

Development Cooperation in the EU – After the Lisbon Treaty

Dóchas Submission to the Sub-Committee on Ireland's Future in the European Union

4 November 2008

Summary

The 39 members of the Dóchas network welcome the opportunity to discuss European external policies with the Sub-Committee on Ireland's Future in the European Union. The EU is a key actor on the international stage, and the biggest donor of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in the world.

From the outset, the European 'project' has emphasised the importance of Europe's role and responsibility to bring about a fairer world, and we are proud to state that to be European means to be committed to international justice.

The founding values of the European Union – equality, solidarity, international cooperation and human rights – are of great value, and cannot be taken for granted; they need to be protected and reinforced on an on-going basis. When Ireland is discussing how it can best protect its long-term interests within the context of European cooperation, it is vital that it does so on the basis of our core values as a nation, and as Europeans, and that it is looking for the legal and institutional frameworks that will guarantee those values for the future.

This submission is made by Dóchas and its 39 member organisations. Our members are supported in their work by 850,000 people – one in seven people on the island of Ireland – who consider it vital that the EU should keep development cooperation and independent humanitarian aid at the heart of the European project. In our view, the current debate about the future of the European Union and Ireland's place within it, is an outstanding opportunity to reaffirm Ireland's and Europe's commitment to global solidarity and global justice.

In our view, the Lisbon Treaty contained much that was positive in this respect. The positives of the Treaty text need to be maintained, and the areas where the nature and scope of proposals in the Treaty text were not clarified need to be discussed further. And importantly, the appropriate mechanisms need to be put in place that make it possible to implement the aspirations of the Treaty.

For better or worse, Ireland is uniquely positioned after the 'No vote' to engage actively to ensure that the arrangements put in place have a positive impact on Development and Humanitarian work within the EU and its Member States. An opportunity well worth exploring.

Introduction

Dóchas is delighted to be given the opportunity to make this submission. Our 39 member organisations view the work of the Sub-Committee on Ireland's Future in the European Union as vital to promoting a thorough debate on Ireland's place in the European Union, and of the European Union in the wider world.

The rejection of the Lisbon Treaty by the Irish electorate has prompted a degree of confusion about Ireland's expectations of, and support for, the EU; confusion that needs to be addressed. Our submission today is aimed at ensuring that the principles and values behind Ireland's and the EU's development cooperation programmes are borne in mind in the deliberations of the Committee.

Europe – a key actor in the efforts to make poverty history

The EU is a key development actor in the world today, providing more than half of the total global official development assistance. Furthermore, development cooperation has been a principal expression of the EU's relations with the rest of the world since the EEC was first established.

And development cooperation – together with coherence in other policy areas to complement and sustain it – is at the heart of a 'social and responsible Europe' that many of its citizens want to see...built on values of equality, inclusiveness, solidarity, human rights and multilateralism: a Europe which uses its wealth and influence responsibly as part of the global community.

At the same time, Ireland has emerged as a powerful actor in the area of development cooperation, and the government has declared that Development Cooperation is at the very heart of Ireland's foreign policy.

Nevertheless, when the Lisbon Treaty was being discussed in Ireland, the debate focused principally on many other areas of EU policy making: corporate tax rates, neutrality, agriculture reform, etc. There were other important elements, however, that made the Treaty important for EU development cooperation and that of Member States – and, therefore, for millions of people around the world who live in poverty.

Dóchas represents 39 Irish member organisations, supported by some 850,000 supporters – one in every 7 people on the island of Ireland – for whom making poverty history is a prime goal. As the national umbrella group of Irish overseas Development NGOs, Dóchas also coordinates with NGO colleagues across Europe, who share similar views. For us, and for all those we work with, Europe has the motive, and the ability, to be a major force in the world.

Ours is a passionate and committed constituency that considers it vital that the EU should keep development cooperation and independent humanitarian aid at the heart of the European project – on an equal footing with other foreign, security and commercial agendas – and that Ireland should continue to play an active role in ensuring that.

It's because the European debate after the Irish 'No vote' will now help shape and define the future of Europe (including its development cooperation and humanitarian practices) that we would like to keep those matters to the fore during your Committee discussions.

And with the European Parliament elections coming up in 2009, development NGOs and activists will be busy making the case (to political parties, party blocs, sitting MEPs and other candidates) that strong overseas development is vital to how voters see themselves, as Irish citizens and Europeans, and should be strong in their mix of policies and positions.

Strengthening Europe's positive role in the world

As we set out in our presentation to the Oireachtas Committee on European Affairs some months ago, we feel that the Lisbon Treaty would have strengthened specific aspects of the EU's development policy. The Treaty established that Europe's development policy will be clearly focused on poverty eradication and that it is the principal framework for its relations with all developing countries. The Treaty also provided, for the first time, a legal provision for the EU's humanitarian assistance.

Within the Lisbon Treaty, the two main articles that deal with development cooperation and humanitarian aid (Article III-118b and 118j) set the eradication of poverty as the primary objective of development cooperation, call for coherence between EU policies that affect developing countries and development goals, and require Member States and EU development cooperation to complement and reinforce each other.

Dóchas members also welcome the Treaty provisions that would have meant that the EU's development policy would legally be the framework for all of the EU's relations with developing countries (whereas at the moment that's split between different Commissioners and fragments of Commission services).

Dóchas considers it vital that any arrangements that may emerge in the debate about the EU post the Irish 'No' vote maintain these elements of a strong and clear legal framework for development policy, with poverty eradication at its heart, and the legally enshrined principle of the coherence of EU policies with development objectives, as proposed in the Lisbon Treaty.

Clarifying intentions and implications

On the other hand, Development NGOs saw dangers in aspects of the Lisbon Treaty, such as increasing military cooperation among Member States, both inside and outside Europe's own borders; extension of new powers to the Commission in the area of trade, where it has already been aggressive in dealings with developing countries; and the drive for 'consistency' in all EU external relations, with the risk that development and humanitarian responses could be subordinated to political and security objectives.

Also, with the nature and scope of many of the proposals in the Lisbon text not spelt out clearly, but left for later discussions and negotiation, the status and implications for Development of some of the other proposals in the Lisbon are still not clear. What is certain is that there will be implications.

The High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy will play a role, as vice-president of the Commission, in coordinating the different external policies areas (including development), but what that means is not clear:

- Will Development be brought to the heart of EU political processes, alongside other EU interests -- or will it be submitted to the "political control" of the High Representative

- Will there be a fully-fledged Development Commissioner, overseeing the different Development and Humanitarian programmes currently fragmented, reducing Development's visibility, effectiveness and due 'political power' within the EU?
- And will there be a distinct Development Budget (which should include the EDF) to strengthen the reality of an independent, coherent Development priority within the EU?

Another key area of uncertainty is the setting-up of the proposed External Action Service (EAS) to aid the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs. Its remit is still not clear but many are concerned that this major change in the EU set-up will be introduced with little transparency or democratic consultation – and that it could sideline and reduce Europe's development cooperation to an expedient tool of foreign and security policy.

So the appointment of the High Representative and establishment of the External Action Service could yet be positive for increasing the effectiveness of EU development policy, or could be quite the opposite: at the moment, there is still no way of knowing.

Going forward: What Europe can do to help make poverty history

As with so many other policy areas, the Irish vote and current status of the Lisbon Treaty has created uncertainty and ambiguity in relation to both Development Cooperation and Humanitarian engagement at EU level. The current debate about about the future of the European Union and Ireland's place within it, is an outstanding opportunity to reaffirm Ireland's and Europe's commitment to global solidarity and global justice.

In particular, at this stage, Development NGOs would like to see:

1. Maintenance of a clear, **independent space in the EU for Development**, so that it is not instrumentalised for overall foreign policy objectives;
2. **Retention of a Commissioner for Development**, and consolidation of the different Development programmes within DG-DEV, to ensure adequate political space and strength in EU policy-making, and the establishment of an independent budget line for development;
3. **Improved Policy Coherence for Development**, so that development goals are not undermined by other policy priorities – such as Trade, Agriculture or Security;
4. Proactive use of the space provided for **scrutiny and oversight by the European Parliament** – and also national parliaments, as you have been discussing – in relation to EU development policy in the first place, but also those other areas (such as trade, agriculture, security, arms trade, migration, and so forth) that have a major impact on developing countries.

Each of these points is elaborated below.

1. Independent space for Development: The proposed institutional changes are vital, and the detail of these remains to be worked out between the Commission and Council. From the remit of the High Representative to the scope and workings of the External Action Service, to the structure of the Commission and its different DGs, these arrangements will have a vital influence on the nature (and ultimately impact) of Development Cooperation and Humanitarian response.

For better or worse, Ireland is uniquely positioned after the 'No vote' to engage actively to ensure that the arrangements put in place have a positive impact on Development and Humanitarian work within the EU and its Member States.

2. Retention of a Commissioner for Development: Secondly, we would urge the Committee to support the retention of a Commissioner for Development, in order to assure a clear focus and strong political voice for development and humanitarian matters within the EU.

If we are to make serious inroads in the fight against poverty and exclusion, we need clear leadership and guidance. Only by ensuring that Development concerns are represented at the table when it comes to decision-making time, can we be sure that these key interests – cemented in the *White Paper on Irish Aid* as a central plank of Irish foreign policy – are reflected in Europe's relations with the wider world.

Not alone that but – depending on the remit of the Select Committee, and bearing in mind Ireland's continued leadership on Development matters – it might consider suggesting that Ireland seek to be given the honour of appointing the Development Commissioner.

3. Improved Policy Coherence for Development: Just as development is much wider than aid (involving economic aspects, human security, participation and social justice, human rights, etc), developing countries, and programmes are affected by so many other factors – whether they relate to trade, agriculture, bio-fuels, or wider political and diplomatic considerations...

With that in mind, Dóchas strongly emphasises the need for Policy Coherence for Development, which means, at a minimum, ensuring that we don't undermine development goals and activities through policies and actions in other areas.

This "Policy Coherence for Development" is embedded in EU development policy – and was also enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty – and that's one commitment Development NGOs really need to see maintained in any new proposals and arrangements that may come after Lisbon.

But, perhaps importantly, the EU's rhetoric on policy coherence for development needs to be matched by its actions and – in certain areas at least – that's not the case.

One strong negative is the EU approach to Trade policy, which fails to take seriously the EU's commitments on development. In the pointed example of Economic Partnership Agreements, for instance, the Commission is using Europe's economic might to pressurise some of the poorest countries in the world to open up their economies at a pace and scale they consider too fast, and diminishing these countries' abilities to set their own pro-poor policies.

Progress on such issues requires political will and leadership, above all, and we consider it vital that Ireland maintain this commitment to EU and Member States' policy coherence for development in whatever new treaty, or referendum, or other arrangements may emerge from the current discussions at Irish and EU levels.

4. Scrutiny and democratic oversight: The Lisbon Treaty text also brought some scope for national parliaments (as well as the European Parliament) to play a stronger role in EU policy-making and scrutiny. Dóchas urges the Select Committee to ensure that such a strengthened oversight role remains in any new proposals.

Dóchas urges that the Oireachtas and its Committees – especially European Affairs, European Scrutiny and Foreign Affairs, in this context – continue to ensure that the legislative and policy implications of new EU initiatives are carefully considered in an Irish context... and that their implications for our partners in developing countries form an essential part of this analysis, so that any new arrangements in Europe give due space and priority to Development issues.

Recent changes in the Oireachtas structure – not least the establishment of the Joint Committee on European Scrutiny and this Sub-Committee on Ireland’s Future in the EU – reflect the increasingly important role Europe plays in our national assembly. A development that Dóchas welcomes.

In the coming years, there are many issues where strong input from the Oireachtas will be required. These include development issues, such as the implementation of the EU Consensus on Development and the Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, but also issues relating to other areas of policy that have a direct impact on development processes. The Oireachtas must play a strong role in ensuring that the EU does not *give aid* with one hand and takes *away the opportunity to develop* with the other. The Oireachtas could play a particularly useful and important role, for example, by scrutinising EU trade policy – notably, and urgently, the Economic Partnership Agreements being negotiated at present with ACP countries, and especially their compatibility with Irish and EU development policy.

Continuing the debate

And so, to conclude: thank you for this opportunity to address the Committee and for involving civil society in your deliberations. We hope the EU will continue to engage Civil Society in these important discussions in the coming months, so that our considerable experience and expertise is brought to bear in shaping a ‘social Europe’ – not just for its own citizens but for a more just, fair and stable world.

We foresee Ireland continuing to work closely with Europe and, as a proven friend of Development, working to protect and strengthen Development and Humanitarian roles within the EU – whatever happens regarding treaties and referenda.

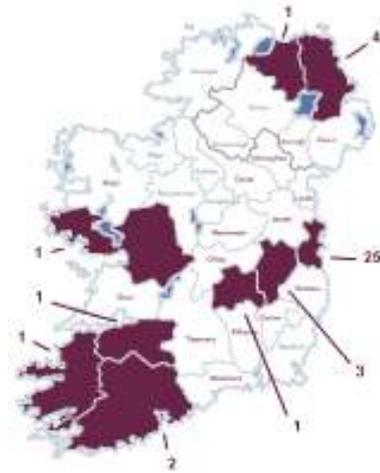
Some important new legal and policy commitments, as well as EU mechanisms and arrangements, are slightly unclear at the moment, but care will have to be taken that important Development concerns are not lost in the mix, and that the world’s poor and vulnerable should come out better from these deliberations.

And it is also our hope that the Oireachtas will be in a stronger position than ever to help deliver principled and effective action on the EU’s development and humanitarian activities, in the first place, but also in all its wider policies that affect developing countries.

We look forward to working with Oireachtas members – individually and in Committee – and helping you with your work in any way we can – to make sure that the EU gives Development Cooperation the priority, political weight and focus needed to really help Make Poverty History.

Dóchas Member Agencies

1. **ActionAid Ireland**
2. **Action from Ireland**
3. **Aidlink**
4. **Amnesty International-Irish Section**
5. **Bóthar**
6. **Centre for Global Education**
7. **ChildFund Ireland**
8. **Children in Crossfire**
9. **Christian Aid Ireland**
10. **Church Mission Society Ireland**
11. **Comhlámh**
12. **Concern Worldwide**
13. **Friends of Londiani (Ireland)**
14. **Galway One World Centre**
15. **Gorta**
16. **International Service Ireland**
17. **Irish League of Credit Unions Foundation**
18. **Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs**
19. **Irish Council for International Students**
20. **Irish Family Planning Association**
21. **Irish Foundation for Cooperative Development**
22. **Irish Missionary Union**
23. **Irish Red Cross**
24. **Kerry Action for Development Education**
25. **National Youth Council of Ireland**
26. **Oxfam Ireland**
27. **Plan Ireland**
28. **Self Help Africa**
29. **Skillshare International Ireland**
30. **Suas Educational Development**
31. **The Hope Foundation**
32. **Trócaire**
33. **Vita**
34. **Voluntary Service International**
35. **Voluntary Service Overseas**
36. **Volunteer Missionary Movement**
37. **War on Want Northern Ireland**
38. **Wingspread International**
39. **World Vision Ireland**



Dóchas member organisations:

- ⇒ *Have headquarters in nine counties;*
- ⇒ *Have a combined turnover of over €300 million;*
- ⇒ *Are supported by over 850,000 people in 32 counties;*
- ⇒ *Employ over 900 people in Ireland, and many more in developing countries.*