



Your vote can determine Europe's role in the world

Keep Development in mind when voting on the Lisbon Treaty

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Dóchas urges all eligible voters to use their democratic right to vote in the upcoming Lisbon Treaty referendum – and to bear development issues in mind as they do so.

The Future of Europe has an Impact on Poor People

The debate on the benefits or otherwise of the Lisbon Treaty has largely ignored the Treaty's impact on development and humanitarian programmes in Europe, and on developing countries.

The EU is a major player on the international stage and, for developing countries, the cliché that Europe is an 'economic giant and political dwarf' definitely doesn't hold. Not only are the EU member states together the largest donor of overseas aid, but European policies on trade tariffs, export credit, agricultural subsidies and so forth directly affect the fate of many poor nations. Europe has enormous influence on global issues such as human rights, climate change and human security. The way the Lisbon Treaty, if passed, comes to influence development policies directly, as well as wider policy areas affecting development, is a matter of great importance to NGOs.

Arguments For and Against

There are reasons why the Lisbon Treaty can potentially make a significant contribution to poverty eradication. The Treaty, if passed, will see the mandate for development co-operation strengthened, providing the EU with a legal basis for development co-operation and humanitarian aid with poverty reduction as its principal aim. Furthermore, the reform process inherent to the Treaty may provide an opportunity to make those EU policies which have an impact on the developing world – like trade, agriculture and energy – coherent with development objectives.

However, while the proposed new structures have the potential to streamline decision-making and forge greater cohesion between the institutions, there is no guarantee that Development will remain a clear focus of the EU's external policies. The emphasis on cohesion (as opposed to 'coherence' for development) and the extension of the powers of the Commission in the area of trade, are sources of NGO concern.

Making Europe Work for Development

The nature and scope of many of the stipulations in the Lisbon text – such as the Office of the High Representative (or foreign minister) and External Action Service (or European diplomatic corps) – are not spelt out clearly and could come to have either a positive or negative effect on development and humanitarian affairs in time. For development cooperation, much will depend on how the politics and policy-making of the EU plays out after the Lisbon vote.

In other words, a strong and positive role for the EU in development cooperation will require a strong and positive engagement by Ireland in EU decision-making.

For the members of Dóchas, it is imperative that Europe takes every opportunity to reinforce its role in the world to promote principled development. If Lisbon is passed, the key question is whether the EU follows through on its principles and aspirations of the Treaty, and put in place an effective infrastructure to achieve the objective of poverty eradication.

Dóchas members believe that there are a number of key ways in which the EU can strengthen its role as a positive agent for change:

- There should be a permanent Commissioner for Development, to ensure representation of Development perspectives at the highest political level and to ensure coherence in EU decision-making. The Commissioner should have a say on both development policy and funding and the implementation of those policies and budgets. The Commissioner for Development and other relevant Commissioners must also be accountable to the European Parliament for all their actions.
- Development policy should remain separate to Common Foreign and Security Policy, helping to maintain a clear, independent place for development. New services and mechanisms should ensure that wider EU policies are consistent with Development objectives. Under no circumstances must Development and Humanitarian Aid policies become instrumentalised in the EU's foreign and security policies. Reference should be made to the principles of independence and partnership in Development, and should be endorsed by all the new or restructured institutions within the EU.
- The EU's Development policy should apply to all developing countries. The Development Service, including the Commissioner for Development, should be responsible for all programming in developing countries, to avoid any inconsistencies between African Caribbean and Pacific Countries (ACP) and other developing countries.
- While the Lisbon Treaty text does acknowledge the importance of policy coherence for development, there is a need to develop pro-development trade policies, which are coherent with the EU's wider development objectives. This work should be incorporated into the role of the Commissioner for Development, as well as of the High Representative and the European External Action Service (EEAS).
- The mandate of any EEAS should clearly outline the importance of Development objectives in its work. These objectives should be matched by sufficient budget lines, which remain separate to Foreign Policy and Security funding.
- New EU Delegations should include development professionals to help ensure that poverty eradication remains central to EU international operations.