



PRESS RELEASE

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'It's Time to Help Others!' say 100 Parliamentarians from the New EU Member States

WARSAW, POLAND, 22 OCTOBER 2007 – Over 700 experts, politicians, ambassadors, government officials and NGO representatives participated in parliamentary debates on the role of the new members of the European Union in providing development assistance. UNDP, the European Commission, and national NGOs organized these events around International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (17 October) on 15-22 October in the capitals of all the 12 countries that joined the EU after May 2004. These states spent almost 600 million euros on aid to lesser developed countries in 2006 and plan to increase assistance to 1 billion euros by 2010.

The debates aimed at mobilizing public attention in 12 European countries to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), European development policy, and participation of the new donors in global efforts to eradicate poverty. Through these events the new donors were preparing their contributions to the European Development Days that will be held in Lisbon on 7-9 November.

The 12 parliamentary debates testified to the strong interest on the part of decision-makers and politicians from the new EU members in development cooperation. It also showed that official development assistance is increasing in size and effectiveness. However the issue of raising public awareness of development and the MDGs was cited as one of the biggest challenges in becoming donors. Participants called for more intensified activities in this field. Four out of five citizens of the European Union still have not heard of the Millennium Development Goals – according to a July 2007 survey by the European Commission.

The events gathered over 100 parliamentarians from the European Parliament and national parliaments, including all 56 members of the Cypriot parliament, who attended a plenary session on the MDGs. In most cases national parliaments were represented by parliamentary speakers or chairpersons of foreign affairs committees.

Additionally, the debates were attended by ministers of foreign affairs, education, other representatives of government, ambassadors, non-governmental organizations, international institutions, and journalists. Conclusions were widely communicated through the media. For some countries this was the first time that officials and politicians debated development cooperation.

The **Bulgarian** debate, opened by Mr. Solomon Passy, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, highlighted the country's responsibilities in development cooperation within the framework of European policy.

Participants of the **Cypriot** debates, hosted by Mr. Demetris Christofias, President of the House of Representatives, noted that the MDGs are not only about financial aid, but also about a universal framework for designing development policies.

The conference in the **Czech Republic**, opened by Mr. Ondřej Liška, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs in the Chamber of Deputies, raised the issue of climate change in relation to development. The conference was organized within the campaign "The Czech Republic against poverty".

The debate in **Estonia** brought together chairpersons of two committees from the Estonian Parliament – Foreign Affairs and European Affairs – and focused on linkages between trade liberalization and development.

The **Hungarian** debate, opened by Mr. Gábor Világosi, Vice-President of the Hungarian Parliament, discussed environmental development and the growing expectations towards Hungary as a donor country.

The participants of the conference in **Latvia**, which was opened by Mr. Andris Bērziņš, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, mentioned the previous Latvian experience of being a recipient country as useful in the current role of a donor.

The event in **Lithuania**, hosted by Mr. Justinas Karosas, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, highlighted the challenge of implementing the Millennium Development Goals.

During the **Maltese** debate, Mr. Michael Frendo, Minister of Foreign Affairs, announced a new foreign aid policy, and participants discussed ways of calculating official development assistance.

The debate in **Poland** was held four days before parliamentary elections and provided the opportunity for politicians from all major political parties to present for the first time their approach to development cooperation.

The conference in **Romania**, inaugurated by Mr. Bogdan Olteanu, Chairman of the Parliamentary Chamber of Deputies, focused on Romania shifting its role from a recipient to a donor country.

In **Slovakia**, Mr. Milan Hort, Deputy Speaker of Parliament, appealed to educate society in altruism and solidarity. Participants called for more cooperation between national and European parliaments in this field.

The debate in **Slovenia**, attended by Mr. Jožef Jerovšek, Chairman of the Committee for External Relations in the National Parliament, and Mr. Josep Borrell, President of the Development Committee in the European Parliament, focused on preparations for the Slovenian EU presidency in January 2007 in the field of development.

<http://europeandcis.undp.org/mdgdebates>