

Speech: Co-President of the ACP-EU Council of Ministers, Danish Minister for Development Cooperation Christian Friis Bach

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Minister's Opening Speech

As representative of the President of the EU Council to the Joint ACP-EU Council of Ministers – 37th session, 14-15 June 2012, Port Vila, Vanuatu

Honourable Prime Minister, Co-President, Ministers, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to co-chair the Joint Council on behalf of the EU Council of Ministers in the magnificent scenery of Efate Island.

This is an important occasion that allows us not only to discuss very important topics and make decisions, but also to learn from each other's countries and regions.

Vanuatu is closely related to Europe, where two of the main European languages are spoken alongside Bislama, in addition to the 100 local languages – in Europe we have only 23 official languages!

I wholeheartedly thank Prime Minister Kilman and his Government for this warm welcome and I'm looking forward to discovering more of Vanuatu's rich culture.

EU-Vanuatu relations, developed in the framework of the ACP community, date back to 1980, the year of the country's independence and its accession to the Lomé convention. We have been working together since and progressing on various fronts: for instance Vanuatu is the first country in the region that has become eligible for budget support from the EU. Also, at last year's Ministerial Conference on Climate Change held here in Port Vila, the EU and the Pacific have gone further than ever in developing an innovative approach to fighting climate change.

I look forward to our discussions today and tomorrow and I am confident that they will take place in the same open and constructive spirit that characterises our Partnership.

As stated in the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement, the Cotonou Agreement, this meeting provides for high level consultations on matters which are of specific concern to us all. This 37th session is a particularly substantial one: we have before us issues that will define our relations not only in the short term, but also in the long run, up to 2020 and even beyond.

We are gathered here not only to exchange views but also achieve concrete results.

Later on today we will discuss migration. Let me say that the second round of our dialogue, following last year's ACP-EU Council of Ministers represents a success: we had the opportunity, through our experts and Ambassadors, to learn from each other and agree on recommendations on visa, remittances and readmission. We now have the important task of endorsing and following-up on these recommendations. And, as highlighted in our last meeting in Brussels, we have the possibility of looking at extending our dialogue to other crucial issues, such as legal migration, human trafficking and smuggling, and migrants' rights.

A large part of our deliberations will be dedicated to the second pillar of our partnership: development finance cooperation. In particular I would highlight the importance of the performance review of the 10th EDF, which should contribute to a decision on the amount of ACP-EU financial cooperation after 2013. In this context I would like to reiterate the importance of continued

improvement in transparency and mutual accountability, in the light of the aid effectiveness principles re-affirmed and further developed in Busan.

We will also exchange views on Rio +20, with the aim of adopting a joint declaration for the Rio Conference, Achieving this objective would be a great success both in terms of the specific issues at stake on sustainable development, and in terms of demonstrating that the EU and the ACP countries can work together with the aim of jointly influencing the global agenda.

This could be a positive precedent for the future of our relations.

In July last year, we warmly welcomed the entry of the Republic of South Sudan into the community of sovereign states. It was a remarkable moment when South Sudan declared its independence and the population celebrated this with so much joy and hope.

Almost a year from then we cannot but express concern about the level of tension between Sudan and South Sudan at their border.

At the end of April, the African Union Peace and Security Council adopted a Roadmap, with a series of clear steps and timelines, for ending hostilities and bringing the Parties back to the negotiating table. Following that, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a Resolution endorsing the African Union's Roadmap. This is a major step. It reflects a high degree of consensus in the international community. Sudan and South Sudan have both accepted the Roadmap and committed to cease hostilities.

The Parties are back to the negotiation table and we are hopeful that they will match their words with action.

The EU remains committed to the concept of two viable states in Sudan and South Sudan. The EU is pleased that the Government of South Sudan has expressed its wish to accede to the Cotonou Agreement. This will provide us with a framework for the future development cooperation. As partners, we can establish a dialogue on the issues which are the core principles of this partnership: democracy, rule of law, and human rights.

The EU has mobilized substantial development assistance for South Sudan and will support South Sudan's development agenda and nation-building efforts.

Let me also say a few words about the strategic issues on our agenda that will impact on our future relations.

One is surely the state of play and the perspectives of the Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations – the EPAs. We are glad to see that regional negotiations are gaining momentum and that both sides are showing commitment and willingness to overcome the outstanding issues in order to conclude the negotiations in the near future.

I personally look forward to our discussion on the Sustainable Energy For All Initiative. I hope we will have an open and lively debate on this issues, enriched by our experience from yesterday's visit to the Wind Farm at Devil's Point and the results of our discussions at the side event organised by the European Investment Bank and the European Commission.

Last but not least, we will exchange views on development cooperation after 2013.

It is fair to say that the European Union is experiencing an unprecedented economic and financial crisis. Nevertheless, I am glad to underline that the EU has maintained its position as the biggest global donor for Official Development Assistance (ODA) and that, as stated by the EU Council in May, we stand by our commitment to increase the EUs collective aid spending to 0.7% of GNI by 2015.

We remain firmly committed to the foal of eradicating poverty, as well as to fostering the sustainable economic, social, political and environmental development of our partner countries.

This is particularly important in the frame of the ongoing discussions on the future financing of the ACP-EU cooperation after 2013.

In June 2011, the Commission presented a communication regarding the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework, including a proposal to establish an 11th European Development Fund to finance ACP-EU development cooperation. Discussions regarding the Commission proposals are underway in the Council.

Last year the Commission presented an important Communication on 'Increasing the impact of EU Development Policy: An agenda for change'. This Communication, welcomed by the Council at its meeting the 14th of May, sets our new directions on how to better address new challenges to development cooperation and deliver greater impact, also looking ahead to the Rio +20 outcomes and the development agenda beyond 2015 with special attention to fragile and least developed countries. Furthermore, we need to take into account the vulnerability of countries exposed to shocks and crises as well as landlocked and island countries, as underlined among the fundamental principles underpinning the Cotonou Agreement.

The 'Agenda for Change; encourages the EU and its partners to base their relations on shared values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law as well as the principles of ownership and of mutual accountability, all principles to which we can all surely subscribe, as enshrined in the Cotonou Agreement.

Moreover, this new approach opens up new forms of strategic cooperation based on mutual interests and on joint initiatives to address global challenges, going beyond the donor-recipient dynamics – a true relationship among partners.

I very much hope that in such a spirit we will carry out a successful meeting.

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