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 27th Session in Strasbourg (17 to 19 March 2014) 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. The keynote debate this time will be on the subject of the fight against AIDS and there will also be debates on the WTO Doha Development Agenda, following the outcome of the 9th WTO Ministerial in Bali, and on education and vocational training. The reports from the Committees to be debated cover terrorism and the internet, mining on the seabed and regional integration and customs services. The urgent topics, particularly significant at this time, will be on the Central African Republic and migration.

I do hope that this edition will encourage you to attend the event.

Louis Michel (EU Co-President)

The 2014 Global AIDS response progress reporting guidelines were released on 24 January. The guidelines provide countries with technical guidance on how to measure progress towards the ten targets set in the 2011 United Nations Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS. The results will be used to inform several reports published by UNAIDS in 2014, including a report on the global AIDS epidemic. Members will share their own national experiences in the fight against the scourge of AIDS in ACP countries.

Terrorism and the internet

This report looks at the role of the internet and social media in the rise of global terrorism.

The fight against AIDS

The keynote debate addresses the important subject of AIDS, in the presence of Michel Sidibé, the Executive Director of UNAIDS.

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It highlights the increased terrorist threats posed by the use of the new global and instant media for persuasion, recruitment, training, financing and the conduct of operations. The report suggests making better use of the opportunities provided by these same media to counter these threats. It also clearly shows the difficulty of reconciling human rights and fundamental freedoms with effective counter-terrorism action.

Regional integration and modernisation of customs

The report stresses the vital role of customs administrations not only in collecting duties and enforcing measures, but also in the detection of possible crimes such as trafficking and bribery. It also calls for strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation in customs matters, including the fight against illicit parallel trade in goods and counterfeit goods, corruption and tax evasion which present a monumental hindrance to governance and economic development. ACP countries would greatly benefit from the modernisation of customs as well as a more efficient legislative framework in order to promote sustainable development and regional integration.

Mining on the seabed

The report addresses the emerging issue of mining on the seabed for oil and minerals. Coastal and deep-sea mining for essential resources for industry is an activity which is developing fast in certain ACP regions, fuelled by increasing demand from developed countries. The report address the economic and environmental issues at stake and makes recommendations for the appropriate management and supervision of this activity in the context of sustainable development.

Other topics

The Assembly will debate the escalating conflict and humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic as well as the human, economic and social rights of migrants in ACP and EU countries. There will also be an exchange of views with Fred Agah, WTO Deputy Director General on the state of play in the WTO DDA negotiations, the outcome of which aims to boost trade and development and much-needed growth and jobs, particularly in the developing world, and a debate without resolution on the importance of reaching goals in education and vocational training to develop human resources in ACP countries. The issue of renewable energy and climate change will also feature in a debate with the Greek authorities.

Finally I would like to welcome the appointment of Fitz A. Jackson, from Jamaica, as the new ACP Co-President and look forward to working with him at this upcoming 27th session. The next edition of the newsletter will provide detailed coverage of this important event.

For more information go to the ACP-EU website
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/

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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