Activities of the ACP-EU Joint Assembly in 2002

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Joaquim MIRANDA (EUL/NGL, P) on the work of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in 2002. A large part of the report was devoted to the "unfortunate sequence of events" that led to the cancellation of the Brussels session of the JPA planned for November 2002. Against the background of the deteriorating political and economic situation in Zimbabwe and the consequent travel ban imposed by the EU on President Mugabe and his close associates, two banned deputy ministers were included in Zimbabwe's delegation to the Brussels session of the JPA in November 2002, were issued with entry visas by the Belgian Government after it had consulted the other Member States but were denied access to Parliament's premises. This prompted an indignant reaction from the ACP side and, after it proved impossible to find a solution acceptable to both sides which would allow the session to go ahead, a decision was taken to cancel the session. Pointing out that these events had left relations between EU members and ACP members "in a delicate state", the report stressed the need to improve the information and dialogue structures between the EU and ACP partners and also underlined the importance of the "joint nature" of the JPA. There was, moreover, an extremely pressing need for a joint solution accepted by all sides with a view to the forthcoming assemblies on the territory of the EU and in one of the EU Member States. It was also essential to ensure that the situation which occurred in November 2002 did not prevent the holding of future important events in Europe, such as an EU-Africa summit. The committee added that it would be much more effective and legitimate if sanctions were to be imposed by a country or a regime only after a joint decision had been taken by the representatives of the EU and the ACP countries. The report went on to reaffirm the positions expressed in previous resolutions on Zimbabwe and drew attention to the lack of coherence in EU policy with regard to this situation. The Council and the Member State governments were urged not to seek exemptions from the EU's own sanctions regime. On a more positive note, the committee welcomed the fact that the cancellation of the November 2002 session had not altered good working relations and that the 5th session of the JPA in Brazzaville (Congo) had been held in a spirit of goodwill. The report also highlighted a number of achievements of the JPA in 2002, such as the success of the session held in Cape Town in March, the streamlining of procedures and organisation, and the fact that the majority of participants in the JPA sessions in 2002 were parliamentarians, in line with the provisions of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement. It underlined the importance of the JPA missions undertaken during 2002 but regretted that there was often unequal participation between EU members and ACP members. Lastly, the committee reiterated Parliament's often-repeated calls for the budgetisation of the European Development Fund.