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Subject : Council Conclusions on the EU-Caribbean Partnership

At its meeting on 10/11 April 2006, the General Affairs and External Relations Council, adopted the Council Conclusions on the EU-Caribbean Partnership in Annex.

Council Conclusions on the EU-Caribbean Partnership

1. The Council recalls the strong historic ties and longstanding partnership between Europe and the Caribbean countries* and reaffirms its commitment to existing EU agreements with the Caribbean, notably the revised Cotonou Agreement, the EU-LAC process and associated EU financial instruments.
2. The Council reaffirms the ambition of a mutually beneficial partnership between the European Union and the Caribbean region based on equality and ownership and recalls its ambition of working with the Caribbean to tackle the challenges it faces to transforming them into opportunities with the primary aim of poverty eradication in its multidimensional aspects, including achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and supporting the countries that aim to join the ranks of the developed states by 2020 in the context of sustainable development.
3. The Council recalls the unique identity of the Caribbean region, its prominent role within the ACP group of states, the important role of CARICOM/CARIFORUM and the close links with some Member States through the French DOMs and the UK and the Netherlands OCTs.
4. The Council acknowledges the challenges faced by the Caribbean and notably the unique vulnerability of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), and therefore the need for a tailor-made policy approach.
5. The Council considers that the importance of the EU partnership with the Caribbean region also needs to be seen in the context of the wider strategic partnership between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean (EU-LAC process). In this regard the Council notes that the EU-LAC Summit of May 2006 in Vienna is an opportunity to enhance the evolving relationship between the Caribbean Region and the EU.

* The Council recalls its Common Position of 1996 regarding Cuba (OJ L 322 of 12.12.1996)

6. The Council emphasises that the EU Caribbean Partnership will be based on shared principles of democracy, good governance, rule of law, universal human rights and gender equality. Within the EU Caribbean Partnership we work together in the fight against poverty, and global threats to peace, security and stability. The Council emphasises, that the EU Caribbean Partnership will be based on 3 dimensions:

- shaping a political partnership based on in-depth political dialogue, universal values and principles and Caribbean ownership, including democracy, human rights, good governance, support to the civil society and peace & security,
- addressing the socio-economic and environmental vulnerabilities, and supporting regional integration;
- supporting social cohesion and combating poverty, inequality, HIV/AIDS and drugs through coherent development assistance.

7. The Council welcomes the Commission Communication on “An EU-Caribbean partnership for growth, stability and development” and agrees it will focus attention on the areas set out below:

EU-Caribbean Political Partnership

8. Strengthening the political dialogue and shared principles with Caribbean political and civil society leaders and with the CARICOM/CARIFORUM, including DOMs and OCTs, to share views on issues of common concern and to support each other in the multilateral framework working towards an effective multilateralism with the UN at its centre, and to jointly address issues which require close political cooperation such as migration, and problems like the fight against illegal trafficking of human beings, international crime and terrorism.

9. Redoubling our efforts to stem regional illegal trafficking, in particular drug trafficking, the illicit flow of weapons, including small arms, money laundering, and providing support for border management controls. In this respect, the Council welcomes the coordination efforts made by the Dublin group and advocates synergy with the Members States' actions in the fight against drug trafficking. The Council also highlights the efforts of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF) in preventing and controlling money laundering and in combating the financing of terrorism.

10. Supporting the regional political dialogue and working with the CARICOM/CARIFORUM to provide specific assistance to fragile states, to support post conflict reconstruction in accordance with the United Nations, and to encourage further initiatives such as electoral monitoring and special missions for the resolution of political issues. In this regard, the Council welcomes the decision of CARICOM to re-establish a comprehensive cooperation with Haiti.

11. Recognising that good governance is based on credible, efficient institutions, the EU will support good governance and the strengthening of key institutions such as parliaments, the judicial and public financial management systems, and promote transparency, accountability and the effective exchange of information between authorities in order to fight corruption.

12. Promotion and protection of human rights, including the effective implementation of International Human Rights Conventions, as well as fundamental freedoms and respect for the rule of law and support to the growth of pluralistic participatory democracy in the Caribbean region. In this respect, the positive role of civil society, especially NGOs, is important for the effective implementation of this partnership.

Social cohesion and combating poverty

13. The primary objectives of Community cooperation in the Caribbean for the period 2007-2013 shall be the eradication of poverty, inequity and social imbalances. Better social cohesion needs to be achieved by reducing unemployment, income generation and building up social security networks as well as addressing both the positive and negative impacts of migration. Support needs to be directed to the development of human resources particularly through secondary and higher education in accordance with the specific needs of each country. Furthermore, special attention should be paid to health care issues including HIV/AIDS and the problem of drugs. The Council also recalls the important role of culture.
14. Our development cooperation should be based on the Caribbean countries' own needs, strategies, priorities and assets. Therefore the Council invites the Commission, in association with the Member States, to cooperate with Caribbean countries in the elaboration of coherent national and regional development strategies and expresses its support to gradually align all EU aid to these strategies.
15. The Council reconfirms that all efforts should be in line with the European Consensus on Development defining the objectives and principles for the Community's development cooperation and highlighting the importance of policy coherence for development, and be implemented in accordance with the commitments in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, aimed at improved donor coordination and harmonisation and alignment to recipient country systems.

Socio-economic and environmental challenges

16. Recognising the challenges an increasingly interdependent and globalised world poses for the particularly vulnerable, small, open economies of the Caribbean, the Council reiterates the importance of supporting the Caribbean countries in their efforts at structural reforms, tackling unsustainable debts and economic diversification. The Council acknowledges the specific needs due to the erosion of preferences and reforms of the banana and sugar markets and recalls the EU Action Plan on accompanying measures for Sugar Protocol countries affected by the reform of the EU sugar regime¹.
17. The Council recalls the potential of regional trade and economic integration in the context of CARICOM, including the important relations with DOMs and OCTs. EU-Caribbean co-operation at the national level should support and reflect the dynamic towards greater regional integration. The promotion of interconnectivity will support this process.
18. The Council welcomes the launch of the Single Market which is the first component of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) with a first group of members. The support of the CSME and the successful conclusion of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) as instruments for development will be privileged areas of cooperation, as they are crucial to foster smooth and gradual integration of the region in the global economy and for a sustainable economic development. In this respect the Council reaffirms its commitment to timely conclusion of the EPA negotiations to allow their entry into force by 1st January 2008.
19. To utilize the potential of sustainable economic development in the region, support to the private sector, especially sustainable tourism is seen as being vital. Furthermore, cooperation for the elaboration of sustainable energy policies and diversification of energy sources need to be strengthened. In this regard, the Council emphasises the potential of renewable energies in environmental and also economic terms, as well as of regional cooperation in the sharing technologies and experiences.

¹ SEC/2005/61 of 17 January 2005.

20. The Council notes the manifold environmental challenges to the Caribbean countries, especially as one of the most disaster-prone areas in the world. Therefore, particular attention should be paid to natural disasters and environmental challenges that are vital, including land use, land and natural resources management, deforestation, climate change, waste management and the maritime environment.
21. In this regard, the Council welcomes the activities of UNEP in these fields and underlines its commitment to supporting the region in building up institutional capacities for environmental management, the sustainable management of natural resources and in increasing the region's capacity in Natural Disaster Management at all levels. Emphasis should be laid on the integration into development programming of risk reduction, preparedness, early warning, amongst others through improved weather forecast radar systems, prevention and mitigation, as well as on post-disaster management related programming. Specifically rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction require strengthening through new and faster disbursing arrangements.

Follow-up

22. The Council invites all parties to ensure the effective follow-up of these conclusions. The Council will build on existing mechanisms to monitor and review progress on the implementation, in consultation with Caribbean Partners. The Commission is invited to report on progress within the field of community competence. The contribution of EU Heads of Missions in the area is welcomed.
