



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union to South Africa

1 December 2009

Press Release

.../ for immediate release

European Union Delegation to South Africa comes into existence on 1 December 2009

With the Treaty of Lisbon having entered into force today, the European Union will move to a level of increased democratic accountability, greater efficiency in decision making, and increased coherence externally. The Treaty of Lisbon effectively takes the European Union from an organisation designed for 15 Member States to one that will be able to serve its 27 Member States well into the future. A key innovation is the creation of the post of High Representative/ Vice President of the European Commission who will head a new service, the European External Action Service (EEAS). In line with this the European Commission's offices in third countries will as of today operate as part of the EEAS and will be known as European Union Delegations.

On her first day in office Catherine Ashton, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, noted: "I am looking forward to working closely with colleagues in the Council, the Commission and the Member States to strengthen Europe's foreign policy. We will do this with determination and with full respect for the values that the European Union stands for, above all peace and prosperity, freedom and democracy, the rule of law and the universality and indivisibility of human rights."

In South Africa, European Union Head of Delegation, Lodewijk Briët adds: "The Treaty sets out common principles and objectives for the Union's external action: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, as well as the principles of equality and solidarity. " He continues: "One of the most important policy changes that the new Treaty formally enshrines is the reduction and eradication of poverty as the primary objective of development cooperation".

Moreover, it gives a legal base to policy coherence for development, placing the obligation on the European Union to take account of development objectives in the other policies which it implements which affect developing countries. And Member States and the European Union are obliged to coordinate their development policies to promote complementarity and efficiency.

The Treaty introduces for the first time a specific legal basis for humanitarian aid and it is to be an area of shared competence (co-decision) with Member States. The provision stresses the specificity of the policy and the application of the principles of international humanitarian law, in particular impartiality and non-discrimination. It also envisages the creation of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps which will require a proposal for a regulation from the Commission at some point in the future.

In case of urgent financial aid, the Council acts by qualified majority upon a proposal from the Commission. This should mean quicker financial aid in the future.

Ambassador Briët concludes: "It is important to underline that the new institutional structure with the High Representative / Vice President is, of course, a very important development in relations with the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific, including South Africa."

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A copy of the Treaty of Lisbon can be found at: http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty