



28th MEETING OF ACP-EU ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INTEREST GROUPS

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, BRUSSELS, 15-16 MAY 2017

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) organised the 28th meeting of ACP-EU economic and social interest groups in Brussels, Belgium, in accordance with the mandate conferred upon the EESC by the Cotonou Agreement. The conference brought together delegates from the economic and social interest groups of most ACP countries, members of the EESC and representatives of the Economic and Social Councils of EU and ACP countries; representatives of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, the European Commission, the General Secretariat of the ACP Group of States and international institutions and socio-professional organisations as well as NGOs also attended.

Recommendations have been drawn up on five specific topics of mutual interest: a) trade relations between the EU and ACP countries; b) the new European Consensus on Development; c) prevention and reduction of food waste; d) industrialisation in ACP countries as a development driver; and e) a renewed partnership between EU and ACP countries in the post-Cotonou framework. The following declaration was adopted:

FINAL DECLARATION

The representatives of the ACP-EU economic and social interest groups:

On Trade Relations between the EU and ACP countries

1. take note of the signature in June 2016 of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the EU and six members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), but regret the lack of provisions for the participation of economic and social actors in the monitoring of this agreement;
2. recall that planning and implementation cannot happen without the involvement of non-state actors, and that failing to provide mechanisms for their involvement in monitoring the implementation of the EPAs would clearly contradict the Cotonou Agreement, namely Article 2, which defines non-state actors' participation as a fundamental principle of EU-ACP cooperation;
3. in this sense, commit themselves to taking steps, on their own initiative, to engage in a dialogue with economic and social actors from the SADC region, focusing on the follow-up of the agreement, and encourage the EU and SADC political authorities, including parliamentarians, to support, both politically and financially, such an endeavour;

4. welcome EPA provisions (such as those present in the case of the Cariforum, West Africa or the East African Community EPA recently ratified by Kenya and signed by Rwanda) establishing a consultative committee that includes socio-economic partners and civil society organisations, and draw attention to the need to involve this consultative committee throughout the whole policy process, from the impact assessment stage to the monitoring and evaluation of EPA implementation;
5. call on the signatories to provide these consultative committees with adequate, predictable and clearly budgeted financial resources and logistical means to ensure their regular work of making recommendations, both at domestic level for partner countries, and for joint meetings of regional and EU non-state actors;
6. reiterate the need to have a dedicated chapter on sustainable development in each EPA agreement aimed at striking a balance between the economic, social and environmental dimensions, in order to be able to make a successful contribution to promoting sustainable development by reducing poverty, increasing prosperity and respecting the planet's limitations with regards to climate and biodiversity protection;
7. insist that EPAs are an integral part of the mandate given by the Cotonou Agreement, and that they can play an important role in improving the business environment and bringing about political stability and economic and social development; point out, however, that they might not be sufficient to ensure development in ACP countries and integrate them into the global economy, and urge EU and ACP governments to set up schemes to limit the potential negative impact that the entry into force of EPAs could have on local populations in ACP countries;
8. recall that EPAs must contribute to individual wellbeing, not only through regional economic integration, but also through access to health, skills development and decent jobs;
9. commit themselves to working with the political authorities of African countries in order to create an enabling environment that will facilitate the free movement of people and goods and the development of intra-regional trade in Africa, with a view to forming a continental free trade area;
10. call for the EPA to facilitate the creation of regional food markets that can react effectively to global volatility shocks, and ask for EU technical and financial support to help local agricultural producers meet health standards for food exports to the EU, without neglecting the food and nutrition security of the population in ACP countries;
11. call on economic and social actors to step up their cross-border cooperation, inform and raise awareness about the EPAs among their members and the general public, and urge public authorities to help train these stakeholders on trade issues and to contribute to their capacity-building, not least by defining specific measures to support entrepreneurship among women and young people;

On the New European Consensus on Development

12. welcome the European Commission's proposal for a new European Consensus on Development, which brings this overarching EU development policy document fully in line with the 2030 Agenda, and expect that this new consensus will play a defining role in development cooperation at EU level;
13. applaud the explicit commitment of the Consensus to the overarching goal of eradicating poverty, a rights-based approach to development cooperation and gender equality, creating decent jobs and ensuring that no-one is left behind;
14. stress the need for social dialogue to be recognised as a tool for the implementation of the development agenda, in line with the ILO conventions;
15. take the view that development aid should not be used as leverage to impose cooperation on EU economic and foreign policy goals, state security or migration control;
16. emphasise the role of the economic and social actors (ESAs) in development policy, and encourage donors to develop better-adapted financial mechanisms to support a wider variety of non-state organisations, so as to ensure the access of smaller and more local organisations to funds;
17. call for ESAs to be transparently informed about public spending on development, as well as being meaningfully involved in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development programmes so as to ensure that these respond to the genuine needs of the widest possible range of people;

On the Prevention and Reduction of Food Loss and Waste

18. believe that, in a world affected by climate change where many countries are facing serious famine and resources are limited, the prevention and reduction of food loss and waste must be given a key place on the political agenda and suitable platforms, in order to exchange best practices and share resources;
19. recommend that particular attention be given to investment in storage infrastructures with regard to food production, processing, transport and commercialisation;
20. consider it essential to raise awareness among producers, restaurateurs and consumers about the prevention of food loss and waste, and to support initiatives aimed at providing training programmes for all links of the food chain (from producers to consumers) on how best to store food and keep the cold chain unbroken;
21. stress the importance of cooperation agreements between ACP and EU universities and vocational training institutions, and of continuing to carry out applied agricultural research in every link of the food chain, in order to improve and disseminate production and conservation techniques;

On the Industrialisation of ACP countries

22. welcome the UNIDO Report on Industrialization in Africa and Least Developed Countries, and hope that this report will support the industrialisation of these countries and provide a comprehensive framework to strengthen their inclusive growth and development potential through increased investments in infrastructure and industry, access to domestic and external finance, access to energy, adequate fiscal schemes, fighting against illicit financial flows, sharing and transfer of technologies, trade facilitation and capacity building;
23. acknowledge the important benefits that industrialisation and the production of intermediate goods can have on the diversification of the economy, the improvement of regional and global value chains, the deepening, broadening and updating of the knowledge base, the creation of decent jobs, not least among young people, and the building of equitable societies;
24. stress the need to promote inclusive and sustainable structural transformation and industrialisation in ACP countries through knowledge-sharing platforms for peer-to-peer learning, the sharing of best practices and multi-stakeholder discussions;
25. recall the private sector's need for an enabling environment in the industrialisation process; inclusion of the private sector in the policy process is crucial not only to improve productivity, but also to promote green and clean technologies and to increase energy and resource efficiency and effectiveness;
26. remind governments, employers' organisations and workers' organisations that social dialogue must be recognised as a tool not only to promote sound industrial relations, but also to implement the SDG agenda;
27. call for industrialisation to support agriculture and agribusiness development through stronger links between farmers, cooperatives and agro-industry, technology exchanges in areas such as irrigation systems, water-harvesting and agro-ecological technologies, training and skill upgrading for smallholders on sustainable production and resource management, and the development and harmonisation of technical and food standards;

On the Future of EU–ACP relations

28. welcome the EU communication "Towards a renewed partnership with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries", setting out different options for a more targeted and flexible partnership;
29. concerning future relations between the EU and Africa, recommend that the objectives of the African Union's Agenda 2063 be fully taken into account;
30. agree that this partnership should be built on specific, mutually agreed priorities, and hope that an agreement is reached before the expiry of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement;

31. call for a modern and effective "partnership of equals" that transcends a donor-recipient relationship, is based on a consistent and integrated EU external policy, and recognises the universality of challenges across EU and ACP countries such as income inequality, gender inequality, youth unemployment, climate change, natural disasters, economic crises and migration;
 32. stress the need for a framework that guarantees the involvement of socio-economic actors, whose specific task should be not only to monitor and assess the impact of the implementation of the future agreement on the sustainable development of the parties, but also to participate in its conception and inception. To undertake this role, these organisations should be provided with capacity building and adequate financial support.
-