

INTERVIEW WITH FLORENCE CORMON, FRANCE, ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

NGLS interviewed Florence Cormon, France, on behalf of the European Union. During the negotiating period, France held the rotating Presidency of the EU and negotiated on the group's behalf. Ms. Cormon was the group's lead negotiator in this regard. Below she responds to NGLS's questions.

NGLS: Is the European Union overall satisfied with the Doha outcome? In your opinion, what are the positive and the negative points of the Doha Declaration?

The Doha follow-up Conference was an essential event on the international agenda. Given the impact of new challenges for development, especially the impact of the food crisis, climate change, and the global financial crisis, the Conference took on even more importance for the European Union, which is the world's first donor, accounting for approximately 60% of ODA.

For these reasons, it was essential for the European Union, represented at the highest level, that the Doha Conference should result in a clear show of unity of the international community on the priority that must be given to financing for development in these troubled times, and in reaffirming the solidarity of the developed countries with the more vulnerable ones. In this respect, the reiteration of the objectives of the Monterrey Consensus, its fundamental principles and global approach — including a global partnership for development — and donors' unambiguous commitment to respect their ODA commitments represent the fundamental achievement of the Doha Declaration.

It was also important for the EU that the final Declaration should indicate possible means to mobilize additional financial resources at national and international levels. Among these, the Declaration points out the importance of tax reform, fighting corruption, and combating tax evasion (mentioned for the first time) and capital flight. It also underlines the importance of an enabling climate for investment and private sector development, which are essential for wealth creation. At the international level and complementing national efforts, the Declaration covers new ground on the quality and effectiveness of aid. It also acknowledges the positive contribution of innovative sources of financing for development and opens new avenues in

this area. New actions are considered to contribute to debt sustainability and improve international financial and economic governance. The Declaration also insists on the importance of the human dimension of development, which requires promotion of inclusive economic growth and implementing policies that enable everyone to access basic economic and social services. Gender equality is strongly reaffirmed and the Declaration recalls that sustainable development comprises economic, social as well as environmental dimensions. Moreover, it was essential that the Doha Declaration should devote some time to new and emerging issues, including responses to climate change and commodity price volatility, and preventing future food crises.

However, the EU would have wished that the Conference had discussed more ambitiously the role of new development actors, in particular the potential contribution of sovereign wealth funds to development, better international tax cooperation, progress on the "Delivering as One" agenda on improving the impact of the UN system on the ground, and better convergence between South-South and North-South cooperation to improve the coherence of development efforts.

What were the more controversial issues during the negotiations? How were these resolved?

Given the current context, characterized by important mutations on the international scene (emergence of new powers, major changes in aid structures, recent crises that threaten progress on the fight against poverty), it was normal that differences of perception and expectations were voiced in the course of negotiating the final document. However, it must be emphasized that none of the fundamental issues that were brought up during the preparatory process were put aside — whether these referred to global economic and financial governance, debt, or financing responses to climate change — since there was a consensus on the importance of discussing these subjects in the



*Florence Cormon,
EU lead negotiator*

final Declaration. The EU strived to bring closer the various positions so that the discussions could focus on essential issues and areas of action acceptable by all parties. The meeting at ministerial level on the more thorny political issues enabled a consensus agreement. Accepted by all parties, it must now be implemented.

In Doha, President Sarkozy of France, who was speaking on behalf of the EU, said that "the world came close to disaster because people got used to profit at all cost . . . they got used to seeing some get richer while others got poorer." In your opinion, did the financial crisis have an impact on the negotiations?

Of course, the current financial crisis deeply influenced the discussions and the context in which the negotiations took place. Thus, it was first and foremost a message of solidarity with the poorer countries that the European Union, represented by President Nicolas Sarkozy and State Secretary Alain Joyandet, came to express in Doha. The Doha Declaration approaches the impact of the crisis on development in a comprehensive way, not limited solely to systemic issues. It gives indications for the actions that the international community should take in order to improve the functioning of the system and to comprehensively reform it: policy coherence for development at all levels, commitment to pursue sound macroeconomic policies, strengthening of the regulatory and supervisory frameworks of financial markets and further reform of the Bretton Wood institutions in order to strengthen their legitimacy and effectiveness (missions, resources, instruments, voice and participation of developing countries and new actors of the world economy).

Concerning the decision taken in Doha to organize a UN Conference at the highest level on the world financial and economic crisis and its impact on development, how did the tension between the "G-20 approach" and the "G-192 approach" manifest itself during the Doha negotiations? In your opinion, are these two approaches complementary or contradictory?

As President Sarkozy said, efforts from all countries are necessary to overcome the crisis and turn it into an opportunity. France, as President of the EU, supported the participation of the UN Secretary-General at the first G-20 meeting in Washington. The EU has always underlined the fact that the United Nations — on account of its universal composition and legitimacy — had a role to play in the international response to the crisis. The Doha Declaration affirms that the UN system must keep on playing a role in the actions undertaken in the crisis, and it calls for a conference at the highest level on the impact of the financial crisis on development. This underlines the fact that the UN does have a role to play and that there is no contradiction between the two approaches; on the contrary, there is complementarity in the actions to be undertaken

to improve, in a pragmatic way, global economic and financial governance and ensure greater coherence of objectives and better programme coordination.

The next meeting of the G-20 will take place in the spring. From France's point of view, how can the G-20, the Follow-up process on Financing for Development and the UN Conference on the financial crisis, turn "this unprecedented financial crisis into an opportunity to change the world," as President Sarkozy put it?

The EU will continue to promote adaptation of international institutions to new political, economic and financial realities. Upcoming milestone events (including the next G-20 meeting, the Spring Meetings of the BWIs, the ECOSOC Spring Meeting with the international financial institutions and the UN Conference on the impact of the financial crisis on development) will constitute as many opportunities to define what measures are needed to bring about the profound institutional changes required to correspond better with 21st century realities. France will continue, within the EU framework, its efforts in that regard and particularly its advocacy and support for the full participation of developing countries in the process of reforming the international financial system.

Do you think civil society played a significant role before and during the Doha Conference? In your opinion, what role should it play in the preparatory phase of the UN Conference on the impact of the financial and economic crisis?

The EU pleaded for a strong participation of civil society at the Doha Conference (the European delegation also included representatives of civil society), as it had at the time of the Monterrey Conference. Civil society, (NGOs, associations, private sector) played an important role during the whole Conference and preparatory process, by greatly contributing to the richness of the debates and through written reports and proposals and informal exchanges with delegates. Evidently this does not mean that all NGOs' expectations were met in the final document. Some NGOs regretted that there had not been any further progress on issues such as a currency transaction tax, the struggle against tax havens, and increasing ODA. Nevertheless, thanks to their mobilization, a vigorous dialogue was engaged where they could express their point of view. It is highly desirable that this mobilization should continue, particularly as regards the implementation of the Doha Declaration and beyond: we should stress that the European Council has taken some very specific commitments to reinforce several points mentioned in the Doha Declaration, for instance by explicitly deciding to take on non-cooperative tax havens.

As you know, the modalities of the upcoming Conference will be discussed soon, in conjunction with the President of the General Assembly. It is clear that the EU will encourage the close association of civil society to this next preparatory phase.