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12 May 2026, Brussels

Subject: Europe's opportunity to renew its commitment to sustainable development, address fragility and ensure coherence of the Global Gateway

Dear Development Ministers,

Ahead of the Foreign Affairs Council on Development taking place on 18 May and in the context of negotiations on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), we urge you to reaffirm the Union's commitment to sustainable development as a cornerstone of its global leadership. This includes preserving the primary focus of the Global Europe Instrument on poverty reduction, addressing inequalities, advancing human development, human rights, and gender equality. As these priorities face growing pressure, maintaining an external action framework based on people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships is essential to uphold EU Treaty objectives, the European Consensus on Development, and international commitments such as the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

The EU needs a vision for its international cooperation which delivers on the objectives of Official Development Assistance (ODA) while pursuing EU strategic interests through foreign economic policy. To maintain a clarity of mandates, it is essential that EU ODA respects the criteria set by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC). Recent [analysis](#) from CONCORD highlights an increasing risk that the EU's external action is being driven by short-term geopolitical and economic interests at the expense of its development objectives. The pursuit of strategic interests is legitimate, but allowing ODA to be primarily steered by internal EU objectives undermines aid effectiveness, weakens long-term development outcomes, and significantly erodes the EU's credibility.

Such an approach is of particular concern in fragile and conflict-affected contexts where people and communities face heightened risks. These settings require long-term, flexible, and grant-based approaches focused on resilience, governance, and human development, implemented through a triple nexus approach. Yet they risk being left behind and further undermined amid major ODA cuts - such as the 13.8% decline by EU Institutions announced in the preliminary OECD figures for 2025 - and a growing shift towards investment-led approaches.

We are especially concerned about the rapid expansion of the Global Gateway strategy and its focus on large-scale infrastructure projects. While it can deliver under certain conditions, financial leveraging does not fit every development need. There is a high risk of diverting ODA away from projects that do not generate immediate financial returns and from the communities most in need, raising questions about whether this is the most effective and equitable use of already significantly reduced ODA resources.

The current lack of transparency, oversight and democratic accountability is a significant reputational risk for the EU. To minimise risks and maximise positive impact, the Global Gateway strategy requires:



- Taking partner countries' development priorities as the starting point, including in fragile and conflict-affected contexts where tailored approaches relying on concessional finance are essential;
- Improved transparency, accountability, and democratic oversight, including more multistakeholder exchanges and enhanced involvement of the Council and the European Parliament in governance;
- Rigorous compliance with environmental, social and human rights safeguards, grounded in a human rights-based approach. This includes engaging exclusively with finance institutions and companies that demonstrate alignment with the highest standards and have in place mechanisms to avoid practices that undermine local economies, public systems and aggravate indebtedness;
- Meaningful engagement and close cooperation with local authorities and civil society throughout the projects to increase effectiveness and local ownership.

Global Gateway should complement, not replace, sustained ODA commitments. As the Council itself stressed in the Council Conclusions of 24 June 2024, it is “urgent for the EU and its Member States to take additional action” towards achieving ODA targets. Grant-based financing and locally led approaches must remain the backbone of EU engagement, especially in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

In light of these considerations, we call on you to:

- Ensure that the external action budget represents at least 10% of the overall MFF, with the Global Europe Instrument adequately resourced as a minimum baseline for a credible EU global role;
- Safeguard the primacy of poverty and inequality reduction, human development, human rights and gender equality in the Global Europe Instrument;
- Ensure that private finance leveraged through blending operations and budgetary guarantees is genuinely additional while ring-fencing grants and budget support for core development needs;
- Ensure that Global Gateway complements - rather than reorients - EU development policy, with clear governance, safeguards, and accountability mechanisms.

ODA represents a tiny fraction of EU spending. On average, EU Member States spend less than 0.5% of the GNI on ODA - remaining well below the 0.7% target and continuing the decades-long mismatch between commitments and practice. Yet it has a proven transformative impact on people's lives and contributes to addressing shared global challenges, from climate change to health crises. The EU must continue to uphold its role as one of the world's main donors and fulfil its commitments.

We count on your leadership to ensure that the EU's external action remains credible, effective, and firmly grounded in its values.

Yours sincerely,

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