

Thursday 1 February 2007

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Strategy for a strengthened partnership with the Pacific Islands

European Parliament resolution on EU relations with the Pacific Islands — A strategy for a strengthened partnership (2006/2204(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee of 29 May 2006 entitled 'EU Relations with the Pacific Islands — A strategy for a strengthened partnership' (COM(2006)0248),
 - having regard to the Council conclusions on an EU-Strategy for the Pacific adopted by the General Affairs Council on 17 July 2006,
 - having regard to the Partnership Agreement between the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) and the European Community signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000 (the 'Cotonou Agreement')⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to Article 89(1) of the Cotonou Agreement, which provides that 'specific provisions and measures shall be established to support island ACP States in their efforts to overcome the natural and geographical difficulties and other obstacles hampering their development so as to enable them to step up their respective rates of development',
 - having regard to the report by the UN Millennium Project: 'Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals',
 - having regard to the Joint statement 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'⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness endorsed on 2 March 2005 by the Ministers of developed and developing countries responsible for promoting development and by the Heads of multilateral and bilateral development institutions,
 - having regard to its resolution of 23 March 2006 on the development impact of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs)⁽³⁾,
 - having regard to rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Development (A6-0325/2006),
- A. Having regard to the historical involvement of European countries in the Pacific region,
- B. Whereas the majority of Pacific Island countries have only relatively recently become independent,
- C. Whereas the EU has a significant presence in the region by virtue of the Overseas Territories of New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Wallis and Futuna (France) and the Pitcairn Islands (UK),
- D. Whereas the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement (NFIP) is campaigning for both the halting of all nuclear tests in the region and respect for the dignity of its indigenous peoples,
- E. Whereas the EU is a substantial donor to the region, having granted in total, since the accession of the first Pacific Island countries to the first Lomé Convention in 1975, aid exceeding EUR 1,8 billion,

⁽¹⁾ Partnership Agreement between the members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States of the other part, signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000 (OJ L 317, 15.12.2000, p. 3).

⁽²⁾ OJ C 46, 24.2.2006, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 292 E, 1.12.2006, p. 121.

Thursday 1 February 2007

- F. Having regard to the adoption of the Pacific Plan by the 16 member countries of the Pacific Islands Forum, which aims to strengthen regional cooperation and integration, focusing on economic growth, sustainable development, good governance and security through regionalism, and offers the opportunity to further EU-Pacific relations,
- G. Whereas the Pacific Island countries face significant problems arising from high population growth, an insufficient supply of skilled labour, low economic growth, ethnic tensions, socio-economic disparities, governance failures and the impact of global economic trends, giving cause for concern as to further increases in poverty and instability in the region,
- H. Whereas the Pacific region possesses substantial natural resources, yet has very complicated land tenure systems which may in some cases be obstacles to development,
- I. Whereas the Pacific ACP states are fully fledged democracies, except for Tonga, which is a constitutional monarchy,
1. Welcomes the initiative of the Commission to develop the first EU strategy for the Pacific after 30 years of cooperation, following on from the signature of the first Lomé Convention in 1975 and the Cotonou Agreement in June 2000;
 2. Emphasises that, as a major donor to the region, the EU has an opportunity to create a strategy that will support the island countries of the Pacific in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
 3. Emphasises the heterogeneity of the region and therefore calls for flexibility in the Commission strategy to ensure that development assistance is channelled according to national and regional priorities, thereby achieving maximum benefit for both the more developed and the less developed countries of the Pacific;
 4. Endorses the Commission's view that enhanced political dialogue is needed with the Pacific Islands Forum, whose leaders have adopted a new agreement establishing the Forum as an intergovernmental organisation under international law; at the same time, emphasises that any increase in dialogue at regional level must also address the needs of the region's poorest countries;
 5. Stresses that any strategy must adequately address the development needs of all the Pacific Island countries, especially the poorest, in order to support their efforts to achieve the MDGs;
 6. Recognises that the Pacific region is endowed with an abundance of natural resources, especially fisheries, minerals and forests and that in many countries of the region, agriculture and tourism are the mainstays of the economy; stresses, therefore, that ecologically and economically sustainable development must be at the heart of any strategy relating to these key sectors; stresses that the exploitation of natural resources must contribute to income generation for the entire population of the Pacific Island countries and support poverty alleviation in particular;
 7. Recognises the importance of EU financial assistance to encourage the development of local fisheries in the region, which are a major source of revenue for Pacific Island countries, and especially states with lower gross national incomes, such as Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia and Tuvalu;
 8. Stresses the importance of good management in the fisheries sector so as to discourage over-fishing and destructive fishing techniques and to prevent environmental hazards from destroying marine life, particularly in the case of tuna fisheries, in which the Pacific has one of the richest fishing grounds in the world;
 9. Applauds the regional approach that the Pacific Island countries have taken to managing tuna fisheries in their region, and encourages the EU to negotiate any future tuna agreements with the entire region, rather than with individual States;
 10. Recognises the importance of imposing licence fees for the long-range fishing of tuna in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of countries in the region, as these are a major source of revenue for Pacific Island countries, especially the lower income countries such as Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Tuvalu; is concerned, however, about the low number of catches actually processed within the EEZs and the consequent loss of earnings;

Thursday 1 February 2007

11. Welcomes the Commission's proposal to increase efforts to promote sustainable fisheries management by supporting the monitoring, control and surveillance systems of the region, and to strengthen the capacity to fight illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing;
12. Calls on the EU and the Pacific Island countries to support the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) international action plan for combating illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing; considers that this must be a priority when fisheries agreements are concluded with third countries;
13. Calls on the EU and the Pacific Island countries to collaborate closely in order to eliminate IUU fishing in the region, making every effort to comply with their obligations as port and/or flag states;
14. Recommends that more developed Pacific Island countries continue to develop local processing operations, thereby creating more employment, and that they explore the possibility of European Investment Bank soft loan lending to small and medium-sized enterprises owned by Pacific Island interests so as to increase processing capacity and to bring increased revenues to the region; welcomes the evaluation of fish resources and fishing capacities undertaken by the Pacific Forum Fisheries Agency, and calls, where there is scope for increases in capacity, for local fleets to be expanded;
15. Calls on the Commission to conduct an ecological and social impact assessment of illegal and large scale industrial logging activities and related trade in the Pacific countries;
16. Calls on the Commission to focus on the rapid implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity and related agreements, especially the programme of work on protected areas, which is an effective instrument for preventing further destruction or degradation of forest and marine ecosystems in the Pacific region;
17. Calls on the Commission to increase support for ecologically and socially responsible forest management and for the implementation of reliable systems which can provide credible guarantees to European consumers that wood products sold on the EU market are made out of timber from sustainable sources; stresses the importance of shifting the paradigm from excessive large scale industrial logging to eco-forestry projects to generate income for local communities and support poverty alleviation;
18. Endorses the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean signed in September 2000 with the aim of achieving the long-term sustainable harvest of tuna fisheries, as a sign of cooperation between Pacific Island countries and distant-water fishing nations;
19. Emphasises that substantially greater investment is needed in the management of mineral deposits, a vital source of foreign exchange to both more developed and less developed Pacific Island countries, in order to prevent the premature depletion of resources, as was witnessed in Nauru during 50 years of continuous phosphate mining;
20. Calls on the Commission to ensure, in collaboration with the Pacific Island countries, that full disclosure of all taxes and duties paid by oil, mining and gas companies in the region to the various governments is given in their published annual financial reports;
21. Draws attention to the economic importance that tourism has for the region, given that one of the main assets of the Pacific islands is their idyllic setting; stresses that any encouragement of tourism in the region must go hand in hand with increased local ownership of tourist services, to ensure the sustainability of the tourist sector and to maximise the benefits to the local economy;
22. Calls for all nuclear tests to be banned, and regards it as essential that the entire region be made nuclear-free and that the damage to the environment, ecosystems and public health caused by nuclear test be repaired;
23. Recognises the benefits that the setting up of low-cost airlines servicing the region has brought to the Pacific Island economies, and calls for impediments to 'open skies' policies to be eliminated while air transport is developed rationally so as to minimise emissions and other environmental impacts of increased air travel;

Thursday 1 February 2007

24. Stresses that, in the majority of cases, only the richer countries with more developed infrastructure and more frequent air connections attract significant numbers of tourists each year; emphasises that, in these cases, development assistance must continue to be used to finance infrastructure and to encourage sustainable tourism;
25. Calls on the Commission to place the emphasis, in projects implemented under the 10th European Development Fund, on support for the education and technical training systems of the States in the region whose development is being hampered by shortcomings in this area;
26. Recognises the importance of agriculture as a primary source of income, including export earnings, and as a means of subsistence and of employment in the region;
27. Emphasises that globalisation, together with the loss of preferential access to the EU market, has already had a profound economic impact on the region, especially on Fiji;
28. Stresses that in less developed countries which survive mainly on subsistence agriculture, a gradual transition should be made from the production of staple crops to the production of cash crops so as to provide more agricultural products for export, and that the viability of setting up food processing and packaging services should be examined;
29. Emphasises that skilled labour is an important prerequisite for economic growth in Pacific Island countries and therefore calls on the Commission to support national policy frameworks aimed at providing vocational training facilities and other training to support local industries in Pacific Island countries;
30. Emphasises the importance of intra-regional trade and trade between the Pacific Region and the EU, including under regional trading arrangements such as the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreements (PICTA), the proposed Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER), and the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), as a means of increasing economic prosperity in the region;
31. Bearing in mind the costs of the management and administration of such trading agreements, including the implementation of the Pacific Strategy by the Pacific Island countries and regional organisations such as the Pacific Forum Secretariat, calls on the Commission to provide appropriate financial and technical assistance for the timely and effective implementation of such agreements;
32. Endorses the Commission's assessment of the significance of key regional actors such as Australia, New Zealand, the USA and Japan, given that they are important donors to and trading partners with the Pacific region, and that bilateral relations between the EU and these countries will improve through increased involvement in the Pacific;
33. Endorses the Commission's assessment that closer coordination of aid delivery with other partners in the region such as Australia and New Zealand would increase the effectiveness of aid delivery;
34. Emphasises that the Pacific region is one of geo-political significance, and expresses concern that inter-state rivalry can foster low quality, politically-linked aid, to the detriment of longer-term development, resource sustainability and good governance;
35. Calls on the Commission to recognise that land tenure systems, especially in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and New Caledonia (a French Overseas Territory) are very complicated and are real obstacles to development; therefore urges the Commission to support the national land reform initiatives undertaken by those countries and that territory;
36. Calls on the Commission to initiate policies to tackle the rapid spread of HIV/Aids in the region, which is becoming increasingly prevalent in countries such as Papua New Guinea;
37. Draws attention to the four countries affected by malaria in the region, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Timor-Leste; urges the Commission to develop programmes to tackle this problem, ensuring that there is adequate protection from malaria, for example, through the supply to affected countries of anti-malarial bed nets;

Thursday 1 February 2007

38. Stresses that, in order to ensure the efficient delivery of aid, the promotion of good governance throughout the Pacific region is vital in order to prevent corruption, one of the key obstacles to meeting the MDGs, as well as to achieve sustainable development; emphasises that national institutions and transparent and robust procedures must be put in place so that development aid reaches the intended recipients in the region;
39. Shares the Commission's views that political instability and conflict can be devastating for the region's economic development, especially in terms of lost revenues from tourism and the destruction of economic infrastructure;
40. Emphasises that the strengthened partnership between the EU and the Pacific Island countries must be reflected in increased support for the parliaments of the states concerned with a view to strengthening their capabilities and their role in fostering regional political stability;
41. Draws attention to the vulnerability of Pacific Island countries to natural disasters and the devastating effects they have on their economies; therefore endorses the Commission's call for the establishment of a regional disaster preparedness programme;
42. Endorses the Commission's view that the Pacific Island countries have a major stake in tackling climate change, given the potential effect on the region of rising sea levels; takes note of the Pacific Islands Framework for Action on Climate Change 2006-2015 as a regional mechanism to support responses to climate change and calls for an increase in dialogue between the EU and the Pacific region with a view to tackling climate change and related concerns;
43. Draws attention to the situation in Timor-Leste which was torn by violence in May and June 2006 and expresses the hope that the Commission, working closely with the international community, will assist Timor-Leste's leaders in addressing the underlying problems contributing to the crisis, including the need for political stability, poverty alleviation, social development and reconciliation among various sections of society;
44. Welcomes the Council conclusions on an EU-Strategy for the Pacific of 17 July 2006 and their emphasis on poverty eradication, achievement of the MDGs, human resources development and health issues; deplores, however, that the Council has adopted its conclusions without waiting for Parliament to express its position;
45. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and parliaments of the EU Member States and the governments and parliaments of the Pacific Island countries.

P6_TA(2007)0023

The European private company statute

European Parliament resolution with recommendations to the Commission on the European private company statute (2006/2013(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 192, second paragraph, of the EC Treaty,
- having regard to Rules 39 and 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament of 21 May 2003 entitled 'Modernising Company Law and Enhancing Corporate Governance in the European Union — A Plan to Move Forward' (COM(2003)0284),