would be no final deal on the new Development Co-operation Instrument unless Parliament negotiators accept a deal on Tuesday morning, the Presidency is in effect aligning itself to a Commission position, unwilling to consider crucial elements of the position adopted by the European Parliament in May.

While the Commission has conceded that the Instrument for Development Co-operation should be based on the Treaty's article covering the development policy, it is seeking to introduce language that confuses the scope of the instrument.

Key issues are firstly the Commission's rejection to abide by the OECD's classification of developing countries as well as its definition of development assistance; secondly, its refusal to translate its commitment to the Millennium Development Goals into targets for the allocation of aid resources to basic education and health, as well as other social sectors. Thirdly, the secretive process of agreeing the multi-annual programmes with developing countries is creating deep division over the lack of political control and accountability – the issue was repeatedly raised by European Parliamentarians.

Simon Stocker, Director of Eurostep, commented: *“Tomorrow will be a critical day for the European Union. We know its development programme has been a flagship of its external policies. Parliament rapporteur Gay Mitchell should be commended for his role in expressing a solid and clear Parliament line to make sure that the instrument will be consistent with European law, international agreements and commitments. To succumb to pressure at this stage would undo the critical gains made in the process.”*

Paddy Maguinness, Director of Concern and Chair of Eurostep, adds: *“Rushing into a deal on this Development Instrument is not wise. This instrument will be in place for years to come, and we need to get it right now. We have got to be steadfast in our commitment to the poorest of the poor – tackling these outstanding issues is essential in order to show that commitment.”*

Eurostep is organising a round table on Tuesday 19 September 2006 at 13.30 in the Renaissance Hotel (Brussels) to discuss proposals for ensuring that the MDGs are adequately targeted through the EU's development co-operation instrument.

For more information contact:

Simon Stocker on +32 2 234 62 23

Florent Sebban on +32 474 576 737, fsebban@eurostep.org

Eurostep is a member of CONCORD

Eurostep A.I.S.B.L. 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