

AT A GLANCE

ACP-EU relations after 2020: State of play

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The question of the form of post-2020 relations between the EU and ACP countries will soon acquire political visibility.

The important question of how relations between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states will look after the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) expires has largely been left on policymakers' backburner¹, as underscored by both sides' decision not to carry out a third five-yearly revision of the CPA in 2015. All sights are now set on 2020, when the agreement will lapse (Article 95 of the CPA), although the political visibility of this issue will soon increase, following the designation of the new EU leadership team and with the forthcoming publication of a key report on the future of the ACP group of states.

Recent developments in the ACP group of states

The ACP group of states has established an Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to examine the options for the future of the ACP group and the post-Cotonou situation.

The ACP group of states formally began to reflect on the future of the group – and, in parallel, the post-Cotonou scenario – with the [Sipopo Declaration](#). Adopted by heads of state and government in 2012, the text states the group's aim of reforming to foster greater South-South cooperation. The ACP group established an [Eminent Persons Group](#) (EPG)² in March 2013 to examine options for the future of the ACP group and the necessary reforms (including of its decision-making bodies) to make it a 'stronger more effective framework of cooperation'. The EPG has since then met and carried out [consultations in the six ACP regions](#). A [progress report](#) was submitted to the ACP Council of Ministers in June 2014, detailing the EPG's activities and some emerging conclusions. These notably included the need for political support 'at the highest political level' – only achievable 'if there are common interests that can keep the ACP group together'. The EPG reflected the perceived 'strong political will that the ACP group should remain but be reinvented (...) and focus on a few core and niche areas', as well as the Group's goal of coming up with 'realistic, doable and reachable targets'.

The forthcoming EPG report aims to advance realistic, doable and reachable recommendations that will require political support from the highest level.

A drafting committee is preparing the EPG report, taking into account the regional consultations and the input of an ACP ambassadorial working group. The EPG intended to present the final report and recommendations to the 8th summit of ACP heads of state and government in November. The summit has been postponed, although the report may be on the agenda of

¹ A [briefing on the options for ACP-EU relations after 2020](#) (dissolution; overarching framework; revamped ACP group) was published by the Policy Department in 2013.

² Composed of 12 members and chaired by Olusegun Obasanjo, former Nigerian president.

the 100th session of the ACP Council of Ministers in Brussels (9-12 December 2014).

Recent developments in the EU

The EU development Commissioner has noted the possibility of agreeing overarching principles with ACP countries, coupled with specific regional programmes.

A public consultation will take place in 2015.

A potential division exists between EU Member States favouring the status quo and those seeking to establish a new framework.

EU reflections on future relations with the ACP group of states have sped up following the confirmation of new leaders in the Commission and EEAS. During his European Parliament hearing, Commissioner-designate for development Neven Mimica said he intended to launch a broad consultation in early 2015 on the approach to the post-Cotonou framework. He noted that the EU will 'continue such a partnership with ACP countries, especially with Africa' but will 'have to adapt to some of the new realities, which means that maybe we can think of having overarching principles agreed with the ACP countries that would cover all aspects of our future cooperation, and then to develop specific programmes for Africa or for regions or for groups of countries within ACP countries'. This is a clear indication of how the Commissioner envisions the post-2020 scenario, but it is not a formal position. Inter-departmental consultations have begun in the EEAS and relevant Commission services, which will be brought up to the highest political levels in coming months, before a proposal is formalised. A public consultation is expected in late 2015.

Some EU Member States have expressed their interest in this subject, although no formal discussion has yet been held in the Council's ACP working group. (This may take place rather soon, though.) Informal positions, however, point to a potential division between EU Member States wishing to continue relations with the ACP group in the current format, and those favouring breaking with historical legacies and giving the ACP group of states the same treatment as other developing regions.

Implications for the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA)

The JPA should ensure that a strong parliamentary branch is part of the new framework – whatever form the framework takes.

An ambitious JPA position could play a role in shaping future ACP-EU relations.

As one of the joint institutions of Cotonou, the JPA should play an active role in defining the post-2020 scenario, and should ensure that a strong parliamentary branch – one providing democratic oversight as well as a space for open and comprehensive dialogue – is a fundamental element of the future framework, regardless of the final form of the framework. Although no formal positions have yet been adopted, the EU and ACP states share the assessment that their relationship should continue, while adapting to new realities, including the heterogeneity of ACP countries and regions (and EU relations with them), weakening historical legacies, an enlarged EU membership, and the potential for cooperation on global affairs.

The complexity of EU-ACP relations – involving a very specific legal set-up, encompassing political dialogue, development cooperation and trade relations, and overlapping with other regional frameworks – requires that the JPA now embark on a deep reflection on the future of ACP-EU relations. The diverging views on this matter and the lack of a dominant position mean that a timely and ambitious JPA position could play an important role in shaping the framework for ACP-EU relations after 2020.