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EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT DAYS: OPENING SPEECH

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

European Development Days

Brussels, 6 December 2010

Your Royal Highness,
Your Excellencies,
Heads of State,
Heads of Government,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the 2010 edition of the European Development Days, co-organised by the European Commission and the Belgian Presidency of the European Union.

I would like specifically to thank Prime-Minister Leterme and Minister Charles Michel for the high priority they have given to development issues during this very successful Belgian Presidency of the European Union.

This is the fifth time I take part in the European Development Days, and I do so with great satisfaction. European Development Days has quickly established itself as a major forum in the international development calendar. It is also Europe's window on the world of development.

I would particularly like to thank all the Heads of State who have travelled to Brussels. There are also representatives from the highest levels of the International Financial Institutions, I particularly welcome Dominique Strauss-Kahn, Executive Director of the IMF; key UN Agencies, NGOs and Foundations, research centres and think tanks, development agencies and partner country representatives. Welcome to you all.

This wide variety of participants has been a constant feature of the European Development Days since their beginning and is also a demonstration of the way the European Union looks into Development: as a challenge that will only be overcome with the participation of all, in a true partnership approach.

This year, European Development Days falls at a decisive moment in our policy-making. We have put the finishing touches to the European External Action Service. As it opens its doors, this is the moment to underline once again the important role development plays at the heart of Europe's external relations.

Let's go back a few months. A UN Summit in New York reaffirmed the world's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. I dare to say that this is the most challenging task that the world has ever set itself. Despite of the difficulties I still believe that these goals can be achieved. In fact it is a moral imperative to strive for their achievement.

In an era of interdependence such as ours images of a father that struggles to feed his family, of a child that cannot get proper education, of a mother that dies because of lack of medical care or of a girl whose dreams are thwarted because of its gender are no longer tolerable.

But we need to close the gap between our indignation and resolute action. Where it becomes clear that we are off-track, we cannot just stand on the sidelines. We need to act. That is why I was proud to announce on behalf of the European Union last September in New York an MGD initiative of €1 billion to help those countries most in need.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When we speak of development we speak of a joint challenge. That of developed countries who have the responsibility and obligation to help lift developing countries out of poverty; but also that of developing countries who have the primary responsibility of respecting good governance. Last week we have seen the unfolding of a story we have unfortunately seen too many times. The story of democratic elections whose results were not accepted by those who were defeated, thus putting at risk the stability and peace in their country. I am referring to the situation in Ivory Coast. Similar situations have happened too many times in the past and they are one of the main causes of poverty and instability. This should not be like this. This is no inevitability. We have also witnessed this last week the opposite situation in a neighbouring country - Guinea Conakry - which had been ravaged by the very same problems of the Ivory Coast in a recent past. There, the incumbent also lost the elections but, contrary to the Ivory Coast, he has recognised the results. This shows that political leadership, statesmanship and respect of the will of the people are an integral part of the development equation. We deeply need it to overcome together the challenge of development!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Now let's go back a few weeks. At the G20 Summit in Seoul, we have agreed a new development consensus for shared growth. The European Union was at the origin of the initiative to put development also at the centre of the G20 agenda for a global governance.

It is now clear that traditional development aid on its own is not enough. It needs to go hand in hand with policies which encourage growth. We need to boost trade and investment as well as tackle global challenges like climate change and poverty.

We are in a new development paradigm. G20 countries, which represent around 80% of the world's wealth, have recognised their responsibilities. This is an area where Europe has taken a lead on the world stage.

A quick conclusion of the Doha Development Round is of paramount importance. These trade negotiations have a lot to offer developing countries, both large and small.

International trade is a powerful engine for sustainable development. It has lifted millions out of poverty, for instance in China and India. It is estimated that a one per cent increase in Africa's share of global trade would deliver four or five times more income every year than the continent currently receives in aid.

So it makes sense that another building block is Aid for Trade. Europe provides over €10 billion annually in Aid for Trade. And this money has helped developing countries improve their capacity to participate in the global marketplace.

This is Europe helping our partners to increase their trade flows and revenues. Even something as basic as customs procedures can be improved so that exporters can guarantee delivery times.

Let's now go back just a few days. The EU-Africa Summit took place in Tripoli. Leaders from 80 countries came together to chart a new course for relations between the two continents over the coming years. Again, development was at the heart of the agenda.

This was a Summit about growth and jobs. True, we discussed human rights, peace and security missions and fight against poverty. All vitally important issues. But we also discussed cooperation in science and technology, renewable energy and climate change.

I believe Modern Africa is on the move. In spite of remaining serious problems, we can also see impressive economic growth rates, expanding investment inflows and trade with Europe are back on the rise. In the first nine months of 2010, Africa's share of the EU's total trade in goods rose to 9%.

The events of the last days, weeks and months in New York, Seoul and Tripoli are now behind us.

So let's look into the future. And it is to European Development Days that we turn, as our forum to digest and debate what the new decade means for development. Indeed, the secret of this event's success is its unique format: it combines a summit-style gathering of leaders with a forum for debate with NGOs and civil society.

It is not just a forum for understanding changes that are already underway. It is also an opportunity to forge and bring about those changes.

In particular, this edition of European Development Days is a chance to prepare ourselves for the Summit on the Least Developed Countries in Istanbul next spring.

And at the end of 2011, another major international forum will look at how to make development aid more effective. European Union development policy needs to set the gold standard in getting development agencies to work together.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The true value of development lies in policies for shared growth, high impact aid and genuine partnership. The fruit of this work is often only visible after years, sometimes decades. But as we look ahead, there are three things which Europe brings to the table.

First, solidarity. For those looking in on Europe, they see that this is wired into our DNA. Solidarity is not just what we practise inside the EU. I say this in the presence of Lesley-Ann, one of the Ambassadors for the European Year against poverty and social exclusion.

Solidarity goes beyond our borders and is at the heart of our global aspirations. This is what drives our approach to international challenges such as the economic downturn, access to sustainable energy and food security.

Second, innovation. European Union development policy needs to modernise aid. We need to make it work stronger by acting as a catalyst for growth. We need to focus on private sector activity, regional integration and international trade. We also need to look into innovative ways of financing. We can no longer look into the depleted national budgets as the only source of aid finance. While we welcome the agreement of the European governments to keep their promises on aid it is important to look at new ways of financing development.

The EU Africa Infrastructure Trust Fund is a successful example of this new approach. So far, €210 million in grants from the European Commission and EU Member States have been blended with loans from the European Investment Bank, bilateral European financing institutions and others. The result is total financing of over €2 billion for 35 regional infrastructure projects in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Europe needs to deliver smart, high-impact aid. This is why I strongly support the initiative of Commissioner Andris Piebalgs, Commissioner for Development, to put forward a Green Paper on EU Development policy. These two days are another chance to debate the Commission's ideas.

In the new development paradigm, Europe's third concern is sustainability. Ministers are gathering this week in Cancún, Mexico, for more negotiations on climate change. Many are frustrated that talks on global warming are making glacial progress.

Europe has shown that action is possible. We have demonstrated that cap and trade theory can be made binding in reality. Our offer to cut emissions further remains on the table.

There can be no more excuses for inaction. The terrible irony of climate change is that it will hit hardest those in the developing world that have done the least to cause the problem.

We must secure an international, comprehensive and legally binding agreement. And while the Cancun conference will not deliver that agreement, it should at least lead to incremental progress on a number of substantial issues which will bring us closer to our end goal.

We also need to improve our efficiency in how we use natural resources in Europe. Whatever the outcome in Cancún, the Commission will propose a Flagship initiative early in the New Year on this issue. "Resource efficient Europe" will be the last building block in the comprehensive reform strategy, Europe 2020, that is central to this mandate of the European Commission.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the UN, in the G20 and in our relations with partner countries across the world, the development agenda is now firmly based on the principles that I just outlined: solidarity, innovation and sustainability.

Inclusive, smart and sustainable growth is at the core of the reform strategy which we have set out for the European Union over the next decade. And in this sense, I see development policy as an extremely important external projection of Europe's own internal priorities.

We have a unique contribution to make. So let us use this forum to make sure it is a contribution which counts and makes a difference in people's lives.

Thank you for your attention.