

NEWS: ACP Parliamentarians urge 'flexibility' on EPAs, protection of development funds

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Brussels, 19 November 2011/ ACP Newsdesk: Parliamentarians from the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific concluded their twice-yearly plenary this week in Lomé, Togo with discussions on Economic Partnership Agreements, development cooperation with European partners, and the future of the ACP Group beyond the expiry of the Cotonou Agreement in 2020.

“While the Caribbean have finalised an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the EU, it is to be noted that the negotiations with the rest of our sub-regions in Africa and the Pacific have proven more protracted than any of us would have wished. We are all aware of the new deadline that the Commission has set for the conclusion of these negotiations,” ACP Secretary General Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas stated at the 26th session of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly yesterday.

During the meeting, members raised concerns about Europe’s recent proposal to amend Market Access Regulation 1528, setting a deadline for ACP countries to ratify their EPAs by January 1 2014, or lose preferential free access to European markets. Out of the 36 ACP countries which have negotiated EPAs with Europe since 2007, only half have taken steps to ratify the agreement. The remaining 18 have either initialled but not signed the agreement, or signed but have not satisfied the Commission’s required steps to ratify.

“I hope that [the upcoming Joint Parliamentary Assembly] will be a catalyst to finding a way out of the current impasse. It is our expectation that the European Commission will demonstrate flexibility in the negotiations to ensure EPAs that are development-friendly and that enhance regional integration,” stated the Secretary General. The next JPA will be held next week, 19-24 November.

The Assembly also addressed the effects of the global financial crisis in the Euro Zone, and how this may affect development cooperation for ACP countries. Calls were made to ensure that in planning the next cycle of the European Development Fund (EDF), quality and quantity of resources from the EDF meet the development needs of ACP member countries.

“I believe that Europe will not be Europe without an ethic of global responsibility, in a world rendered small by the forces of technology and globalisation,” added the Secretary General.

“I believe that Europe will not be Europe if it abandons its responsibility to its African, Caribbean and Pacific development partners; a partnership that goes back to the very foundation of Europe itself as enshrined in the Rome Treaty of 1957.”

He called for “vigorous strategising” for the future of the ACP Group post-2020, when the region’s partnership arrangement with the EU under the Cotonou Agreement comes to an end. Parliamentarians discussed possibilities for increased South-South cooperation and were urged to ensure their countries’ budgetary contributions were made on time.

The ACP Parliamentary Assembly is a consultative body which brings together Members of Parliaments from the ACP Group’s 79 member states to exchange ideas and encourage better negotiations with European counterparts. The Assembly meets in plenary twice a year, before sitting in session with EU Parliamentarians in the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly. - END -

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