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Brussels,
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To all EU Development Ministers

Dear Ministers,

Further to Andris' letter of 13 October 2011, let us begin by saying how pleased we were with the discussions at the Foreign Affairs Council on 14 November and at the meeting of the EU Directors-General for Development on 26 October.

We were heartened by the warm welcome given to the recent Communications on development policy and on budget support. Furthermore, the broad convergence of views on joint programming, coupled with a strong willingness on the part of many Member States to take its implementation forward as of now, was most encouraging.

In the light of these discussions and the Council Conclusions for the Busan Forum on Aid Effectiveness, we would like to stress a few issues.

We are convinced that joint programming can only succeed if it is conducted primarily at partner country level. Furthermore, to maximise the effectiveness of our aid we should synchronise our programming cycle with partner countries' cycles¹. This will demand greater flexibility in the programming practices of the EU, and possibly of some Member States.

Moreover, we have to base our approach as much as possible on partner countries' development and reform strategies. Joint programming is a 'joint cooperation response' by another name: it involves performing a shared analysis of the partner country's development and reform strategy, identifying priority sectors for intervention, arriving at an in-country division of labour between participating donors and mentioning indicative financial allocations per sector and per donor.

It goes without saying that the EU and its Member States are the driving force behind our joint cooperation response. Nonetheless we should be open to the participation of non-EU actors whose commitment to a joint response in a given partner country is as great as ours. Our field offices know best with which key donors to work. We might also call on Member States' missions to assist EU delegations in playing a coordinating role where necessary.

¹ For countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy this should be understood to mean the time horizons of ENP Action Plans or equivalent documents. For these countries, the political cooperation agenda and economic integration and regulatory harmonisation strategies also need to be taken into account. ENP Action Plans or equivalent documents identify priority objectives jointly agreed among the EU, its Member States and the Partner country.

Participation in a joint cooperation response is, of course, voluntary. Therefore, when it comes to determining whether or not to undertake joint programming in a country, it is first and foremost up to the Member States providing assistance to said country to decide whether they are willing to go down this road. Furthermore, the competences of Member States over their assistance should be fully respected, and the usual comitology procedures in Brussels should be used only to adopt the part of the joint cooperation response relevant to the EU, not the aspects pertaining to Member States' interventions.

Bearing in mind these considerations, the aforementioned Council Conclusions and the lessons learnt from the exercise for South Sudan, we believe that we are in a position gradually to move ahead with implementation. To that end, we first need to gain more experience in a few selected partner countries, beginning in earnest in 2012.

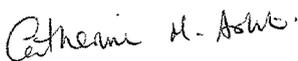
The Commission services and the EEAS, together with EU Delegations and in close coordination with missions of Member States, have tentatively identified those partner countries in which the timing of their development strategy, the existing level of donor coordination and experience with aid effectiveness initiatives such as the EU Fast Track Initiative on Division of Labour, make them the most suitable candidates.

Our discussions have given rise to the following list of country candidates: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guatemala, Laos, Mali, Moldova, Rwanda, Tunisia and Ukraine. We would also welcome other suggestions. Several of these countries are fragile states or in transition – an area in which we have amassed valuable experience in providing assistance.

As discussed, further assessments should be made by our field offices in these countries, alongside more formal consultations to seek these countries' views. We will therefore instruct Heads of EU Delegations in the countries concerned to draw up a common opinion with Member States' Heads of Mission by the end of this year, so that we can start implementation in early 2012. We kindly request that you brief your Heads of Mission to the same effect.

We trust that this phased approach will secure a consensus and look forward to making progress in this undertaking.

Yours sincerely,



Catherine Ashton



Andris Piebalgs



Štefan Füle