

# THE EUROPE WE WANT



## A New European Parliament for a Fairer World

### Why are the European Parliament elections important for development cooperation?

European citizens will have the chance to cast their votes on a new European Parliament (EP) between 22 and 25 May 2014. The EU elections provide the opportunity to ensure that global justice and poverty eradication are prioritized by the new European leaders in the Parliament and also in the next European Commission (EC). Development NGOs, networks and all citizens who care about Europe and the world we live in and want to influence the outcomes of the elections should cast their vote for candidates for Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who champion issues of global justice.

The European Parliament (EP) has a significant impact on European development policies and other policy areas that matter for development. Also, it co-decides on the EU budget and monitors the use of EU funds for international development. The European development policies and budget matter – in 2012, the European Institutions implemented over EUR 13.7 billion in development assistance<sup>1</sup>, which makes them the second largest donor in the world.

Experts and polls are indicating that there could be a much bigger bloc of populist Eurosceptic lawmakers in

the next European Parliament. The on-going crises and Eurosceptic and extremist tendencies in many of the EU member states could endanger values of solidarity, equality, tolerance and human rights.

Ahead of the upcoming European elections, this Policy Digest firstly looks more closely at the role of the new European Parliament in development cooperation and in addressing inequalities in the world. Secondly, the actions of European civil society organisations (CSOs) active in the field of development cooperation are presented both ahead of and following the elections. Thirdly, suggested action points are outlined for citizens (individuals and organisations) that want to get engaged in achieving the “Europe We Want” by influencing the European elections and the new set of commissioners.

### What role does the new EP have concerning international development?

Many important decisions, including agreement on the EU long-term budget until 2020, have already been taken by the current EP together with the other European institutions. Nevertheless, there are numerous ways the future MEPs can influence

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.concordeurope.org/275-2013-aidwatch-report>

international development and other policy areas<sup>2</sup>.

The European Parliament contributes to the **definition of European development policies**, for instance through parliamentary reports, and by organizing thematic discussions with the participation of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs (HR/VP). During the 2011-2013 negotiations on the EU's Development Cooperation Instrument for the period up to 2020, the Parliament played a prominent role in convincing the Commission and Member States of the importance of having a stronger focus on poverty eradication, gender and human rights.

The European Parliament has enhanced **legislative powers** since the Lisbon Treaty came into effect (2009), and it decides on EU legislation on an equal footing with the Council in 90% of cases. It also elects the president of the European Commission and consents to the appointment of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The EP can contribute to **making other policy areas with an impact on developing countries more coherent** and supportive of development objectives. One example of the current EP making policy coherence for development (PCD) a reality was when the Parliament introduced amendments in various pieces of legislation in 2013 to increase the transparency of multinational companies in developing countries and tackle tax cheating. **Tax dodging** by EU companies and other transnational corporations costs developing countries billions in lost tax revenues each year. In 2010, at least \$859bn was lost from developing countries through illicit financial flows. This is 13 times the amount the EU spent on development aid in 2012.<sup>3</sup> Corporate transparency is not a development policy, but by making it more difficult for European companies to cheat taxes in developing countries, the European Parliament helped to increase tax revenues in these countries, which in turn can be used to fund education and health for example.

The EP also has **budgetary powers** as it co-decides on the budget of the European development cooperation instruments and on the EU's annual budget each year. As part of its **supervisory and control powers** the EP monitors how European law and policies are implemented and whether development funds are being used effectively and in

line with the priorities defined in the policy framework.

Another important role of the newly elected EP will be to **approve the next EU leadership** team – elect the new President of the European Commission and approve the new set of commissioners. Therefore by participating in the May EP elections, citizens will also have a say in the formation of the new European Commission, making this year's elections truly European and more democratic.

The European Parliament matters and has a position to influence important **global discussions**. In 2014 we are close to the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals and in the process of creating the new agenda for the period **beyond 2015**, not only for the countries of the Global South, but for every country in the world. In this context, there is a **need for leadership** to tackle the root causes of current and future global challenges. The European Union positions in global fora have the potential to influence the debates on issues like climate change, tax transparency and human rights. In order to tackle such challenges there is a need for a **Commission, Council and Parliament that will prioritise the fight against poverty and inequality** both inside and outside of Europe.

### “The Europe We Want!” Campaign ahead of the European Parliament Elections

CONCORD – the European NGO confederation for relief and development – has developed together with allies a politically independent campaign “The Europe We Want!” in order to encourage a debate on achieving a fairer Europe at home and abroad at the upcoming European Parliament elections on 22-25 May 2014.



In particular, the campaign calls for CSOs and EU citizens to mobilize their vote for the Europe and the world we want to live in. The 2014 European Parliament elections provide an opportunity to elect MEPs who are committed to global justice, poverty eradication and fostering an enabling environment for CSOs. There are three key messages within the campaign.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.simonmaxwell.eu/blog/why-the-european-parliament-elections-matter-for-international-development-and-eight-things-to-look-out-for-in-the-manifestos.html>

<sup>3</sup> CONCORD, Spotlight on EU Policy Coherence for Development: The real life impact of EU policies on the poor, 2013

### ● Message 1: A Fairer Europe for a Fairer World

Policy coherence for development (PCD) has to become a reality. It is an important step to tackle poverty at the global level. After decades of providing development aid, the European Union has recognized this is not the only solution to poverty. Other policies in areas such as trade, environment, finance and migration have negative impacts on development cooperation goals.

### ● Message 2: Inequality Hurts Us All

Inequality is a phenomenon that occurs both in the EU and outside. The gap between the rich and poor is growing in many of the EU countries. Tackling inequality both in Europe and outside should be at the core of the decisions taken by the European Parliament. This can be achieved through key measures such as tax justice, fair and sustainable use of natural resources and a fairer system of food production.

### ● Message 3: A new Social Contract with European Citizens

As the only directly and democratically elected EU institution, MEPs have both the responsibility and the opportunity to step up their and the EU's engagement with citizens. One way to do this is by involving organized European civil society more in decision making. In particular, to ensure that relevant and representative civil society organisations are involved in the expert and advisory groups or committees that are put in place to support and advise the European Commission and the European External Action Service in their political and executive tasks.

Together with other civil society actors CONCORD has launched a campaign website Europe We Want: [www.europewewant.eu](http://www.europewewant.eu). The website explains the messages of the campaign, invites EU citizens to take

actions and informs them on the events relevant for the EP elections.

The success of the campaign lies at the national level of each EU member state. National development CSO platforms and their members are invited to build coalitions with other organisations working on the EP elections in their countries, spread information on the importance of EP elections and engage citizens.

The key tools of the campaign are the **web-streamed debates** with the MEP candidates. Also, from mid-April there will be an **online candidates' database** available that includes all MEP candidates, sortable by party, country, constituency etc. It will include the candidates' contacts details, domestic party and position on election list and feature predicted results and make up of constituencies after the vote. This database can be used to plan and strategize advocacy actions around the elections.

Around the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 2014, CONCORD will launch the **week of symbolic action** which will give CSOs the opportunity to direct the attention of EU citizens to the EP elections. To develop the EP elections campaign CONCORD has cooperated with other stakeholders across Europe (among them European Youth Forum, Fair-Trade Advocacy Office, European Parliamentarian Forum on Population and Development and others).

There are also "non-development" organisations working on the EP elections and trying to mobilize voters. Across EU member states there are possibilities to get in touch with university students associations, Erasmus Students Network, European Youth Forum members, youth parties etc. These organisations organise discussions with candidates and other stakeholders for their target groups. This is an opportunity for development NGOs to bring about their issues and messages for a fairer life in the EU and in the world.

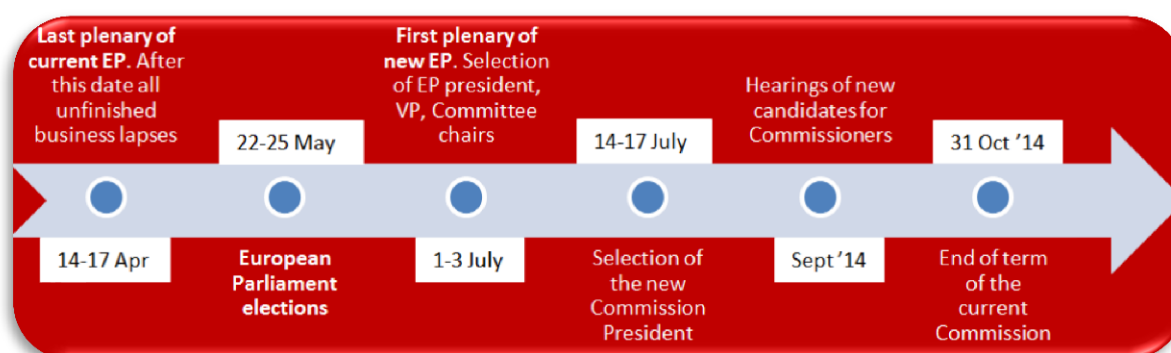


Table adapted from: Linklaters (2013) EU transition around European elections in 2014

### What will happen after the elections?

Voting in the European Parliament elections is the first and arguably most important step of a long process that will continue until November. In June, elected MEPs will come to Brussels to start **building the political groups** and agree on the **composition of the different parliamentary committees**, which focus on specific policy areas. The whole Parliament will formally meet for the first time in Strasbourg at the beginning of July. This **first plenary meeting** will be used to elect the President and Vice-president of the Parliament, as well as the members and chairs of the different committees.

Once it is clear who is elected as a MEP from your country, **raise awareness about development issues with the successful candidates**. CONCORD is also planning to take actions to raise awareness among the newly elected MEPs on the role of the European confederation regarding European development policies.

Soon after the elections the MEPs have an important role to play when **approving the new European Commission** including the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs. The new President of the European Parliament together with the Council will propose the 28 members of the Commission, known as Commissioners and broadly equivalent to ministers since each is assigned a thematic responsibility. There has to be one Commissioner from each Member State.

Then, the EP will start the **hearings of the proposed Commissioners** and vote on their suitability. At this time CSOs can suggest MEPs questions to be proposed to test the suitability of the individuals for these positions. Once the 28 Commissioners have been confirmed by the Parliament, the new Commission should formally start working on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November.



### What can I do?

- Take part in “The Europe We Want” campaign through the social media platforms and joint actions – share the joint messages!
- Build alliances with other organisations working on EP elections in your country (e.g. environmental CSOs, students’ organisations, think tanks, etc.) and bring the topic of the fairer life in the EU and in the world in the discussions.
- Get in touch with the Office of the European Parliament in your country to establish cooperation and become involved in its information campaign on the EP elections “Act. React. Impact”.
- Organise or participate in discussions on EP elections (with the MEP candidates and other stakeholders).
- Approach the MEP candidates with a questionnaire/ memorandum/ manifesto/ letter on development cooperation and PCD related issues and ask them to commit to the pledges.
- Organize personal meetings with the MEP candidates and discuss your manifesto and possibilities of future cooperation.
- Inform the target groups you work with and the wider public on the EP elections and why they matter, e.g. via your newsletters, social networks, website, etc.
- Raise awareness on EP elections among your colleagues, family and friends and mobilize them to go to vote for a fairer world.
- After the elections, approach and raise awareness about the development issues among the new MEPs.
  - Propose questions for MEPs ahead of the hearings of the Commissioner candidates.

#### AUTHORS:

Andrea Girmanová  
(Platforma MVRO)

Igoris Kononovas (LU)

Javier Pereira (ActionAid)

Mirjam Sutrop (TRIALOG)

European NGO confederation  
for relief and development