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

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In adopting the report by Mr Michel ROCARD (PSE, F) on new cooperation agreements with the ACP countries by 454 votes to 24 with 30 abstentions, Parliament clarified the guidelines set out by the Commission in its communication and the principles which should guide and shape the future negotiations of agreements between the ACP and the Union. In general, it welcomed the recognition of the ACP group as a political entity and the introduction of geographical differentiation reflecting regional diversities and the increasing role of regional cooperation and integration as a factor for development. Trade liberalization and economic growth alone were not sufficient to reduce poverty and European development cooperation must recognize the need to guarantee the poorest people in the world access to and control over resources such as land and credit. Parliament considered that the new ACP-EU agreement should be a global agreement reasserting ACP-EU partnership on a new basis, strengthening democracy and respect for human rights and establishing parliamentary and political dialogue. - Political dimension: Parliament called for ACP-EU partnership to be subject to a new type of conditionality with respect for the principles of democracy and human rights and based on an evaluation of the efforts being undertaken by a government which favoured long-term sustainable development achieved through good governance and respect for human rights. At the request of the ACP, the Convention should provide for procedures and funding to support the strengthening of democracy (training of judges and lawyers, participation of women in political, economic and social decision-making processes, aid to establish and spread independent media, support for traditional forms of dispute resolution and justice, capacity-building, particularly at municipal level, etc.). It also called for a new dimension to cultural and political cooperation. With regard to the prevention of conflicts and consolidating peace, Parliament favoured EU technical support for regional security agreements and called for the setting up of regionalised mediation structures, in particular of regional listening posts to monitor ethnic, linguistic, economic, social or religious tensions. It called for the new EU-ACP Partnership Agreement to incorporate a ban on anti-personnel mines for all member countries, a time schedule for the removal of existing mines and a special fund to achieve the goal of a mine-free EU-ACP zone within a reasonable time frame. It suggested that the ACP countries, through the OAU, should themselves propose the criteria for security, limitation of military spending, respect for human rights and good governance, which should be the criteria for the non-misappropriation of aid, and failure to respect which could involve penalties. - New partnership with poverty alleviation as the cornerstone of Community policy: Parliament stressed the value of the integrated approach with regard to poverty eradication, gender mainstreaming and environmental impact assessments with the aim of ensuring that basic human needs such as access to clean water, basic education, primary health care and housing are met. It welcomed the inclusion of the popular economy as a key element of development policy. In order to eradicate poverty, it called for the development of a micro-credit system, use of leading-edge technologies (hygiene, waste treatment, use of local medical resources, etc.), support for advertising of local products and environmental regeneration. It stressed the need for decentralized cooperation with local authorities, economic and social operators, training bodies and non-governmental development aid structures. Special attention must be paid to the situation of children and population growth. - Economic partnership and the WTO: Parliament feared that the Commission's proposal to negotiate regional free trade economic partnership agreements might be premature and lead to increased poverty and social tension in the ACP countries. It could involve large adjustment costs for non-industrialized countries, such as lost government revenue and damage to domestic industrial production, affecting in particular the poor and most vulnerable. It called in particular for a study on the impact on ACP States of the establishment of regional free trade areas or graduation into the Generalized System of Preferences. However it welcomed the Commission's proposal to maintain the current Lomé preferences for the least developed ACPs and called for their extension to cover vulnerable economies of the ACP group such as small island States and countries highly dependent on

commodity exports. It asked the Commission and the Council to inform and consult the ACP countries on the impact of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) before signing. It considered that this agreement in its present form threatened the right of governments, local communities and citizens to control democratically investment in their economies. It therefore called once again on the Fifteen not to sign the MAI and asked the governments of ACP countries not to apply to join this agreement as it stands. It considered that economic cooperation agreements which imply moving towards reciprocity in commercial matters should be implemented gradually in support of regional integration processes and in phase with them. Nevertheless it considered that the EU must use all possible means to have it recognized that non-reciprocal preferences and protocols were instruments of development until the stated objectives were achieved. It believed it essential to accompany the process of adaptation and integration of regional markets while maintaining the current trading system (preferences, product protocols, and compensation for export revenue losses) for an appropriate transitional period which would not however exceed 10 years following the expiry of the Fourth ACP-EU Convention (instead of five years). It stressed the need to make European Union development cooperation policy genuinely consistent with the Union's other policies, in particular the CAP, fisheries, trade, the environment, gender, policy on arms exports, etc. It considered that the balance of programmes and strategies must ensure that growth in domestic production, purchasing power and consumption were encouraged at least as much as exports. It recalled the importance it attached to scientific research in ACP countries and the protection of intellectual property in all these countries. Parliament also called for a study into the economic and financial implications of the entry into force of the euro for the ACP-EU cooperation partners and, in particular, into how it would link in with the CFA franc zone. - Budgetary aspects: Parliament called on the Commission to involve Parliament more closely in the annual estimates of EDF expenditure it draws up. It regretted that, with regard to the financial implications, the information on the new financial instruments remained incomplete. It considered that these instruments ought to provide the necessary guarantees that expenditure programming would be predictable and that the objectives would be realized on schedule. It called on the Commission to present a mechanism for phasing the EDF into the budget, a subject to which the European Parliament had frequently returned. With regard to ACP migrants in the Union, Parliament stressed that many specific experiences of aid to return home would open the way for a general policy of joint development and partnership, based on assistance provided for migrants responsible for productive-investment projects in their countries of origin. Training in development-related trades (agriculture, craft trades, etc.) devised in accordance with the country of origin, to which the person was returning, could be implemented in developed countries temporarily accepting these workers in order to facilitate their return and to help them contribute to development. - Financial and technical cooperation: Parliament called for the next Convention to establish the principle of an updating of EDF resources which was at least proportional to the demographic consequences of enlargement of the European Union to include new States. It called on the Fifteen to contribute 0.7% of their GNP to official development assistance. It regretted that the Commission had not upheld the principle of a financial envelope for non-governmental operators and called for such an envelope to be set up. It considered that priority should be given to programmes for the management of natural resources, both renewable and non-renewable, in accordance with the principles of renewable development.