



Slovensko predsedstvo EU 2008
Slovenian Presidency of the EU 2008
La Présidence slovène de l'UE 2008

Madam Co-President of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, (Glenys Kinnock)

Mr Co-President of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, (Wilkie Rasmussen)

Mr President of the ACP Council of Ministers (Mr Ali Farah Assoweh),

Distinguished Members of Parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to Ljubljana. The Joint Parliamentary Assembly of Africa, Caribbean, Pacific and European Union countries is today meeting for the fifteenth time. It has become a synonym for good partnership and successful dialogue between Members of Parliament representing more than one sixth of the citizens of the world.

Slovenia is the first of the new EU Member States to assume the Presidency of the EU Council. During the Slovenian Presidency, the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly is undoubtedly one of the most important events. In addition to your invaluable role in the development of democracy and good governance as well as the promotion of respect for human rights, your voice has become indispensable also in raising the awareness of citizens on overcoming stereotyped representations of our cultures and on the meaning of the synergy resulting from better cooperation. Strengthening dialogue between cultures is one of the Slovenian Presidency's specific priorities, constituting a special commitment for us.

The European Union is changing. The entry of new Member States has opened up new opportunities for cooperation. This is confirmed by the trade statistics of recent years. Although Western European countries are the largest trade partners of the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, the highest growth in trade in goods with these countries in the period 2000-2006 was recorded by the majority of new EU Member States. With the signature of the Reform Treaty at the end of 2007, the European Union overcame its internal deadlock in institutional development. Strengthened in this manner, it will be easier for it to turn outwards, a process in which we, the new Member States, can see new opportunities for cooperation with the European Union partners throughout the world.

In 2008, the European Union wishes to devote particular attention to the negotiations aimed at the conclusion of comprehensive regional partnership agreements with the ACP countries. Their basic aim is clear: to contribute to greater economic growth, the gradual inclusion of the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries in the global economy, and to encourage their regional integration.

The information provided by the World Trade Organisation indicating that more than a quarter of the world trade in goods in 2006 was conducted within the European Union in 2006 and less than one per cent within the African continent is very illustrative. Similarly, the volume of intra-African trade in goods was as much as eight times less than the volume of African trade with the European Union. Regional integration obviously has a positive impact on development; it is therefore also encouraged by the European Union in other parts of the world.

Overcoming mutual differences and boundaries is the key to long-term development. I therefore welcome the first comprehensive economic partnership agreement between the EU and the Caribbean region, initialled at the end of last year. It will pave the way for comprehensive agreements with the remaining five regions. As the country currently holding the EU Council Presidency, Slovenia will see to it that special attention in the negotiations is devoted to the development aspect of these agreements and to a flexible approach.

In 2006, every European Union citizen contributed almost 100 euros to development aid, more than 50% of which went to the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. As the largest global donor, the European Union wishes to enhance its development cooperation in terms of contributing “more, faster and above all, better”. Contribute more, chiefly through funding the tenth European Development Fund that provides almost 23 billion euros in development aid, and better through the EU Code of Conduct on Complementarity and Division of Labour in Development Policy. We, the new Member States of the European Union, are proud to be participating in the Tenth European Development Fund for the first time as contributors. We shall direct our efforts to the areas where we can achieve the best effects, and participate in projects with other donors in those regions where we have, to date, not been represented.

Better aid is also reflected in partner countries' enjoying a stronger role in development policy-making, administration of funds, and taking more responsibility for development and capacity to adjust to change. We are convinced that the national parliaments in the ACP countries will do their utmost to ensure the higher absorption capacity of their countries and the more effective use of development aid.

Distinguished Members of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly,

The European Union is firmly resolved to make its contribution to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration. In 2005, it adopted the European Consensus on Development and thus considerably contributed to the successful outcome of the UN Summit on the Review of Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. In 2008, the EU is continuing to take new initiatives, such as the Millennium Development Goals Contract, on accelerating progress towards attaining the set goals. The EU leaders will pay special attention to the issue of achieving the Millennium Development Goals at the European Council meeting in June. We are conscious that achieving these goals will be a very demanding task in certain regions. An important step forward in this regard was taken with the adoption of the Joint EU-Africa Strategy and the associated action plan at the Lisbon Summit last year.

Sustainable development, including energy security and climate change, is one of major challenges of this millennium, one that is shared by developed as well as developing countries. An African saying goes: "Those who walk together warn each other." The importance of the efforts we all take together and also of the warnings of the smallest among us is reflected in the initiative introduced by Palau, a Pacific island state. Thanks to its sustainable fisheries policies derived from its ancient wisdom, it was in the 1990s that this State began to take action against the severe depletion of fish stocks which play an important role as a source of food for Palau. Since 2005, Palau, with a successful approach and an awareness of mutual interdependence, has motivated several island countries in the region to participate in its initiative, the Micronesian Challenge, aimed at the conservation of coastal waters. At the same time, the Caribbean challenge, an initiative pursuing similar objectives of conserving coastal areas, was launched on the other side of the planet.

At the European Council meeting held last week, we, the leaders of Europe, confirmed our resolve to seek solutions which will help us adapt to climate and energy challenges. We set a timetable for adopting the climate and energy package with a view to improving the European Union's sustainable development. We set ourselves two key objectives to be achieved by 2020: to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% by 2020 compared to 1990 levels and to increase the share of renewable energy sources in overall energy consumption to 20%.

The European Union's objective is to reach an effective and comprehensive global agreement next year in December in Copenhagen. We shall strive for shared but differentiated responsibility between countries in the international community as well as for increasing the transfer of new environment-friendly technologies to developing countries. It is our firm belief that the path we set out on in December in Bali is the right one. There is no doubt but that the establishment of the Adaptation Fund for developing countries is a good start. As a complement to this, the European Union has adopted an initiative for a Global Climate Change Alliance. It is vital that development cooperation strategies and programmes take account of environmental aspects to a greater extent. On our path towards finding equitable and sustainable solutions to climate change for the post-2012 period, we count on partnership with African, Caribbean and Pacific states. In order to reduce the impact of climate change on international security tomorrow, we must all take action today. There can be no development without peace, no peace without development. We must therefore make every effort, taking into account the principles of interdependence and mutual assistance, to ensure the involvement of new world actors in the process of addressing global challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nelson Mandela, that great advocate for human rights, drew attention to the importance of time by stating: "We must use time wisely and forever realise that the time is always ripe to do right." We bear a great responsibility for converting challenges into opportunities in a timely fashion, not tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, but right here and now. I have every confidence that, at this meeting in Ljubljana, the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly will again be able to identify the opportunities which can lead us towards strengthening our mutual partnership.

Thank you!