



STATEMENT

The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee, gathered in Porto (Portugal) on 16-17 March 2023 to discuss the future of the ACP-EU relations, adopted the following statement.

Regarding the new Partnership Agreement between the EU and the OACPS:

1. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee welcomes the negotiated text of the new Partnership Agreement between the EU and the OACPS. The new Agreement will modernise and strengthen the relations between the EU and ACP countries. It will reaffirm the EU and OACPS' joint determination to protect human rights, including the rights of women, migrants and persons with disability.
2. However, the Follow-up Committee took note that a political consensus is still to be found in the Council of the EU to allow for the signature of the Agreement and that there is no indication of when such consensus could be reached.
3. The Follow-Up Committee is deeply concerned about the delay in the final signature of the Agreement and its negative consequences, particularly in the economic, social, environmental and cooperation fields, as well as in the field of technical assistance and financial support to civil society organisations and social partners.
4. The Follow-up Committee calls on all EU countries to agree with the signature of the Agreement which was negotiated in line with the mandate given by the Council of the EU, in order to open up a partnership of equals between the EU and the OACPS for the benefit of the people concerned. In this context, the Follow-up Committee urgently calls on the Council of the EU to swiftly find a solution to the current deadlock so that the necessary conditions for signing the Agreement are met.

Regarding the role of civil society in the future Partnership Agreement:

5. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee welcomes the recognition of the importance of civil society and social partners' participation in the new Partnership Agreement between the EU and the OACPS.
6. While the negotiated text includes several references to civil society involvement, it does not specify how this participation should be organised. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee calls on the parties to set up formal institutional mechanisms to explicitly

encourage and support the engagement of civil society in the new agreement. These mechanisms shall involve civil society organisations and social partners with the aim of improving good governance which, as a result, serves the interests of communities and populations and contributes to economic growth, the well-being of citizens and the democratic resilience of societies.

7. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee points out that the institutional mechanisms for stakeholder engagement should be in line with the new structure of the Partnership Agreement in order for organised civil society to contribute meaningfully. According to the opinion of the Follow-up Committee, four institutional mechanisms should be set up, namely: one related to the common foundation that would work as an 'umbrella' for the other mechanisms; a second one, directed towards Africa and underpinned by the EU-Africa Protocol; a third one, targeting the Caribbean and built up on the EU-Caribbean Protocol; a fourth one, directed towards the Pacific and underpinned by the EU-Pacific Protocol.
8. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee considers it essential that:
 - the new mechanisms ensure a balanced representation of civil society, including representatives of different categories of CSOs, as well as social partners.
 - the representativeness of participating organisations should be taken into account as well as the possibility to involve regional networks.
 - the engagement processes rely on an institutional, autonomous and regular functioning, with distribution and formal registration of documents.
 - the engagement processes include feedback provision allowing stakeholders to know how their recommendations were taken into account by political bodies.
 - the mechanisms benefit from structural support and sufficient resources.
9. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee recalls the importance of involving non-state actors from all the parties in drawing up, implementing, monitoring and reviewing any agreement between the EU and ACP countries, at national or regional level. Trade partnerships through Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) or investment agreements should strive towards sustainable development, including enabling civil society to contribute to their monitoring. The Follow-up Committee also proposes to the European Commission that Consultative Committees be created in the EPAs. It considers the CARIFORUM Consultative Committee to be an excellent example of good practice, which should be disseminated and replicated.
10. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee calls on the EU and the OACPS to pay particular attention to the issue of capacity-building and funding of civil society organisations and social partners. It is essential to provide them with stronger financial support and capacity-building programmes given the economic and social development levels of ACP societies.

11. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee recalls the huge degree of informality (and its consequences) and the wide geographical dimension of the territories (combined with lack of infrastructure, notably in terms of mobility) create profound difficulties for the operation of civil society organisations and social partners. This technical assistance and financial support should be targeted both on the technical empowerment of organisations and the empowerment of their managers, including youth and women leaders, and on the implementation of activities, so that they can properly fulfil their role.
12. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee, with its more than 20-year experience as the only ACP-EU mechanism in place to involve civil society and social partners, stands ready to contribute to and support the establishment of these institutional mechanisms and their future networking and trusts the European Commission to provide the financial support needed to continue its activities despite the current challenges.

Regarding the EU Global Gateway:

13. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee welcomes the launch of the EU Global Gateway initiative that will help to tackle the most pressing global challenges, and the principles attached to it (democratic values, good governance and transparency, inclusive and equal partnerships, and green, clean and secure infrastructure, catalysing private sector investment). It also welcomes the announcement to dedicate half of the investment amounts (€150 billion until 2027) to the African continent, as well as the priority areas identified (digital sector, climate and energy, transport, health, education and research).
14. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee believes that for the Global Gateway projects to deliver lasting economic and social benefits for the local communities in the partner countries it is crucial to build a true partnership of equals. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee recalls the importance of involving civil society in the EU and in partner countries in the analysis of the priority needs for investments. A bottom-up approach is needed to build resilient local value-added production chains and strengthen the domestic markets in the partner countries by creating high quality jobs as well as sustainable know-how transfers.
15. Given the current food and energy crisis, the ACP-EU Follow-up Committee deems it essential to prioritise infrastructure that provides access to water, food and energy for the population. The entire ecosystem that makes it possible to achieve food security at global level must be given priority.
16. The governance bodies of the Global Gateway should involve representatives of civil society, including social partners and the private sector, as well as experts in the fields

of investment priorities in development cooperation, healthcare, environmental protection and education and training.

17. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee calls on the EU, its Member States and partner countries to ensure that the implementation of Global Gateway projects is carried out in full respect of fundamental human rights. The respect of human rights, social and environmental impact assessment and compliance with transparency and due diligence procedures must be found as *sine qua non* conditionalities for launching any Global Gateway project.

Regarding water issues:

18. On the eve of the World Water Day and of the UN Water Conference, the ACP-EU Follow-up Committee recalls that water is not a mere commodity but a public good vital to human life and dignity. Water is the most valuable resource of our planet and it is a crucial issue for achieving the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, many of them relying on progress on water-related goals.
19. Against this background, the European Economic and Social Committee has decided to choose water as a cross-cutting theme for the year 2023, highlighting the importance of water in all policy areas.
20. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee calls for more efforts to be made towards achieving access to clean water and sanitation for all. Water governance as well as the development of infrastructure are key to improve the situation. The EU Global Gateway should contribute to investment in water resources including new wells, water distribution, agricultural irrigation and waste water management. The Global Gateway should also fund joint research and development projects in areas subject to water stress, notably as a result of climate change.
21. The ACP-EU Follow-up Committee stresses the importance of water diplomacy, international cooperation and partnerships to address trans-border aquifer, river and lake cooperation issues. Transboundary cooperation and governance in the management of water resources, especially when they are used for hydro-power and irrigation, are crucial to avoid potential conflicts.