

EU/Caribbean relations: partnership for growth, stability and development

2006/2123(INI) - 06/07/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Gabriele **Zimmer** (EUL/NGL, DE) on the EU-Caribbean partnership for growth, stability and development. It applauded the involvement of the CARIFORUM Group in the discussions on the draft Commission Communication and welcomed the fact that the communication had taken account of most of the concerns raised by the States in the region. However, it regarded Parliament's de facto marginalisation by means of a timetable which ruled out its involvement in the drafting of the cooperation strategy for the Caribbean as an exceptionally regrettable departure from the consensual approach employed by the three European institutions. Parliament deplored the Commission's failure to take proper account of the recommendations made in its evaluation report.

Whilst it endorsed the Commission's analysis that cooperation between the two regions has not thus far been accompanied by proper political dialogue, and welcomed the planned involvement of the French overseas departments in the region and the Caribbean overseas countries and territories (OCTs) in the future political dialogue, it called on the Commission to ensure that EPAs are structured in a way which takes into account regional realities. Any commitments undertaken within the framework of the EPA negotiations must be carefully sequenced with the delivery of EPA-related development support which targeted the main areas of concern to the governments concerned, including economic restructuring to enhance competitiveness, fiscal adjustment and trade facilitation support.

Parliament went on to state that the compensation and adjustment programmes to cushion the impact of changes in the market for sugar and bananas were under funded and, in the light of the recent demonstrations in the region, it feared that social cohesion, a cooperation objective, might be seriously undermined. The Commission was asked to develop programmes to encourage agricultural conversion with a view to safeguarding and creating acceptable jobs in farms currently run along conventional and uncompetitive lines.

Parliament shared the Commission's concerns that, as a result of global climate change, the frequency and intensity of weather-related disasters in the region would increase even further. It deplored the lack of any reference to the EU-ACP natural disaster facility established in 2005. The Commission should support the permanent long-term establishment of such a facility, and Parliament asked the Commission to provide regular follow-up on this process.

It criticised the fact that the strategy for the Caribbean pays far too little attention to the task of dealing with the problem of youth unemployment and the growing frustration among young people. Over 60% of the region's population is under 30 years of age. There was concern that the impending crisis in the Caribbean farming industry would serve to exacerbate this situation.

Parliament emphasised the key role which the development of sustainable tourism could play as a force for economic development and advocated long-term financial support for the building of the requisite infrastructure (roads, ports, airports, etc.). It drew attention, however, to the Commission's failure to acknowledge that local ownership of tourist amenities was fundamental to that sustainability and must be encouraged in order to reduce the outflow of profits to ensure that local people were not forced into roles as menial workers and to prevent the ultimate destruction of landscapes.

It welcomed the Commission's offer to keep the door open for political dialogue with Cuba, but was critical of the tight restrictions imposed on any such dialogue on the basis of the 1996 Common Position. Successful representations by the EU to the USA resulting in a lifting of the embargo policy could have substantial economic benefits for the entire region. In keeping with a policy based on respect for political, social, individual and economic human rights, Parliament urged the opening of a critical dialogue with the Cuban Government. It also emphasised the importance of coordinating development programmes with non-European players in the region, in particular Canada, China, Brazil and Venezuela. Parliament regretted the fact that the Commission's portrayal of the involvement of other players was characterised by a degree of mistrust.

Finally, Parliament drew particular attention to Haiti's desperate plight and called for a special programme for Haiti which went beyond the scope of general cooperation with the Caribbean region and for which additional resources would be required.