

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS

4 – 7 June 2009

Our Christian vision, our views, our questions, our concerns for Africa

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WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Between 4 and 7 June 2009, citizens of all 27 member states of the European Union (EU) will express their vision for Europe by electing a new European Parliament (EP). Parliament is the only EU institution whose members are directly elected by the people.

For five years, from 2009 to 2014, the 736^[1] MEPs will make decisions that will have long-lasting consequences, not only for some 500 million people living in the EU, but also for those in Africa and throughout the whole world.

Since the last EP elections in 2004, the Parliament has gained considerable power. The next Parliament will have a greater say in EU international trade policies, once the Lisbon treaty is ratified. In most areas of EU law, legislation now has to be jointly approved by both the Parliament and the Council. Furthermore, the College of European Commissioners, which proposes all new legislation, may only govern with Parliament's approval. Even more importantly, Parliament has the final say over the EU budget.

With climate change accelerating, financial crises deepening and yet the divide between the world's rich and poor ever more alarming, the stakes could not be higher. This is why AEFJN is calling on you to play an active role in raising awareness of the importance of the June 2009 elections.

Although the European Parliament's powers have increased, interest and participation in the parliamentary elections have decreased. With so much at stake in this election, we must work to reverse this trend and ensure that the next Parliament will work to create a Europe that is socially-conscious and willing to uphold the dignity of all human beings and the safeguarding of creation.

^[1] If ratified, the Treaty of Lisbon would set the number of MEPs at 751.

USING THIS INFORMATION

The International Secretariat of AEFJN (Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network) is based in Brussels and closely follows European Union policy on certain issues that have a particular influence on the socio-economic future of Africa and its peoples. Our wish is to see the development of European policy that is just, that respects Europe's partners and that counters poverty and exclusion.

We hope this information will

- encourage members of our antennae to play an active role during the time leading up to the election of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in June 2009,
- highlight certain hopes and concerns about the work of the next European Parliament,
- show how this Parliament might address certain important issues affecting not only people within the European community but also its partners in Africa,
- give ideas for questions that could be put to parties presenting their manifestos or to the candidates themselves,
- stimulate a more critical reading of the views expressed by the candidates.

You may like to use this information

- at meetings of your AEFJN Antenna and of other groups you belong to,
- in your communities and your local area,
- in your parishes, at your parish councils,
- during public meetings with the candidates and/or at party meetings,
- with the media.

SAFEGUARDING CREATION

Responsibility for the environment, the common heritage of mankind, extends not only to present needs but also to those of the future. (Social Doctrine Compendium, Ch.10, IV, §467)

The EU is a leader in the fight against global warming and should again set the standard by a resolute decision to adopt coherent policies in trade, agriculture, energy, cooperation, security and migration, policies that encourage sustainable development in the field of the exploitation of natural resources.

We believe that the effects of **climate change** are different for rich and poor. The South is already suffering the effects without having the scientific and financial means that the North has to remedy the situation. Among the most vulnerable, millions of 'small' farmers, fishermen and people living in the forests are already seeing their food security under threat. The movement for climate justice aims to defend the 'common good' and to examine the social and economic consequences of climate change.

We would like to know

Will you prompt the EU to immediately fulfil its Bali commitment of giving fund adjustment aid to the least developed countries?

What type of energy partnership between Africa and Europe would seem fair to you?

We believe that the European **agricultural and trade policies** need to take greater account of the following:

- assuring food availability, the economic growth of essentially rural countries, social cohesion and the conservation of the environment and natural resources;
- respect for access to essential agricultural resources (land, water, seeds) and for biological diversity;
- agricultural practices that counter global warming.

We would like to know

How will you encourage the EU to move resolutely towards agricultural practices with low emissions of

methane, nitrogen oxide and carbon and which do not accelerate deforestation and soil degradation?

How can the Common Agricultural Policy respect the interests of developing countries and take care to reduce volatility in agricultural prices and exports that endanger the importing countries beyond the EU?

We believe the EU must commit itself to a **GMO policy** that has as top priorities healthy food and biodiversity, and not simply economic profit. At the very least, it must respect the principle of precaution on the question of GMOs.

We would like to know

Do you believe that GMOs

- (a) reduce hunger in the world or
- (b) increase dependence on wealthy countries and decrease biodiversity?

We believe that the **European energy policy** needs to encourage reduction in consumption and the use of renewable materials that do not divert agricultural resources away from food production. At the same time the EU would do well to contribute to the development, beyond its own borders, of new sustainable energy technology that respects the right to food, access to land and water, the environment and biodiversity.

We would like to know

How will people see that you respect the people of the South when it comes to granting funds for research into renewable energy?

LIVING IN DIGNITY

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services...” (Article 25.1, Universal Declaration of Human Rights)

The European Parliament is an important player on the world political stage. Its decisions on corporate business, trade and agriculture have repercussions for the well-being of people living far beyond the borders of the EU. Through its policies, it influences access to basic resources and facilities that are central to the personal dignity of every woman, man and child on earth.

We believe that safe **drinking water and hygienic sanitation** facilities are pre-conditions for health and success in the fight against poverty and hunger. We believe that the EU Water Initiative has potential but that the EU's policy has meant that profits have too often taken priority over the needs of the many without access to water facilities. This undermines the dignity of all of us, rich and poor alike. It also damages the prospects for regional and international peace.

We would like to know

What you believe the EU can do to reduce dramatically the number of people in the world with inadequate access to basic water facilities,

What action you personally are prepared to take as an MEP to contribute to this reduction,

If you are prepared to promote greater use of 'Public-Public' partnerships in essential services such as water and health, and why.

We believe that the EU must defend **food sovereignty** at home and in third world countries by having coherent agricultural, trade and cooperation policies. To combat hunger in the world, European policies must prioritise support of sustainable family farming and the guarantee of fair access for all to land, water, seeds, credit and market networks.

We would like to know

How you would defend sustainable agricultural practices in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) within the trade and cooperation policies

How you would support the integration of firm criteria for social and human rights into policies (agriculture, trade and development) that affect the environment.

We believe that each human being has the right to **quality essential medicines** and that therefore the EU needs to review certain aspects of its trade policy. The Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) the EU is trying to force through in its trade agreements jeopardise the efforts of developing countries to have access to quality generic medicines. This puts the lives of hundreds of thousands at risk.

Insufficient coherence in EU policies is damaging public health in developing countries. For example, while EU Aid to developing countries is directed to improve health systems, at the same time its trade agreements favour (IPR) that restrict the production of and access to generic drugs.

We would like to know

What would you be ready to do to prevent the EU from imposing greater IPR restrictions on developing countries than those imposed by the World Trade Organisation?

What is more important to you: defending IPRs or allowing access to generic medicines for developing countries? Why?

PROMOTING SOLIDARITY - through trade

“The wealthier nations have the obligation of mutual solidarity in the aid that they give to developing nations; and of social justice, in the rectification of trade relations between strong and weak nations” (Populorum Progressio 44)

The EU's trade policies impact on the quality of life not only in Europe but throughout the world. The solidarity the EU builds by trying to reconcile economic efficiency with social justice and equal opportunities must not stop at European borders, but extend to all peoples, especially those in developing countries. At present, the globalised economy benefits the world's wealthy, but not the poor. To avoid this, economy and trade need to be at the service of all people, wherever they live. The current crises show the failure of a system that lacks regulation, transparency and accountability. The Global Europe strategy aims at improving the competitiveness of European business – at whatever the cost to sustainable development. The growing influence of corporations on politics leads to economic decisions that ignore the vulnerable both at home and abroad.

We believe the EU, in its **trade policies**, is called to respect, protect, promote and fulfil universal human, socio-economic, democratic, cultural and environmental rights. It therefore needs to ensure greater coherence between its trade and development policies.

We would like to know

How you would ensure that trade policies promote sustainable development for all trading partners and allow for the protection of their agriculture and industry.

What you would do to prevent the emphasis on competitiveness in the “Global Europe Strategy” from threatening social standards, natural resources, equity and development in developing countries and Europe.

As regards the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and the 4 African regions, do you agree not to force African countries to include services, intellectual property, investments and government contracts in these agreements?

We believe in a **global trade system** based on equity and justice. Currently the WTO structure and policies favour the richer nations. We believe the EU can and must, with others, change the WTO so that trade policies that put developing countries at risk of increased poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation become instruments of socio-economic growth for these countries.

We would like to know

Do you agree that the WTO needs to become fair and equitable for all its members, especially the most vulnerable? What are you prepared to do to promote this change?

What would you do to guarantee that the EU does not push for the liberalisation of Trade in its economic and development policies at the expense of poorer countries?

What action would you take to promote strong socio-economic and human rights criteria in trade and development policies, so as to favour the growth of developing countries?

We believe that European companies must act in a **socially responsible** way. The EU could take a world lead by introducing legally binding regulation for companies working outside the EU and by working for this regulation to be enshrined in both an EU and a UN framework.

We would like to know

Are you ready to support binding legislation that would stipulate responsibilities for EU companies working outside the EU?

Are you ready as an MEP to work towards a global governance system at the UN to enforce legally binding mechanisms for corporate accountability?

We believe that there needs to be a **distancing between large companies and the EU institutions** (and its member states) if EU policies are to benefit ordinary people both inside and beyond the EU.

We would like to know

What would you do to make sure that all players have equal access to the EU institutions (and its member states) so that there is a healthier balance in EU policies between the influence of business and the interests of the people?

WORKING FOR PEACE

'Justice, right reason, and the recognition of man's dignity cry out insistently for a cessation to the arms race... A general agreement must be reached on a suitable disarmament program, with an effective system of mutual control. (John XXIII, 1963, Pacem in Terris, N°112)

In December 2008, the EU's Code of Conduct on the export of arms became a legally binding document, a 'common position'. It obliges each member state to integrate the code into its own legislation on the transfer of arms. It will be necessary to ensure that no arms transfers are made to countries that violate Human Rights, find a satisfactory solution to the issue of the arms surplus brought about by the reduction in the number of soldiers in national armies and avoid a lack of transparency on the part of public authorities and the absence of parliamentary control.

Specifically, we **urge member states** of the EU to:

- refuse to send small arms to countries or regions which are in the process of disarming or where there is a moratorium ;
- review their national legislation and procedures in order to implement the 2008 Common Position on exports of military technology and equipment, including small arms.
- submit detailed information annually on small arms exports and imports to the UN Conventional Arms Register.
- support the implementation of the international code of conduct concerning the transfer of arms. This was presented to the UN by the Nobel Peace Prize winners and is included in the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). It is an effective tool for promoting peace and should therefore be supported and implemented as widely as possible.

- publish an annual report on the transfer of weapons, including small arms.

We believe that peaceful means of resolving conflicts are preferable to military options.

We would like to know

how to be sure that sufficient funds are allocated to the genuine resolution of conflicts.

how MEPs can encourage greater openness, transparency and coherence between diplomacy, aid and interest in the support afforded to the resolution of conflicts and sustainable development.

We believe that the EU must be true to its principles of democracy and equality, faithful to its legislation and respectful of the rights of the human person both in Europe and elsewhere.

We would like to know

why the European Union should follow the European Convention on Human Rights and the Convention of the Rights of the Child

how Member States can be helped to ratify and implement the (optional) protocol of the Convention against Torture, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the UN Treaty against the Transfer of Arms.

if you think that the European Parliament should set up a committee for human rights to replace the current sub-committee.

WHERE TO FIND FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about the specific issues and national policies, you may like to look at other sections of our website, party manifestos and:

'EU Civil Society Contact Group' - four easy to use action and fact sheets.

http://act4europe.horus.be/code/en/actions.asp?id_events=139

European Parliament Information Offices in Member States distribute detailed information on numerous topics in your language. To find an office near you, visit:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/parliament/public/nearYou.do>

CONCORD Manifesto for the 2009 EU Elections, a presentation of hopes regarding development policies.

http://www.concordeurope.org/Files/media/internetdocumentsENG/4_Publications/3_CONCORDs_positions_and_studies/CONCORD-EU-MANIFESTO-FINAL.pdf

OCIPE – the Jesuit European Office:

<http://www.ocipe.info/index.php?id=3>

"European Parliament Elections 4-7 June 2009, Guide for Churches and Christian organisations" a joint publication by four ecumenical organisations in Brussels (APRODEV, CCME, CSC and Eurodiaconia): <http://www.ecumenicalvoices2009.eu>

AEFJN thanks the members of "Ecumenical Voices for the inspiration drawn from their guide to the European Elections.