

Thursday, 6 April 2006 - Strasbourg

Aid effectiveness and corruption in developing countries (debate)

Ana Gomes, on behalf of the PSE Group . - (PT) Mr President, I should first like to commend Mr van den Berg on his excellent, timely and important report. The EU, and its Member States, contributes over half of public aid to development, overall. Following the decisions taken by the 2005 Spring European Council and the Gleneagles G8 Summit, international aid is set to increase substantially over the next ten years.

In this context, if we are to properly accomplish the Millennium Goals, appropriate transparency mechanisms must be brought in to ensure that development aid actually reaches the people on the ground it is designed to help. As the van den Berg report says, the appropriate management of development aid is essential to the good governance of the recipient countries. I should like to turn to the example of Ethiopia, where despite the fact that it is the largest recipient of external aid, which accounts for almost 25% of the country's public budget, there have nevertheless been serious breakdowns in the rule of law, democracy and human rights.

Pursuant to Articles 96 and 97 of the revised Cotonou Agreement, serious cases of corruption can lead to political consultations. The EU should not hold back from using this tool. Naturally, in the medium and long term, it is crucial to foster a dynamic civil society with a free, balanced press. This is the only way in which the citizens of developing countries will be able to expose corrupt governments and to free themselves from them. On a more practical level, the EU must bring pressure to bear on the parliaments and governments of developing countries to step up control over military spending.

Shadow and parallel budgets are in themselves a form of corruption, directly affecting internal, regional and even global security. The lack of transparency in this area is a clear example of the link between corruption, bankrupt countries and security. In other words, when we speak of corruption, we also speak of war and peace, and as such the problem is not confined to developing countries, given that our own EU and western governments more often than not have a part to play in this. The G8 countries, for example, are responsible for more than 80% of world arms exports.

I welcome the efforts made by EU Member States towards ensuring the compatibility of arms exports from the Union with the technical and economic capacity of importing countries under the EU's Code of Conduct on Arms Exports. It is vital to guarantee that money for development is not diverted towards arms. Unfortunately, we are still awaiting detailed reports from the Member States on the implementation of the rules of this code.

In this murky area of arms, corruption and violence, Europe has a responsibility to guarantee that the arms sold by European companies and by European governments reach their legal recipients, and only them, and do not fall into the hands of criminals, militias and repressive governments. The partial implementation by Member States, including my country, of the 2003 European Council common position on arms brokering means that there remain legal loopholes in this area in Europe. Unless we start being tougher on arms control within our own borders, it will be difficult to combat corruption in this area in developing countries.