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

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OBJECTIVE: the communication has the aim of identifying the foundations for a new relationship with the ACP countries as a whole in the light of the results of the Green Paper on the future of relations between the Union and the ACP (COS0497). SUBSTANCE: The Commission observes that relations between the developing countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) are entering a new phase, and presents a strategy document proposing a new vision of relations between the EU and the countries concerned, the key concept being partnership. The new guidelines proposed by the Commission are based on a five-pronged strategy: 1) giving the partnership a strong political dimension: this means greater selectiveness in managing Community cooperation, more effective and open dialogue and a new overall contract based on a shared political vision. The idea is to serve the objectives of peace and stability in the countries concerned and to make more resources available to prevent and resolve violent conflicts. Partnership will support the promotion of human rights and democratic principles, consolidating the rule of law and good governance. An enhanced policy dialogue will be initiated, bringing together economic, political, social and environmental aspects in an integrated vision. 2) making poverty alleviation the cornerstone of the new partnership: the problem of poverty will have to be tackled by means of an integrated approach, with simultaneous consideration for economic growth factors (development of local markets), regional integration and integration of the countries concerned into the international economy, on the one hand, and the social and environmental impact of growth, on the other hand. The development of private initiative will be an integral part of this approach, as will development of the social dimension with specific measures to develop employment, access to productive resources and to basic social services (health) and taking account of the specific needs of women. Generally and horizontally, development must take account of environmental imperatives and the development of the institutional dimension and of local capacity. 3) opening up cooperation to economic partnership: the idea is to conclude with the ACP regional or subregional economic cooperation and partnership agreements linked to the overall EU-ACP partnership agreement. These regionalized agreements will seek to develop close cooperation in all areas of economic and trading relations: compliance with technical, health and safety standards, basic labour rights, environmental measures, protection of investment and of intellectual property, services, competition and public contracts. They will also include preferential trade arrangements, with reciprocity gradually being introduced for ACP countries or groupings that want it. This new economic relationship will take account of the situation of each country and will therefore be implemented gradually (with particular attention to the least-developed countries (LLDCs), for which new market access arrangements will be laid down). 4) overhaul of financial and technical cooperation arrangements: the instruments made available are to be rationalized and simplified, with a gradual transition to direct aid to the budgets of the countries concerned. Conditions must be met for this, particularly the application by each country of the principle of responsibility for its own development. This new system of resource allocation will be based not only on a clear assessment of the needs of each country but also on its own merits within a framework of rolling programming (i.e. less determined a priori). This new approach to financing will require more decentralized and effective management of cooperation. 5) introduction of considerable geographical differentiation: a regional dimension is to be applied to economic and trade cooperation, and cooperation is to be adjusted in the light of the realities and specific character of the various components of the ACP group, seeking the most appropriate level for dialogue and cooperation. In conclusion, the Commission proposes entering into a new overall agreement with the ACP countries, with differentiated procedures and agreements, which should be flexible and open enough to respond to new needs and opportunities. Negotiations are scheduled to begin in September 1998.