

STATEMENT

AT THE HIGH LEVEL PLENARY MEETING OF

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

AT THE 43RD SESSION OF THE COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

BY

H.E. MRS. MARIE-JOSEE JACOBS,

MINISTER FOR FAMILY AND INTEGRATION OF LUXEMBOURG,

ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Mr Chairman,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Accessing Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, as well as Norway, align themselves with this declaration".

The European Union would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for the work done in preparation for the 43rd session of the Commission for Social Development, and in particular for his report on the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the 24th special session of the General Assembly, and for his report on the 10-year review of the World Summit for Social Development.

Mr Chairman,

The Programme of Action adopted in Copenhagen focused on poverty reduction, the promotion of employment and social integration, three objectives which are valid for developing and industrialised countries alike. The Summit Declaration and Programme of Action also highlighted the importance of promoting a national and international environment favourable to social development.

Since the Copenhagen Summit, the European Union has developed its social policies internally. The objectives of the policies adopted by the European Union in the areas of employment, the fight against poverty, job creation and social integration, and the commitments made by the Member States in implementing those policies, agree in many respects with the three objectives of the Copenhagen Programme of Action and with the new initiatives adopted in Geneva in 2000.

While the policies adopted by the European Union are of course not automatically applicable to developing countries, the approach adopted by the Union may serve as a basis for reflection and for the exchange of ideas. The European Union's experiences may serve as a source of information and an example of good practice.

Mr Chairman,

I should like first to present the policies developed by the European Union internally;

second, to describe the European Union's policies externally, in its relations with the other countries of the world;

and finally, to indicate how the European Union intends to follow up those policies in the years to come, in the more general framework of implementation of the commitments made in Copenhagen.

Mr Chairman,

During its history, the European Union has seen several enlargements, the most recent of which, in May 2004, ended a tragic division of the European continent. With each enlargement, the European Union has adjusted its institutional, political and legal environment to the new needs.

* Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

The European Constitution which the Member States and their citizens are asked to adopt is designed to adapt the European Union to the challenges of the 21st century. This adaptation must respect the shared values on which the Union is founded. The Charter of Fundamental Rights incorporated in the Constitution reaffirms these values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity.

However, Mr Chairman,

This European Union of 25 members is not immune to unemployment and social exclusion. It has an average unemployment rate of 9%, and 15% of its population is on or near the poverty line.

To keep poverty and social exclusion at bay, the European Union needs to develop a favourable environment for economic growth and take advantage of the positive effects of globalisation – such as the opening up of economies and societies, and the liberalisation of exchanges of goods, ideas and knowledge, while preserving a European social model which guarantees social justice.

That is why we must ensure that economic, financial, commercial, environmental and social policies, all combine to promote human development and social progress.

The welfare of the individual must be at the centre of all policies.

Since the Copenhagen Summit, the European Union has successively put in place strategies to tackle the problems linked with unemployment and with poverty and social exclusion.

At the Luxembourg European Council in November 1997, the Union developed a coordinated strategy for employment, particularly with a view to promoting a skilled, highly-trained and adaptable workforce and labour markets which react more readily to economic changes.

At the Lisbon European Council in March 2000 the European Union set its sights on a bigger target.

It set itself the aim of becoming, by 2010, the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.

To do this it adopted a strategy based on the concept of interdependence of economic, social and environmental policies.

In an economy based on knowledge and technological development, a poorly educated population deprived of access to goods and services is clearly going to have a negative effect in terms of growth and employment.

While the development of economic growth and employment is vital in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, equal importance must be given to social policies.

In implementing the social inclusion strategy, Member States are guided by the following six strategic priorities:

1. promoting investment in and tailoring of active labour market measures to meet the needs of those who have the greatest difficulties in accessing employment;
2. ensuring that social protection schemes are adequate and accessible for all and that they provide effective work incentives for those who can work;

3. increasing the access of the most vulnerable and those most at risk of social exclusion to decent housing, quality healthcare and lifelong learning opportunities;
4. making a concerted effort to prevent early school leaving and to promote smooth transition from school to work;
5. developing a focus on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion affecting the most vulnerable such as poor families, children, the disabled and isolated women;
6. making a drive to reduce poverty and social exclusion of immigrants and minorities.

As regards social security systems, the Member States of the European Union are making a particular effort to maintain safe and sustainable pensions systems.

Since the adoption of the Lisbon integrated strategy, some progress has been made.

For example:

1. More than six million jobs have been created since 1999.
2. Several key markets have been totally or partially opened up to competition – for example, telecommunications, rail freight transport, postal services, and the electricity and gas markets.
3. The knowledge economy is starting to become a reality, as illustrated by the gradual establishment of the European Area of Research and Innovation.
4. Several Member States have launched reforms of their pensions schemes or systems to address the problem of ageing.
5. As regards social inclusion, the Nice European Council in December 2000 determined common objectives in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and the 25 members of the Union are pursuing those objectives with the help of social inclusion action plans.

Mr Chairman,

In a few weeks the Commission on the Status of Women will analyse the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action – adopted, just a few months after the Copenhagen Programme of Action, at the close of the Fourth World Conference on Women – and of the conclusions of the 23rd special session of the General Assembly.

It should be noted that one of the ten commitments in the Copenhagen Declaration, carried over into the new initiatives adopted at the 24th special session of the General Assembly, concerns equity and equality between men and women, and that this commitment runs like a leitmotif through the whole Copenhagen Programme of Action

In the same context, I should point out that the Amsterdam Treaty included gender equality among the European Community's objectives and confirmed gender mainstreaming in Community actions. The promotion of policies enabling people to reconcile work and family life and the reduction of gender inequality in the various sectors of the labour market are essential to achieving the Lisbon targets.

While it is true that progress has been made in reducing gender inequality in a number of strategic fields, the European Union must continue its efforts to promote gender equality in all spheres of society.

Mr Chairman,

The European Union is aware of the need to promote solidarity with developing countries and help them attain the Millennium Development Goals. In its external action, the European Union is the main partner of the developing world. It provides 55% of official international aid and is by far the largest trading partner and foreign investor.

Since 2000, the Millennium Goals have provided the international framework for development cooperation. Realisation of those goals will represent a significant improvement in the social development of the world's poorest populations. We will not attain the Millennium Goals by compartmentalising them, but by establishing clear links between them.

The primary aim of development cooperation must be to reduce poverty. It should be noted that the official development assistance provided by the European Union is constantly increasing. Four of the five countries in the world which set aside 0,7% or more of their Gross National Income (GNI) for official development assistance (ODA) are European Union Member States, and a number of other European Union countries have announced that they will reach that target within the next few years. The European Union has made a joint commitment to attaining an average ODA level of 0,39% by 2006. This increase in ODA has already led to advances in combating poverty, in particular its causes and social consequences.

We must also continue to implement the Monterrey Consensus on financing for development.

Progress under the Beijing and Cairo action programmes has already produced significant results in terms of health, HIV/AIDS prevention, and enhancing the role of women in development. That progress has brought major social benefits, and it must be continued and consolidated. The UN Summit to be held this September will provide a major opportunity to take stock of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the success achieved, but also of any shortcomings and how best to deal with them.

Development aid programmes must be implemented in a spirit of partnership and respect for local ownership of the measures taken. The active involvement of civil society and institutional capacity-building are the surest means of guaranteeing people-centred development in which individuals play a full part. Investment in education and training are also very effective in increasing people's ability to control their future.

Of course this applies also to the disabled, who must be able to enjoy their human rights just like any other citizen. I should point out here that the United Nations is in the process of drawing up a draft comprehensive international convention on the protection and promotion of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. The European Union is fully committed to this initiative.

It is also important to ensure gender mainstreaming in development aid programmes.

The European Union believes that poverty reduction programmes must take full account of both the economic and the social dimension.

In order to ensure that development programmes correspond to the Millennium Goals and the international consensus on development, the European Union must continue to improve coordination and coherence with other Community policies.

The EU will continue to reinforce its partnership with Africa in particular. Much remains to be done to reduce poverty and improve social development, and the increased and sustainable support of the international community is vital. The problem of HIV/AIDS, while affecting all continents, is particularly serious in Africa and in some countries threatens to wipe out all the development

achievements of recent years.

Mr Chairman,

This year, the ambitious development strategy which the European Union set itself in Lisbon in March 2000 reaches the halfway stage.

The European Commission has just submitted a report in which it takes stock of progress and sets out its ideas for the strategy's future direction.

That report will be on the agenda for next month's meeting of the European Council, which will determine the priority action which the Union must take in the next few years to attain its targets.

The European Union's global strategy includes a Social Policy Agenda.

The current Social Policy Agenda, adopted by the Nice European Council in December 2000, will come to a close at the end of 2005. It was founded on an integrated approach incorporating both economic and social aspects.

It is based on:

- the prospect of a strong economy generating high-quality jobs,
- a high level of social protection,
- equality of opportunity for all,
- education and the social dialogue.

The next Social Agenda will cover the period 2006-2010.

As the European Union starts work on this new Social Agenda, it is faced with four major challenges:

- globalisation,
- the demographic imbalance,
- the growing diversity of its societies and
- transition towards a knowledge economy.

To cope with these challenges, the new Social Agenda will have to retain the integrated approach adopted in December 2000.

Mr Chairman,

In conclusion, I should like to situate the internal and external efforts of the European Union in the broader context of the discussions now under way here in New York and in the capitals in the build-up to the Summit of Heads of State and Government at UN headquarters in September.

This is the debate which is to enable the international community – with the UN at its centre – to equip itself more fully to deal with the threats and challenges of the 21st century. The report of the High-level Panel presented by the Secretary-General to the Member States last December, and discussed in the General Assembly, focused unerringly on the unquestionable links between social and economic problems on the one hand and the threat of insecurity and violence, often armed, on the other.

In this context, the European Union also welcomes the publication of the ILO's report on the social dimension of globalisation, which not only adds a perceptive and realistic analysis to the ongoing debate but recommends a series of practical measures to be taken by the international community, such as promoting decent jobs and more coherent policies.

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

In the context of implementing the results of the Social Summit, the dialogue among UN Member States within the Commission for Social Development is essential.

In that dialogue, the European Union and its Member States call for and commit themselves firmly to globalisation with a human face, that will contribute to a safer world.

Thank you for your attention.