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**The Barroso II Commission:
one small step for European
development policy**

By Dr. Mark Furness and Davina Makhan,
German Development Institute /
Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik



The Barroso II Commission: one small step for European development policy

Bonn, 1 March 2010. The approval of the second EU-Commission of José Manuel Barroso by the European Parliament on 9 February should prove a defining moment for European development policy. The Lisbon Treaty changes the institutional setting for the external relations of the European Union (EU) and while intra-EU horse-trading over policy responsibilities and budgets is ongoing, it is likely that development will play a more prominent role.

Nevertheless, the Treaty was never about to unite trade, development, humanitarian aid and foreign policy into one institution. Nor has it changed the fact that the EU can only act forcefully and coherently when member states' political will and development imperatives concur. Even so, the trend towards integration of EU external policies is real and the Treaty continues this process. Progress will not be smooth or uniform and although the transition period may be difficult, the Barroso II Commission will have the opportunity to demonstrate the added value of deeper coordination to member governments and citizens.

Raising expectations

From a development perspective, EU external policy reforms have been eagerly anticipated on at least two grounds.

First, there is a growing realisation in Brussels and member state capitals that development policy is central to EU external action and ranks alongside other areas such as security and trade. The notion that development, long considered "low politics", can complement harder foreign policy tools is hardly new, but the ring-fencing of the EU development budget has been a double-edged sword that safeguarded development spending but also kept other instruments from being used for poverty eradication. Some commentators have argued that development policy risks subordination to narrower political and security interests, while others expect that the more external policies are harmonised, the more prominence development will have. The jury is still out as to which of these views will prevail.

The second promising move is the Lisbon Treaty's creation of an explicit institutional link between the various Commissioners with external relations responsibilities, the European Council, and individual member states. The new post of High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy has three main tasks: to conduct the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and common security and defence policy (CSDP), to conduct the Union's external relations, and to ensure consistency with other external policies, especially development, enlargement and trade. The intention is to strengthen coherence and efficiency by centralising strategic planning and oversight.

The "gang of five"

There are signs that the first post-Lisbon Commission will deepen policy coherence for development, not least due to the qualities of five key Commissioners. At the European Parliament hearings, all stressed the importance of consistency in EU policies and the need to work closely



with High Representative Baroness Catherine Ashton and the new European External Action Service.

Both Ashton and EU Trade Commissioner Karel de Gucht bring experience with development issues to their portfolios. In her former capacity as EU Trade Commissioner, Ashton dealt ably with the thorny Economic Partnership Agreements negotiations, which aim to establish development-oriented free trade arrangements with some of the world's poorest countries. De Gucht spent some months as EU Development Commissioner in 2009, and is a former Member of the European Parliament and member of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly. At his hearing he promised to facilitate the Parliament's greater trade policy role foreseen in the Lisbon Treaty.

New EU Development Commissioner Andris Piebalgs gave a strong performance at his hearing. Former EU Energy Commissioner Piebalgs is widely respected, an attribute that bodes well for development policy coordination. He will represent the Commission on the Foreign Affairs Council, a role which he may be able to use to keep development policy at the core of the EU's external action.

The humanitarian assistance portfolio was allocated to Kristalina Georgieva following her Bulgarian colleague Rumania Jeleva's unsuccessful Parliamentary hearing. The former Vice President of the World Bank has the opportunity to raise the EU's emergency response profile, although the dividing lines between her role and that of Piebalgs are as yet unclear.

The major addition to EU Commissioner for Enlargement Štefan Füle's portfolio is likely to be the European neighbourhood policy. While the decision to separate the neighbourhood from other developing regions has raised eyebrows, Füle promised the Parliament that he would work to foster development based on economic and political reform in neighbouring countries.

Grounds for cautious optimism

The Barroso II Commission reflects the reality that in the EU, policy coherence must emerge from a multi-actor decision-making system in which nobody wants to risk exclusion where core interests are at stake. The allocation of portfolios indicates that the need for coherence is to be balanced by a desire to prevent any one Commissioner or the entire College becoming too powerful. Responsibilities are simultaneously diffused and overlapping and there is potential for turf wars.

EU High Representative Ashton's small high-level working group is working closely with key member governments on the institutional configurations of post-Lisbon EU foreign policy. Discussions are reportedly difficult and a compromise on finalising the division of labour, personnel and policy responsibilities will take time, not least regarding the European External Action Service. Nothing will be decided until everything is decided – the working group's report due in April is unlikely to contain more than a broad outline and detailed blueprints are not expected before the European Council meets in June. The world will not wait too long for Europe to get its act together. US President Obama's decision to cancel his attendance at the EU-US summit planned by the Spanish presidency for May is a signal that should concentrate minds.