Relations between the European Union and the ACP countries: options for a new partnership. Green Paper

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In adopting the report by Mr Wilfried MARTENS (PPE, B), Parliament said that, under the Fifth Lomé Convention (2000-2010), it supported the renewal and strengthening of ACP-EU cooperation and was in favour of a political dimension that was close to the people and which would allow the ACP countries to find their place in the world economy: (1) Principles of the new partnership: Parliament expressed support for a fifth Convention consisting essentially of a global agreement defining for all ACP countries the political, economic, financial, commercial and social objectives and principles of cooperation. This agreement should incorporate institutions to promote parliamentary and political dialogue and include a range of cooperation instruments tailored to the level of development of the ACP group, without however, calling into question their identity or political history. This new Convention should consist of several levels in addition to the national level: - the first level, bringing together all partners who share the same objectives of sustainable social development, peace and respect for human rights, - the second level, promoting regional cooperation and enabling issues such as security, restrictions on the arms trade, the banning of landmines and the prevention and resolution of disputes to be dealt with, - the third, encouraging sub-regional integration in Africa. Parliament believed that the composition of the ACP group could only be expanded or changed by mutual agreement with the ACP countries. It considered that the EU, which did not respect its commitments towards the developing countries at the Uruguay Round, should do all it could to ensure that non-reciprocal preferences and protocols were recognized as instruments of development until its objectives had been reached. The principles of the Lomé Convention, contractuality, foreseeability, security and partnership should be maintained, and the EU should not scale down the efforts it had made to assist its partners in the South. The Union should ensure that the common agricultural policy, commercial policy and fisheries policy were consistent with development policy. Parliament asked the Council to give the Commission a mandate to negotiate with the WTO differentiated trade regimes for the ACP countries in respect of products which were 'economically and socially sensitive'. (2) Partnership: Parliament was in favour of: - re-balancing the partnership in favour of the ACP countries (so as to give them as much control as possible over their development); - using contracts in place of the unmanageable cumulation of multiple conditionalities provided that the countries involved respected democratic principles and human rights; - giving greater importance to civil society organizations and decentralized cooperation; - including crisis and conflict prevention; - including protection of the environment, social issues and culture; - paying particular attention to the social dimension and specific problems of the small island ACP countries (rules of origin and climate change); - promoting the rule of law and the proper utilization of resources. Parliament called for the new partnership to be characterized by cooperation among the population; the programmes should therefore be transparent and accessible. It also stated that cooperation should also take full account of the situation of children. (3) Human rights and security: As regards human rights, Parliament believed that basic human rights should be guaranteed to ensure that citizens could participate democratically in decision-making and so that alternative proposals for sustainable development might be drawn up. To guarantee the security of the African continent, il recommended: - a ban on landmines; - monitoring and establishing a code of conduct for the limitation of arms sales; - limiting military budgets to 1% of GNP failing cooperation aid would fall;; - establishing regional evaluation of tensions and preparation for mediation; - crisis management instruments which would ensure the possibility of financial aid to help re-establish peace; - providing the ACP counties with satellite information which could help with the prevention of crises. (4) Objectives: The main objective of this cooperation was to combat poverty, concentrating mainly on the poorest countries (which should favour Africa) while reducing extreme poverty by half in the ACP countries by the year 2010. Getting the birth rate under control would be a decisive factor in this respect. Parliament

called for the protection of the environment to be incorporated into all policies. It advocated a joint ACP-EU environmental policy which would conserve biodiversity, develop renewable sources of energy, halt the process of desertification and drought, protect forests, coastal zones and wetlands, establish regional genetic units to preserve local vegetable and animal species and which would take into account urban development and the protection of natural resources. It called for the inter-African centre for the prevention of natural disasters be reestablished. (5) Instruments of cooperation: Parliament called for measures to help the ACP countries become integrated into the world economy through: - the establishment of regional economic areas; - the diversification of production; - the adaptation to the rules governing international trade; - the resumption of investment; - the introduction of measures to help stabilize local monetary systems; - the reduction of debt. Parliament proposed the establishment of a centre to monitor economic practices and the establishment of an ACP quality label. It asked that the next Convention introduce measures aimed at protecting intellectual property in ACP countries, and it supported advanced research and technology that would help combat poverty. As regards trade, Parliament supported the Commission's decision regarding differentiation under a single framework. It called for the revision of the specific instruments used in ACP-EU cooperation (Stabex and Sysmin) with a view to ending the exclusive dependence of the ACP countries on a small number of basic products. It recommended increased support for scientific and technical research and for the information society and proposed the establishment of a European foundation to provide long-term support for research laboratories in developing countries. It emphasized the importance of micro-credits in promoting the development of the popular economy and the private sector as well as the development of small businesses, cooperatives and craft industries. Parliament recommended regional integration and hoped that the regions on the periphery of the Union and the Overseas Countries and Territories should be involved in the process of cooperation and regional integration promoted by the Union. It asked that the new Convention highlight the advantages of the Protocols on bananas, rum, sugar and beef and veal. (6) Financial and technical cooperation: Parliament supported the Commission's decision to retain three financial envelopes (long-term, short-term, non-governmental operators) and the inclusion of existing instruments therein. It asked that social criteria which improved the living and working conditions of the population be incorporated into the programmes and gave its support to budgetary and sectoral assistance in the place of project aid. It asked that NGOs make their commitment to the poor a priority and that the Union help them escape from the straitjackets of projects in order to build on the traditional skills of district associations and groups of villagers. It asked that Structural Adjustment Programmes ensure that more rather than less support was given to basic social services. It also demanded that the ACP debt be decreased, rescheduled or cancelled and reiterated its call for the incorporation of the European Development Fund (EDF) into the EU budget. (7) The Union's responsibilities: Parliament demanded the retention of the EU's commitment towards the South and did not accept its recent reduction. It was alarmed by the efforts to renationalize development cooperation made by the Member States and asked that policies become more consistent with European development policies. To conclude, it strongly welcomed the Commission's proposal for a global European strategy vis-à-vis the ACP countries and asked that it be implemented and that a Union policy on Africa covering all aspects (including security) be drawn up.