



COMMISSION EUROPÉENNE
DG DEVELOPPEMENT

Afrique occidentale et centrale, Caraïbes et PTOM
Relations avec les pays et la région des Caraïbes et les PTOM

REPORT STAKEHOLDERS' CONFERENCE ON FUTURE EU-OCT RELATIONS

Brussels, 3 October 2008

1. OBJECTIVE OF THE CONFERENCE AND KEY MESSAGES PASSED:

The stakeholders' conference was organised in the context of the public consultation launched by the Green Paper on future relations between the EU and the OCTs that was adopted on 25 June 2008. The Green Paper poses a number of questions in particular on the rationale and nature of the OCT-EU association, but it was clear that its underlying objective was to kick-start a discussion on how to lift the OCTs out of the traditional development cooperation approach that is applied to them today. The event gathered around over 100 interested parties, from the OCTs' authorities, Member States, the EU's institutions and bodies and civil society at large, both in the OCTs and in the EU. The Commission underlined, that within the limits of the EC Treaty, there was room for manoeuvre to modernise relations between the EU and the OCTs. It was however not a simple task, and it would take time and effort to accomplish it. The Commission therefore call for all interested parties to read the Green paper and submit their thoughts on the future EU-OCT relations before October 17.

Main message passed in the morning session:

A common denominator in the morning session was that the aim of the Green Paper was to develop a partnership that could do more, not less, for the EU-OCT relations. Since, the entry into force of the Treaty of Rome of 1957, the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs), related to a Member State, have been associated with the EU. The aim of this association was to promote their economic and social development and to establish close economic relations between the OCTs and the EU as a whole. But since 1957, most of the original OCTs have become independent countries, mostly ACP States, hardly comparable to the 21 OCTs associated with the EU today. Despite this historical evolution, the present logic applied to the cooperation between the EU and the OCTs is still inspired by similar principles applied to the cooperation between the EU and the ACP States. And this was the main problem facing the OCT-EU relations of today, because such a parallelism did not correspond to the reality in the field when looking at the specific social, economic and environmental challenges faced by the OCTs, neither the close historical, institutional and political ties between the OCTs and the EU.

A new logic based on the vulnerability and competitiveness of the OCTs, the integration of the OCTs in their respective region and the OCTs as being pieces of Europe spread all around the

globe, representing European values, would be more appropriate. In addition to this, it was underlined, that more flexibility in the cooperation between the EU and the OCTs was necessary, both as a consequence of the OCTs being part of the European family, their limited resources and micro economies etc. as well as the diversity within the group of OCTs in their specific development needs and development challenges. Furthermore, the importance of creating a more balanced partnership, where obligations and rights were more streamlined was highlighted. It was stressed by the Commission, that the underlying rationale behind the Green Paper was to strengthen the close links between the OCTs and the EU, and

Differentiation was recognised as a central theme, but it was stressed that a global concept covering all OCTs was sought for as the best solution in order to strike the right - and persuasive - balance between the political reality in the European Council, where only 4 out of 27 member states had profound interest in the OCTs, and the need for individual features for each OCT. Differentiation was also touched upon in relation to the EU-OCT trade regime and the choice to be made by each OCT and three different scenarios for the future were pointed out. OCTs could continue to i) orient their trade towards the EU and their quota free and duty free access on goods and services and adhere to regional integration when relevant, or ii) orient their trade towards regional trade cooperation and the European Partnership Agreements (EPAs) or iii) orient their trade towards the global market and the international trade flows. Either way, OCTs needed to enhance their competitiveness, attract foreign investments and trade more and better. Due to the diversity and also the similarities of the OCTs economies as well as the evolution of the EPAs, differentiation concerning regional protocols on rules of origin should be reflected upon. Furthermore, the situation of the most isolated OCTs should be taken into consideration as they are not in the scope of EPAs.

A general observation on the OCTs as representatives of a global environmental heritage and rich biodiversity was pointed out as a possible focal point for future cooperation and policy framework. Regional integration was also pointed out and the creation of a regional platform to coordinate the different funds available for ACPs, OCTs and ORs cooperation as well as connecting the OCTs to existing EU strategies and the enhancement of the actual participation of OCTs in international organisations when relevant.

2. THE PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Main messages passed in the afternoon session and the two panel discussions:

The first panel related to the purpose of the OCT-EU relationship. It was stressed that the new relationship should be defined into a global framework which would enable flexibility, in order to take into account the individual context in each OCT, in full respect of each partner. The partners should make sure that the new system would be realistic and effective. It was pointed out that the objectives of the EC Treaty vis-à-vis the OCTs were larger than providing development aid. Thus, the criteria to be eligible to EU funds should not be based anymore on the poverty level but rather on a vulnerability index. Such a change in the nature of the partnership raised the question of defining rights and responsibilities for each party. Among the rights, human rights and democracy were held up as examples of common EU values shared by the OCTs. It was also underlined that a strategy of communication should be developed in order to promote the concept of the European family to which the OCTs belong.

The second panel discussed the competitiveness, vulnerability, mutual interests and diversity of the EU-OCT relations. It was argued, that the OCTs could not be competitive while at the same time not open their economies to the regional or even global markets. It was important

to define sectors of growth and develop sectoral expertise, bearing in mind, that not all sectors required economies of scale to be competitive. Political will to engage in regional trade was imperative, but this also required regional incitements and access or influence on the regional trade negotiations such as the EPAs in order for the OCTs to better positioning themselves in their regions. It was underlined, that the OCTs should be seen as an opportunity rather than as a problem. On the other hand, the OCTs should be more proactive in attracting interest and funds from the EU and develop their competitiveness and promote their own clusters of regional excellence.

The need to strengthen capacity building in the OCTs was raised and flagged as one of the barriers for attracting funds from the EU horizontal programmes as well as disseminating appropriate and relevant information coming from the EU and among OCTs. The importance of enhancing the mutual interests and values of the OCTs as bridgeheads to the EU but also the value of OCTs for the EU in their respective regions was discussed. The possibility of narrowing the approach between the OCTs and the ORs was raised, but the answer to this has to be considered within the limits of the Treaty. However, the EU's policy approach towards the ORs was important to examine, in particular regarding the challenges the OCTs and ORs are facing, but it was also relevant to notice, that the instruments used for the ORs and allocation of structural funds are mainly based on GDP pr. capita and thus not directly incorporating a tool that could take into account the diversity and vulnerability.

3. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, Mr Stefano Manservisi noted that the OCTs had to take up a double challenge: being part of the European family and being located far from the European continent. He insisted on the fact that the future relationship between the EU and the OCTs should not be confined within a rigid framework nor suffer from added constraints. The new system should allow to take fully account of the OCTs' diversity inside a global framework. The aim of the reflexion is to do more and better for OCTs. He specified that the Commission did not preconceived ideas about the future relationship and that it is why it was decided to launch a public consultation on the subject. Therefore, he invited all the stakeholders to make a written contribution to the Green Paper.