

Statement by H.E. Dr. Patrick I Gomes Secretary-General of the ACP Group of States at the 53rd Session of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly, 15th March 2019, Bucharest, Romania

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Hon. Joseph Owona Kono, President of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly,

Honourable Members,

Excellencies; ACP Ambassadors & representatives of Missions,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honour and privilege to welcome you to this 53rd Session of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly, hosted by the Government of Romania. We are grateful for the hospitality accorded to us in this historic city of Bucharest, known for remarkable architecture of several centuries. It is my pleasure once again to share with you recent developments in the post-Cotonou negotiations as well as related activities of the ACP Council of ministers.

The technical support of the ACP Secretariat continues to be indispensable and highly commendable as we shape a dynamic and relevant organization, serving the near 1 billion people of Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific.

In particular, I recall our meeting in Benin, Cotonou, last November and feel confident that this 53rd session would build on the awareness and commitments expressed on that occasion. For example, the resolutions on populism and globalization and cyber-crime and drug trafficking, as well as the concern for the financial sustainability of the ACP Group stand out as exemplary. Your debates and resolutions on those topics show the great relevance for a strong Parliamentary dimension to be in the post-Cotonou Agreement.

Mr. President, Hon. Members,

As a brief account of key recent events, may I mention the following:

1. First is the meeting of the Ministerial Central Negotiating Group of 12 December 2018 where Minister Dussey, ACP's Chief Negotiator, emphasised that the ACP Group should reassert its identity, purpose, objectives and relevance in engaging its European counterparts; and also recalled the decision taken by the African Leaders at the African Union Extraordinary Session, on 18 November 2018 to endorse the all-ACP framework as the overarching structure for the post-Cotonou negotiation process.

The Ministers also indicated that:

- Technical negotiations for regional protocols would commence only after substantial progress on the main body of the Agreement has been reached. This is fundamental to sustaining unity and solidarity of the ACP Group.
- While negotiations of ACP regional protocols will be held in Brussels, consultations and political dialogue could take place at locations within the ACP regions.
- regional protocols are to be integral parts of the Agreement that would be a legally binding, fair and balanced Undertaking of at least 20 years' duration, with revisions of 5 years, or as necessary

Mr. President, Hon. Members, Excellencies:

I quickly turn to the 2nd Meeting of ACP and EU Chief Negotiators on 14 December 2018, at ACP House which marked the closure of Round 1 of the Negotiations and noted progress made by the technical teams since they last met in New York in September 2018 and the broad convergence on the Strategic Priorities (Part II) for the Foundation of the Agreement.

The Negotiators endorsed the structure of the future agreement, noting that considerable work remains for example, on Title 3, in some ways, the core of the Agreement addressing Inclusive Sustainable Economic Growth and Development. (Difficult engagements can be expected on Title 5 treating Migration and Mobility.)

The need to speed up the negotiations was expressed in order to ensure concluding the bulk of the negotiations by the summer of 2019.

A decision also favoured negotiations of regional specificities, to be Protocols of the main agreement.

In relation to preparatory consultations for regional protocols, the Leaders of the Pacific Region held their consultations with Commissioner Mimica, on 26 February in Apia, Samoa; the Caribbean Region will hold consultations on 15 April in Jamaica, while arrangements for consultations of the African region, are being explored.

It was further agreed that a third Ministerial Chief Negotiators' Meeting should take place in late March/early April 2019. This would assess progress and close Round 2 and give further instructions to technical teams.

It is expected that by June 2019, to address all outstanding issues, including parts on general provisions, institutional architecture, means of cooperation (including financing) and final provisions.

In summary, therefore since your last Assembly in Cotonou, Benin those are main events but more significant has been the rigorous work of the technical teams, both from the ACP and the European Commission, on the drafting of texts of the Strategic Priorities of the Foundation of the Agreement and preparations for negotiations of the regional protocols.

Mr. President, Hon. Members,

By way of additional updating, I will refer to developments, particularly with respect to the 108th Session of the ACP Council of Ministers held on 13th to 14th December 2018.

Major matters decided relate to –review of the Gt Agreement; the ACP's Information Centre on SSC to be opened in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea; Secretariat's budget for 2019 inclusion of Regional Protocols; the 9th ACP Summit and a strong PA in post-Cotonou.

a. Review of the Georgetown Agreement

The Council of Ministers received and considered a Report of the Committee of Ambassadors on the Review of the Georgetown Agreement. Since Council has invited Member States and regions to submit amendments to the document, I would expect that as legislators, some mechanisms at the national level are enabling your views to be taken into account. It will be important to have those considered. An Editing Committee will incorporate views and re-examine the document for resubmission to the next Council meeting.

b) The ACP Information Centre for South-South and Triangular Cooperation in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

The Council of Ministers accepted the generous offer from the President and Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to establish the ACP Information Centre for South-South and Triangular Cooperation, and approved its Organisational Structure with a Head/Director of the Centre as a professional staff member of the ACP based in Malabo. This is a gigantic step forward by the ACP for its original permanent presence of an office in one of its member states. It will serve as a Clearing House and Hub to disseminate information, convene meetings and uplift the visibility of this unique organization.

Another important item addressed at Council is c) Secretariat's Budget for Financial Year 2019.

The Budget for 2019 approves expenditure of €16,035,346, with the contribution from ACP Member States amounting to 59.78% and that from the European Development Fund amounting to 40.22%. The expectation that 79 member states of the ACP will fulfill their financial responsibilities to provide a total assessed contribution of approx. €9mn is both reasonable and realistic. Why then do we continue to fail and if we reach 7mn that is a good year. It shows lip service to unity and solidarity stemming from an ingrained dependent mentality. We must first free ourselves from mental slavery, about which Bob Marley sang- if we are to have a global impact. So much ingrained in receiving donor funds from the EDF, the reciprocal, modest responsibility to meet our obligations appear of secondary or no importance – please engage with your Ministries of Finance.

Fourthly, on the Negotiations for a New ACP-EU Partnership Agreement Council was explicit in its endorsement that the new agreement should maintain the existing institutional architecture in accordance with the ACP Negotiating Mandate. Council also reaffirmed that all the negotiations will be conducted by the plenipotentiaries of the ACP Member States in conformity with the Georgetown Agreement and with support, as may be requested, of technical personnel from regional and continental organisations.

e) 9th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the ACP Group

The Council also decided that the 9th ACP Summit of Heads of State and Government shall be held in 2019, and welcomed and accepted the offer of the Republic of Uganda. However due to a major event on South-South Cooperation to be hosted late in 2019 Uganda is willing to host the Summit in 2020. The COA charged the Bureau with ascertaining from Uganda its willingness to host the Summit in 2019. If Uganda is not able, other Member States will be invited to express their interest.

f). Strong Dimension of the ACP-EU Parliamentary Assembly in the New Post-Cotonou Agreement

From the perspective of the Parliamentary Assembly, this decision of Council is the matter of most immediate significance and deserving of most serious consideration. When at the outset of these remarks I alluded to the important resolutions the Assembly adopted on such pertinent topics as populism and globalization it was with the conviction that enormous potential exists for a dynamic role of the PA in a future ACP willing to confront challenges of the 21st century.

The issue of maintaining and deepening the Parliamentary Assembly (Art.17) in a post-Cotonou Agreement must be seen in the context of a changing role of the State and the increasing demands of popular democracy by which transparency and accountability of all who exercise authority are now open to scrutiny. These changes recognise a need for societies to respect human rights as a means of ensuring that civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights can be enjoyed by all persons in every society.

Today we must ask ourselves what is to be done – together –by the executive and Legislature to remake the state as an embodiment of equality, trust and transparent rule of law. The impact of globalization and intense domination of finance capital

over all walks of life have given rise to growing inequality, widespread corruption and loss of confidence in elites in society. Cohesive and coherent societies need formal and informal mechanism for enlarged participation in decision making and setting of norms to guide the realization of the full potential of the dignity of each person –irrespective of race, religion, economic status or creed or none.

The Council of Ministers in adopting the Resolution on the Strong Dimension of the ACP-EU Parliamentary Assembly in the New Post-Cotonou Agreement only scratched the surface of this task.

Planning at different levels of society and in the legislature or local communities need now to craft ways of acting to implement resolutions that the Assembly has adopted. This Session of the Assembly can give adequate time to how the Secretariat will assist in the process of awareness building and crafting common actions...in a multi-stakeholder manner.

In this regard, Council mandated the Committee of Ambassadors to:

- Facilitate the interaction of the Parliamentary Working Group with the Central Negotiating Group; and
- Prepare the working modalities for the Parliamentary Monitoring Group in consultation with Chairs of the Technical Negotiating Teams and the Bureau of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly.

Steps to implement this Resolution are being taken, with the understanding this activity was not budgeted for in the Secretariat's 2019 Budget.

Mr. President, Hon. Members,

This year 2019, is a very decisive period for the ACP Group and its relation with European Union. We are also monitoring the effects BREXIT might impact to this renewed ACP-EU Partnership. It thus calls for the continued unity and solidarity of our Group to address all these challenges.

In conclusion, let me wish you fruitful deliberations at this 53rd Session of the ACP Parliamentary Assembly as well as the 37th Session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in this beautiful city of Bucharest. I am sure the insights, Honourable Members, you will provide at these Sessions, will greatly contribute to the process of the Post Cotonou Negotiations, the strengthening of the solidarity and unity of the ACP Group of States, and the pursuit of the 2030 inclusive sustainable development agenda in the service of the ACP family.

I thank you for your kind attention.

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