9th REGIONAL MEETING (CARIBBEAN REGION) OF THE ACP-EU JOINT PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
14-16 February 2013

Santo Domingo Communiqué

Website of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp
Introduction

In accordance with Article 17 of the Cotonou Agreement and Article 6 of the Rules of Procedure of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA), Members of the Assembly from the Caribbean Region of the ACP Group and their European Parliament counterparts held a regional meeting in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic from 14 to 16 February 2013, for the organisation of which they thanked the Chamber of Deputies and Government of the Dominican Republic.

Their discussions focused on the following subjects:

The Cariforum-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), the Regional Strategy and the EDF Financing

Members took note of the state of play of the provisional implementation of the comprehensive Cariforum-EU EPA, which was concluded in 2007 and signed in 2008 and provisionally applied since 29 December 2008 and noted that only 7 Cariforum States and 11 EU Member States completed the ratification process of the EPA. Members were satisfied that all the organs of the EPA governance structure had become operational, with the exception of the EPA Consultative Committee.

Some Cariforum Members expressed concerns about the possible negative impact of tariff reductions on their government revenues, especially in highly indebted countries. Moreover, Members noted that particularly small island developing countries in the region were sensitive to policy changes and to such negative impact. European Members pointed out that government revenues through import tariffs should be replaced by implementing a tax revenue system that compensates such losses. Some Members urged that the moratorium periods put forward by the signatory States be adopted.

Members also took note of the agreement’s long-term perspective and that the EU has opened its market fully (duty and quota free) to the EPA signatory countries, providing for Cariforum States an asymmetric and progressive trade liberalisation in trade in goods. Some Members, however, felt that implementation of trade in services presented a significant challenge for some Cariforum States.

Members recognised that the European Commission has provided financial resources for the EPA implementation and accompanying measures under the 10th EDF Regional Indicative Programme (RIP), complemented by national programmes. Members regretted the decision of the European Council to reduce by 11% the Commission’s proposal for the 11th EDF, which will imply an unprecedented and unacceptable reduction of development assistance. Members took note that the initial proposal of the European Parliament had not been met. The meeting stressed that EU Member States had to respect their commitment to devote 0.7% of their GDP to ODA.

The meeting expressed its concern on the proposed EU policy of differentiation and requested a gradual phasing out procedure to be applied to the affected middle-income countries.
With regard to the on-going negotiations in other ACP regions, the meeting expressed support for the proposal of the 7th Summit of ACP Heads of State and Government held in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, to put in place a High-Level panel whose work would lead to an ACP-EU Summit to provide political guidance in order to unblock the negotiations at the technical level, and to conclude them effectively.

**Regional integration and cooperation in the Caribbean Region – progress in the establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME)**

Members acknowledged that despite the best intentions of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, the establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy has not been achieved. However, some progress had been made as Members States had already enacted the treaty into domestic law, removed some specific duties for intra-regional trade and allowed some free movement of persons, removal of visa requirements and made some progress in common external policies. Within the sub-region, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States had achieved a number of benchmarks for a single market and economy, such as common currency and easing of border controls.

Members urged all governments and parliaments concerned to do their utmost to remove remaining obstacles as the overall benefits of an integrated market will by far outweigh any perceived short term advantages of keeping non-tariff barriers. Members called upon the EU and the Caribbean region to advance further institutional cooperation on research, development, citizens’ initiatives as well as the fight against organised crime and drug trafficking.

The EU itself has a geographical presence in the Caribbean, with territories that are classified by the Union as either Outermost Regions (OMRs) or Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs), and discussions on issues of mutual interest between these territories, the EU and CARICOM, for example on the fight against narcotics trafficking, were recommended.

**Building resilience to natural hazards/disasters (Disaster Risk Reduction), in particular tropical storms, tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, etc**

The meeting welcomed the efforts of the Caribbean to integrate Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in their main policy objectives. Strengthening resilience and mitigating risks to natural disasters is essential in the region, given the frequency of their occurrence and impact they have on the population, and social and economic conditions. Cross-border cooperation on pre-emption and early warning systems and monitoring were highlighted. Members called for coordinated and integrated interventions in vulnerable and disaster prone situations (such as Haiti) by all actors.

Environmental degradation and pressure on natural resources due to climate change as well as demographic growth are interlinked with natural and man-made disasters, requiring adaptation and appropriate urban planning in risk prone areas. The EU is actively supporting the region and intends to continue the momentum for cooperation in this field, as it has become a central issue of development cooperation.
Members highlighted the need for integrated policies to address urbanisation, identifying and declaring non habitable areas based on land slide and earthquake risk and areas prone to flooding. The need for reforestation zones was underlined as an important tool in combatting disasters which have been caused as a result of deforestation.

**The attainment of the MDGs – Access to health and education**

The achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is a key issue for development in its various dimensions. In the Caribbean region, the results have been encouraging, in particular in achieving universal primary education, as the enrolment rates are above 95 %. However, there are still number of shortcomings, for example, with regard to quality of education, gender equality, high dropout rates and lower levels of adult literacy rates. The meeting welcomed the actions taken by the authorities of the Dominican Republic and other Caribbean States with a view to achieving MDGs on education.

Members acknowledged that Caribbean countries have been progressing well towards the achievement of MDGs on health, but progress is heterogeneous across the countries and targets. In this context, special attention was given to the area of HIV/AIDS, in which the region still has one of the highest prevalence rates in the world, even though several positive developments were noted with regards in particular to a decline of new HIV infections and AIDS related deaths and insisted that access to medicines be maintained and guaranteed. Members also deplored the high incidences of maternal mortality and violence against women.

**Caribbean trade in services – tourism and the free movement of labour**

The tourism sector is a major contributor to the economies of the region, and the services aspect of the Cariforum-EU EPA had highlighted the critical importance of the sector. Members emphasized the need for comprehensive and diversified tourism policies that take into account ecological factors, as well as common aviation and transport policies to promote intra-regional tourism.

Concern was raised at the unfair and distortionary effect of the UK’s Air Passenger Duty for the tourism industry in the region, which had made the region a more expensive destination than the United States of America for European travellers.

Members reiterated the need to address the complicated and onerous visa requirements that discouraged Caribbean tourists from travelling to Europe and tourism operators from establishing commercial presence in EU Member States under mode 3 of the WTO’s GATS agreement.

Following concerns raised by the ACP Members, the EP Members agreed to take initiatives to request European Member States to grant a visa waiver to the ACP elected Members of parliaments and the State representatives and remove obstacles that hinder persons such as professionals, officials and the business community from travelling.
Caribbean renewable energy initiatives

Members heard that the small island states in the Caribbean face unique challenges associated with the generation and use of energy. Most Caribbean island nations depend almost exclusively on imported petroleum for their energy, including both electricity generation and transportation. This high level of dependence leaves these countries vulnerable to the volatility of international oil prices and results in a tremendous drain of capital for imports. This highlighted the absolute necessity for countries in the region to switch to renewable energy sources.

Members lauded the initiatives being pursued at regional level in Caricom and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), which had provided an adequate policy and institutional basis for addressing the needs of the region. However, Members emphasised that countries should speed up the process of the utilisation of renewable energy. Governments needed to drive the switch to renewable energy and to involve all economic sectors, such as agriculture and manufacturing. ACP Members called for exchanges of best practice with the EU to promote sustainable energy sources.

Progress with the reconstruction efforts in Haiti

Following the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the international community, in particular the EU, had pledged a significant amount of resources to the reconstruction of Haiti. Although there were a number of shortcomings, important improvements had been made to address the effects from the earthquake. It was recognised that, even before the earthquake, Haiti had suffered from a vicious cycle of poverty and aid dependency.

The major challenges to address were education, good governance, environmental protection, health problems, better preparedness for natural disasters and security. The need for genuine political dialogue in the framework of Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement was emphasised.

Members also supported the need to maintain cooperation between Haiti and the Dominican Republic including on common security and immigration issues.

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Members called on the Co-Presidents to present the conclusions of the regional meeting to the next Bureau meeting in March 2013 and to the 25th session of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly to be held in Belgium (Brussels) in June 2013, and to forward them to the ACP Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament, the European Commission, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Forum of the Caribbean Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (CARIFORUM) Secretariats, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Secretariats, the ACP Group of States, the Governments and National Parliaments of the Caribbean region of the ACP Group of States and to the EU Member States.