

Opening Session by K. RUDISCHHAUSER:

‘Civil society and local authorities in the post-2015 framework’

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

It is my pleasure to welcome you today to the Opening Session of the Third Interim meeting of the Policy Forum on Development. As I said this is an interim session and what makes it particular is that it is gathering here today our dear “Ambassadors” of the Structured Dialogue Process who have walked with us during these past three years and who have contributed immensely to our work and have helped shaped this Policy Forum on development. I cannot express how grateful we are to all of you for your commitment and active participation during these 3 years, including having to travel from far away to Brussels on a regular basis. This session is particular because we also welcome today the new members of the Policy Forum, those who will accompany us for the next 2 years at least and maybe longer. We have today here gathered almost 30 regional networks of NGOs, Trade Unions, Cooperatives, Local Authorities and from the Private Sector, coming from Asia and the Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the European Neighbourhood regions North and South. This is a rather exceptional moment I have to say. I gather that you had some time this morning to get to know each other and I hope that affinities and new friendship will start building today. I would also like to welcome our representatives from various European Platforms whom I know have been key in the Structured Dialogue process and along the setting up of the Policy Forum. I want to inform you that DEVCO has approved the Chart. We will thus close the Interim process and start a new Chapter. We count on your active support, participation and commitment to make it a frank, open and lively Forum.

Post-2015: process up till now and EU vision

This meeting is gathering at an absolutely crucial moment: be it at the global level with the debates around Post-2015, the recently released report of the High Level Panel on post-2015, of which Commissioner Piebalgs is a member and the preparation of the UN General Assembly on the MDG in September.

The European Union intends to be a constructive and dynamic player in the global efforts to forge a workable development framework to take us beyond 2015. Our policy proposal is called “A Decent Life for All: ending poverty and giving the world a sustainable future”. It brings together the strands of poverty, sustainability, equity and security and, beyond that, sets the goal of delivering a Decent Life for All by 2030. Accordingly, it advocates a single overarching post-2015 framework bringing together the Sustainable Development Goals and the MDG review processes.

I am delighted to say that the EU Member States have endorsed our proposal, which includes five pillars around which the framework could be built. These are:

1. basic living standards;
2. inclusive and sustainable growth;
3. sustainable natural resource management;
4. good governance and human rights; and
5. peace and security.

I want to thank you for playing such a pivotal role in building this vision. Two-thirds of all contributions to our public consultation on the post-2015 process came from civil society organisations, including from your exchanges with Commissioner Piebalgs at the last Policy Forum meeting in October.

UN High-level Panel on the post-2015 development agenda

The five pillars, along with other priorities outlined in our vision, are well reflected in the recently (May 2013) issued report by the UN High-level Panel on the post-2015 development agenda.

It, too, talks of formulating one overarching post-2015 framework. The report outlines an ambitious agenda to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030 and put countries on a path towards to sustainable development.

The report underlines the necessity to reach the very poorest and most excluded people ("leave no one behind") - and to bring the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability together to guide international development efforts.

The Report stands out by putting people at the centre emphasising the need for promoting active citizenship, voice, participation and accountability. People want influence over their own lives and they want to be able to hold authorities account - for example to know how public funds are being spent.

And it refers to five transformational shifts that lead to poverty eradication and the transformation of economies through sustainable development, namely:

1. leaving no one behind;
2. putting sustainable development at the core;
3. transforming economies for jobs and inclusive growth;
4. building peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all; and
5. forging a new global partnership involving multiple stakeholders – national governments, local authorities, business, civil society organisations etc. ("multistakeholder approach").

All in all, then, I believe we can be satisfied with the outcome of the panel's work. The final report is based on a tremendous amount of consultations with civil society, the business community, researchers and, most importantly, people living in poverty.

Moreover the report with its focus on good governance and accountability is well in line with the policies of the European Union in terms of how we see the roles and contributions of civil society and local authorities in the Post-2015 framework. You have already listened this morning to presentations on EC Communications dealing with both actors. Let me say a few extra words on both actors while also pointing out that central authorities have an important responsibility to facilitate the development of both civil society and local authorities:

Civil Society and Local Authorities

This is also a crucial moment for what concerns the EU with the new financial perspectives and the new programming.... That will guide our steps in the next seven years to come, from 2014 to 2020..... Where to put Programming....

You have in the Introduction Session this morning been listening to and discussing important changes since the Structured Dialogue – notably the adoption of EC Communications on civil society (September 2013) and local authorities (May 2013).

I would like to take this opportunity to put these Communications – and consequently EU policies and support for civil society and local authorities - into the context of current international efforts to define a framework to take us beyond 2015 and the Millennium Development Goals.

The message I want to convey to you is that civil society and local authorities should play an increasingly vital role in the 2015-2030 period. This is essential to ensuring ownership and sustainable development as the world embarks on an ambitious path to eradicate (extreme) poverty.

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Civil society

Civil society, at all levels, can make an essential contribution by empowering people to influence and control their lives. Similarly, civil society is essential in holding authorities to account. The rapid development of ICT and social media has empowered citizens and civil society to collect evidence and engage with authorities on a much more informed basis.

Moreover, in many countries of the world, civil society organisations are well placed to identifying, analysing and remedying inequality and injustices providing a voice to the very poorest and most excluded people – e.g. disabled people, indigenous people, etc.

Importantly, there also needs to be emphasis on internal accountability of CSOs – CSOs need also to promote internal governance and transparency to their own constituencies.

All of these messages are essential to the EC Communication on civil society and are also captured in the report of the High-Level Panel.

Local authorities

Similarly, through the recent LA Communication, EU recognizes Local Authorities as policy and decision-makers, as legitimate and accountable public authorities closest to the citizens. We will work to enhance political, administrative and fiscal autonomy, and capacity and institutional development of LAs.

Concretely, we will promote a territorial approach to development, in which different local institutions and actors work together – including civil society organisations.

We will also promote the role of LAs in tackling the challenges of a sustainable urbanisation. The support to Associations of Local Authorities is foreseen and the role of EU LAs via decentralised cooperation is acknowledged.

All of these steps are essential, together with the support to civil society, for empowering citizens and strengthening linkages between citizens and authorities at the local level.

Central authorities: A legal environment

Central authorities, for their part, are required to putting in place a legal environment enabling citizens to form and join CSOs, protest and express opinions and have access to justice.

Similarly, central authorities are responsible for putting in place a legal and institutional framework as well as human resources and financing allowing local authorities to deliver on their mandates in an effective way

Next steps/ conclusion

Civil society and local authorities can (and should) play a major role in contributing to the post-2015 agenda – in terms of defining goals, contributing to their realisation and in terms of monitoring/ keeping authorities accountable. Turning back to the Communication: *A Decent Life for All*, the need for a broad consultative process is indeed one of the strong messages contained in the Communication.

I wish you a successful PFD – we depend on your active participation. You will in the coming sessions discuss the EU programming process and various other important initiatives such as the preparation of the future CSO-LA thematic programme. It is my hope that will provide us with inspiring recommendations and suggestions as you engage in debate and discussion.