



**ΚΥΠΡΙΑΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ
ΒΟΥΛΗ ΤΩΝ ΑΝΤΙΠΡΟΣΩΠΩΝ**



**Address of the president of the Parliamentary Committee on Foreign and European Affairs
Mr. Averof Neofytou at the closing ceremony of the Cyprus National Programme for the
European Year for Development 2015.**

House of Representatives, 20 January 2016

Dear guests,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the House of Representatives for today's ceremony that marks the end of the Cyprus National Programme for the European Year of Development 2015.

The year 2015 was an important year as far as development is concerned. The agreement reached at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit of 2015, which charted a new course towards the eradication of poverty and the achievement of sustainable development as well as the historic agreement on Climate Change reached at the Paris Summit, constitute events that make the year 2015 a landmark on the future of sustainable development and the tackling of climate challenges.

The designation of the year 2015 as the European Year for Development constitutes an act with substantial political significance since it indicates Europe's commitment to the endeavours of the international community to eradicate poverty, to promote sustainable development and to tackle climate challenges.

The European Union, through the European Year for Development, had a unique opportunity to bring the citizens closer to its development policies in order to make them more understandable, and at the same time it contributed to the promotion of a feeling of common responsibility and solidarity with respect to the issue of tackling the humanitarian crisis that affects the developing countries.

The work completed in Cyprus during the past year was substantial, since today's event constitutes the crown of a series of events where culture, education and the participation of civil society had a crucial role in raising the awareness of the public.

Dear guests,

In a period of multiple internal and complex problems faced by Europe, the European Union proceeded to an act of substantial political significance: the year 2015 was the first year

dedicated to the external action of the Union, with focus to the challenges faced by the developing world.

It constitutes a fact that the European Union, as the main sponsor of official development aid in the world, has made substantial contributions which have enabled many developing nations to mark substantial economic growth and to reduce poverty levels in the last few years.

However, despite these achievements, warfare and extreme weather conditions continue to undermine the living conditions of millions of people, resulting in the deprivation of basic human rights. The year 2015 has been a year characterised by the severe aggravation of chronic humanitarian crises, which triggered an increase in forced displacement.

According to the report of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, the past year was a year of unprecedented growth in the number of displaced persons. During the first half of 2015, at least 5 more million displaced persons were registered. 4,2 million people were displaced in their own country and 839.000 have crossed the border. Moreover, in the first half of 2015, Europe was faced with an unprecedented arrival of migrants arriving from the Mediterranean Sea, the majority of whom fled Syria and other countries ravaged by wars. The countries of sub-Saharan Africa host the majority of refugees (4,1 million), followed by the Asian-Pacific region (3,8 million), Europe (3,5 million), the Middle East and North Africa (3 million), while 753.000 refugees live on the American continent.

Undoubtedly, the Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean region is situated at the center of the current geopolitical developments. Cyprus, in its capacity as a member state of the Union with a key geopolitical position, has an important role to play in the European and international efforts to achieve stability in this sensitive region and to tackle multidimensional issues such as, the humanitarian aid of instability incidents and energy security.

The message of the European Year for Development is clear: the European Union, our Europe, but also each and every one of us can and do have a role to play in the tackling of the enormous environmental and social challenges that lie ahead. As long as we continue to gaze at the world, realizing the potential of an aid programme based on the strengthening of economic development with social characteristics.

It is my firm belief that the European Year for Development constitutes a deeply political and moral challenge for our world, our dignity and our future.

Thank you.