

THE CHALLENGES OF GLOBAL GOVERNANCE AND THE EMERGING WORLD ORDER: WHAT ROLE FOR THE ACP-EU PARTNERSHIP?

ACP Day Brussels 6th June

Geert Laporte, Deputy Director ECDPM

Excellencies', Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased and honoured that ECDPM, as a non-partisan and independent think and do tank has been invited to the discussions and celebrations on this 39th ACP Day. It is a clear sign of the longstanding trust that exists between the ACP Group and ECDPM but also of the openness of the ACP. Among good friends, it is always good to be frank but also constructive and this is what I will try to be in the next 20 minutes. I will not put the key focus of my presentation on the **desirability** of a renewed EU-ACP partnership in global governance but rather on the **feasibility** of ACP-EU cooperation in global governance.

A lot of soul-searching has taken place within the ACP Group over the years about the past, current and future (ir)relevance and value added, or lack thereof of ACP-EU cooperation and of the ACP Group itself. The members of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) and of the Ambassadorial Working Group on Future Perspectives of the ACP are looking into future orientations for the ACP group and for the longstanding ACP-EU relationship.

The debate of today focuses particularly on HOW ACP-EU cooperation could enrich the expanding global governance agenda.

First of all I will formulate a set of key questions related to the central theme of our discussions. Secondly I will try to do a reality check of some major official declarations and statements by the ACP, including the [Sipopo declaration of ACP Heads of State](#) (December 2012) with a view to look a bit deeper than formally expressed ambitions and align them to current realities. Thirdly, I will look at the potential for “*complementary comparative advantages*” (an expression that I borrow from AUC Chairperson Dlamini Zuma who used this at the most recent EU-Africa summit) and I will try to explore some routes where ACP-EU and the ACP Group could pursue common interests in global governance.

1. Key questions

- (1) On which global issues did ACP-EU collective action have a major impact? Which global issues covered in the ACP-EU partnership have moved to other fora over time and why? Has there been a real convergence of interest between the ACP and the EU that allowed both parties to turn global processes to their advantage?
- (2) To what extent is the ACP regarded as the best grouping to serve the global interests of its members, also beyond Brussels? What is the specific comparative advantage and added value of the ACP as a Group on global themes that cannot be covered by other institutions?
- (3) To what extent does the ACP-EU partnership play an important role in furthering the EU's ambitions and strategic interests in the world?

While history is extremely important to learn lessons from and to avoid making the same mistakes, we are all aware in this meeting room that the overall rationale for the ACP-EU partnership and the international context in which it operates has evolved dramatically over the last two decades through changes in each of the ACP regions, in Europe and across the world.

It seems therefore critically important to discuss today's topic (i.e. working together on global issues) in the light of the CURRENT political realities and a realistic assessment of the capacity of the ACP Group to engage with global issues and deliver real impact.

2. The reality check: from rhetoric to empirical evidence

There is no shortage of strong political declarations and statements in favour of ACP-EU relations and of the ACP Group itself. Much reference is made to the revised Georgetown Agreement of 2003 and the Sipopo ACP Heads of State Declaration of December 2012. In recent months we also have had the various declarations coming out of the EPG meetings in the various parts of the ACP.

Wordings such as "*shared interests*" "*solidarity*" and "*unique partnership*" re-appear regularly in all these statements but at some stage these risk

becoming hollow slogans, not supported by evidence of concrete action. We should dare to ask the question of how solid the foundations of the ACP-EU Partnership are in the global arena beyond these nice and ambitious intentions.

At least on paper, there can be no doubt that the Cotonou Agreement remains the most sophisticated partnership framework covering political, economic and development cooperation between any regions of the world. But is Cotonou, based on the financial over-dependency of one party over the other, really an example of a “unique partnership” in actual practice? Does it have the sufficient commonality of interests along with political and economic clout to meaningfully address global governance challenges? Can this so-called “unique partnership” generate truly effective “collective action” to be heard and to exercise influence?

I would like to illustrate the declining importance of the ACP-EU cooperation with 3 concrete examples:

(1) A **first example** focuses on the **political roles** of the ACP-EU Partnership. In the past few years these roles have been taken over by other international organisations and groupings. Global public goods such as security, peace, migration, democracy, and human rights are no longer primarily addressed through the ACP-EU framework. These global issues have moved elsewhere. Thus African peace and security issues (conflict-prevention, peace support operations, maritime security, transnational organised crime and terrorism....) are dealt with by the African Union (AU Peace and Security Council, Africa Peace and Security Architecture), by the Regional Economic Communities and by the Africa-EU Partnership (JAES, summits). The most recent EU-Africa summit in Brussels (2-3 April 2014) has spent a lot of time and energy on issues relating to peace and security. Also issues relating to democracy and good governance and human rights are more systematically dealt with in the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and the EU-AU dialogue mechanisms. Other delicate political issues such as migration and development are also dealt with in the EU-Africa dialogue (HoS Joint Declaration on Migration and Mobility)

It seems quite obvious that these issues are covered in a continental dialogue, treating Africa as a whole, including the important North-African region. The Maghreb is a region in political turmoil and is the place from where refugees from different parts of Africa and Syria transit to the

European Union. European and African continental bodies now lead the political dialogue on the delicate issues of migration and mobility.

(2) A **second example** relates to the **economic and trade related roles** that are gradually being taken over by RECs that negotiate the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with the EU. Also relatively “new” areas such as economic transformation, the transparent management of natural resources, transport, energy and the engagement of the private sector in development are increasingly dealt with at the continental (AU) and regional (RECs) levels.

My **third example** relates to the evolving landscape of actors involved in global challenges and indeed ACP-EU cooperation on many other issues as well. While there is still regular interaction among and between ACP and EU at official and parliamentary, evidence suggests the political traction and influence of these ACP-EU structures is waning. There are only a few European Ministers that show up at the meeting of ACP-EU Council of Ministers. The questions can be raised whether an ACP-EU summit of heads of state - if it is still to be organised - would be able to mobilise comparable numbers of Heads of State as the recent EU-Africa summit, which had more than 60 heads of state in attendance.

Questions can also be raised as to whether ACP-EU relations are still able to effectively mobilise the non-state actors. Around the year 2000 business, civil society and local government leaders spontaneously came together and established ACP and Civil Society Business Forums and an ACP Local Government Platform in which interaction took place among representatives of all 3 ACP regions and the 6 sub regions. There is not much left of these initiatives and what we notice now is the shift that has gradually taken place from these ACP configurations to the organisation of business and civil society at continental platforms.

We consulted quite a few actors in different ACP countries and regions and their reaction to ACP-EU cooperation were sometimes eye opening. It is hard to convince a businessman or woman in the Pacific of the strong common interests between the Pacific and sub-Saharan Africa. He/she will definitively tell you that there is more common interest and incentives for business growth in nearby Asia, regardless of almost 40 years of common ACP history.

These examples suggest that the ACP and the ACP-EU partnership has lost traction, political clout and bargaining power. There is a major overlap of

mandates between the ACP and other groupings and in terms of visibility the ACP Group seems to be losing the battle on the international stage. All this is compounded by ACP heads of state and ACP member states who seem in practice little concerned with using the ACP group as a vehicle to defend their global interests or even fund their own ACP bodies.

And yet, despite this rather limited concrete political support, we see at the same time, Heads of State, Ambassadors and Parliamentarians of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) fiercely defending the ACP-EU cooperation and the ACP Group and even pleading to add new tasks to this fragile building - amongst others by incorporating complex global challenges. Bad characters would suggest that this is mainly for the financial manna that is still considerable. These same bad characters also would suggest that the ACP would not survive if European Development Fund (EDF) resources would disappear.

These are the facts, evolutions, and contradictions that may merit more open debate and analysis. They seem to be a precondition ensuring that the valuable assets from the ACP-EU partnership are not lost but also to base any future ambitions on coping with global challenges on a solid footing.

While the historical “package of common interests” between the two groups seems no longer strong enough to generate collective action in key policy areas, there might be new windows of opportunities to re-align common interests.

For instance, in Europe we still see a strong interest in the component parts of the ACP, particularly in Africa. Most African countries are booming and there is a major interest in the EU and the BRICS in building stronger relations with them. The Caribbean and Pacific regions should continue to be of interest to Europe, and both smaller ACP regions hold major potential as blue economies and diplomatic capital. But whether the EU believes that the ACP will make a difference *as a group* in the strive towards becoming a stronger global player remains to be seen.

3. Where could ACP and ACP-EU still play a useful role beyond 2020?

On the basis of the few examples listed above - should the ACP wind up its business by 2020? This should not necessarily be the case. It would be in

the interest of the Group to be VERY REALISTIC about its future, about what it could do and what it better not do as a group, with the EU and other partners. It is great to explore the potential opportunities of ACP-BRIC cooperation and for increased South-South cooperation. All ACP countries can benefit from cooperation with other partners, in addition to and beyond the EU. But then, is it realistic to assume that China, for example, would be interested in upholding a special relationship with an ACP group that is perceived as a left-over of the colonial past of some EU member states?

A realistic future orientation for the ACP in the new global arena, based on solid political economy analysis, is absolutely needed and ECDPM is willing to invest in close cooperation between ACP and EU actors.

Let me conclude with a few practical recommendations:

1. First, focus the debate and don't spend too much time analysing past successes of the ACP. It is always good to remember where the group came from and have a historic perspective as long as this does not give rise to conservatism or myopia. To paraphrase Bob Dylan "The Times They Are A-Changin'" and so the ACP and the nature of the ACP-EU cooperation should also fundamentally change. Strategic vision is needed BUT wishful thinking and unrealistic ambitions should be avoided.

2. Second, build a stronger internal coherence to the group. Numbers are important but they are not enough, particularly if there is no internal coherence among a large group or if the group is unable to have impact. Now the ACP is composed of middle-income countries, Less Developed Countries (LDCs) and vulnerable and fragile states. This can debilitate the scope for meaningful collective action. A group of LDCs and vulnerable small economies could have coherence but this would imply that other stronger countries would be asked to leave the group, which seems unlikely.

3. Third, do less but better. The best recipe for irrelevance is trying to do everything at the same time and duplicating the work of other institutions. Substantially reduce the mandate to improve on delivery.

In a highly competitive world the ACP should have a clear brand that is recognisable to all its members. Areas where a common interest could be found among all 80 ACP countries could possibly include the Blue Economy, which is undergoing spectacular growth. It is the 2nd global economic sector after the food and agricultural sector valued at some 1,500 billion Euros a year. Related areas such as renewable energy, bio-diversity and fisheries

could be areas of common interests among ACP countries and regions. The ACP as a knowledge network could focus on the exchange of experiences among countries and subregions in different sectors such as tourism, regional integration, trade negotiations and non-tariff barriers to trade and could generate common interests, building on the recognised expertise of an established ACP-EU institution such as the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA)

4. Fourth, mobilise your own financial means. Moving beyond a donor-recipient relationship of dependency with the EU would give a clear signal of traction and belief that the ACP is able to offer something of substance in the global arena.

5. Last but not least, make sure the ACP is alive and kicking outside Brussels and among different stakeholders from the bottom-up, such as civil society or the private sector who would take an interest in working with the ACP in global governance.

I hope that my key message this afternoon is clear. I did not speak out on the **desirability** of a renewed EU-ACP partnership in global governance but much more on the **feasibility and preconditions needed to make the dreams of the ACP come true.**

Let me conclude with the very wise words of Ms Patricia Frances, a member of the ACP Eminent Persons Group:

“Be aspirational but ensure that the goals are realistic!”

Thank you and congratulations on ACP Day!



Geert Laporte is Deputy Director at the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM)

The views expressed here are those of the speaker, and not necessarily those of ECDPM

Go to ecdpm.org/subscribe for weekly updates on EU-ACP relations