



European Year for Development – 2015

Position paper – March 2015

our world
our dignity
our future

"Communication is of course important, but the success of this Year must be linked to concrete outcomes. This will be achieved by engaging with new people, encouraging a real two-way dialogue and being realistic about what can and must be accomplished."

Andris Gobiņš, rapporteur on EESC opinion "European Year of Development (2015)"*

Introduction

This year is a momentous one for development. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)¹ are due to be evaluated, while the UN General Assembly in September is expected to set new targets for the post-2015 period. Furthermore, the COP21 climate change conference² in December will aim to achieve a legally-binding international agreement.

National NGOs, private-sector partners and international organisations are well positioned to help raise grassroots awareness of these upcoming decisions, which will affect everyone, but also to work as engines of change where necessary.

This is why civil society has been campaigning for a number of years to make 2015 the dedicated European Year for Development (EYD2015)³. The concept of EYD2015 was originally developed by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) together with Concord⁴, the European Confederation of Relief and Development NGOs, with strong support from the the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions.

Despite the current economic downturn, support for development remains high across the EU: Some 83% of EU citizens say that Europe should continue to help developing countries, according to a recent Eurobarometer survey⁵. Nonetheless, this is the first time that the external dimension of the EU plays a key role in the subject of a European thematic year.

What the EU is doing

Responding to the joint initiative by civil society and the EESC to nominate 2015 as the European Year for Development, the Commission adopted a proposal⁶ that was amended in some points (e.g. the title

changed from "of" to "for" and a stronger focus on engagement with people was introduced, as recommended by the EESC). Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker formally launched the EYD2015 at a high-level opening ceremony in Riga, Latvia on 9 January under the motto "Our world, our dignity, our future".

A busy calendar of EYD2015 events at EU, national, regional and local levels has been organised, featuring a wide range of creative opportunities for involvement across the Member States. Key players at the national level are NGO Alliances, which are coordinated by Concord and its members. Each month of the Year will be dedicated to a special theme: for example, January's focus was on Europe's position in the world; February's was on education; while March will cover gender issues. The Year also presents an opportunity to highlight the EU's role as the world's largest donor of official development assistance.

The EESC's position

On 18 September 2013 the European Parliament consulted the EESC on the EYD2015. The Committee's opinion⁷ was adopted in plenary on 10 December 2013 by 144 votes to 2 with 1 abstention.

The EESC, which was instrumental in pushing for a European Year for Development in the first place, has consistently viewed the Year as an opportunity to involve more stakeholders – e.g. those from the private sector – in development issues. By bringing the private sector and civil society organisations (CSOs), including trade unions and consumer, farmer and environmental groups, together with EU institutions and national governments, effective action can be implemented.

The 2013 opinion also welcomed the Commission's plan to invest a significant amount of funding to ensure that the Year is a success, though the EESC did express concern that only a small percentage of this funding had been earmarked for civil society engagement and activities. The EESC has always supported a decentralised approach, with task forces at national level established to best reflect the situation within each Member State. This, it says, is the most effective means of achieving concrete and sustainable results, with good coordination being a vital ingredient in ensuring that the Year is a success.

Finally, the Committee called on players in other regions of the world to get behind the idea of a Year for Development 2015, in order to make the event as globally resonant as possible.

1. <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.

2. <http://unfccc.int/2860.php>.

3. <https://europa.eu/eyd2015/en>.

4. <http://www.concordeurope.org/>.

5. http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_439_420_en.htm.

6. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2013:0509:FIN:EN:PDF>

7. <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.rex-opinions.29673>



EESC recommendations

While European Years play a key role in promoting communication, raising awareness and encouraging the active involvement of citizens, a key element of EYD2015 should be about achieving concrete results. The activities implemented by CSOs should therefore be prioritised during the Year, and should receive a majority of the funding. Indeed, spending on cost-intensive campaigns run by public relations agencies should be kept to an absolute minimum.

Civil society plays a key role not only in fund raising and implementing development activities, but also in political processes. This is especially true for the younger generation who tend to be more connected to the world at large through social and other media and more aware of the pressing issues that they – as our future leaders – will need to resolve.

Emphasis should also be placed on the role of the private sector in development, as outlined in another recent EESC Opinion on involvement of the private sector in the post-2015 development framework⁸. The EESC wants to see Europe's experience of supporting SMEs transferred to developing countries in a targeted and relevant way. Special attention should be paid to citizens living in Member States without a long-standing tradition of development cooperation.

Effective action can be accomplished through collaboration with social partners and interested NGOs, says the EESC. The end result will be sustainable economic, social and environmental growth in developing countries, which will help to eradicate poverty and facilitate inclusive growth.

In terms of issues, the EESC recommended that the Year should focus on the most sustainable and relevant aspects of development cooperation. This reflects the Committee's underlying goal of ensuring that concrete and sustainable results are achieved. These issues include global solidarity and justice, policy coherence for development, sustainable development goals, global public goods and challenges, and European citizens' role as consumers and actors in a global economy. Narrow and donor-recipient-related issues should therefore not be the priority, says the EESC.

In terms of organisation, the EESC has strongly advocated the establishment of a wide and inclusive CSO Alliance capable of planning and implementing the European Year. In its opinion, the EESC stresses that the key to success in previous European Years has been close cooperation between EU institutions and civil society, both at national and EU levels. This holds especially true for the European Year for Development.

"Each of us can contribute to a better and fairer world through our behaviour as consumers, political actors, etc. Each organisation, company or trade union can create synergies and links to development issues. Let's make the European Year for Development a joint success!"

Andris Gobiņš, Rapporteur on EESC opinion "European Year of Development (2015)"*

* The title of the Year was changed from "European Year of Development" to "European Year for Development", as suggested by the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee.

Further information

EESC opinions: www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.rex-opinions.29673

European Year for Development homepage: <https://europa.eu/eyd2015/en>

Concord: <http://www.concordeurope.org/index.php>

Special Eurobarometer: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_439_420_en.htm

Commission proposal to Parliament and the Council: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2013:0509:FIN:EN:PDF>

Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year for Development:

<http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&t=PDF&f=PE+43+2014+REV+2>

8. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2014:067:0001:0005:EN:PDF>.