EU/Pacific Islands relations: a strategy for a strengthened partnership

2006/2204(INI) - 29/05/2006 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to establish a new strengthened partnership between the EU and the Pacific ACP countries.

CONTEXT: The EU and the Pacific ACP countries (Cook Islands, Fiji Islands, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) can look back on more than 30 years of cooperation in the context of the EU-ACP partnership. This long-standing relationship is based on the legacy of a shared history, common values, economic and trade cooperation. However, developments on both sides warrant renewal of this partnership and the establishment of a fully-fledged strategy on the Pacific ACP countries. The purpose of this paper is to propose a strengthened partnership between the two regions, taking into account developments relating to aid policy.

CONTENT: On the EU side, the revised Cotonou Agreement and the European Consensus on Development provide a new basis and impetus for EU-Pacific relations. The Cotonou Agreement strengthens the political dimension of EU-ACP cooperation, allowing an improved political dialogue with partners, while the European Consensus identifies poverty eradication in the context of sustainable development as the core objective. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness adopted in March 2005 reaffirms the commitments to harmonise and align aid policy and sets specific targets for 2010. (Please see INI/2006/2208.) On the Pacific side, the ACP countries are experiencing a number of important challenges in terms of vulnerability, poverty and weak governance At the same time the region is home to substantial natural resources (fish, timber, agricultural produce, oil, gas, minerals). It is therefore proposed to focus on a limited set of specific priorities, where the Pacific has significant needs for which Europe has indisputable comparative advantages. The strengthened partnership should therefore focus on governance, regionalism and sustainable management of natural resources.

Accordingly, the proposed strategy consists of three components:

1) a **strengthened relationship** between the EU and the Pacific ACP countries and region in order to pursue a **broad political dialogue** on matters of common interest ranging from political and security to economic, trade, social, environmental and governance issues, thus enhancing the visibility and political profile of the EU-Pacific partnership on both sides;

2) **more focused development action,** with greater emphasis on regional cooperation to build up critical mass, enhance regional governance and facilitate cross-fertilisation. The main focus will be on matching the key priorities of the region, notably as defined in the Pacific Plan. To recall, the Pacific Plan focuses on the concept of regionalism. Stronger regional cooperation would improve the region’s capacity for dealing with the development challenges it faces. The strategy will provide greater support to the Forum Secretariat and other relevant CROP (Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific) agencies in particular as regards natural resources management, vulnerability and governance. The strategy will reinforce the **Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA)** whichis having a catalytic effect on economic cooperation and integration in the Pacific region. In order to maximise the desired effect of the EPA, it is crucial that the negotiations and outcome are closely coordinated with programming and, in due course, implementation of development assistance, at both regional and national levels, in order to harness synergies. Of particular importance are trade-related assistance and capacity-building, socio-economic, financial and tax governance as well as targeted support measures including compliance with international customs standards and trade facilitation where relevant, sugar, the private sector or human resource

development and social protection. In addition, the Commission proposed in 2005 to the Pacific ACP countries the establishment of a regional **disaster preparedness** programme. This initiative could be followed up and expanded into the field of disaster reduction (risk reduction, hazard mitigation and reduced vulnerability taking into account the need for adaptation to climate change).

3) **more efficient aid delivery**, including greater use of budget support and closer coordination with other partners, in particular Australia and New Zealand.

Conclusions: the Pacific and the EU have a real opportunity for strengthening the partnership in terms of a broad political dialogue, trade and development cooperation. Since only a few Member States and the Commission have representations in the Pacific ACP countries, the Pacific region would appear particularly well-suited for joint EU presence and action in the field, for instance, through seconding officials from Member States' services to the Commission's regional Delegations in the Pacific, which could also provide facilities on an ad-hoc basis ("Europe House"). A gradual process, combined with the necessary flexibility, would provide a framework for better external representation of the EU in the Pacific, in the form of broader presence, deeper political dialogue and a higher profile for the EU.