

Déclaration de la ministre Ekaterina Zaharieva, représentant le Conseil de l'Union européenne à la 35ème session de l'Assemblée parlementaire paritaire ACP-UE

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Honourable Co-Presidents, Distinguished members of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly, Ladies and Gentlemen,



It is an honour and a great pleasure for me to be here today, to participate in this 35th session of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, and to represent the Council of the European Union at the request of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini.

You, the Members of this Joint Assembly represent the parliamentary dimension of our partnership, and you play a key role in ensuring the diversity, strength and continuity of the ACP-EU cooperation. I wish to convey the Council's sincere appreciation for your work, which is based on frank and constructive dialogue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to start with the topic that is the highest on our respective agendas, and what is certainly one of the key priorities of the Bulgarian Presidency. As you all know, we are at a crucial moment in the ACP-EU relations: [we are about to open / yesterday, we formally opened] negotiations on how to organise our future relations after the expiry of the Cotonou agreement in 2020. This is an opportunity to create a new political partnership that enables EU and ACP states to join forces in driving forward a common agenda in global and multilateral fora.

The EU and the ACP represent no less than 107 countries, a majority of the United Nations member states. Together, we play an important role in shaping the global agenda and international cooperation. Our commitment to multilateralism is becoming more and more important while other players are promoting unilateral and isolationist agendas. Effective and mutually beneficial multilateral action is the only way that will allow us to tackle jointly today's challenges of building peaceful and resilient states, ensuring respect of human rights, fundamental freedoms, and democratic p

inciples.

To achieve this, we need to modernise our partnership framework to take account of the changed global context. In order to be

effective, we need to deepen our partnerships at the regional level and reflect and integrate the regional dynamics in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. We are seeking a comprehensive political agreement, setting a modern agenda framed by the internationally agreed sustainable development agenda and going beyond a traditional development dimension. I am very happy to note that both sides have largely convergent views regarding these goals and the need to adapt the relations to the new reality.

A future agreement should seek to bring forward common and intersecting interests in different key areas.

Promoting our common interests also goes

hand in hand with the confirmation of the specific framework that has been built up with the ACP countries, mainly at bilateral level. The framework is based on common values and principles, but also on political dialogue including actors at different levels. All this provides for a well-structured and therefore more predictable relationship, also in relation to financing.

The ACP-EU partnership needs to have a parliamentary dimension, which can contribute to increasing dialogue and understanding between our peoples. It is crucial for the democratic legitimacy of the partnership. In line with the stronger focus on cooperation with each region, we believe it is at this level that an enhanced parliamentary dialogue becomes most relevant in the future.

Therefore, as we are about to start the formal negotiations in the spirit of a true partnership, I look forward to discussing the issue today with you, in order to hear your views, expectations and experiences.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the main successes in our cooperation on the global arena has been the UN climate change negotiations. In 2015, the EU and ACP played a key role in achieving the historic Paris Agreement on climate change. And together we have been driving for the implementation of the agreement: from Fiji chairing the COP23, to Poland as the chair of COP24, we have an invaluable opportunity to show our joint determination and steer this agenda further ahead. This was reflected in the joint declaration on climate change that EU and ACP states adopted in the Joint Ministerial Council in Lomé three weeks ago. It allows us to continue to show a unified force in Katowice in December, and maintain the issue of climate change high on the agenda of international discussions and reap results.

Climate action is an important strategic area of cooperation, in particular with our Caribbean and Pacific partners, as these regions are directly and severely suffering the consequences of climate change. We stand ready to further develop a closer dialogue and more coordinated action with Small Island Developing States and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) on climate change and other global challenges.

We are very well aware of specific vulnerabilities inherent to Small Island Developing States and low-laying coastal areas. The immense fragility related to the effects of climate change and recurrent natural disasters undermine the legitimate sustainable development efforts of your nations. But we also understand that along natural hazards, many Small Island Developing States have to cope with exogenous shocks of man-made character such as demonstrated by the global financial crisis. We do hear your concerns about graduation and the use of income status as a sole indicator of country's development needs. Bulgaria, my country is among the EU Member States that went through similar experiences during its transition period.

Another area closely related to climate action, in which we cooperate with the Pacific region in particular, is the sustainable management of global public goods such as fish stocks and oceans, and we also support the region to build up resilience.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In November last year, the European Union and the African Union held their very successful 5th Summit in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Under the theme "Investing in Youth for a Sustainable Future", the Summit demonstrated strong mutual determination to face today's challenges together and in the spirit of partnership, and therefore it was a unique opportunity to lift the relations between the EU and Africa to a higher strategic level.

Now our primary objective is to implement directions given by the Summit, and to make sure political commitments are followed by concrete actions. This includes peace and security (to which I will come back), and investing in skills and jobs. The recent meeting between the two Commissions also took concrete cooperation forward through launching the second phase of the Pan-African Programme of 2018-2020 of a total amount of EUR 400 million, setting up the Task Force Rural Africa and the joint EU-AU Task force on digital economy.

Another important area of follow-up to the Summit is migration and mobility, where both sides are committed to deepen cooperation, as clearly demonstrated by the work of the Trilateral EU-AU-UN Taskforce addressing the dire situation of African migrants in Libya. Our work in Libya continues, in a spirit of a genuine partnership, on improving conditions in detention centres and working towards alternatives to detention, on stabilisation of host communities and on voluntary returns by putting in place a major evacuation operation. Migration is also a global issue, and the principles of solidarity, shared responsibility, multilateralism and engagement guide us in paving the way towards the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The EU is very much supportive of the process for the Global Compact on Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees, and we are keen to work hand in hand with partners towards a successful outcome.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

More than three years ago, we established the EU emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The EUTF was designed as emergency

instrument to foster stability and address the root causes of migration in the North of Africa, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa regions.

Generally speaking, the EUTF is a success story, and its implementation is moving forward. By now, 147 programmes worth almost EUR 3.4 billion have been approved by the Operational Committee, and a total of 235 contracts have been signed with Implementing Partners. A total of 26 African countries are eligible for funding of the EUTF.

Another important new tool supporting our external action is the European External Investment Plan. This innovative instrument is expected to trigger public and private investment volumes of up to EUR 44 billion with an initial EU investment of EUR 4.1 billion, therefore bridging the huge gap between available development funding and the needs to realise the SDGs, particularly in Africa and the countries neighbouring Europe. The work on this is advancing well and the first call for proposals under the five investment windows has been successful.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me turn now to the security issues as we see them for our cooperation with each of the three ACP regions.

As regards Africa, I recall that at the AU-EU Summit, African and European leaders have also made a number of joint commitments in the area of peace and security.

Africa and the EU have common security threats. New threats to international and regional peace and security have an impact on the stability of our two continents, particularly the growing terrorist threats and trans-boundary criminal activities. Last month, High Representative Federica Mogherini and the Chairperson of the African Union, Moussa Faki signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Peace, Security, and Governance, taking our already excellent cooperation in this area to a deeper and more strategic level. This includes commitments to intensify cooperation in the fight against terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation. Through this framework document, we will strengthen cooperation between EU and AU bodies, such as EUROPOL and AFRIPOL. This will put our partnership on peace and security on a more solid and structured basis, taking into account the complexity of these threats and the need to address their root causes.

Beyond Africa, peace and security, including human security, will continue to be an area of enhanced EU cooperation and dialogue with Caribbean and Pacific countries, including within multilateral fora.

Turning now to the Pacific: the ACP countries of the region and the EU could and should together play a security role in the region, perhaps best through actions related to non-traditional security threats such as Illegal, Unregulated, and Unreported fishing, climate change, water security, food security, food sustainability and Humanitarian Action and Disaster Relief. Together we can promote global maritime security and international cooperation at sea. Working together in the International Maritime Organisation to reduce shipping emissions is a case in point.

In the Caribbean region, cooperation on crime and security is included in the priorities of the Joint Partnership Strategy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I mentioned already, modernising our partnership beyond 2020 offers us an opportunity to forge a stronger political relationship for each region. I believe the new Post-Cotonou framework will provide the basis for further developing the common priorities, and achieving an ever-closer relationship that will address key challenges of each region.

Our strong and enduring partnership with the African continent is a key priority for Europe also in the Post-Cotonou context, and as I described already, we are developing our partnership based on key common interests.

For the Pacific, the negotiations for the new framework will offer an opportunity for the EU and the Pacific countries to conduct a strategic assessment of our joint policy interests. Although the Pacific is the region that is geographically the furthest away from Europe, it hosts about half a million EU citizens living in the Overseas Countries and Territories, and we have common interests that put the Pacific firmly on our political map.

With regard to the Caribbean, many of the key challenges identified have already been incorporated in the Caribbean-EU Joint Partnership Strategy adopted in 2012. The five priority areas for joint action - regional integration and cooperation, support to Haiti, climate change and natural hazards, crime and security and cooperation in multilateral fora and on global issues – remain valid, and additional areas of cooperation have emerged in the past years. We aim for the new post-Cotonou agreement to provide us with a strong and solid framework to further develop our cooperation on common challenges and objectives. More resilient Caribbean countries, economies and societies are what we all aim for.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In order to face successfully all these challenges, we of course need to have a stable and corresponding financial means available to implement the priorities. As you will know, the Commission and the High Representative adopted a proposal on the future financial framework for the period 2021-2027 last week. The Council has been awaiting this eagerly and the Bulgarian Presidency has prepared the ground for the Council legislative work to start on this as soon as possible. The Council is looking forward to a fruitful cooperation with the European Parliament on this major file for the next months to come.

At this stage, allow me to conclude by expressing again my full appreciation of your very fruitful discussions on all the topics of your agenda. I am sure the results of your frank and open deliberations will be an important contribution to building our future partnership.

Thank you for your attention.

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