

**Follow-up by the European Commission to the Resolution of the ACP-EU Joint
Parliamentary Assembly (Prague, Czech Republic, 4-9 April 2009) on
Economic Partnership Agreements and their impact on ACP States**

The Commission has been working actively with the Council and its ACP partners to address ACP concerns, whether related to the substance or the process of the EPA negotiations. In this context Commissioners Ashton and Michel have held several high-level meetings with the ACP Group and regions, which our partners have clearly appreciated. Indeed, all ACP regions remain committed to the negotiations and the Commission continues to seek tailor-made solutions for all countries within a regional EPA in order to secure their duty-free quota-free access to the EU and provide an improved framework for their economic development.

The Commission remains committed to negotiating comprehensive regional EPAs tailored to the needs, capacity and development context of each region, including services and trade-related issues where appropriate, but without undue pressure from the EU. This is not so much a question of WTO compatibility but of seeking adequate solutions for ACP development. The Commission considers that it is up to the ACP partners themselves to decide which type of trade-related rules they want to negotiate at this stage and to what extent.

The Commission is open to re-discuss any provision of the interim agreements in the framework of regional negotiations, with a view to improving them where possible. The Commission and its staff are, of course, ready and willing to offer support and advice to the ACP negotiators during the negotiating process, without undue pressure or haste. Whilst pointing out that this is a sovereign ACP decision, the Commission agrees that ACP national parliaments, local authorities and non-state actors should be involved in the negotiations and implementation of EPAs.

The Commission welcomes the Joint Assembly's support to the regional Aid for Trade packages and fully shares the Assembly's view that Aid for Trade should not be conditional on signing an EPA. In this context, the Commission wishes to underline that EC resources for the ACP are essentially EDF resources. The Regional Strategy Papers and Indicative Programmes of the 10th EDF have been discussed and agreed with ACP regions and 75% of their resources (i.e. €1.3 billion) will be dedicated to regional economic integration, including support to EPA implementation. Overall, as shown in the EU Aid for Trade 2009 monitoring report, collective EU Aid for Trade to the ACP was about €2.7 billion in 2007.

Finally, the Commission agrees with the need for broad-based monitoring and review to ensure that the EPAs meet their objectives. It also believes that monitoring and identifying the exact effect of a trade agreement compared to wider political, social and economic factors requires a flexible and participatory approach where the right mechanism should be decided upon by the EPA institutions with the countries concerned. This can be linked to formal amendments where necessary. Both systematic monitoring and five-yearly reviews are already foreseen under the only full EPA so far (the Caribbean EPA) and this can be an example for other full EPAs.