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(Notices)

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Answers from the Commission to written questions

(2018/C 415/06)

Questions 1-11

QUESTION 2/COM 1

by Michela Giuffrida

Subject: ACP-EU relations

Our partnership is solid and fundamental for the growth of both the ACP and the EU countries, but I would like to reiterate that the main focus in our relationship is, above all, the economic aspect. Sensitive issues such as respect for human rights, the rule of law, democracy, the management of migratory flows, sustainable growth and poverty reduction are often considered less important than economic topics.

Therefore, will the Commission consider the need for a broader agreement which not only pays attention to economic growth, but also assigns the abovementioned elements more significance, subject to the principle of conditionality?

REPLY TO QUESTION 2/COM 1

The new agreement is envisaged as a comprehensive agreement covering several aspects of the relations between the EU and the 79 ACP countries, the economic dimension being one of them.

Issues related to human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy, rule of law and good governance, as well as migration and mobility will continue to occupy a central place in the partnership, as shown by the EU negotiating mandate, where they feature as strategic priorities.

In our view, the future agreement should include provisions whereby the Parties will reiterate their commitment to promote, protect and fulfil human rights and fundamental freedoms, which are universal and indivisible, as well as to promote the values of democracy, good governance, the rule of law, and the principles of non-discrimination, equality and solidarity. Further, the Parties will commit to turn migration and mobility into opportunities and address together challenges in this field.
QUESTION 3/COM 2

by Sabine Lösing

Subject: The future set-up and implementation of Economic Partnership Agreements

Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are a central aspect of the Cotonou Agreement between the EU and ACP states. However, the terms of the EPAs further EU interests and are often detrimental to the economies of partner countries. To boost sustainable development, it is fundamental that there are fair terms of trade facilitating the emergence of local supply chains generating added value within ACP countries. Historically, no country has developed on the basis of trade liberalisation in the form demanded by the EU.

Will the Commission strive to review the framework for design and implementation of EPAs so as to guarantee fair terms of trade for ACP countries?

REPLY TO QUESTION 3/COM 2

The Cotonou Agreement establishes the overarching objectives of poverty eradication and sustainable development, and the essential elements of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The Cotonou framework also provides for development cooperation, including Aid for Trade. The Commission has proposed that these elements continue to be the framework for the Economic Partnership Agreements.

The Commission shares the goals of promoting the supply capacity and value addition in ACP countries and regions. The Economic Partnership Agreements contribute to this by creating trade and investment opportunities, flexible rules of origin, and targeted development support. Nevertheless, if trade agreements can set the right incentives, they cannot by themselves generate economic activity. That is why, pursuant to the new European Consensus on Development and to the updated EU Aid for Trade strategy, comprehensive approaches to sustainable investment and job creation are being designed at country and region levels.

To see how these objectives are being met, the Commission is monitoring the implementation of Economic Partnership Agreements. Likewise, there are also provisions for the regular review of Economic Partnership Agreements to examine their implementation. These are carried out with our partner countries and with the involvement of stakeholders.

QUESTION 7/COM 3

by Jo Leinen

Subject: China’s ‘One Belt One Road’ initiative and EU-ACP relations

Now that the shape and goals of China’s ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI) are becoming clearer, the European Commission is developing a ‘Connectivity Strategy towards Asia’ as a response.

Since the BRI is also clearly targeted at African countries and will therefore have an impact on ACP-EU relations, is the Commission planning a similar strategy towards Africa? If so, with what goals?

If not, what steps are being taken to either mitigate or take advantage of the BRI’s effects on the countries concerned?

REPLY TO QUESTION 7/COM 3

The EU’s Global Strategy (1) recognised the growing economic weight of Asia and called for a coherent approach to China’s connectivity drives westwards.

The EU has been working towards an EU strategy on Connecting Europe and Asia, first with a Joint Communication, which ought to be followed by Council conclusions.

The Strategy will outline a European vision of connectivity and partnership with the region, from regulation to policy dialogue and from technical to financial assistance, in the fields of transport, electricity grids, digital links, and people-to-people exchanges. It strives towards sustainable connectivity, helping countries meet the Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Climate Agreement targets.

Financial mechanisms will be put in place to achieve those aims, combining policy dialogue with public financial incentives and private capital mobilisation.

Geographically, the Joint Communication will focus on Europe and Asia, but it will have implications for the wider world: better economic management and more sustainable investment locally will have a positive impact globally.

China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) raised strong expectations in Africa as a possible launch pad for several major infrastructure projects in line with the African Union’s own Agenda 2063, to promote the development of the continent.

In the absence of a transparent framework and information related to China’s engagement in Africa, it remains a challenge to assess the impact of BRI in Africa and to engage China in established coordination mechanisms. The EU is strengthening its partnerships with various actors to enhance cooperative approaches to connectivity and to provide new tools to address e.g. debt risks and impact assessments of investment projects.

At the same time, the EU pursues constructive engagement with China bilaterally through the planned establishment of a Dialogue on Development issues and has re-started the dialogue on Africa. This allows more detailed exchanges about respective approaches to development and Africa.

**QUESTION 1/COM 4**

by Thierry Cornillet

Subject: The need to improve communication on EU funding and provide training for local stakeholders in making applications for their projects

Working documents produced by the Commission as part of the mid-term review of external financing instruments show that a large proportion of the earmarked funding has not yet been disbursed. Although some streamlining has been done, the procedures remain cumbersome. This situation could result in a loss of credibility for the EU: our partners sometimes think that it is our intention not to disburse the funding that has been earmarked.

In the next multiannual financial framework, could the Commission propose a communication and training programme aimed at local stakeholders, focusing on how to put together applications? This would put them in a better position to comply with the relevant criteria, and increase their chances of having their projects accepted.

**REPLY TO QUESTION 1/COM 4**

The Commission Report on the Mid-Term Review of the External Financing Instruments considers that the budget implementation is efficient. In particular as stated in the Staff Working Document on the European Development Fund (EDF), its implementation is deemed efficient with 50% of its budget committed, 31% contracted and 13% paid (as of June 2017), and considering the fact that the 11th EDF reached its cruising speed only towards the end of 2016.

In the frame of the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) thematic programme for Civil Society Organisations, EU Delegations often organise information sessions for grassroots local actors on the relevant calls for proposals, their objectives and submission requirements.

This is complemented by tailor-made specific training sessions. The EU intends to further pursue these efforts during the 2018/2020 period.

Furthermore, since 16 April 2018, the DEVCO Academy(1) provides free access to online training on international cooperation and development, including courses on financial and contractual management.

Regarding the next Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF), the Commission takes good note of the recommendations expressed and will reflect on and propose the most efficient ways to improve outreach, information and training activities intended for local actors in partner countries.

(1) https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/devco-academy/
QUESTION 4/COM 5

by Nathalie Griesbeck

Subject: Bringing stability and development to the Sahel region

At the high-level conference on the Sahel of 23 February 2018 held in Brussels, EUR 414 million was earmarked for assistance to the G5 Sahel joint force. The G5 force is committed to bringing stability to the region by combating terrorism and organised crime.

How can we ensure that this financial aid contributes not only to the region’s security, but also to its sustainable development of the Sahel, which is fertile ground for the growth of violent extremist ideologies?

REPLY TO QUESTION 4/COM 5

The EU is already very committed in the Sahel region, with a particular focus on fragile and trans-borders areas. The overall EU development assistance provided to G5 Sahel countries amounts to EUR 3.8 billion (2014-2020), including EUR 1.7 billion in budget support. Together with its Member States, the EU development assistance to the region amounts to EUR 8 billion.

The security situation in the Sahel region continues to worsen, as seen recently with the large-scale terrorist attack in the heart of Ouagadougou on 2 March, and continuous attacks on defence and security forces in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger and on Operation Barkhane and MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali). State authority remains absent in large areas of central and northern Mali, as well as in northern Burkina Faso. The local population lacks access to basic social services. The underlying root causes of instability, notably weak political, financial and security governance continue to fuel this trend.

Over recent years, in order to help tackling these challenges, the EU has developed a Comprehensive Approach and subsequently an Integrated Approach, combining security and development aspects. Within the framework of the EU Sahel Strategy and its Regional Action Plan, the Sahel has been a real test-bed for developing integrated EU policies and strategies using instruments and actions within the entire range of diplomacy, development, stabilisation, humanitarian aid and security policy.

The EU is very pleased with the outcome of the Sahel Conference held in Brussels on 23 February 2018. With a total of EUR 414 million pledged for the G5 Sahel Joint Force, the Conference marked a milestone with regards to our integrated efforts to mobilise support to the Sahel. The EU provided EUR 100 million from the African Peace Facility in support of the G5 Sahel Joint Force.

In order to ensure long-term stabilisation and sustainable development in the region, the EU objective is also to accompany the security actions with continuing development effort, for a return to the Rule of Law and basic social services, particularly in fragile areas.

QUESTION 9/COM 6

by Alpha Ousmane (Burkina Faso)

Subject: Future of the EDF

Three specific memoranda of understanding with ACP countries are currently in the pipeline. But what will become of the European Development Fund (EDF)

The European Union’s approach raises three concerns:

1. Where will the regional indicative programmes (RIPs) be based, and how will they be managed?

2. Is there an RIP managed by the African Union for the benefit of all countries or will each region retain its RIP?

3. How will the situation in the Maghreb be managed, which, although it has a specific agreement with the European Union, does not have an RIP?
REPLY TO QUESTION 9/COM 6

The Commission recently adopted its proposal for the post-2020 Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) and will issue its sectoral proposals for external action on 14 June.

For external action, including development cooperation, the European Commission envisages significant simplification, in order to gain in coherence and effectiveness without downgrading what makes the cooperation between the EU and its partners so special: its predictability, its policy-driven nature and its level of funding.

In this overall coherence-enhancing exercise, the European Development Fund (EDF) is proposed to be integrated in a broad neighbourhood, development and cooperation instrument under the EU budget, and key features should be promoted across a broad instrument.

The proposed broad instrument would have a dominant geographic component, which would be broken down by areas of the world.

The funding for regional actions, or what is currently known as Regional Indicative Programmes (RIPs), will be addressed in the programming phase.

Without prejudging the upcoming discussions and decisions, regional integration and cooperation between partner countries could continue to be supported at different levels. Inside the sub-components foreseen in the future regulation, regional programmes could be designed while ensuring continental coherence for Africa, where relevant.

Under the broad instrument, the Maghreb would be covered by the ‘Neighbourhood’ component. Here again, the question of regional programming is primarily a programming matter, to be defined at a later stage.

QUESTION 10/COM 7

by Marlene Mizzi

Subject: The Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are goals agreed upon by 193 countries, involving a commitment by all to meet 17 goals linked to 169 targets.

In view of this, can the Commission shed light on its plans to invest in the implementation of the SDGs, both at EU level and among our partner countries?

The matter is even more important considering that these goals tackle more than just economic policy, since they also touch on the issues of social inequality, the need for a greener economy, and a safer environment for all generations.

REPLY TO QUESTION 10/COM 7

The European Commission has chosen a two-step approach towards implementation: (i) to mainstream the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the European policy framework and Commission priorities; and (ii) a reflection work on our longer-term vision and the focus of sectoral policies after 2020. The reflection paper ‘Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030’, on the follow-up to the UN SDGs, including on the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, is expected in the second half of 2018. It will form part of the discussion on the Future of Europe and will be supported by a ‘distance-to-SDGs’ analysis and stocktaking of the achievements of the EU in the implementation of the SDGs. A multi-stakeholder platform has been set up to follow up and exchange on best practices on SDGs implementation, and an overview of their engagement and input will also be included as an Annex.

As regards specifically the implementation of the SDGs through development cooperation, the EU and its Member States agreed in June 2017 a new European Consensus on Development. This provides a new common framework for development policy for the EU institutions and Member States, with the focus remaining centred on poverty eradication, while at the same time recognising the nexus between development policies and humanitarian aid, environment, climate change, migration and security policies. Efforts will be targeted towards addressing inequalities to ensure that no-one is left behind. The European Consensus has already informed the proposals for negotiation directives to the Council on a renewed partnership with the ACP countries.
Policy commitments should be followed by investments. In this regard, the SDGs are guiding the EU’s thinking on the next Multiannual Financial Framework and future instruments. The Commission is already investing in achieving the SDGs in partner countries through a range of initiatives. Last year, the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative was launched with the EU’s contribution in the order of EUR 500 million to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. The EU External Investment Plan is expected to leverage more than EUR 44 billion of investments in partner countries by 2020, in Africa and the EU Neighbourhood, with a contribution of EUR 4.1 billion from the European Commission. Furthermore, the Commission will contribute EUR 30 million to the new UN Joint Fund on the 2030 Agenda.

Looking forward, the European Commission is committed to strengthening its policy dialogue with partner countries based on the SDGs, and to supporting its partner countries in achieving the 2030 Agenda at national level, including by aligning their national development plans to the SDGs.

**QUESTION 6/COM 8**

*by Catherine Beader*

**Subject: Wildlife trafficking and ACP-EU relations**

The Commission adopted, two years ago, the Action Plan against Wildlife Trafficking, whose objective 3.2 calls for strengthened global partnerships involving source, transit and market countries.

Which ACP countries has the Commission identified as priority countries for establishing enhanced dialogue and technical cooperation on wildlife trafficking?

What steps have been taken to include the topic in high-level meetings with regional organisations such as the AU, SADC and EAC?

What progress has been made towards using trade instruments to press for actions against wildlife trafficking? Are such provisions included in current and future ACP-EU FTA negotiations?

**REPLY TO QUESTION 6/COM 8**

As part of the implementation of the 2016 Action Plan against wildlife trafficking, the EU and its Member States are investing significant resources in favour of actions reinforcing partnerships involving source, transit and market countries. For instance, around EUR 340 million of EU external development cooperation was committed in 2016 and 2017 and directly contributes to achieving the objectives of the Action Plan.

Since wildlife trafficking is present in all ACP countries through various products (ivory, rosewood, pangolins, turtles, birds, etc.), all countries have received specific support in the fight against this crime, but priorities have focused on the main supply regions: Madagascar, Central Africa, East Africa, West Africa and Southern Africa.

Programmes mobilised against wildlife trafficking include support to international organisations specialised in the fight against wildlife crime, such as the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICCCWC). Promoting the role of local communities in wildlife protection has also been a priority for the EU and its Member States. Programs therefore involve multiple partners at global, regional, national and local levels and comprise a full spectrum of activities: sustainable management of protected areas, livelihood improvement of local communities by economic activities and provision of ecosystem services provided by (water, energy, green jobs, wild meat, etc.), dismantling of criminal networks.

The EU has been very active in engaging with ACP countries in meetings with regional actors such as the African Union, the Association of South East Asian Nations, the Southern African Development Community, and the Economic Community of Central Africa States, but also fora such as the Congo Basin Forest Partnership. Furthermore, regional programming related to the environment and wildlife involves partnerships with and the involvement of the relevant regional authorities.

Environmental safeguards and sustainability are an integral part of trade and economic partnership agreement discussions involving the EU. The EU ensures, for instance, an increasing focus on compliance to the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species.
**QUESTION 5/COM 9**

by György Hölvényi

**Subject: Role of religious communities in conflict management in ACP countries**

Religious communities have an indispensable potential for conflict management in crisis-hit ACP countries. Religious communities and institutions are necessarily stakeholders, not exclusively spiritually but also as a major contributor to social stability by reason of their leadership and legitimacy, as shown by recent examples such as the role of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Congo as a key mediator in negotiations towards a political transition in the DRC.

How does the Commission ensure the participation of religious communities in EU conflict management efforts? How does it consider their recommendations when implementing external actions? Will religious organisations be involved in EU-ACP cooperation structures and policy dialogue for the long term?

**REPLY TO QUESTION 5/COM 9**

Religious communities and more broadly religion may play an important role in conflict prevention, management and resolution. They have often unique spiritual, moral, social and sometimes political assets to bring to peace process engagements.

The EEAS and the European Commission services are thus often engaging with them to contribute to conflict prevention, management and resolution efforts.

In the ACP countries, the Commission is in contact with a wide number of different mediation support organisations, actors and stakeholders, including working on religious dimension, such as the Network for religious and traditional peacemakers, the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), as well as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. For example, we are interacting with the Sant’Egidio community in the Central African Republic.

In some cases, such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference indeed played a significant part in reaching an agreement, while in other cases the role of religious leaders may be overstated, or even instrumentalised.

Depending on the situation and the local context, the European Commission can support the participation of religious communities in dialogues and consultations. It can also provide technical support to religious actors who are engaged in peace processes.

The religious dimension, however, needs to be assessed through a careful analysis of issues at stake and actors involved. The EU needs to ensure that its assessment of the role of religion includes sufficient nuance, to recognise the complex relationship among all drivers of conflict and their evolving patterns. As emphasised in the 2015 report of the United Nations Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, the role of human agency in exploiting religion for political purposes is particularly important to understand.

Concretely, through the program ‘Intercultural Dialogue and Culture’ (Development Cooperation Instrument, DCI), cultural pluralism and intercultural understanding, including aspects relating to religion or belief will be enhanced in selected ACP countries. Five projects were selected and started implementation in the beginning of 2018, for a total amount of EUR 10 million.

Priority was given to actions taking place in countries with fragile situations or affected by important flows of displaced people or irregular migrants: the selected proposals will take place in Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe; Syria, Iraq and Lebanon.

The projects leverage the influence of religious leaders to promote cultural diversity and respect for equal dignity of all men and women through interfaith and intercultural dialogue and cooperation. As such, religious leaders and communities are among the target groups of capacity-building actions.
In addition, the ongoing call for proposal under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) aims at enhancing ‘mutual understanding and respect between individuals of different faith or none, contributing to inclusive communities and societies accepting diversity and capable of addressing potential conflicts in a peaceful manner’. Civil society actions targeting ACP countries are eligible for support. Projects will be selected in the course of 2018 (indicative amount EUR 5 million).

QUESTION 8/COM 10

by Laura Agea

Subject: Future CAP reform and impact in ACP countries

Multiple studies confirm the direct impact of the EU’s common agricultural policy (CAP) in ACP countries. Unfortunately, the impact is not always positive. The EU plays a key role regarding the international agriculture market and global food security, as the most important importer of agricultural products from ACP countries. Our key challenge is to align the future CAP reform with the EU’s commitments under the global agenda on sustainable development (SDGs, Paris Agreement, etc.).

What instruments are foreseen in the architecture of the future CAP to improve the positive impact on developing countries and to further respect of our commitments to sustainable development and to food security in particular?

REPLY TO QUESTION 8/COM 10

The new European Consensus on Development of June 2017 confirmed the importance of Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) to achieve SDGs.

Agriculture is intrinsically linked to issues such as jobs, food, air, climate change, water, soil and biodiversity, and hence plays a substantial role in Agenda 2030. The long journey to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) has just started and the agriculture sector has an opportunity to demonstrate it can be part of the solution.

Successive reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) over the last 25 years have progressively increased the CAP’s market orientation (1), while improving its environmental and climate performance (2). These reforms have emphasised the CAP’s main objectives, which are to ensure viable food production, sustainable management of natural resources and climate action, and a balanced territorial development within the European Union.

The current revision of the CAP also aims to further contribute to the EU’s international commitments. The Communication on ‘The Future of Food and Farming’ of November 2017, laid down broad policy orientations (3), including on the CAPs international dimension. Those are further specified in the legislative proposal on the Common Agricultural Policy post-2020, which the Commission recently adopted.

The EU is evidently committed to helping developing countries integrate their agricultural sectors into the world’s trading system and share in the benefits of the global economy (4). It is aware that this can happen only when partner countries are in the driving seat. The EU is currently working with more than 60 partner countries on sustainable agriculture and food security (5). The focus in Africa is on policy support, fostering responsible investments in rural areas and supporting the agri-food sector, ultimately to help African countries harness the potential of their agricultural sector and respond to the needs of their citizens.

(1) This has been achieved by minimising measures with production and trade distorting effects. Currently, over 90 % of the support that the EU grants to farmers is no longer linked to the quantity or product produced and therefore has no distorting effect on trade. Market measures are limited to safety net levels for crisis only and export refunds have been eliminated since December 2015.

(2) The specific CAP instruments addressing sustainable food production include both mandatory (cross-compliance, greening) and voluntary measures (under rural development policy). The support granted to EU farmers therefore reflects their efforts and implementation of measures that guarantee a sustainable agriculture.

(3) It also contains a clear indication that that the future CAP must play a larger role in implementing the outcome of the Valetta Summit, addressing the root causes of migration. For example, capitalise on knowledge and innovation and deepen cooperation on agricultural research and innovation, explore training and exchange projects and enhancing strategic policy cooperation and dialogue with the African Union on issues related to agriculture and rural development

(4) The EU gives duty-free and quota-free access to all Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) allow partner countries to protect their sensitive agricultural products from liberalisation, either by excluding them entirely or by allowing robust safeguards that can be used to guard against sudden increases in imports.

(5) EUR 8.5 billion of EU Development assistance allocated to this purpose over the 2014-2020 period
In April, the Commission also set up a Task Force composed of EU and African experts to advise and come up with recommendations to strengthen the partnership between the EU and the African Union in food and farming and in enhancing the role of the EU in African job-creating economic development in agriculture, agri-business and agro-industries.

**QUESTION 11/COM 11**

by Neena Gill

**Subject: Humanitarian aid to the DRC**

Humanitarian assistance to the DRC in 2017 was at the lowest level of the past decade. EU humanitarian aid to the country last year was EUR 4 million less than in 2016.

In October 2017, a level 3 emergency was officially activated in the DRC by the UN, with a geographical focus on the Kasai, Tanganyika and South Kivu regions.

1. What is the current global funding gap for the humanitarian situation in the DRC?
2. Has the Commission taken measures to step up humanitarian assistance to the DRC since October 2017?

**REPLY TO QUESTION 11/COM 11**

Given the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the first ever international humanitarian conference on the DRC was held in Geneva on 13 April 2018. The conference was co-hosted by the UN, the EU and the Netherlands. 101 Delegations attended, including 22 EU Member States. It resulted in pledges and announcements of USD 528,1 million for the humanitarian response in the DRC in 2018. The European Commission announced assistance worth EUR 77,1 million for the DRC in 2018 and EU Member States announced a further USD 246 million, so that the EU pledge totals two thirds of the overall amount.

The Humanitarian Response Plan for the DRC for 2018 requires USD 1,68 billion with 13,1 million people in need of assistance, according to the UN.

A ‘level 3’ emergency response — the highest response level possible — was activated by the UN on 20 October 2017 for six months with a geographical focus on the provinces of South Kivu, Tanganyika and the Kasais. The level 3 status has been de-activated on 20 April 2018, as the benchmarks for an effective mobilisation of international capacity to scale up the humanitarian support have largely been met, according to the UN.

The European Commission has been supporting humanitarian operations in the DRC since 1994 and continues to do so. It supports the response to basic humanitarian needs including food assistance, nutrition, health services, protection, shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene, education in emergencies, but also logistics and the coordination of humanitarian aid. It will be complemented in 2018 by mediation, reconciliation and resilience building activities funded by other instruments at the disposal of the European Commission, in addition to the already significant development funding in the DRC.