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

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The Council adopted a series of conclusions on the cooperation with the Pacific ACP countries in the framework of the ACP/EU Partnership Agreement. It recalls the existing EU agreements with the Pacific and draws attention to the close links with some Member States through the overseas territories of France (French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna) and of the United Kingdom (Pitcairn).

The Council reaffirms its commitment to work with the Pacific region to support the eradication of poverty and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by addressing issues such as governance, stability, regional and economic integration, and environmental vulnerability.

The Council welcomes the Commission Communication on "EU Relations with the Pacific - a Strategy for a Strengthened Partnership" and agrees to focus its attention on the areas set out below:

- strengthening the political relationship between the EU and the Pacific ACP countries, for example through an enhanced dialogue with the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF);

- addressing the socio-economic and environmental challenges through more efficient, better coordinated and more focused development cooperation, giving priority to sustainable development and sustainable use of natural resources.

The Council confirms that all efforts should be in line with the European Consensus on Development, which defines the objectives and principles of Community development cooperation.

A strengthened political relationship: the Council emphasises its wish to enhance political dialogue on matters of common interest with the Pacific states and region, including democracy, good governance and human rights, peace and security and regional and economic integration. Recognising that democracy and good governance are based on credible, efficient institutions, the EU will lend particular support to good governance and the fight against corruption. The positive roles of parliaments and civil society, especially NGOs, are seen as important in this respect. Promoting and protecting human rights, especially women's and children's rights, and fundamental freedoms, respecting the rule of law and encouraging the growth of pluralistic participatory democracy in the Pacific region are recognised goals and will be advanced as prerequisites for stability and growth. Political cooperation will also include specific assistance for fragile states and for post-conflict reconstruction, in line with the United Nations, and encouragement for further initiatives, such as electoral monitoring and special missions to help resolve political issues.

Regional cooperation and integration: the Council underlines the unique identity and vulnerability of Small Island States and the importance of respecting the special needs of the smaller nations in the region, and highlights the outstanding cultural diversity of the Pacific region. Therefore, regional cooperation shall be further intensified by encouraging the existing regional organisations, in particular the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), to implement the Pacific Plan, and key CROPs (Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific), such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, and also by building on synergies and cooperation with the OCTs in the region.

The Council furthermore reiterates the potential of regional economic integration and trade, including cooperation with the OCTs, which is seen as beneficial for all parties. The Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) as an instrument for development will be the privileged area of cooperation, fostering

smooth and gradual integration of the region into the global economy and promoting sustainable economic development. In this regard, the Council reaffirms its commitment to the timely conclusion of the EPA negotiation to allow it to enter into force by 1 January 2008. The Council underlines the importance of compatibility of the EPA with similar arrangements between the countries of the Pacific

and like-minded partners in the region.

More efficient and focused development cooperation: the Council highlights the need for the EU to enhance its profile in the region, including through strengthening EU representation and contacts between the EU and the Pacific. Given the limited presence of Member States in the Pacific, the Commission's proposal for joint EU action shall be elaborated further, for example the "Europe House" concept. It sees the necessity of supporting the Region to achieve the MDGs as an overall objective, especially the fight against poverty. In this respect special attention should be given to Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Timor Leste, being the three countries with the lowest GDP/capita in the Pacific, and the most disadvantaged and poorest groups of society of the countries in the region.

The Council notes the particular challenges of sound sustainable development in the Pacific and the vulnerability to natural disasters. Willing to support sustainable development in the Pacific, the EU will help countries protect their biodiversity, including dealing with climate change and rising sea levels and addressing diminishing fish-stock and coral bleaching.

The Council also emphasises its readiness to support Pacific countries in land use, land and natural resources management, the fight against land degradation, illegal logging and deforestation, and making ecological and sustainable use of renewable energy resources and the immense ocean and coastal resources, including enhanced pollution and waste management.

The Council recognises the importance of working closely with all other donors active in the region, as well as with multilateral institutions, such as UN organisations, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, in an effort to improve donor coordination and harmonisation and alignment to recipient country systems. In this context, the existing relations with Australia and New Zealand should be further strengthened.

Follow-up : the Council invites all parties to ensure the effective follow-up of these conclusions. The Council will build on existing mechanisms to monitor and review progress on the implementation, in consultation with Pacific Partners. The Commission is asked to report on progress within the scope of Community competence.