

Press Release: 104th Session of ACP Council of Ministers convenes in Brussels

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Brussels 01 December 2016/ ACP: The 104th session of the Council of Ministers of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States ended yesterday in Brussels, presided over by the Hon. Lindsay F.P. GRANT, Minister of Tourism, International Trade, Industry and Consumer Affairs of the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis.

While the November / December session of the ACP Council traditionally deals with administrative and budgetary matters, the 104th Council also tackled the pressing question of the future of the ACP Group, as well as its future relations with its principal interlocutor, the European Union. To this end, the 104th Council availed itself of the opportunity to engage in an exchange of views with the EU Commissioner for Development, Mr. Neven MIMICA, on the just released EU Joint Communication on the Future of ACP-EU relations after 2020.

In delivering his opening remarks, Council President Grant reminded the 104th session that the world in which the ACP Group was formed forty-one years ago in Georgetown, Guyana, is markedly different from the milieu in which the Group finds itself today; hence the need to reinvent and reposition the Group in order to respond better to the needs and aspirations of its Member States. According to the Council President, the 104th Council session is particularly significant because it “will have to take important decisions on the future of the Group”, following the Decision of ACP Heads of State and Government at their 8th Summit in June 2016 to “mandate the Council of Ministers, subject to the outcomes of the consultations at regional and national levels, to put in place implementation modalities for recommendations of the Eminent Persons Group report by the end of 2016, and report to the Summit thereafter”^[1].

In his welcome remarks, the Secretary General of the ACP Group, H.E. Dr. Patrick I. GOMES, reminded the 104th Council session that “The ACP has had many successes and accomplishments in its 40-year history but as is often noted, achievements pave the way for new and exciting opportunities to do better. Our meeting is therefore a very timely occasion to be forward looking and shape the type of ACP Group we want”. He however cautioned that “the ACP is now on a course of uncharted waters. We’re facing turbulence and the unpredictability of a multi-polar world as we look to a future with, and beyond, the longstanding relationship with the European Union”. Secretary General GOMES also highlighted other important issues, including the importance of unity as a precondition for a successful outcome in the negotiations for an ACP-EU agreement after 2020, the detrimental conditions facing ACP countries, and the need for financial self-reliance.^[2]

Council Proceedings

Apart from the future of the ACP Group, and its relations with the European Union, the 104th Council addressed the following strategic matters, including:

1. Exchange of views on BREXIT

While the full implications of Brexit will not be known for some time, a systematic impact analysis and suggestions for courses of action by the ACP Group as a whole, by regions and individual Member states, for engagement at various levels, will need to be done at the appropriate time.

The UK contributes 15 percent to the European Development Fund that finances implementation of the provisions of the ACP-EU Cotonou Partnership Agreement. What therefore will be the impact of the UK leaving the European Union on the ACP Group, and how can this impact be mitigated?

1. Update on the EPA negotiations and implementation

Council was updated on the situation of the negotiations and implementation of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the EU in the various ACP regions. Presentations from the respective EPA Regions were followed by a robust exchange of views.

1. Preparations for MTC and Joint MTC

In accordance with Article 38(3) of the ACP-EU Cotonou Partnership Agreement, the ACP Ministerial Trade Committee will meet on 7th and 8th December 2016, while the Joint Ministerial Trade Committee with the EU takes place on 9th December 2016. Council was apprised of the status of preparations of these meetings, which will address important matters related to ACP-EU trade relations, including the EPAs, BREXIT, and developments in the international trade arena affecting ACP countries.

Outcome

After two days of intense debate and discussions, the 104th ACP Council of Ministers adopted the following Decisions:

1. Future perspectives (of the ACP Group): The Eminent Persons Group process and the way forward
2. Support for the claim of sovereignty of Mauritius over the Chagos Archipelago
3. ACP Information Centre for South South and Triangular Cooperation in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea
4. Guidelines to be followed in the event of a natural disaster in an ACP State
5. ACP Secretariat's budget for 2017

The 104th Council also passed Resolutions on the following:

1. ACP-EU Economic Partnership Agreements
2. Common EU list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions
3. ACP Investment Facility managed by the European Investment Bank
4. ACP agricultural commodity trade, and sector development
5. Difficulty in identifying Correspondent Banking Services in ACP States

Finally, Council adopted a Declaration on the humanitarian situation in Haiti.

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[1] The full statement of the President of Council can be found on https://youtu.be/cC4nov_Kds8 [1]

[2] The Secretary Generals' full statement can be found on <https://youtu.be/QdK795YwQ9Y> [2]

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