



Summer surprise or summer shock: how did the EU's development ministers treat the Spring Package?

Written by
Simon Maxwell,
Senior Research
Associate, ODI
(s.maxwell@odi.org.uk)
and
Mikaela Gavas,
Research
Associate, ODI
(m.gavas.ra@odi.org.uk)

The EU's Foreign Affairs Council discussed development issues on 14 June. Its [Conclusions](#) can fairly be considered as a partial endorsement of the proposals put forward by the Commission in its [Spring Package](#) back in April. Of 31 specific proposals, 26 find their way into the Council Conclusions, though some have been watered-down. Needless to say, some of the most ambitious proposals have been left out.

Remember, the main element of the Spring Package was a twelve-point EU Action Plan in support of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). When we [reviewed it back in April](#), we drew attention to the MDG 'story-line', the plea for aid commitments to be met, the work programme on Policy Coherence for Development, and the proposed measures on taxation, innovative finance and regional integration.

A detailed point-by-point analysis can be found [here](#), but the key findings are as follows: of the 31 proposals put forward by the Commission, the Council has addressed 26. The five that are missing from the conclusions are:

1. enacting national legislation for setting ODA targets
2. developing single Europe-wide country strategy papers and multi-annual programmes
3. concentrating EU and Member State action on education and health in countries where need is greatest
4. enhancing policy coherence and EU political and financial involvement in health, and

5. strengthening coordination and, ultimately, working towards a single European seat in the World Bank, IMF and regional development banks.

At the same time, the Council has added two of its own specific proposals on taking into account the cultural dimensions when designing development strategies and programmes, and on the importance of disaster risk reduction as a means of achieving the MDGs. It has also issued a fully fledged EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development (2010 – 2015) and separate conclusions on child labour (including a whole unrelated section on business and development and Corporate Social Responsibility, as well as trade), cross-country division of labour and tax and development.

On aid commitments, the Council reaffirms the commitment of 0.7% of GNI for official development assistance (ODA), but 'asks' Member States to take actions, 'invites' them to 'share information' on the actions planned, and suggests that it will 'examine a report in the framework of the Monterrey process and assess progress annually'. This is in contrast to the Commission's proposal for national yearly action plans and a peer review of aid commitments at Council / Head of State level and involving the European Parliament. Also, unsurprisingly, the Council has dropped any mention of national ODA legislation.

On aid effectiveness, the Council does little to acknowledge that progress on aid effectiveness has been too slow. It does not urge Member States to speed up implementation of the Paris and Accra

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commitments, nor does it mention any commitment towards the Seoul High Level Forum.

- As in so many of the Commission's Communications and the Council Conclusions, there is no mention of monitoring mechanisms, in particular, monitoring progress of the MDGs.
- Both the Spring Package and the Council Conclusions pay particular attention to off-track countries/regions and most off-track MDGs. However, there is no mention of what criteria the EU will use to determine off-track regions and countries.
- The Council Conclusions make scarce reference to health, with a fleeting mention of 'the EU role in Global Health'.
- On climate change, although the Commission had called on Member States to ensure that the €2.4 billion fast-start funding is 'disbursed in accordance with the aid effectiveness agenda', the Council adds a new dimension and 'calls on partners to spend climate finance in line with the Copenhagen Accord and the aid effectiveness principles'. Does this imply a link between the EU's allocation of climate finance with the association of developing countries to the Copenhagen Accord? There is also no mention of the need for climate finance to be additional.

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It takes an experienced cryptographer to understand fully the nuances of language found in European Commission and Council texts. At our recent public [meeting on the Spring Package](#) at ODI, we were lucky enough to have such a person in our midst, in the shape of Sven Kuehn von Burgsdorff, the new Head of Policy in DG Development. He guided us, on the record, in how to interpret the difference between adjectives and nouns in the texts, and how to cross-reference paragraphs to find out what really was decided and what openings exist for further work. He highlighted the positives, but also the areas where the Commission fell short of its expectations because the Member States had different opinions. Most of these, as we set out above, are about aid volume and effectiveness. We have seen again, at the [G-8](#) and [G-20](#), that the Gleneagles targets are not as palatable as once they were.

Overall, then, and as the [New York Summit on the MDGs](#) approaches, the EU is likely to offer rather better than an unpleasant surprise. But it will not quite offer a complete summer delight.

The views presented in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of ODI.