



Monday, 17 March 2008

PRESS RELEASE

Opening of the 15th Joint Parliamentary Assembly

**Economic partnership agreements
to take centre stage at the ACP-EU
Joint Parliamentary Assembly in
Ljubljana**

Directorate-General for Communication
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

FORMAL OPENING SITTING

Economic partnership agreements to take centre stage at the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in Ljubljana

Negotiations on economic partnership agreements (EPAs) - and fears that negotiating separate deals with individual states or groups could threaten the regional integration of ACP states - will take centre stage at the 15th session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA), in Ljubljana (Slovenia).

The ACP-EU JPA, which brings together 78 MEPs and 78 parliamentarians from the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states, is meeting in Ljubljana (Slovenia) from 17 to 20 March. JPA Co-Presidents Glenys Kinnock (European Parliament) and Wilkie Rasmussen (Cook Islands) were the key speakers in the opening session on Monday.

"Conflict and contention has mired the whole EPA process", commented **Glenys Kinnock** on progress in negotiating the EPAs. "With the exception of the Caribbean, the agreements were scaled back, and WTO-compatible interim deals were made, mainly on trade in goods, and signed in haste. In fact, fewer than a third of ACP countries agreed interim EPAs by the December 2007 deadline", she said.

Ms Kinnock stressed that "regionalism is a key component of a progressive development strategy and yet the Commission's policy of concluding separate deals with individual states, groups or countries, has splintered ACP regions".

Wilkie Rasmussen said at the press conference that some ACP countries are "unsure" about the EPA negotiating process, and feel that it might have implications for the flow of European development funding. He described the difficulties of negotiating EPAs with the Commission, which he felt was "insensitive" to cultural sensitivities.

EP President Hans-Gert Pöttering said in a video message that "ACP-EU relations are not simply a treaty between states and the Community; they also constitute a union between peoples. (...) You are the living embodiment of dialogue between cultures; and in this year of intercultural dialogue, I invite you to play your full role".

Reports to be put to a vote

The Assembly will debate and vote on three reports on:

- *Social and environmental consequences of structural adjustment programmes*, by Gay Mitchell (EPP-ED, IE) and Alma Oumarou (Niger), which calls on the World Bank and the IMF to refrain from economic policy conditionality in their lending, make their policies more country-specific, and focus on outcome-based, anti-poverty conditionality.
- *Experiences from the European regional integration process relevant to ACP countries*, by Filip Kaczmarek (EPP-ED, PL) and Mr De Sousa (Angola), which calls on ACP countries to agree to exercise sovereignty jointly in areas where they have long-term common interests and cross-border problems, and advocates regional undertakings for joint exploration, regulation and control of natural resources.
- *Food security issues in ACP countries and the role of ACP-EU co-operation*, by Alain Hutchinson (PES, BE) and Mohamed Ali (Ethiopia), which says that better managing water supplies, empowering women to manage food production, and banning the use of food plants in bio-fuels would all help to reduce food insecurity.

The reports and resolutions will all be put to the vote on Thursday 20 March.

The Assembly's two co-Presidents will hold a press point after the votes.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/60_15/default_en.htm

Link to website of the ACP/EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly

Further information:

Andrew Boreham

Ljubljana, Slovenia

Mob. (32) 498 98 3401

e-mail: andrew.boreham@europarl.europa.eu