



Press Release

Monday, 26 November 2012

Intense debates on first day of meetings MEPs with ACP counterparts

The first day of meetings between MEPs and counterparts from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific was one of intense debates on the Economic Partnership Agreements replacing the preferential trade tariffs, article 8 of the Cotonou agreement between the EU and the ACP countries providing for a regular and deep political dialogue, the threats posed by military coups, the effects of the EU agricultural policy on development countries, healthcare in ACP countries and the preservation of elephants in Africa.

In the run-up to the formal plenary session of MEPs and ACP parliamentary representatives from 27 to 29 November, three committees met to vote on draft resolutions on the conflict in Somalia and ICT-based entrepreneurship as well as to debate on EPAs and article 8 of the Cotonou agreement.

Ratification Economic Partnership Agreements moving slowly

ACP representatives in the Economic Committee voiced concerns over the trade disadvantages for them that would result from the EPAs and pointed out that only a small number of ACP countries have therefore ratified. The European Commission tried to reassure them saying that in fact the EPAs have hardly any effect in practice and that possibly only Swaziland and Fiji would be affected in their sugar exports, though with rising sugar prices even that would be questionable.

The EPAs had to be put into place because the World Trade Organisation laid down that the preferential trade tariffs which the ACP countries enjoyed with the EU were against the WTO rules. MEP Robert Sturdy (ECR, UK) believed that in fact a bigger stumbling block for trade was the EU agricultural policy. Marielle de Sarnez (ALDE, FR) hoped that an extension of the negotiations beyond the current deadline would lead to better agreements, beneficial to both sides. David Martin (S&D, UK) agreed that 2016 as final deadline was not in the bag.

Political dialogue (art 8 Cotonou agreement)

The political dialogue which the EU's External Action Service has with some ACP countries on the basis of article 8 of the Cotonou agreement met with criticism on the side of the ACP representatives in the Political Affairs Committee. They contested the one-sidedness which characterizes the dialogue in their eyes as well as a lack of transparency in the proceedings and outcome. Surinamese MP Rabindre Parmessar said there was no real dialogue in the case of Suriname and called on the ACP secretariat to help his country in the future.

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Article 8 stipulates that the focus of the dialogue are "specific political issues of mutual concern" or important for the implementation of the Cotonou agreement, such as "the arms trade, excessive military expenditure, drugs and organised crime, or ethnic, religious or racial discrimination". There is also a regular assessment of developments in "the respect for human rights, democratic principles, the rule of law and good governance".

The EU External Action Service said that the dialogue should not be seen as punishment but instead as an attempt to find solutions to possible problems.

Healthcare

The Social Affairs Committee meanwhile looked at ways to solve shortcomings in healthcare in ACP countries. A shortage of healthcare workers and a lack of healthcare education were identified as bottlenecks. Philippe Boulland (EPP, FR) suggested better use of online medicine as part of EU-ACP cooperation. Michèle Rivasi (Greens/EFA, FR) felt that the EU should not liberate funds to ACP countries which do not meet their commitment to spend 15% of their national budget on health.

Elephants

In a debate on the poaching of African elephants, Catherine Bearder (ALDE, UK) pointed out that "wildlife crime has never been more profitable" and contributes to the financing of terrorist organisations. She proposed a ban on the trade in ivory. Job Yustino Ndugai from Tanzania was against such a ban as a "territory the size of Rwanda and Burundi cannot be controlled effectively".

On Monday there are working visits to and workshops on the infrastructure put in place in the port of Paramaribo and to the Surinamese Staatsolie company. In the afternoon EP political groups meet followed by a Bureau meeting.

Note to editors

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 should have a parliamentary dimension, allowing for the scrutiny of the governmental and executive dimension.

Therefore parliamentary representatives of the 78 ACP countries and 78 MEPs 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.

Links

[ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly](#)

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