Partnership EU/ACP States: democratisation, rule of law, respect for human rights, good governance

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Article 5 of the Lomé Convention (Lomé IV, as revised in 1995) introduces a reference to the recognition and application of democratic principles, the consolidation of the rule of law and good governance. Article 366a contains a mechanism introducing sanctions for failure to fulfil an obligation in respect of one of these essential elements. Article 224(m) states that cooperation is to cover support for institutional and administrative reform measures with a view to democratisation and the rule of law. The report by Fernando FERNÁNDEZ MARTÍN (EPP, E), which has been adopted by the Committee, notes that progress has been made over the last few years in a number of ACP countries as regards democracy, in spite of difficult socio-economic circumstances. However, it also notes that corruption still exists in certain ACP countries, which is eroding confidence in the State's ability to take effective action. The report therefore urges that the promotion of good governance (accompanied by an explicit reference to action to combat corruption) should also become one of the basic features of the next ACP-EU Convention. The committee calls for the introduction of practical instruments and measures which would enable action to be taken to combat corruption at all levels. It want the next Convention to contain a set of specific, practical and uniform anti-corruption sanctions which would apply equally to the ACP countries, the EU Member States and their economic operators. It says the sanctions contained in the next Convention should be reinforced by a joint anti-corruption watchdog and enforcement mechanism which can be activated in both the EU Member States and the ACP countries. The report says that the ACP countries themselves should be invited to propose criteria relating to the promotion of human rights, democratisation and good governance, including action to combat corruption. The committee also calls for particular attention to be devoted, in the context of ACP-EU dialogue, to the situation of children, the protection of children's rights, the participation of women in political processes, women's legal and social rights and the involvement of civil society. It stresses the importance of specific initiatives relating to army, police and prison personnel, with particular regard to the conditions under which they operate and the extent of their human rights training. It also stresses that the emergence of independent media is crucial. The report argues that the social, economic, political and cultural specificity of each ACP country must be recognised. As regards the ACP-EU Joint Assembly, the committee reiterates its call for this body to be democratised so as to reflect the diversity of opinion within the ACP countries, which are currently represented by a single delegate per country. It believes that the existing structures of the ACP-EU Council of Ministers and the ACP-EU Joint Assembly must be strengthened.