

briefing

European Parliamentary Labour Party

Labour MEPs working to make Europe a force for good in the world:

Labour in Europe is committed to the international coordination of humanitarian efforts, an ethical foreign policy and peace-building. The EU is a success story, creating jobs, improving the quality of lives of European women and men and promoting safety and security for all European nations. Now, the challenge for the EU is to look outward to the world.

Global issues affect our everyday lives at the most local of levels. From changes in the economy, climate, migration patterns to international terrorism, no European state can face the challenges ahead acting solely within its national borders. As an alliance of 27 Member States, the EU's 'soft' power - in the form of economic sanctions, trade agreements and diplomacy - continues to exert a positive influence. Recently the EU imposed a strict set of sanctions including a travel ban on Zimbabwe government official or in Georgia, where the EU secured a ceasefire within three days of the outbreak of hostilities, and the with the support of Labour Euro MPs has agreed to a 200 strong civilian observation mission to help support peace building.

Building a safer, more secure world:

Labour in Europe is working to make the world a safer place. The European Parliament has already given its support to a legally binding International Arms Trade Treaty, and Labour MEPs are pushing for the existing EU code of conduct on arms exports to become legally behind on all European countries - making it harder for conflicts to be fuelled by weapons getting into the wrong hands. Each year over 300,000 men and women are killed with conventional weapons and many more are injured.



Socialist Group in the European Parliament

European Parliamentary Labour Party

It is in the interest of Britain and the EU to work with fragile states to prevent conflict in the wider world. Through the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), in the past half decade the EU has deployed over 20 missions, from full blown military operations in the Congo and Bosnia, to border monitoring missions in Moldova and on the Gaza-Egypt border, to ceasefire monitoring in Aceh in Indonesia, to security sector reform missions in the Balkans, West Bank, Iraq and Afghanistan, or civilian protection mission in Chad.

Enlargement:

During over half a century, the European Union has achieved ever closer collaboration between its members whilst at the same time opening its doors to new members. Today's European Union, with 27 Member States and a population of close to 500 million people, is safer, more prosperous, stronger and more influential than the original European Economic Community of 50 years ago, with only 6 Member States.

Labour MEPs' values are based on peace, freedom and democracy as well as tolerance and solidarity - these values flourish in the world's largest economic zone. The wider internal market and the new economic opportunities have increased the prosperity of Europeans and our ability to be competitive in today's global world.

Labour in Europe is committed to the expansion of the EU. Turkey has opened up negotiations to join the European Union as have many of the Western Balkans. Their membership depends on the fulfilment of stringent human rights criteria, good governance, and successfully developing their economies and political governance.

Reforming global institutions:

In this 60th Anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Labour MEPs have been proud to support and to attend the birth of the UN Human Rights Council. We backed the decision to replace the former United Nations Human Rights Commission, widely discredited for acting as a cover for some of the worst perpetrator countries of human rights abuse in the world, allowing protection of Human Rights in the world to benefit from a fresh start.

Election monitoring:

The EPLP has been at the forefront of the EU's efforts to promote democracy outside its borders. Since the last European elections in 2004, Labour MEPs have been involved in EU election monitoring missions in conflict zones and some of the most sensitive areas in the world including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, The Palestinian Authority and most recently Angola and Rwanda.

In Afghanistan, the brightest sign of hope witnessed by Labour MEPs monitoring the election were the more than 500 enthusiastic women candidates standing in the elections, just five years after the Taliban regime had confined women to their homes'. 27% of Afghan MPs are now women.

Election Monitoring is a vital tool in supporting emerging democracies by giving protection to opposition parties and the independent media.

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International Development:

Labour in Europe is at the heart of efforts to ensure that the EU fulfils its development responsibilities - urging more and better aid, debt relief, trade justice, and the strengthening of democratic rights and social justice.

Labour MEPs continue to work together with their Socialist colleagues to advance European action on, for instance, the UN Millennium Development Goals, Economic Partnership Agreements, human rights and security.

Trade Justice: Economic Partnership Agreements

Labour in Europe understands that a fair and equitable global trade system is not only morally right, but essential for development.

When talks on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and the 78 African, Caribbean and Pacific states (ACP) began in 2000, it was with the best of intentions - to agree WTO compatible trading arrangements that would contribute to poverty alleviation, development and regional economic integration. Yet as the deadline for the end of talks approached at the close of last year, it appeared that EPAs would end-up closely resembling ambitious bilateral deals, with very few development concerns included.

Today, with only one comprehensive EPA finalised and negotiations still continuing, Labour MEPs remain concerned that there is still no clarity as to whether poor countries will have longer to adjust than richer ones, or that the agreements have been tailored to meet the ACP's development needs and objectives. In spite of the concerns raised by ACP Presidents, Prime Ministers, Parliaments and civil society, the Commission has pressed on with little regard for the fragmentation of regions which has ensued, or to the questions raised about jettisoning the relationship Europe has with the ACP, based on a shared commitment to partnership and mutual respect.

Labour MEPs support the position adopted by the EU Council of Ministers which calls for increased flexibility and more pragmatism on negotiations towards EPAs.

These trade agreements between the EU and the ACP are absolutely critical to the future of the poorest countries in the world. We must ensure they are a genuine force for development.

Human rights and security: Burma, Darfur and Zimbabwe

Respect for human rights and human security remain central to the work of the EPLP.

Following the Burmese regime's inadequate response to the Cyclone Nagris disaster, Labour MEPs backed a European Parliament Urgent Resolution calling for the Burmese authorities to be taken to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. The European Parliamentary Labour Party group also supported the EU's decision to renew sanctions against the regime, including a travel for leading figures and a freezing of their assets as well as measures targeted at the sources of revenue of the military junta, including the lucrative timber, gems and metals industries. Indeed, Labour MEPs called for the EU to go even further, by restricting access to international banking services to the big businesses which finance the junta, as well as a trade embargo on their key commodities, and a complete ban on new investment.

In Zimbabwe, the EU has long been at the vanguard of international pressure for reform - since 2002 imposing sanctions on the Zimbabwean government, including the freezing of personal assets, a travel ban and an arms embargo. Labour MEPs have followed events surrounding the recent elections in Zimbabwe very closely and are committed to ensuring the EU assists its African partners in resolving the political crisis and respecting the wishes of the Zimbabwean people.

Concern about the situation in Darfur continues as we see increasing violence and suffering. The EPLP welcomes and supports the humanitarian efforts taken by the EU, but recognises the international community's failure to provide for the security of those living in the refugee camps in Darfur.

In 2000, the UN produced a blueprint for change which promised to transform the fortunes of the developing world.

An EU Call to Action on the UN Millennium Development Goals

The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are time-bound targets which include cutting world poverty in half by 2015 and tackling hunger and disease.

Today, although we are already past the halfway point, many of the goals are seriously off-track. Yet, to turn this situation around no new promises are needed, just existing commitments met.

Labour in Europe, under the leadership of Gordon Brown, is at the forefront of action to ensure Member State governments of the EU meet their commitments and accelerate progress on the MDGs. Labour MEPs have welcomed the EU's leadership on the 2008 MDG Call to Action, including a reaffirmation of the EU's aid commitments and an Action Plan committing the EU to redoubling its efforts in support of the MDGs. By 2010, we want to see:

- 75 million more people out of extreme poverty, to be on track to achieve the MDG on halving world poverty by 2015.
- 25 million more children in school, to be on track to meet the MDG on universal primary education.
- 4 million more children's lives saved, to be on track to achieve the MDG on under-5 mortality.
- 35 million more births attended by trained health workers, to be on track to achieve the MDG on maternal health.
- 70 million more people to have access to water and sanitation, to be on track for the MDG on access to safe drinking water.

These targets are wholeheartedly supported by the EPLP, especially following a recent UN report which 'sounds strong alarms' on gaps in achieving the MDGs.

The EU provides 56% of all international development assistance and forms the world's largest trading bloc. It is central to global efforts to eradicate poverty and inequality across the globe.