Future of ACP-EU relations beyond 2020

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The Committee on Development adopted the own-initiative report by Norbert NEUSER (S&D, DE) on the future of ACP-EU relations beyond 2020.

Members recalled that the Partnership Agreement between the members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States, of the other part, signed in June 2000 (the Cotonou Agreement), **is based on a number of unique characteristics:** it is: (i) a legally binding document, with an unparalleled numerical strength of 79+28 member states, (ii) comprehensive through its three pillars of development cooperation, political cooperation and economic and trade cooperation, and (iii) comprised of a joint institutional framework, with a large budget in the form of the European Development Fund (EDF).

The report recalled the unique nature of ACP-EU cooperation and stressed the need to **put in place a new structure** that maintains those parts of the ACP-EU acquis, e.g.:

- a commitment to human rights and gender equality, human development, good governance and democracy;
- the objective of the rule of law;
- exchange of best practice in a common framework, while the main work must be carried out in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, that is, it must take place in regional agreements that are tailored to specific regional needs and to the mutual interests existing between the EU and the region.

Members underlined that the common framework and the regional agreements should be legally binding.

Objectives, principles and terms of cooperation: the report states that the following must be placed at the centre of a new agreement:

- the 2030 Agenda and the **Sustainable Development** Goals (SDGs) and respect for internationally agreed aid effectiveness principles;
- fight against, and ultimate eradication of, **poverty and inequalities;**
- **human rights**, democratic principles and the rule of law.

Members called for an **ACP-EU peer monitoring**, accountability and review mechanism to scrutinise SDG implementation in member states on a regular basis. They also called for **stronger involvement in political dialogue**, programming and implementation and support for capacity building by civil society, especially for local groups that are directly concerned by policies.

The **private sector** could play a pivotal role in the development process and could contribute to financing development, provided investment occurs with respect for the people, for traditional ownership or use, and for the environment. Private investment should be supported under the auspices of the European Investment Bank (EIB).

Future ACP-EU institutions: the report stressed the following points:

- joint ACP-EU Council meetings should include **topical and urgent political debates, including on sensitive issues,** with the aim of adopting joint conclusions on them;

- the new cooperation agreement should include a strong **parliamentary dimension**, through a Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA), ensuring the adequate democratic and proportional representation and participation of all political forces in its debates;
- the JPA should be aligned with the new regional structure, thus **focusing its work in regional fora on issues of regional importance**, strongly involving the national and regional parliaments;
- further efforts should be made to **improve JPA scrutiny** of development programming, bearing in mind the development effectiveness principles and follow-up to such scrutiny.

Future funding: Members were convinced that the simultaneous expiry of the Cotonou Agreement and of the Union's multiannual financial framework (MFF) provides an opportunity to finally decide on the **budgetisation of the European Development Fund**. However, this budgetisation should be conditioned by:

- a guaranteed ring-fencing of developing funds to maintain the level of financing for developing countries, and
- a permanent and separate solution for EU financing of security expenses that are linked to and in coherence with development cooperation;

Members stressed that EU development aid principles must be applied on an equal basis to all developing countries, and that advanced ACP countries must therefore graduate out of receiving EU development aid on the same terms as non-ACP countries. Furthermore, a **higher degree of self-financing by the ACP countries** would be in line with the ACP ambitions to be an autonomous player, and the new agreement should include enhanced tools for building ACP countries' capacity to fund vital economic sectors.

The report called for the introduction of a dedicated instrument for all **overseas countries and territories** (OCTs), which is in keeping with their special status and their membership of the European family.

Trade dimension: Members reiterated that **Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs)** constitute a basis for regional cooperation and that they must be instruments for development and regional integration. They called for a **post-Cotonou Agreement as a political umbrella agreement under which binding minimum requirements for EPAs are set**, in order to ensure continuity for EPA linkages in the existing Cotonou Agreement to sustainability provisions on good governance, respect for human rights, including among the most vulnerable people, and respect for social and environmental standards.