EC/ACP agreement: new cooperation agreements with the African, Caribbean and Pacific States

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The Committee has adopted a report by Michel ROCARD (PES, F) setting out guidelines for negotiations on new agreements between the EU and the ACP countries. In general terms, the report welcomes the fact that the group of ACP countries are regarded as a political entity. It also approves of the introduction of geographical differentiation to reflect regional diversity and the increased role of regional cooperation and integration as factors in development. The future ACP-EU agreement must, says the committee, be a global agreement, reaffirming the partnership between the two sides on new foundations while strengthening democracy and human rights as well as establishing a parliamentary and political dialogue. The committee calls for ACP-EU cooperation to be made subject to new political conditions (respect for democratic principles and human rights) and based on an assessment of the efforts made by individual governments. At the request of the ACP countries, the future Convention is expected to provide for new procedures and funding arrangements, involving programmes for training judges and lawyers and support for independent media organisations. As regards peace-keeping and conflict prevention, the committee is in favour of technical support from the Union for regional security agreements. It calls for the establishment of regionalised mediation arrangements using regional monitoring units to keep track of ethnic, linguistic, economic, social and religious tensions. New partnership The report emphasises the value of an integrated approach to the elimination of poverty, the inclusion of gender issues and the carrying out of environmental impact assessments, as ways of meeting fundamental human needs such as access to clean water, education, health care and housing. It approves of the principle of regarding the grassroots economy as a key factor in development policy. To help combat poverty, it calls for the development of systems of micro-credits as well as the use of the latest technology and believes that publicity for local products should be encouraged. The Development Committee fears that the Commission's proposal to negotiate regional economic partnership agreements and free-trade agreements may be premature and result in increased poverty and greater social tension in the ACP states. However, it endorses the Commission's proposal to preserve existing Lomé preference arrangements for the least advanced ACP countries and calls for these arrangements to be extended to the ACP countries with vulnerable economies, in particular the small island states and countries whose exports consist chiefly of primary products. It believes that economic cooperation agreements, entailing moves towards reciprocity in trade, should be organised on a progressive basis, in support of the regional integration process and in step with it. However, the report argues that the EU should use all available means to ensure that non-reciprocal preferences, as well as the protocols, continue as instruments in development policy for as long as the intended objectives have not been achieved. It believes that the process of adaptation and integration of regional markets requires the present trade system (preferences, protocols and compensation for loss of export revenues) to be preserved for a suitable transition period which should, however, not exceed 10 years after the expiry of the Fourth ACP-EU Convention (Commissioner PINHEIRO proposes a 5-year period).The committee calls for the next Convention to incorporate the principle of updating the resources of the EDF, at least in proportion to the increased population of an enlarged EU. It also calls for funding to be provided for non-governmental operators.