

ACP-EU Joint Assembly resolution on experiences from the European regional integration process (20 March 2008)

Caption: On 20 March 2008 in Ljubljana, the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly adopts a resolution on experiences from the European regional integration process relevant to ACP countries (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific).

Source: ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly. Resolution on experiences from the European regional integration process relevant to ACP countries, ACP-EU/100.203/08/fin. [s.l.]: European Parliament, 2008.

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/acp/60_15/pdf/re_integration_en.pdf.

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http://www.cvce.eu/obj/acp_eu_joint_assembly_resolution_on_experiences_from_the_european_regional_integration_process_20_march_2008-en-a45e037b-bd3f-46a4-9574-2167d7febcca.html

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ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly resolution 1 on experiences from the European regional integration process relevant to ACP countries

ACP-EU/100.203/08/fin.

The ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly,

- meeting in Ljubljana (Slovenia) from 17 to 20 March 2008,
- having regard to Article 17(1) of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000 and revised in Luxembourg on 25 June 2005, and in particular Articles 1, 11 and 28 to 30 thereof,
- having regard to the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular Chapter VIII on regional arrangements,
- having regard to the joint statement of 20 December 2003 by the Council and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the Commission on European Union Development Policy: 'The European Consensus', and in particular Articles 72 to 74 thereof,
- having regard to the Declaration on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome, adopted in Berlin on 25 March 2007,
- having regard to the Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed on 13 December 2007,
- having regard to the Kigali Declaration on Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), adopted by the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Kigali (Rwanda) from 19 to 22 November 2007,
- having regard to the resolution on the role of regional integration in the promotion of peace and security, adopted by the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Vienna (Austria) from 19 to 22 June 2006,
- having regard to the ACP Committee of Ambassadors' report on the future of the ACP Group as adopted by the ACP Council of Ministers at its 86th session held from 10 to 14 December 2007 in Brussels, Belgium,
- having regard to the ACP Secretariat's project to develop indicators to measure and monitor regional integration processes in the six ACP regions,
- having regard to the report by the Committee on Political Affairs (ACP-EU/100.203/08/fin.),

A. whereas regional integration has become a dominant feature in the ACP world, with all ACP countries being members of at least one regional organisation and around twenty regional integration arrangements including ACP countries, ²

B. whereas the joint exercise of sovereignty in regional integration frameworks may lead to an enhanced capacity of governments to protect the interests of their citizens, rather than a loss of sovereignty,

C. whereas, in connection with regional integration, it must also be ensured that no loss of transparency and democratic accountability in decision-making takes place and that increased crime through the abolition of border controls and negative social repercussions through hasty liberalisation and wage competition are prevented,

D. whereas major progress has been made in recent years in the field of regional economic and political integration among ACP countries, and regional organisations play an increasingly prominent role in conflict prevention and peace-keeping; whereas the fight against poverty and for sustainable development has been, and remains, a major objective for regional integration in most ACP countries,

E. whereas the strong political will of all partners to lay down and carry through common objectives and projects is the basis for successful integration,

F. whereas several regional organisations including ACP countries have established a customs union or are planning to do so in the coming years, and monetary unions are already in effect in some regional groupings; whereas some regional organisations have established solidarity mechanisms for reducing disparities or for offsetting polarisation effects from trade liberalisation within the region,

G. whereas many ACP regional organisations have indirectly elected parliamentary institutions, which may develop democratic oversight functions and legislative powers in parallel with the deepening of integration,

H. whereas regional initiatives like NEPAD or the Pacific Plan may further enhance regional cooperation with a view to meeting development and good governance challenges,

I. whereas overlapping membership in different organisations with similar functional objectives is a serious problem in Africa, as recognised by the African Union at its 7th Summit in Banjul in July 2006,

J. whereas the lack of cross-border infrastructure, e.g. transport routes, makes regional integration more difficult,

K. whereas some ACP subregions and states have entered into interim EPA arrangements in a way that may split ACP regional economic groupings and could undermine their integration process,

L. whereas all integration processes must be transparent to the population concerned and require democratic oversight over all political levels through the involvement of parliamentary bodies and civil society,

M. whereas EPAs must have a strong development content to ensure that the ACP states become trade-competitive and to foster the smooth and gradual integration of ACP countries into the world economy,

N. whereas no model of regional integration can be laid down since any integration strategy has to be adapted to particular interests and circumstances, but nonetheless general features can be identified which impede or foster integration processes; whereas the study of Europe's experiences with regard to the ACP regional integration processes can therefore be instructive, and can also deliver new insights for the EU itself,

O. whereas European integration dynamics have partly stemmed from the existence of strong joint institutions, in particular the European Commission, which has considerable autonomy and the right of initiative, and from the existence of a European Parliament, directly elected by citizens, with ever increasing competences,

P. whereas, in the European case, solidarity between countries and societies has been one of the key factors for successful integration, as both richer and poorer countries have gained from internal development and cohesion policies,

Q. whereas Europe's integration process benefited, particularly in its early phases, from territorial continuity and proximity, an advantage neither the island states in the Caribbean and Pacific regions nor the African continent with its large land mass share,

R. whereas economic development and reconstruction in Europe after the war also benefited greatly from external aid, in particular the US-funded European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan),

S. whereas the European economic integration process has not been based on liberalisation alone, but has been complemented by regulatory and budgetary policies for supporting and protecting certain sectors, as well as cooperation for the promotion of sustainable development,

T. whereas compliance with common principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law has been essential for successful integration in Europe, and the EU has recognised their central role by adopting a mechanism for suspending membership rights in the event of serious violations of these principles,

U. whereas a similar level of development and prosperity among Member States has proven not to be a precondition for regional integration in Europe and its experience suggests that regional organisations can be an effective framework for diminishing economic and social disparities; noting that nonetheless significant income inequalities remain, both between and within EU Member States,

V. whereas the European Communities/European Union has also experienced major crises and difficult phases because of diverging interests among Member States and as a result of reservations among citizens inter alia as regards the speed and depth of regional integration; whereas those crises could always be overcome because of the readiness of all parties to accept compromises and the political will to uphold the overall objective of European integration,

W. whereas integration in Europe has not prevented separatist movements and tendencies to disintegrate, but has helped to prevent or diminish violent conflicts,

X. whereas the increasing number of EU Member States has led to more flexible integration mechanisms, with some Member States entering into enhanced cooperation structures; stressing that these pioneering agreements have always been non-exclusive, remain open to all other members and do not touch on the core areas of integration,

Reconciliation and conflict prevention

1. Underlines the fact that stabilisation of peace and institutionalisation of peaceful means of resolving conflicts constitute one of the major achievements of the European integration process, resulting from the lessons learned in Europe from devastating wars;
2. Welcomes the fact that regional and subregional ACP organisations play an increasingly important role in conflict management, peace-keeping and peace-building, and are important partners of the United Nations in promoting international peace and security; welcomes the creation of regional early warning and early response mechanisms, e.g. by ECOWAS and IGAD, and calls for further strengthening of such mechanisms; calls on the international community to support capacity-building for regional organisations active in the field of peace and security, in particular as regards conflict prevention, management and resolution;
3. Believes that regional organisations can play an important role in tackling the root causes of conflicts within and between Member States; believes that the promotion and protection of human rights at regional level and the joint fight against impunity represent a major step towards preventing conflict and permitting reconciliation between conflicting parties;
4. Calls - realising that education is an important factor for tolerance and understanding - for the setting up of regional commissions to reach agreement on school and university curricula resulting in a breaking down of concepts of the enemy, in mutual respect and in the elimination of discrimination, meetings between teaching staff, pupils and students being important fora for bringing people in conflict-ridden regions closer together as neighbours;
5. Notes that, as a rule, women and children are affected most by war, conflicts, violence, hunger and expulsions and that women must therefore be appropriately involved in all development and decision-taking processes;

6. Calls on the ACP countries to step up regional actions for joint exploration, regulation and control of natural resources, in order to promote reconciliation and interdependence;

Institutions and integration agendas in ACP regions

7. Underlines the fact that strong joint institutions, representing regional rather than national interests, are needed to push the integration process forward and ensure compliance with jointly agreed standards; calls on the ACP regional organisations to ensure the necessary autonomy, proper funding and selection of qualified staff for joint institutions; invites the Commission to support capacity building for regional institutions, both with know-how and the necessary funding;

8. Stresses the need for regional institutions to mitigate power differences among Member States;

9. Calls on the regional organisations to define priorities, realistic common objectives and clear benchmarks to allow joint institutions, governments, parliaments and civil society to measure progress and success;

10. Invites the ACP governments to agree to the joint exercise of sovereignty in selected sectors where long-term joint interests exist and cross-border problems need to be solved;

11. Underlines the fact that regional integration processes must be built on tolerance and mutual respect for national and cultural differences;

12. Encourages the ACP Secretariat to expedite the development of the proposed regional integration monitoring system and calls on the European Commission to provide financial and technical support required for implementation of this system for the benefit of ACP regional integration organisations;

Interregional cooperation

13. Invites the African Union to support and steer a process of rationalisation of the regional organisation framework in Africa where competing integration agendas exist; notes that the European example shows that overlapping membership is not a major obstacle where close coordination and cooperation are ensured between regional organisations or functional differentiation is agreed upon;

14. Calls on the ACP Group to consider, with the EU's support, transforming the existing periodic meetings between the ACP Secretariat and the heads of ACP regional organisations into an institutionalised Coordination Forum in order to facilitate dialogue, cooperation and coordination; calls on the ACP regional organisations to coordinate their positions in international negotiations to enhance their positions and influence;

15. Welcomes the fact that the organisation of meetings of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly at regional or subregional level pursuant to Article 17(3) of the Cotonou Agreement will enter the implementation phase and looks forward to the outcomes of the first regional meeting of the JPA in Windhoek (Namibia);

Democracy and good governance

16. Underlines the fact that a culture of freedom, openness and inclusion within the Member States of regional organisations is a precondition for successful regional integration; calls on all regional organisations in the ACP region which have not done so to define clear political criteria for membership, based on human rights, democracy, the rule of law and good governance, and to develop constructive mechanisms for helping member countries to comply with these criteria; invites the ACP countries to consider effective mechanisms for suspending membership rights in the event of serious violations of these principles;

17. Calls on the EU to support regional initiatives for promoting democracy, human rights and good

governance, such as the African Peer Review Mechanism and regional election observation mechanisms, and to bring its governance initiatives into line with the existing regional mechanisms;

18. Calls on the EU and the ACP Group to step up their support for the parliamentary structures of regional organisations; stresses that direct election of representatives of Member States in regional parliamentary assemblies contributes greatly to the legitimacy of the integration process and is the prerequisite for securing it on a lasting basis;

19. Believes that civil society organisations - in particular their transnational activities - play a major role for pushing regional integration processes forward and ensuring democratic accountability of regional institutions;

20. Calls on the EU and the ACP countries to ensure that the parliamentary organs of the regional organisations are consulted on the EDF Regional Strategy Papers and their implementation;

Economics and trade

21. Calls on the EU and ACP countries to ensure that the EPAs are consistent with and contribute to the strengthening of ACP regional integration initiatives; notes that many ACP countries fear that the current trend in the EPA negotiations and the adoption of agreements by subregions may undermine regional integration efforts; insists that any agreements adopted by subregions must be open to other members of their respective regional organisation;

22. Stresses that trade barriers between ACP regions should be reduced in order to enhance South-South trade, and calls for harmonisation policies to ensure a level playing field for trans-border commercial activities;

23. Calls on the ACP regional organisations to establish or further develop regional cohesion mechanisms and solidarity funds for helping weaker Member States to bear adjustment costs from trade liberalisation and to ensure proper financing; considers that the EU should support these mechanisms with both expertise and funding; points to the EU experience that strong and independent anti-fraud mechanisms must be developed to limit the risk of misuse of structural and solidarity funds;

24. Calls on the EU and ACP countries to enhance targeted investment in regional infrastructure networks to permit cross-border economic activities;

Functional cooperation

25. Underlines the fact that trade liberalisation alone is not sufficient to engender regional understanding and integration dynamics, and that regional programmes and projects in selected priority sectors must accompany economic cooperation;

26. Welcomes the many functional cooperation efforts in the ACP region; calls on ACP countries to intensify regional and subregional cooperation in areas such as health and education, food security, infrastructure, environment and migration and to ensure adequate financing; points out that the EU budget for joint policies is composed both of external trade revenues and direct contributions from Member States' budgets;

27. Underlines the fact that the EDF Regional Strategy Papers not only must focus on trade liberalisation and integration into the world market, but also need to put more emphasis on regional institution-building, on capacity-building and human resource development in regional integration, on functional cooperation, and on support for redistributive and regulatory policy-making within the regions;

28. Recommends the extension of exchange programmes for schools, universities and research institutions in the ACP regions to enhance transnational understanding and the forging of a transnational civil society;

29. Instructs its Co-Presidents to forward this resolution to the ACP-EU Council of Ministers, the European Commission, the EU Council Presidency and the ACP regional organisations.

1 Adopted by the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly on 20 March 2008 in Ljubljana (Slovenia).

2 Among the regional integration organisations incorporating ACP countries are: African Union (AU), Association of Caribbean States (ACS), Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC), Community of Sahelo-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), Southern African Development Community (SADC), Southern African Customs Union (SACU), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), East African Community (EAC), Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS/CEEAC), Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL), Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Caribbean Forum of ACP States (CARIFORUM), Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Indian Ocean Commission (COI) and Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG).