

Madame la Présidente,

Mesdames et Messieurs les Députés,

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C'est un grand honneur pour moi d'être ici aujourd'hui afin de vous présenter mes objectifs et intentions en tant que Commissaire-désigné au Développement. Je suis fier, et enthousiaste, à l'idée de relever la tâche que le Président m'a confiée. Je réalise à quel point les défis auxquels nous sommes confrontés sont plus nombreux et plus importants que jamais.

Les dernières crises mondiales ont montré, une fois de plus, à quel point nous vivons dans un monde globalisé et interdépendant. Ceux qui pensent que nous pourrions, ou que nous devrions, nous isoler des effets de la pauvreté qui frappent d'autres parties du monde font fausse route. Aider les pays en développement à lutter contre la pauvreté et à tirer profit des opportunités offertes par la mondialisation relève de notre responsabilité. Mais c'est aussi dans notre intérêt. Et le meilleur moyen à notre disposition est précisément la politique de développement.

The next 5 years will be a pivotal period for EU development policy. The creation of the post of High Representative and the External Action Service represent a major opportunity, increasing the importance of the EU's delegations across the world, and providing a real prospect to reduce the fragmentation with which we implement our aid. At the same time, however, we must be clear on the aim of our development policy, which is poverty eradication in the world's disadvantaged countries and regions. We have to take advantage of the synergies and efficiencies that can result from the new arrangements without, however, allowing development policy to be seen in any way as simply a tool to achieve wider political goals for the EU.

This is important not just for the EU, but equally for our partners in developing countries. This is essential to maintain our credibility with them. This view was made clear by President Barroso in his nomination letter to me, where he states his determination "to maintain the EU's role as a champion of the developing world".

The next five years will also be pivotal, because we need to face the challenge of maintaining momentum worldwide to increase development support when we are facing crises on a number of fronts. The focus has to be on "more, better and faster aid". Now allow me to highlight some of the main priorities that I will address if confirmed.

First, the success of the Millennium Development Goals. We have just five years to achieve these essential goals before the 2015 MDG Review. We have to succeed. I know that this will be difficult, but they are serious promises, not just vague aspirations. The current picture does not permit any complacency; on the contrary. Some progress has been made in Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and in some African countries. But Sub-Saharan Africa is lagging far behind. The cumulated effects of the recent crises – food, energy, economic and financial – are even endangering the gains obtained so far.

So my second key objective will be to ensure that we deliver what we have promised. Some Member States are reducing ODA budgets as a result of the financial crisis. I know that national budgets are under real stress. But if we do not keep our promises on development aid how can we expect developing countries to take partnerships seriously? If I am confirmed as Development Commissioner, I will do everything I can to urge Member States to keep the promises that they have made. It is in our most basic interest to do so. I shall not hesitate to identify very clearly those Member States that fail to meet their commitments.

My third key priority concerns aid effectiveness. I will work hard to ensure that our development cooperation programmes allow us to respond to the real situations that our partners are facing on the ground. Equally importantly, the European Consensus for Development has started the process of moving from 28 donors pursuing often overlapping aid policies towards a truly European approach, and from a donor-recipient relationship to real partnerships. We will also continue to work with international organisations provided they have clear added value and good visibility for the European taxpayer. But much, much more needs to be done if we want to reach our objectives. Recent studies have shown that we could gain up to 9 billion Euros of total international aid each year by being more efficient.

I want to give new political momentum to this issue. This is a question of credibility and accountability towards our citizens as much as it is towards our partners in the developing world.

Fourthly, aid effectiveness is also an issue for our partners. There is no point in providing aid, and then seeing the country sell its natural resources for generations to come, rather than developing its natural wealth in a measured manner, which will lead to industries, development and jobs. The quest for jobs and growth is as relevant to developing countries as it is for the EU. If confirmed, one of the themes that I will focus on during the next Commission is ensuring that wherever possible the aid that we grant is used in a manner that will provide long term economic development.

My fifth key priority concerns policy coherence for development. I will work hard to make sure that all EU policies really have a development component, whether they are trade, agriculture, fisheries, and many more. I am aware that this will not always be easy, but you can count on my determination.

Sixth, I am determined to make EU citizens proud of what we do in development aid. We provide about 60% of global ODA, yet only produce around 22% of the world's GDP. But we should also be proud for the manner in which it is provided. Our development policy is based on our European values; such as solidarity, democracy, the respect of fundamental human rights; the right to education, the right to health. We do not focus development aid to support our defence or trade objectives, nor to exploit supplies of raw materials. We provide development aid in order to reduce poverty, to help the world's poorest.

This is our unique strength.

Furthermore, I want to continue to focus on the fact that the respect of fundamental human rights, and in particular the rights of women and children, is an integral part of European development aid policy. More generally, the weakest part of society, including the disabled people, will receive my specific attention. We have to make sure that the aid we grant is really effective and leads to poverty eradication, not poverty management. No country can expect to succeed in pulling itself out of poverty when it deprives itself of the effective contribution of half its population.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have not had time to cover all the issues I would have liked to discuss. Indeed, this list is far from exhaustive. I trust that I will be able to address further priorities such as climate change - the need to ensure that efforts to help developing nations are in addition, not instead of, development aid, the benefits of working hand in hand with Civil Society, to name just a few. But I do hope that these short comments will have underlined my determination to uphold the values that the EU has developed in its aim to alleviate global poverty.

I would like to end by commenting on the importance that I place in developing a real partnership between the Commission and Parliament on development policy; working together and discussing policy at its formative stages just as much as in its practical implementation. I count on your support, and I hope to profit from unique expertise of the Members of this Committee.

I should mention that I come from a Member State which is at an early stage in learning how it can contribute to development policy. But as often in life, what might be perceived as a disadvantage can easily be transformed into an advantage provided you have the willingness and necessary commitment.

Thank you very much for your attention.