On behalf of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) I welcome you to this latest edition of our newsletter. In it you will find an overview of the activities planned for the 29th session in Suva (Fiji) on 15 to 17 June 2015 as well as a summary of the main topics on the agenda.

The Assembly will, as is customary, perform its role of scrutiny over the European Commission and the ACP and EU Councils of Ministers during the Question Times and subsequent debates with members. The keynote debate this time is entitled “Seas and Oceans”, given the location of the session in the Pacific region. There will also be debates on natural resources, revenue generation capabilities and regional integration. The reports from the standing committees to be debated cover cultural diversity and human rights, the financing of investment and trade through blending, and education. The urgent topics, particularly significant at this time, will be on the recent natural disaster in Vanuatu and the situation in the Central African Republic. I do hope that this edition will encourage you to attend the event.

Louis Michel (EU Co-President)

Cultural diversity and human rights in ACP and EU countries

Human rights and cultural diversity have a mutually interdependent and beneficial relationship. The management of cultural diversity, as well as of the conflicts that may arise from it, is a precondition for societies to live in a harmonious environment. The Assembly will discuss recommendations stressing the importance of the respect for human rights standards, outlining that cultural diversity cannot

29th Session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly

15 to 17 June 2015, Suva (Fiji)

Seas and Oceans

The keynote debate will see discussion of various issues relating to the seas and oceans, with presentations by leading experts in the different areas. While climate change is central to the concerns of many states in the region and other ACP countries with islands or coastal regions, other related subjects, such as biodiversity, deep-sea mining, fisheries and piracy are just as important. The debate will highlight what policies and funding are required in order to alleviate the problems involving climate change and human activities in the seas and oceans of the world, and enable the countries of the Pacific region to air their specific needs and demands.
been invoked to infringe upon human rights, and calling on all EU and ACP member states to ratify and implement international and regional human rights conventions and to develop effective legislation aligned with these international conventions.

The financing of investment and trade, including infrastructure, in ACP countries by the EU blending mechanism

The Assembly will debate recommendations concerning the use and utility of the EU’s loan-grant blending mechanism, which is increasingly being used to meet the challenges of development financing, notably for large infrastructure projects in ACP countries. Blending grants and loans allows for the leveraging of substantial private sector funding, while increasing its efficiency and effectiveness by, amongst other things, sharing risks in the financing of development. The considerable potential offered by loan-grant blending should be more effectively exploited, although it should be recognised that this mechanism can engender certain risks associated with ownership, indebtedness and opportunity costs.

Challenges and opportunities in education and vocational training in ACP countries

It is generally accepted that education and vocational training are essential elements for human and economic development in all countries. Despite numerous commitments and goal-setting, many ACP countries fail to live up to the basic targets set by different organisations for education, and this contributes to their failure to achieve basic standards in this crucial field. Members will debate various proposals for improvements in education, including the development of infrastructure and the provision of adequate remuneration packages for teachers to reduce the negative impact of the brain drain.

Urgent resolutions

The Assembly will debate an urgent resolution on the natural disaster in Vanuatu and neighbouring countries and the way forward, including the need for regional cooperation. The damage caused by Cyclone Pam to the infrastructure and homes of the peoples of the islands concerned has shown how vulnerable small island states are to such events, and the debate will focus on what can be done to implement preventive measures in different policy areas at the regional and national level.

The situation in the Central African Republic is the subject of the second urgent topic, and the Assembly will debate the crisis in the country, where there are grave concerns with regard to ethnic cleansing, arbitrary imprisonment, serious crimes against women and children and the persecution of Christians. The SELEKA coalition has been in power for over one year and is regarded as responsible for most of the offences and is seen to be operating with impunity, in the face of an ineffective response from the AU and the UN through the MISCA Mission. There are also concerns of the conflict spreading to other countries in the region.

Other topics

The Assembly will also discuss regional integration in the company of representatives of regional organisations and hold a debate with the national authorities of Fiji. In addition there will be debates without resolution on two subjects of importance to EU and ACP states at large, on natural resources and the subject of how to improve the internal revenue generation capabilities of ACP states.

The next edition of the newsletter will provide detailed coverage of this important event.

For more information go to the ACP-EU website
www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/2015_acp/default_en.htm

The EU has a special partnership with the ACP countries due to historic ties between them and many EU member states.

This partnership is laid down in the Cotonou agreement. It is vital that this partnership has a parliamentary dimension, allowing for the scrutiny of the governmental and executive dimension.

Therefore parliamentary representatives of the 78 ACP countries and 78 Members of the European Parliament meet twice a year in Joint Parliamentary Assembly, once in the EU country holding the EU Council presidency and once in a country determined by the ACP. Apart from the full plenary sessions there are regular committee and Bureau (presidium) meetings.

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