

## CONCORD Speaking Points

### European Parliament: DEVE Committee Hearing

16 May, 2018

Thank you very much for inviting us and for giving us the opportunity to discuss external action in the MFF package proposal.

My name is Katarzyna Lemanska. I work for Global Health Advocates but today, I am speaking on behalf of CONCORD. As you certainly know, CONCORD is the confederation of relief and development organisations. CONCORD brings together 28 national platforms and 21 international networks, which account for some 2,600 organisations across Europe. Today, I have the responsibility of conveying the voice of our collective work.

2015 made us proud and hopeful. The EU put all its weight behind what Ban Ki-moon rightly called the “twin plans for transformative progress”: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, and the Paris agreement. Of course, we knew that the implementation phase would be challenging. Today, once again, the EU’s leadership is needed. This isn’t only about EU’s credibility as a global leader in sustainable development. It is more down-to-earth than that: we cannot afford for the SDGs not to be implemented. The human cost, economic consequences and environmental impact are simply too great.

We were therefore looking at the next EU Budget, hoping that the SDGs and the Paris agreement would act as blueprints.

CONCORD welcomed the Commission’s proposal to scale up the weight of external action by some 13 pc (in real terms; 26 pc in current value). In the wake of reduced resources due to Brexit, this is not something that we underestimate. However, to be satisfied fully with the quantitative aspects of the proposal, we would like to get strong assurances that the current level of DAC-ability will be maintained under the future heading.

Now, can the current draft proposal and architecture deliver on the SDGs?

Back in 2011, in the then-released MFF package proposal, the Commission made a clear link between the proposed budget for External Action, the MDGs, and EU’s commitment to allocate 0,7 of its GDP to development aid. Of course, since 2011, global circumstances have changed. But let’s not forget that the adoption of the SDGs was called “a landmark achievement” by the EU. Yet, in today’s proposal, the increase of resources for external action is not justified by EU’s pledge to meet its 0,7 target or the EU’s commitment to support partner countries’ efforts to implement their own SDG plans.

The political narrative is dominated by insecurity and instability, migratory pressures, and the increasing role emerging actors play on the global scene. Our reading is that these are the challenges the Commission's proposed reconfiguration of EU external action predominantly responds to. And we are concerned that this reconfiguration implies a major step away from the EU's principled and long-term approach to development cooperation.

Let me explain why.

The EC proposes to merge 12 instruments which implement a wide array of policies for instance in the field of development, neighbourhood, human rights, and peacebuilding, into one broad instrument. This, we believe, dilutes these instruments' distinct objectives, and will jeopardize the life-saving and transformative work they have so far achieved.

Now, I would like to make 3 points specifically on development aid.

**Firstly**, this new architecture is designed, according to the EC's Communication, to better serve the Union's priorities. Of course, the EU can proactively pursue its own interests on the global scene (as long as it doesn't undermine the development of its partners). But, the primary mandate of development is poverty eradication not to address foreign policy concerns. And what we do not see in this proposal, is a clear commitment toward the safeguarding of the primary objectives of development cooperation.

Making migration a priority illustrates the soundness of this concern: instead of looking at migration through development lenses, the EU will cement the inclination of looking at development through migration.

Prioritizing migration also throws us back to EU's scale of priorities. In view of EU's international commitments, we would for instance have expected gender equality and the protection of civil society space to be addressed as key political priorities; poverty eradication to get a more prominent spot in the Communication and even more ambitious climate-spending.

**My second point** relates to the compatibility between EU foreign policy objectives on the one hand, and its development objectives on the other hand. Of course, we do not believe that they inevitably conflict. But we believe that it would be a mistake to overlook that tensions between foreign policy and development might emerge. We are not alone in expressing this concern. The EDF's MTR highlighted these tensions and concluded that addressing them is essential. However, in the current draft proposal, we have no indication that this recommendation has been taken on board. There are too many outstanding issues especially with regards to the instrument's governance.

We do not know who will provide political guidance, who will arbitrate between competing interests, or indeed who will ultimately control the resources. For instance, what will be the role of the Parliament?

The issue of compatibility is also burning in relation to DAC-ability. To the best of our knowledge, the EC would like more flexibility over DAC-ability to preserve sufficient space for non-ODA actions. However, it remains silent on how it will ensure that this larger share of non-ODA actions does not undermine development objectives.

**My third point** relates to flexibility. The Commission intends to set up an “emerging challenges and priorities cushion”, which will add to a rapid-response pillar, a stronger humanitarian aid instrument, and the usual flexibility mechanisms built in the broader MFF. We do not know how this extra-flexibility will be governed. All we know is that EU’s inward-looking approach appears to prevail, with migration being a pre-identified priority.

**Three major concerns derive from the above:**

1. We fear that this proposal signals that the EU has lost interest in internationally agreed aid effectiveness principles, rooted in a bottom up, needs-driven and country-owned approach and definition of priorities and is focused on short-termism
2. We fear that this proposal signifies that the most vulnerable regions will be left out at the expense of countries with strategic geopolitical interest
3. We fear that transparency and accountability will be undermined. It will be extremely difficult for you and us to assess the results achieved by EU spending if objectives cover a very broad thematic and geographical area, and even more so if the objectives do not converge, or if they are defined on-the-go, as will be the case with the emergency cushion.

Ultimately, we do not believe that this instrument will allow the EU to support the decisive steps that are needed to achieve the SDGs by 2030. This does not mean that we favour the status quo: simplification can be achieved, while allowing the EU to deliver upon its international commitments. What we believe should be the way forward, and I will close with this, is EU’s strengthened and sustained political leadership to turn the Agenda 2030 and the Paris agreement into reality.

For us, this requires:

- 1) A Sustainable Development Instrument that is 100% ODA eligible, fully aligned with aid effectiveness principles, and targeted at poverty eradication and the achievement of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement.
- 2) Separate instruments on human rights and democracy; peace and stability; and the neighbourhood due to the unique and important role each of them plays.
  - a) And an External instrument that would cover all the others’ priorities of the Global Strategy that would not be covered by these 4 first instruments.

- 3) Overall 90% ODA eligibility for the new external action heading in line with existing Council Conclusions.
- 4) Mainstreaming of the SDGs, gender, climate change and environment, and the principle of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development across the whole EU Budget.
- 5) The inclusion of benchmarks on gender and human development, and the increase of the target for climate-relevant spending.
- 6) A specific civil society programme as well as dedicated envelopes for civil society within each geographic and thematic programme.

As you can see, Honourable Members of the Parliament, our positions converge on a vast majority of points. We will therefore need to work closely together, to ensure that the Parliament's and Civil Society's voices are taken into account.