



Rue De Pascale, 4
1040 Brussels - Belgium

Contact: Annalisa Mazzella
Advocacy and Communication Officer
Tel: +32 (0)2 235 03 94
Email: amazella@caritas-europa.org
Website: <http://www.caritas-europa.org>

BRINGING HUMAN DIGNITY TO THE HEART OF THE EUROPEAN DEBATE

Information briefing for the Czech Permanent Representation to the EU
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Introduction

Caritas Europa is the umbrella organisation of the European network of 48 Caritas member organisations that are operating in 44 European countries. The organisation actively focuses upon policy issues related to social inequality and poverty; migration and asylum within all European countries; and matters of emergency humanitarian assistance, international development and peace throughout the world.

Over the past several years, Caritas Europa has gathered broad experience in exchanging with the Member States designated to hold the EU presidency. This exchange aims to present Caritas Europa's positions and recommendations in a dialogue on policy issues that are relevant to the presidency's political agenda.

We have carefully studied the 18-month programme of the French, Czech and Swedish Presidencies and are convinced that Caritas Europa can make valid contributions to some of the strategic priorities indicated there.

For example, following its overall mission to promote human development, social justice and sustainable social systems in Europe and throughout the world, Caritas Europa is highly concerned with the subjects below which will be addressed in the following chapters:

- ✓ Social Policy: Social cohesion and social inclusion with reference to "active inclusion" and the implementation of the renewed Social Agenda
- ✓ Development Policy: From aid effectiveness to development effectiveness

Caritas Europa firmly believes in the importance of the good offices of the Permanent Representation, in view of the forthcoming French EU Presidency, in achieving future positive developments in these areas. The organisation is therefore pleased to submit this information briefing, which was contributed by the responsible thematic departments of Caritas Europa under the coordination of the Advocacy and Communication department.

Social Policy:

Social cohesion and social inclusion with reference to "active inclusion" and the implementation of the renewed Social Agenda

According to the 18month programme, an overriding priority of the Trio Presidency in the Social Policy area is to promote the "active inclusion" of those furthest from the labour market and the most disadvantaged.

As one of the EU-level networks engaged in combating poverty and social exclusion, Caritas Europa has contributed to the consultation on "Modernising Social Protection for Greater Social Justice and Economic Cohesion" leading to the Commission recommendation on the issue of "active inclusion", which was published in September of this year.

The concept of "active inclusion"

According to Caritas Europa, "active inclusion" is indeed an important step forward as compared to the traditional active labour market policies.

As for inclusive labour markets, access to employment is rightly seen by the Commission as the preferred option when dealing with poverty and social exclusion. Caritas Europa stresses that work is a value as it provides the conditions for a decent life and, in principle, an effective instrument against poverty.

Where people in spite of working full-time are not able to earn enough to live in dignity, income support can only be a second-best solution, as it is through decent job opportunities (including decent wages) that people are given the opportunity to lead a dignified life based on employment. In this sense Caritas Europa welcomes the integration of minimum income as factor of "active inclusion". This in line with a framework of inclusion and participation and require decisions on eligibility and conditions to be taken on a level closest to the potential beneficiaries.

However, despite the introduction of this new concept, there is a need to reconsider the Lisbon strategy in its core assumption that jobs alone will solve the problems of poverty and social exclusion. Appropriate measures are needed to ensure that the overarching values of dignity, full participation and involvement in society can still apply, even in circumstances where standard employment is not an option.

Caritas Europa stresses the contribution that can be made to "active inclusion" through the channel of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Drawing from its experience, the organisation strongly recommends public support not only for social economy enterprises but also for the social function of the enterprise in itself. Public compensation to enterprises which employ disadvantaged people on a permanent basis should be seen as an investment in human resources and, following the notion of general interest, as carrying the preventive function to avoid permanent exclusion from the labour market.

In line with the overarching value of dignity and full participation in society that has still to apply even in circumstances where standard employment is not an option, people without a job should be offered an individually adapted integration path: professional guidance, vocational training and life long learning, as well as employment opportunities including intermediate work, involvement in social economy enterprises and other forms of supported/protected employment. Microcredits are another possibility to empower beneficiaries. They can work as valuable tools for the self organisation of the community surrounding the disadvantaged person with he or she assuming a leading character in both his/her personal development and the common development of the community.

Social inclusion goes not quasi automatically hand in hand with economic progress. Therefore solidarity is essential to maintain and strengthen the cohesion of European societies and implies political commitment to tackle structural inequalities and ensure the dignity of everyone through redistribution mechanisms. Social protection systems and the provision of services of general interest are some of the concrete responses that Member States and people have developed to implement solidarity.

Caritas Europa shares the view expressed by the Commission that investing in human capital is essential to sustain economic growth, labour market participation and living standards and that tackling social problem at their source reduces the risk that the welfare system will have to compensate for social dysfunctions. However, the organisation underlines that the efficiency of social protection systems may not only be assessed on their ability to contribute to employment and economic growth, but very much also to protect human rights, uphold the dignity of men and women and foster social cohesion.

Implementation of the renewed Social Agenda

Caritas Europa was part of the delegation of the Social Platform (Platform of European Social NGOs), which attended a consultation session in the framework of the Informal Meeting of Employment and Social Affairs Ministers, held in July of this year in Chantilly, France.

The organisation welcomed the adoption of the so-called “social package” as an important recognition by the European Commission of the need to achieve a better balance in its agenda through “active inclusion” and promotion of equality.

Among the suggestions put forward by social NGOs on that occasion were the following ways of contributing to greater social cohesion and non-discrimination:

- ✓ Adopt and promote “active inclusion” principles based on the universal right to a life in dignity, adequate minimum income and active participation in society.
- ✓ Adopt and meet meaningful EU targets to reduce poverty.
- ✓ Adopt and promote implementation of an EU anti discrimination directive with the same scope as in the Race Equality Directive (2000/43/EC) and covering age, disability, religion and belief and sexual orientation.
- ✓ Ensure consistency with international obligations related to the principle of equal treatment in the areas of education, financial services, healthcare, marital and family status and the activities of private individuals.
- ✓ Add and promote implementation of a provision on multiple discrimination to ensure an effective protection of all victims.
- ✓ Make and keep a commitment to level up by 2010 the gender equality legislation to ensure the same level of protection than all the other grounds covered in the Article 13 TCE.
- ✓ Establish and promote implementation of a principle for a shared competence between employment and social affairs ministers and interior ministers on European immigration policies in order for these policies to work as a means of strengthening social cohesion and encouraging the integration of migrants.

Conclusion

During its mandate, the Czech EU Presidency will have the opportunity to influence follow-up in the area of "active inclusion" and the implementation of the renewed Social Agenda. A positive consideration of the above presented orientations would be very much appreciated.

Development Policy: From aid effectiveness to development effectiveness

The European Union, as the largest donor of development assistance in the world and one of the strongest economic powers, has an important and legitimate role to play in shaping the international agenda regarding the financing, governance and effectiveness of international development. This role is also a matter of solidarity and a moral duty towards the poor.

At the Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness as well as at the UN Review Conference on Financing for Development in Doha, the EU has demonstrated leadership and capacity to present ambitious common positions. It is imperative that the EU shows its willingness to continue its leadership beyond these conferences by implementing the EU commitments.

Post-Doha process

The results of the Doha conference are mitigated. The context of the financial and economic crisis made the conference timelier and at the same time weakened country leaders' capacity and political will to commit on development financing as far as hoped

Caritas welcomes the UN Secretary General's initiative to organise a UN summit inclusive of all countries with regard to the impact of the financial crisis on poor countries. It will be of great added value to integrate the perspectives of the civil society in this process.

ODA level

Caritas welcomes the EU's repeated commitment to dedicate 0.7% of GNI to international development aid by 2015 as it was reiterated by the EU Presidency in Doha. Yet, aid figures show that many old and new Member States are not on track to meet their 2010 targets (see "No Time to Waste."; CONCORD, May 2007). So far only four EU Member States have reached or go beyond their ODA target; though some Member States have announced drastic cuts in their planned ODA delivery in the year(s) to come.

In spite of the weak language of the Doha Outcome Document, the EU Member States had already agreed to adopt detailed timetables showing how they will deliver on their ODA target; and they are expected to do so by the end of 2009.

Fight against tax evasion

Leaders meeting in Doha have made a small step forward in denouncing tax fraud and prejudicial tax practices and in recognising tax justice as a development priority. However, in order to combat tax evasion, it would be necessary to upgrade the UN Tax committee into an intergovernmental body.

Post-Accra process

The Accra Agenda for Actions (AAA) offered some improvements in recognising the role of civil society as development actors and in holding donors and governments into account. However, the AAA has not gone as far as setting timebound actions and addressing properly some issues causing breaks to effective development such as tied aid.

Democratic ownership by partner countries

The principles of subsidiary and participation require the EU to respect democratic ownership

of the development process and allow partner countries to be in the driving seat by:

- ✓ Creating space for the participation of all national stakeholders - The EU must indicate in the country strategy plans prepared with partner countries how they will work more closely with parliaments, local authorities and NGOs, and strengthen the capacity of these institutions.
- ✓ Untying all aid from the EU, including food aid to all countries - A deadline must be set for each Member State.
- ✓ Reforming technical assistance, so that it responds more to the request of partner countries and contribute effectively to build capacity.
- ✓ Improving the predictability of aid so that developing countries can integrate with greater precision all aid flows in their budget and their accounting systems.

Accountability for the impact of aid

In view of a better accountability towards developing countries and their citizens the EU must deliver radical improvements through:

- ✓ Establishing by the end of 2009 plans of action for the strengthening of mutual accountability, including supporting in-country mechanisms for holding donors to account.
- ✓ Making monitoring and evaluation of aid truly independent and focused on the impact of aid on reducing poverty.
- ✓ Disclosing in a timely and public manner information on the volume, distribution and results of development expenditure in order to provide useful information for budget planning and accounting of partner governments, and to allow civil society organisations to play their watchdog role.

Direct budget support

The transfer of aid directly to governments is welcomed if it is carefully designed to ensure the participation of key stakeholders from the development sector. However, when the recipient government is the only one who can decide whether or not to transfer funding to civil society in a national context of little or no collaboration, this aid delivery modality can lead to reduced allocations for NGOs and even deprivation of funds for certain organisations. Sectors such as health or education, which are sometimes completely run by civil society organisations, are particularly affected. The same risks are incurred by civil society organisations involved in public policy monitoring.

According to "The EU's Footprint in the South", a study published by Caritas Europa and CIDSE in 2007, experiences with both general budget support and sector budget support in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Nicaragua and Zambia have not clearly promoted the role of civil society and national parliaments.

From these remarks it follows that, in the framework of the EU Member States' plans for increasing budget support, the European Union and its Member States shall ensure that this aid delivery modality does not undermine democratic ownership or threaten the existence of civil society in developing countries.

Policy Coherence for Development

Development policy and ODA cannot alone realise the expected impact of eradicating poverty and achieving the MDGs, if other policies have a negative impact on development objectives. Therefore coherence between development aid and other external policies such as trade, agriculture or migration is crucial in view of a well balanced EU's global poverty reduction strategy.

Policy coherence is not only a key political commitment but has also a firm legal basis in the EC Treaty (Article 178). Caritas underlines the need for greater coherence of EU policies and a comprehensive approach to the issue of effectiveness: beyond aid effectiveness, it is urgent to talk about development effectiveness.

Conclusion

During its mandate, the Czech EU Presidency will be in a favourable position to consolidate the EU policies on aid effectiveness and financing for development. Caritas calls on the Czech EU Presidency to actively support and facilitate the adoption of ambitious implementation plans following the EU commitments made in Accra and in Doha.

Follow-Up

Caritas Europa is confident of a continued positive correspondence with the Permanent Representation and will make further contributions during the forthcoming Czech EU Presidency, where appropriate and possible.