

Five points to help secure an ACP-EU deal for the poorest

By Pasqualina Napoletano

Published: March 13 2007 02:00 | Last updated: March 13 2007 02:00

From Pasqualina Napoletano MEP and others.

Sir, Economic partnership agreements will be under discussion when European Union development ministers meet with more than 20 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) ministers at an informal Development Council in Bonn today. The focus will be on how to push forward the EPA negotiations, which are struggling in most of the six regions. The Socialist Group in the European parliament would like to see the six ACP regions succeed in reaching pro-development economic partnership agreements with the EU, and urges ministers to take the following message to the meeting.

First, the negotiating stance of the European Commission must adhere to the spirit and principles of the Cotonou partnership agreement. In particular, no ACP country should find itself worse off as a result of these negotiations.

Second, the Commission has sought to widen the EPA agenda to cover negotiations on services, intellectual property and the "Singapore issues", such as competition policy and investment, and is pressing for EU interests in these areas. All ACP countries must have a clear right to choose whether to extend the negotiations beyond trade in goods: the additional issues must be taken off the table if ACP countries wish.

Third, the Commission must ensure that if negotiations cannot be completed before the end of 2007, arrangements will be made to avoid uncertainty for our ACP partners. This requires a guarantee that, regardless of the state of EPA negotiations at that time, ACP terms and conditions of access to the EU market will remain unchanged. If the negotiations need more time, time should be taken.

Fourth, the €2bn promised for aid-for-trade includes money that has been reallocated and €1bn in pledges by member states yet to be paid. However much such funds are needed, these cash promises threaten to create a situation in which ACP regions are given unrealistic aid offers in return for compliance with what could be suboptimal EPAs. Aid and trade are intrinsically linked, but they should not be played off against one other.

Finally, despite the differing progress made by the six regions in negotiations, it is crucial that the ACP stand united, both as a group of regions and within each individual region, in order to strengthen the ACP negotiating hand.

Reaffirming these five points will help set the EPAs negotiations back on track and bring the ACP and EU closer to a deal that will help the poorest in the ACP countries prosper.

Pasqualina Napoletano, Vice-President of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament

Harlem Désir, Vice-President of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament

Glenys Kinnock, Co-President of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly

Josep Borrell, President of the Development Committee

Max van den Berg, Vice-President of the Development Committee and Socialist Co-ordinator for Development