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European Parliament talks Strategic Partnership with SA counterparts

The European Parliamentary (EP) Delegation for Relations with South Africa is currently concluding its week long official visit to the country. Its purpose, to strengthen relations between the two parties through an Interparliamentary Dialogue, was underpinned by extensive meetings with key Ministers, Members of Parliament and a wide spectrum of research institutions. Topics covered include trade, development and specifically the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), economic policy, HIV/AIDS, regional and global issues.

In its role as a key international actor the European Union has a strong interest in South Africa. Expression to this is given through the recently increased EU development assistance of €980 mil (R9 bn) to South Africa for the period 2007-2013. This is in addition to a €900 mil (R8.5 bn) envelope in loan finance that the European Investment Bank has made available to South Africa for the same period.

The EP Delegation strongly supports the Strategic Partnership, currently being developed between the European Union and the South Africa Government, with a view to deepening political relations, similar to existing partnerships with China, India and Russia. As South Africa plays a pivotal role in the context of continental (within the AU framework) and regional (through SACU & SADC) African development and stability, the EP Delegation proposes to further strengthen the collaboration between the two parties, especially in areas of shared common objectives, including human rights, democratic process and conflict resolution (incl. DRC, Sudan, Somalia).

The EP Delegation wishes to underline that this dialogue should not be restricted to areas of mutual agreement but also be extended to issues characterised by differences in approach and/or areas of diverse views.

In the words of Mr Lapo Pistelli, Chairperson of the EP Delegation for Relations with South Africa, "this political relationship will need to be accompanied by a strengthened dialogue and deepened friendship between the South African and European Parliaments, the very institutions elected to represent the will of the people. This has been precisely the purpose of our visit and we take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to the South African Parliament, specifically to Madam Speaker and the Chairperson of the National Assembly, as well as the South African Government and its Ambassador to Brussels."

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