



European Union
Delegation of the European Commission
to South Africa

EU Perspectives

*Regular publication that seeks to provide information
on EU-related activities of interest to SA readers*



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Headline News

[EU Commissioner Michel and AU chairperson Ping express concern at rising food prices](#)

The incoming Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Jean Ping, and EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, met to discuss issues of common interest to Africa and Europe. During the meeting, Mr Ping stressed that the drastic rise in the price of foodstuffs represented a major challenge for the people of Africa and called on the international community to mobilise in order to reinvest in agriculture, particularly in Africa. Commissioner Michel expressed concern at the "looming world food crisis, which is less visible than the oil crisis, but has the potential to cause a real economic and humanitarian tsunami in Africa." He said the Commission intends to step up its emergency food aid in the short term, and called for international support on the issue of food security in Africa. Chairperson Ping and Commissioner Michel reiterated the importance of the strategic relationship between Africa and the EU and underlined their resolve to continue to work together to implement the Joint EU-Africa Strategy, adopted at the last summit in Lisbon in December 2007.

[EU needs to deliver on development aid to meet the Millennium Development Goals](#)

Following the release of the 2007 OECD development aid figures, which showed Member States' aid volumes dropping for the first time since 2000, the Commission urged Member States to go beyond rhetoric and deliver on their commitments. In its Communication "EU as a global partner for development", the Commission proposed a number of actions to encourage Member States to increase the volume and the effectiveness of aid. José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, said: "We are doing well on aid effectiveness, but we have to be honest and admit that our 2007 aid volume performance is simply not good enough. We have to get back on track at the European level if we are to continue to lead at the global level. So 2008 must be a year for action, not just words. For example, Member States should set out clearly what they are prepared to spend on aid, year by year, until 2015." Louis Michel, Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, said: "This year we mark the half-way point towards reaching the UN Millennium Development Goals of 2015. We know what we must do: increase our aid spending to meet targets and then make every euro count".

[The EU - a global partner for development - speeding up progress towards the Millennium Development Goals](#)

[REACH: new EU chemical legislation to enter pre-registration phase](#)

On 1st June 2008, REACH, the EU's new chemicals legislation will enter the crucial period of pre-registration. This phase runs until 1st December 2008. EU-based manufacturers, as well as importers into the EU, will have to pre-register with the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), over the course of this 6 month period, a process which will involve about 30,000 chemicals currently in use, e.g. acids, metals, solvents, surfactants, and glue. Vice-President Günter Verheugen, for Enterprise and Industry Policy and the Commissioner for the Environment, Stavros Dimas, commonly stated: "REACH is the most ambitious chemicals legislation in the world. It will enable us to drastically increase our knowledge on the use of chemicals and to use them safely, thus protecting human health and the environment".

Other News

[European Parliament MEPs review progress on human rights in the world in 2007](#)

The European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee adopted the draft EP annual report on human rights in the world in 2007. The report looks at a range of human rights issues, as well as highlighting the situation in countries of particular concern. It also evaluates the EU's efforts to promote human rights through its policies. The death penalty is one of the topics covered. The adoption in 2007 of a UN resolution calling for a global moratorium on the use of the death was

welcomed as a huge step forward. However, MEPs still want to see "the eradication of capital punishment in Europe" and ultimately its universal abolition. Women's rights is another key issue, which the Committee says should be raised in all EU human rights dialogues, with the aim of combating "discrimination and violence against women and girls, including, most prominently, gender-selected abortion, all forms of harmful traditional or customary practices, and early or forced marriage". Other areas covered are children's rights (including the special problem of children and armed conflict), torture, the protection of human rights defenders and the rights of minorities and the disabled.

[EU Presidency Declaration on the occasion of the International Day for Mine Awareness](#)

"On the occasion of the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action proclaimed by the United Nations, the European Union welcomes the significant progress made in the fight against the suffering caused by anti-personnel mines. The EU is aware of the potential of mine action as a peace and confidence-building measure in post-conflict situations among parties concerned and urges that where appropriate, all relevant multilateral, regional and national programmes and bodies should include, in addition to specialised mine action programmes, mine action activities in their humanitarian, rehabilitation, reconstruction, and development assistance activities, bearing in mind the need to ensure national and local ownership, sustainability and capacity-building".

[Second debate on The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue](#)

Culture was praised for being an excellent vehicle of exchange and expression of identity during the second "Brussels Debate", held as part of the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. The debate, entitled "Negotiating differences: A responsibility of artists and cultural institutions", was organised by the European Commission, in co-operation with the European Forum for Arts and Heritage and the European Cultural Foundation. Stressing the value of culture and the arts as an essential element of inter-cultural relations, European Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth, Jan Figel, said that "Culture and the arts are the natural fields where intercultural dialogue can happen and progress, thus fighting against ignorance and intolerance".

[Call to make environmental damage a criminal offence](#)

A European Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee report endorsed a proposed EU directive on the protection of the environment through criminal law. The Committee said that making damage to the environment a criminal offence would ensure that EU legislation is properly enforced. MEPs agreed that in principle governments should apply criminal measures to punish any illegal behaviour likely to seriously injure people or damage air, soil, waters, plants and animals, when committed intentionally or with serious negligence. The Committee agreed that the directive would only apply to breaches of EU environment protection legislation. The report was approved by a small majority, with 15 votes in favour, 11 against and 2 abstentions.

[European Parliament approves new Cypriot Commissioner for Health](#)

European Parliament MEPs voted in favour of approving the new Cypriot Commissioner Androula Vassiliou for Public Health, Food Safety, Animal Health and Welfare, with 446 votes in favour 7 against and 29 abstentions. A new Commissioner is needed following the resignation of fellow Cypriot Markos Kyprianou, who left to take up the post of foreign minister in the new Cypriot government. Ms Vassiliou was nominated by the Cypriot government and the Council of the European Union has already given its support to her nomination. Now appointed, Ms Vassiliou will be in office at least until the appointment of a new Commission after the June 2009 European Parliament elections.

[Declaration by the EU Presidency on Kenya](#)

The EU and Kenya's other international partners welcomed the power-sharing agreement signed by Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki and opposition leader Raila Odinga on 28 February. This was an important step towards peace and reconciliation within the framework of the National Dialogue, brokered by the Panel of Eminent African Personalities, led by Kofi Annan. However, Mr Annan subsequently expressed serious concern over the failure to compose and announce a coalition government. This concern was shared by the EU, which urged the parties to maintain the momentum for reconciliation by forming an effective and efficient coalition government as soon as possible, which reflected genuine power-sharing between Kenya's parties. The EU reiterated its commitment to support meaningful power-sharing and to working with the new Kenyan Government, once formed, to put Kenya back on the path to prosperity and stability.

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[Intercultural Dialogue](#)



[Gender Drawing Competition](#)