



**European Economic and Social Committee
Section for External Relations**

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Speech by

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President of the ACP-EU Follow-Up Committee

MAXIMUM ALLOCATED TIME:

10 MINUTES (speech)

+

2-5 MINUTES (answer)

EN

Dear Mr Manscour,

Dear Mr Kono,

Honourable Members of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Thank you for the invitation to attend this Parliamentary Assembly and greetings from the 24 Members of the ACP-EU Follow-up Committee.
- My colleagues accompanying me today are Mr Gajdosik, from the *Austrian Trade Federation*; Mr Ali Abbas, from the *Conseil National du Patronat Tchadien*; Mr Anselme Amoussou, from the *Confédération des syndicats autonomes du Bénin* ; Mr Gunsham Seeborum, from the Mauritian *NGO Falcon citizen league*.
- There are just three months since we met for the 36th Joint Parliamentary Assembly. Today I would like to share the experience of my colleagues, who participated in some recent EU-ACP joint activities.
- The 4th Joint CARIFORUM-EU Consultative Committee, established by the Economic Partnership Agreement between CARIFORUM and the EU, was the pretext to question the possible impact of Brexit.

- Apart from the fog created by Brexit, the CARIFORUM-EU Joint Consultative Committee identified gaps. One of them was that the Joint civil society was only invited to present briefly a joint-statement in the **Trade and Development Committee (TDC)**, which serves as the preparatory body for the decisions taken by the Joint Council.
- In concrete terms, we are currently proposing that co-chairs of this Joint Consultative Committee become **official observers to the Trade and Development Committee**. This is the only way to ensure access to the documents and to the positions of the two parties.
- Furthermore, as we have entered in the **10 years review of the EU-CARIFORUM European Partnership Agreement**, I would like to let you know how much we are looking forward to be acquainted with the terms of references of the evaluation that was commissioned by DG Trade. Hopefully enough, DG Trade will include our members in this evaluation!
- Sailing away from the Caribbean, I am particularly proud to share with this honourable assembly our recent successes in promoting an inclusive approach for civil society in the European Partnership Agreements.

- As some of you have repeatedly mentioned for years now, the legitimacy of the EU trade agreements can be put at risk when civil society is not on board. I totally agree and I am happy to witness that this is starting to change, in particular in Africa.
- **Remember.** In June 2016, SADC EPA Group of states that comprises Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland signed with the EU an Economic Partnership Agreement. The agreement became the first regional EPA in Africa to be fully operational, and we are glad for that.
- **Problem.** This partnership agreement does not include any provisions for the involvement of economic and social actors in monitoring and implementation.
- In this context, the Joint ACP-EU civil society dedicated many efforts since 2017 to take on board the EU and SADC EPA States in the establishment of a **joint consultative mechanism** made of civil society representatives.
- I was recently invited to deliver a speech on the "Participation of Non-State Actors in the Implementation of the EU-SADC EPA" at the *5th meeting of the European Union – Southern African Development Community Trade and Development Committee*.

This meeting coincided with a most senior one, involving the EU Commissioner for Trade, the Trade Ministers of the region and the Presidency of the Council of the EU.

- As a result, the EU and SADC states officially endorsed "*the importance of participation of non-State Actors in the implementation of the EU-SADC EPA and the commitment undertaken to co-facilitate the organisation of a meeting at least once per year of non-state actors' representatives from both the EU and the SADC EPA States to discuss EPA-related issues and EPA implementation.*"
- I am **very proud of this achievement**, which was possible thanks to our efforts and activities in the region.
- Let me turn to Ivory Coast.
- In the perspective of the adoption of the full regional EPA with West Africa, "stepping stone" Economic Partnership Agreements have been initiated between the EU and Ivory Coast and Ghana.
- Again, these agreements unfortunately do not include social and economic actors. This can be detrimental to the objective of Development, claimed by the most warm supporters of the EPAs.

- Nevertheless, I can feel the possible emergence of an EU-Ivory Coast civil society Platform, thanks to the efforts combined of the EESC, the *Conseil Economique Social Environmental et Culturel* (CESEC) from Ivory Coast and the DG Trade.
- Now, let me ask you one question: shouldn't the civil society be given a more prominent role in the future ACP-EU partnerships agreement framework?
- We debated this fundamental question very recently, together with Mr Louis Michel, Co-president of the ACP-EU JPA and DG DEVCO.
- My colleagues coming from the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of states and from the EU very much enjoyed this frank and open debate with Mr Michel.
- However, I feel we are, once again, fogbound when it comes to be recognised as main actor of the future partnership by the ACP and EU negotiators.
- For the time being, **we only know that** *"the Agreement will provide a clearer division of labour between national, regional and sub-regional actors. It will also state that the Parties will*

pursue an inclusive and open multi-stakeholder approach, including by strengthening the role of parliaments, local authorities, civil society and the private sector, both in the Foundation and the regional partnerships".

- To put it blandly, we have the experience, the legitimacy and the ability to get a coordinating role in the ACP-EU activities, if the negotiations will deliver on a geographic approach.
- We are also in the best position to make concrete proposals on a number of issues, such as investments coming from small and medium size actors.
- In this framework, we would very much like to be consulted by the negotiators from the ACP and the EU.
- Needless to say, the ACP-EU Joint Follow-up Committee, we are representing today, is ready to adapt its functioning, enlarge its membership. We have been always adjusting for the last 30 years.
- Finally, concerning Africa, let me stress again the importance of the civil society, not only at country level but at Pan African level. I am referring particularly to the **African Economic Social and Cultural Council** established in 2004. This ECOSOCC remains

largely underused, and which should be given more political and financial support.

- Let me reassure you on the fact that we will spare no efforts to support your work, whenever necessary and with all our means.
- With these words, let me say conclude that we are always glad to contribute in the discussions of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly.
- Thank you for your attention.

Mr Jaroslaw Mulewicz
