

The #EYD2015 at a glance: perspectives from Brussels

Interviewing **Mr Victor Negrescu**, the youngest Romanian Member of the European Parliament (MEP) since the integration of Romania in the European Union in 2007.



Elected in May 2014, he became member in the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and a permanent member of the Committee on Budgets and the Delegation to the ACP-EU JPA. Victor Negrescu has an important professional and academic experience in both politics and Political Science and has worked for several years already in promoting development cooperation policies and European values in Romania. With a PhD on European development cooperation policies he is the founder of the National School of Political and

Administrative Studies English taught MA program on development, international cooperation and humanitarian aid.

He is also well-known for his interesting mix of projects and initiatives that blend local Romanian interests with global open-minded approaches. Thus, the winner of the MEP Awards 2015 for his work on the Digital Agenda for Europe is also the one who brought the regional features of Romania close to Brussels through his project “Delegation of Transylvania and Banat” and tried to improve the access to healthcare in rural communities due to his 1 million EUR initiative “Access to Health for people in rural areas”.

Alexandra: **This year, we celebrated the European Year for Development (EYD2015). Could you tell us more about the European Parliament’s participation in EYD activities?**



Victor: I believe that it is very important that the European Union decided to celebrate the European Year for Development. The European Parliament completely supports the popularization of the concept of development and the need for a stronger debate on the role of the European Union and of the member states in the implementation of development policies. Therefore several debates have been already organized in the EP premises and almost at every plenary we discuss about a topic related to development. Just recently we discussed about the efficiency of development aid funds and the necessity to focus more the cooperation on sustainable projects in partnership with the beneficiaries.

Nevertheless I am one of the MEPs who believe that we could have done more. It is clear that in the context of the refugee crisis the world needs the EU and the member states to get more involved in developing countries. In order to do so we need to raise awareness on the necessity to allocate more resources to development cooperation policies but also to involve more our citizens. Public support and development education are necessary for stronger policies, and the EYD2015 should be the

instrument that the European Parliament should use to enable a wider participation. Events as such are important not only for sending a strong political message - creating the conditions for sustainable and inclusive growth requires not only different policy instruments, but also a socially responsible attitude from the people, when acting as economic actors.

Alexandra: At the end of September 2015, the final post-2015 outcome, comprising 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets have been at the UN Summit in NYC. An EP delegation from the DEVE Committee participated to this Summit and passed on the message and the commitments of the European Union and its Member States. From your point of view, what message should the European Union pass on after the UN Summit?

Victor: I think that the European Union should prove again that it is the largest international donor but also the most pro-active world power in relation to development issues. The European Union has to assume the targets but also to promote the Sustainable Development Goals. That means that the EU should prove that contrary to the failure of the Millennium Development Goals, this time there is no space for a detour.

The European Union has to assume this responsibility as well as to engage with the other partners in reaching true global targets that all parties are going to support. The EU can play therefore the role of a leader but also of a negotiator capable in bringing everyone to the same table and pushing for a more responsible attitude towards our future. It is clear that the EU has to make sure that the Sustainable Development Goals do not remain only nice phrases in the speeches that took place at the UN Summit, but actually transform in concrete policies at global, national and local level. Leading by example can be one of the tactics that the EU should adopt in order to obtain larger support for attaining the SDGs.

Alexandra: In comparison to the MDGs that have been dedicated to ending poverty in developing countries, the SDGs will explicitly broaden their focus to all countries, "poor, rich and middle-income countries", including all the members of the EU. Therefore, they also have to come up with a new just sustainable social and economic model applicable in their own societies. What actions do you think policymakers and implicitly the members of the European Parliament need to take in order to promote and support the new global development agenda at home, in all EU countries?

Victor: This change of including all countries in the Sustainable Development Goals is an important step in making everyone aware that we need to construct a more just and sustainable social and economic model. Therefore a stronger involvement is needed from decision makers at every level.

The first step is to raise awareness regarding the UN Summit decisions and the SDGs. From public debates to education, the SDGs have to become a reference for the citizens and the development perspectives of all societies.



In parallel it is important for everyone, again at every level, to establish clear objectives with concrete benchmarks. Therefore a decision on the European SDGs at European level by the Commission and the European Parliament can be a starting point. This can be followed by national decisions with a wide participation of the civil society in order to transform the SDGs in a development strategy.

Finally we need to identify clear projects and actions that can raise support and public participation around these commitments. From public campaigns to activities that involve the public administration, more resources have to be used support the new global development agenda.

Alexandra: The European Consensus on Development (2006), the Agenda for Change (2012) and the Multiannual Financial Framework (2014-2020) are only a few of the most

important documents that set out specific guidance for planning and implementation of the development assistance component of all EU instruments and cooperation strategies with developing partners. The European Consensus was adopted in 2005 in response to the MDGs and in 2012, the Agenda for Change came as a *de facto* update of the second part. Is the EU preparing a new update of the European Consensus in response to the adoption of the sustainable development agenda?

Victor: There have been debates on the need to work on a new document presenting the guidelines of the EU development assistance policy. At the level of the European Commission there are several active debates on a need to merge the SDG and the EU2020 strategy in order to establish a broad consensus on the development agenda of the European Union.

We are still at an initial stage of these debates but you can be assured that I will contribute as much as possible to the implementation in a clear document of the SDG.

Moreover, I believe that the process of updating the EU's development agenda needs to be taken up responsibly - the new priorities need to become true benchmarks of our dedication to solve the major issues of the continent and not a set of desires we want to see accomplished with the passing of decades. The EU needs to learn from the global lesson, but also from its own institutional history - setting up new policies requires adequate resources and the necessary resolve to see them through. In addition, I believe that at least some of the paramount goals for European development, once set, should not become the object of political trading and negotiation.

*Alexandra: As a member of the **Delegation to the ACP- EU JPA**, could you tell us how do you think the new global agenda will influence the EU external policies, priorities and allocations, namely in the ACP area?*



Victor: I believe that the European Union needs to face up to reality and see that it cannot continue this ambivalent attitude towards globalization and its effects. The EU cannot portray itself as an actor with a global reach and at the same time try to stem the effects of globalization by resorting to outdated policies and models of political action. Many issues

on the European public agenda - combating climate change, seeking a solution to immigration, raising the living standards, creating the premises for sustainable development - have a profound global component and we need to stand up to this fact.

Consequently, while the ACP Area definitely has its own characteristics, many of the challenges it faces stem not from particular dynamics, but are part of larger global processes that the EU can and should influence. I believe that the EU's position as the largest donor in the world needs to be taken up responsibly and that the EU needs to adapt its foreign policy and assistance for development instruments in order to raise the efficiency of its actions.

The EU needs a more coherent approach towards the ACP area. A fair partnership has to be established involving the civil society and the citizens from the ACP area in the direction of a common development. A new approach is needed not only based on aid but on a true guidance and assistance of those countries towards development.

Moreover, I think that the EU is in itself an institutional model with enough flexibility and resistance to tackle the effects of globalization - in the end, accommodating the varying interests of such a large number of members offers an example for managing the challenges brought about by globalization.

*Alexandra: According to the **World Bank** and **Eurostat**, Romania- an upper middle income country with one of the highest poverty rates in the EU- is still struggling with numerous social and economic challenges. Having in mind the new post-2015 agenda and knowing very well the realities of our country, how would you tailor the SDGs to the realities of Romania in order to create better life conditions? On which objectives/ area would you put special emphasis?*

Victor: While the Romanian context has its own peculiarities, the cluster-like manner of establishing the SDGs is a useful method in assessing Romania's future objectives for development. As the World Bank and Eurostat statistics point out, Romania is a country of contrasts and therefore bolder thinking and considerate planning are both needed in order to chart out a course for the future.

We have managed to move away from the harshest consequences of inept austerity policies that have crippled our healthcare and education systems, but we still need to act more on this front. We have done a great job in achieving economic growth, after a period of collapse that has made a serious impact on the livelihood of the poorest citizens of our country. It is high time we moved towards strengthening the conditions for a sustainable, but also inclusive growth model.

We need at the same time to raise the awareness and also our profile in combating climate change - climate change is not something that happens on the news or in developing countries, outside our continent. It is a phenomenon that will affect us increasingly in the coming years.

Last, but not least, we should consolidate our efforts towards building a more inclusive society. Unfortunately, and not because of a desire in public policies, the Romanian society is still characterized by social exclusion: gender equality, social mobility in the context of increasing inequality, racial or ethnic discrimination, these are all symptoms of a what remains a very narrow public space that needs to be expanded in real terms.