



OCTAssociation

ASSOCIATION OF THE OVERSEAS COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

PAYS ET TERRITOIRES D'OUTRE-MER

LANDEN EN GEBIEDEN OVERZEE

OVERSØISKE LANDE OG TERRITORIERS

2017 OCTA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Brussels, Belgium, 22 February 2018

POLITICAL DECLARATION

PREAMBLE

The Representatives of the Overseas Countries and Territories met in Brussels, Belgium, on 22nd February 2018 on the occasion of the 2017 OCTA Ministerial Conference. They discussed the OCT-EU partnership post 2020. They also reviewed ongoing programmes such as the Territorial Strategies for Innovation (TSI) programme and 11th EDF Thematic and Regional activities, the OCTA secretariat and institutional strengthening.

POLITICAL RESOLUTIONS

The OCTs call upon the European Commission (Commission):

OCT-EU relations

1. *Dialogue and partnership*

To continue to engage with OCTs to ensure that the progress in implementing the Common Conclusions of the 16th OCT-EU Forum of 23rd February 2018 is reviewed at each trilateral consultation.

To acknowledge the paramount importance of the Forum and consequently the imperative to safeguard adequate and equal representation of OCTs by setting at four the number sponsored delegates per OCT for future OCT-EU Forums and in addition allowing per OCT the number of non-sponsored delegates that best ensures the political representation in line with the characteristics of individual territories.

To agree, no later than at the trilateral consultation in April 2018, on a calendar applicable to tripartite and partnership working party (PWP) meetings to be held until the next Forum in 2019 which will take place in French Polynesia, in close cooperation with the Executive Committee of OCTA.

To consolidate the specific position of the OCTs within the European Union (EU) and maintain the Unit in charge of the OCTs at the same level in the organigram of DG DEVCO.

To reinforce the necessary preferential and differentiated treatment of the management of OCTs' files, and to considerably improve the quality and frequency of the exchanges between DG DEVCO and other relevant Directorates General and the European External Action Service (EEAS) on the interests and concerns of the OCTs in the implementation of the provisions of the Overseas Association Decision (OAD); Promoting in this respect the systematic mainstreaming of the OCT dimension in the Commission's proposals.

To associate OCTs with relevant fora, such as the Outermost Regions (ORs) forum organized by DG REGIO, and invite them to actively contribute to topics of common concern, such as regional cooperation

11th European Development Fund (EDF) programming

2. *11th EDF regional Programming*

To welcome the joint efforts of the partners in the finalization of the regional programming of the EDF 11 with the signing of the 3 Single Programming Documents.

3. *Envelope B of the 11th EDF and recent natural disaster*

To continue the actions undertaken in response to the devastation and damage caused to Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Montserrat, St Barthelemy, St Maarten and Turks and Caicos Islands by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in September 2017 and acknowledge our deep appreciation of the immediate mobilization of humanitarian assistance.

To take note of the appreciation of the affected OCTs for the front mobilization, where applicable, of funds from their territorial allocations under 11th EDF to support hurricane relief efforts.

To continue to support the rebuilding of the affected OCTs through the swift mobilization of funds from the reserve B envelope under the 11th EDF.

To acknowledge the devastation caused to communities in Greenland by a mountain slide and subsequent tsunami in June 2017, which has necessitated relocation of communities to the town of Uummannaq, and where support on many levels is needed in order to accommodate the relocated communities.

4. *11th EDF thematic Programming*

To recognize the specific challenges of the programming of the thematic envelope, to respect the sectors of concentration agreed among OCTs, and to take the necessary steps to facilitate the finalization of the programming phase with the operational units, in particular to clarify the implementation modalities, in order to allow an implementation by the end of 2018.

To continue to facilitate appropriate consultations and exchanges among OCTs, African Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), and Outermost Regions (ORs), where appropriate, to ensure synergies in the regional and thematic programmes and the development of joint projects.

5. *11th EDF territorial Programming*

To recognize the joint efforts of the partners in the finalization of the 11th EDF territorial envelopes programming phase, as the swift implementation of this financial instrument would allow the OCTs to achieve concrete results and unlock their potential.

Regional integration and Trade

6. *Regional cooperation and integration*

To support OCTs' efforts and actions to enhance regional cooperation and integration (where geographically and politically possible), in accordance with the objectives of the OAD, effectively recognizing our close links with ACP States, with third countries such as Australia, Canada, Iceland, New Zealand and numerous others and promoting our role in regional integration.

In adherence with the OAD and our belonging to the same EU family, to take systematically into account OCTs interests and role, in Partnership Agreements negotiated by the EU with OCT's neighbours, in particular under their regional components.

To urgently follow up on the study produced by OCTA on Regional cooperation, and the initiatives at EU level in order to support the OCTs in this dynamic, in particular through the organization of a common workshop with the ORs, ACP and the relevant partners.

7. *Trade negotiations*

To ensure that the concerns and interests of the OCTs are taken into due consideration as relevant in impact assessments.

To inform and consult (OAD, art 13) the OCTs on current and upcoming trade negotiations which may impact upon them and to consult them and to take into account and accommodate OCTs interest when trade agreements are negotiated by the EU.

To engage in a dialogue with the OCTs regarding the current negotiations on United-Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU, and if possible, explore if the UKOTs can be included in any beneficial agreements made between the EU and the UK post Brexit. Further, to promote dialogue between the OCTs, EU and the United Kingdom to explore how OCTs can continue to benefit from preferential trade arrangements post Brexit.

To continue the dialogue on the cooperation on proactive measures regarding the eroding preferential status because of the EU signing Free Trade Agreements (FTA), by exploring the interest among the OCTs of including the OCTs into existing EU free trade agreements including EPAs.

Thematic support to OCTs

8. *Climate Change*

To reinforce the dialogue with the Member States and explore the possibility of a Fund for climate change adaptation and mitigation, similar to initiatives at global level such as the Global Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility, specifically for OCTs.

To inform and engage OCTs on relevant developments and actions related to the Union's Climate Change Strategy and the implementation of the Paris Agreement. To endeavour to take into account the priorities of the OCTs in climate change negotiations and support the dialogue with Member States ahead of the UNFCCC COP 24 in Poland 3 to 14 December, 2018.

To engage with the OCTs in the finalisation of the modalities of the Paris Climate Change Agreement at the UNFCCC COP24.

9. Sustainable energy

To continue to support research into innovative energy applications for the OCTs and explore the opportunities to create a group composed of representatives from the European Commission, the private sector and OCTA to explore concrete opportunities for OCTs to be used as testing and early roll-out test grounds of infrastructures and management systems for demonstration project and capacity buildings in the OCTs;

To acknowledge our appreciation for the recent efforts of the European Commission for further supporting the decarbonisation of the EU Islands and our strong interest for the ‘Clean Energy for EU Islands’ initiative.

To support involvement of OCTs in the Clean Energy for EU Islands initiative and their participation in knowledge sharing activities.

To promote OCT policy frameworks for investments (OCT-PFI) to improve investment conditions and increase bankable project proposals and acknowledge the need for creating a support fund to improve the bankability of Sustainable Energy projects, or make use of existing fund such as the European Fund for Strategic Investment (EFSI) and other existing Funds;

10. Biodiversity

International agreements

To work together with partners from outermost regions and ACP States on promoting common objectives in international agreements.

BEST 2.0

To recognise the achievements of the BEST initiative and to acknowledge our appreciation of efforts to secure additional funding from DCI to enable the continuation of the calls for proposals for BEST grants, taking into account the high number of good quality projects which could not receive funding.

To pursue its effort to ensure the success of this project, with a particular attention to the quality of communication with all partners.

To ensure that the Operational Manual is reviewed by the Project Steering Committee to fully take into account the special conditions of the OCTs prior to the launch for further calls for proposals.

Sustainable partnership

Building on the experience of the BEST initiative and BEST 2.0, to provide specific support for the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of the ecosystems services, including for climate adaptation in the Overseas Countries and Territories in the new EU programmes through the creation and development of a sustainable mechanism.

To support the creation of a formal BEST group as a means for active dialogue to accompany this transition post 2020, which for the avoidance of doubt, shall include the OCTs acting through the auspices of OCTA.

11. Oceans

To underline that with vast ocean spaces, OCTs represent an important share of the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of the Member States to which they are linked, and more than two thirds of the EU EEZ of 25 million KM², making it the world's largest. At the same time OCTs are in the front line of the effects and threats facing the oceans.

On this basis, continue the dialogue on oceans commenced in the margins of the 16th OCT-EU Forum and to support the OCT's as they explore the development of an oceans agenda, in particular by including it in the discussions on post 2020.

To work with the Member States to which the OCTs are linked to explore the concrete actions to be implemented for advancing the ocean governance agenda in the respective geographical areas of the OCTs.

To encourage cooperation between the OCTs, ORs and third countries on international ocean governance.

To facilitate OCTs' access to the mechanisms presented by the European Commission at the "Our Ocean" conference in Malta in October 2017 and to which they are eligible:

- The Platform for Regional Ocean Governance to be developed by 2020,
- The Copernicus satellite monitoring program and the creation of monitoring indicators on the health of the oceans,
- Marine and maritime research funding: although the OCTs are eligible for Horizon 2020, their access is in fact very difficult.

To explore the potential eligibility of the OCTs to the other mechanisms for the preservation of oceans presented by the Commission at the "Our Ocean" conference.

12. Research, Education and Innovation

To prioritize dialogue between EU (DG Research and DG Education and Culture) and OCTs to enable research institutions in EU Member States and the OCTs to facilitate access to each other's resources thereby making possible knowledge transfer and capacity building within the OCTs.

13. Financial Services

EU development of list on non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes

To acknowledge that none of the OCTs have been included in the annex I of the Council conclusions of 5 December 2017 on the EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes.

To continue to engage in policy dialogue and work with OCTs throughout the exercise of updating the EU list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes via both Financial Services Partnership Working Parties in the first quarter of 2018 and bilateral engagement with individual OCTs per their request or as requested by the Code of Conduct Group on Business and Taxation.

International tax cooperation workshop

To support the organisation by OCTA of an international tax cooperation workshop in the second quarter of 2018 designed to provide technical support to the OCTs on the implementation of international tax cooperation standards set by the OECD including the Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters and Common Reporting Standard and Base Erosion and Profit Shifting Inclusive Framework.

Communication

To support the improvement of communication between OCTs, DG DEVCO and DG TAXUD, taking into account all the information gathered in the frame of the EDF programming and implementation process such as PEFA and annual reports.

EU Support to OCTA

14. Financial support for OCTA

To acknowledge our appreciation for the ad hoc support to OCTA in 2017 funded under the TCF.

To support to OCTA in the implementation of the operating grant, in accordance with the Common Conclusions of the 15th OCT-EU Forum (point 12) and the decision made pursuant thereto.

15. Role of OCTA

To take into account that the support granted by the European Commission to OCTA via the 11th EDF thematic envelope does not release the EU institutions and agencies and/or relevant Member States (France, Denmark, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom) from their responsibilities to the OCTs individually under the provisions of the Treaty and the OAD.

Union programmes and EFSI

To enlarge or replicate for the OCTs in the short term and under the same modalities the support and measures related to the EFSI and Union programs (COSME, ERASMUS+, Horizon 2020 in particular) announced for the ORs in the Communication of October 2017, due to the similar concerns and challenges they face to access those instruments.

16. Mid-term reviews, evaluation, public consultations

To keep OCTs regularly informed on the reviews in order to maximize their level of involvement and participation and make sure their views are adequately taken into account (including through field visits when possible).

17. Accessibility

To support OCTs' participation in calls as well as contribute to building their capacity to manage EU-funded programmes.

To organize in 2018 ad hoc PWP meetings on the main Union programmes of interest for OCTs (H2020, Erasmus+, COSME, Life+) with the relevant directions and services of the commission in

order to allow for an exchange of view on the current level of participation of OCTs based on available statistical data and possible improvements to remove the obstacles they face in accessing those programmes.

18. *Horizon 2020*

To explore the opportunities for a replication in 2018 of the Horizon 2020 coordination and support action for "Mobilising Research Excellence in EU Outermost Regions" which would benefit our OCTs as such measures are also of interest and added value for the OCTs.

19. *Erasmus+*

To recognize that the challenges faced by some remote OCTs cannot be compared with any other EU region.

To provide a top up amount for distances over 12000 km in order to better support the travel costs from those OCTs on a permanent basis, with regard to the mobility and transversal actions elements, especially in the frame of the mid-term review.

To note the interest of the OCTs in participating in the experimentation of the Erasmus plus PRO program and the European Solidarity Corps in their respective geographical areas, since such initiatives are also of interest and added value for youth in the OCTs.

To further develop the international cooperation aspects of the program and provide a specific access to the OCTs, taking into account their geographical situation.

Post-2020 framework

20. *OCT-EU relations*

To consider that:

- The OCTs represent a part of the family, through the shared history with the EU Member States,
- The OCT-EU partnership is a platform for the EU to interact in the regions, in terms of trade, economy, monetary ties and culture,
- The OCTs provide the EU a geostrategic presence in their regions.

To consider the assets of the OCTs:

- more than 17 million square kilometres of OCT exclusive economic zone, enabling the EU to have an influence on the world's largest combined maritime areas,
- an exceptional terrestrial and marine Biodiversity as potential assets on which to develop partnerships in their regions.
- considerable fisheries resources in their respective regions.

To promote the "belonging to the same EU family" as the keystone principle for the OCT-EU post 2020 relationship, and to derive the full consequences from this principle, at both strategic and operational levels and in both internal and external EU policies.

To retain the UN framework on SDGs (Agenda 2030) and Climate Change as essential elements of the OCT-EU cooperation.

To support OCTs as front runners in implementing the 2030 Agenda and to acknowledge their potential role as showcases of the EU capacity to deliver the SDGs and to fight against climate change in the particular context of OCTs linked to EU Member States.

To acknowledge that in their road to sustainable development, OCTs are comparatively disadvantaged, given the combination of circumstances including their size, remoteness and isolation, diseconomies of scale, limited or inexistent industrial base, lack of economic diversification, high exposure to extremely devastating natural hazards, etc. similar to these of ORs, and sometimes even more acute.

To highlight that OCTs provide a very large part of the EU family's natural resources including biodiversity, oceans and seas, and mineral resources.

To recall that OCTs generally lack the human and financial resources to protect their natural capital and ensure its sustainable management because of their unique characteristics; this is also true for OCTs with a higher income per capita.

21. EU Financial Support to OCTs

To strengthen the commitments of the EU towards the OCTs, recognizing that OCTs contribute to the global dimension of the EU and can bring a strong added value in the implementation of the partnerships of the EU with the regions to which they geographically belong.

To establish for the post 2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and under a strategic decision based on the "same EU family" keystone principle as mentioned above, a dedicated OCTs Support, separate from the ACP financial support and from tools exclusively dedicated to development aid.

To increase, under this newly created OCTs Support, the individual envelopes established for eligible OCTs under the 2014-2020 framework, with a view to supporting them given their many challenges and constraints they face in terms of sustainable development.

To adequately weigh climate change and environmental vulnerability against apparently high GDPs by using appropriate indexes but not necessarily identical to – the related UN (ECOSOC) indexes that have been developed for the LDCs context.

To maintain a multi-criteria approach with regard to the OCTs redistribution to the OCTs Support in full coherence with the overarching 2030 Agenda, which does not restrict itself to poverty reduction.

To work closely with the members states and the OCTs towards 2020 to improve statistics, to enable a more refined assessment of their needs, in particular through the use of a purchasing power parity (PPP) methodology for the income per capita.

To include, within the OCTs Support, an appropriate window for OCT external/regional cooperation, along the lines outlined below.

To attach to the OCTs Support even if coming under the EU budget specific regulations with the goal of easing procedures and providing OCTs with administrative requests and features tailor made to their limited capacities and eliminate any risk of funds de-commitment.

22. *Post Cotonou negotiations and OCTs regional cooperation with neighbouring countries and outermost regions*

To acknowledge the important role that OCTs located in the ACP regions must play in the post 2020 EU relations with ACP States, under the future so called “umbrella” agreement, with its centre of gravity devolved to the regional compacts, the negotiations of which to be started circa September 2018.

To define accordingly, in close collaboration with the OCTs and the Member States to which they are linked, a genuine regional integration strategy to support external and regional cooperation initiatives from OCTs, at intra-OCT level and with neighbouring States, at regional and sub-regional levels.

To acknowledge that some OCTs are already full or associate members of some ACP Regional Integration Organisations in the Caribbean and in the Pacific, and to derive from this the need to formally include the OCTs, where appropriate, in the governance framework of the future ACP-EU partnership, more precisely at the level of its regional “compacts” formal structures;

To establish innovative financial device (s), aimed at easing the programming and implementation of regional projects between OCTs/ORs/ACP States/non-ACP States, following a “common instrument approach”.

To analyse, in view of the above, the feasibility of establishing some EU Trust Funds for the OCTs/ORs/ACP States/non-ACP States cooperation both in the Caribbean and in the Pacific, related to the regional compacts of the future ACP-EU partnership, and allow contribution from possible other sources.

To allow the Trust Funds to function with their own regulation, possibly under a thematic approach.

23. *Brexit*

To analyse the feasibility to preserve the OCT-EU acquis for UKOTs and OCTs acquis towards the UK after the Brexit, subject to the outcome of UK-EU negotiations for both the transitional period (to the end of 2020) and beyond.

To explore the possibilities with the UK post Brexit to contribute to the EU financial support earmarked for OCTs, at least through an agreement in principle (whatever the EU financial instruments to be in place by then), with a view to maintain UKOTs within or alongside the OCTs grouping, including – but not limited to – regional cooperation issues, in the post Cotonou context, particularly in the Caribbean (in view of the above).

24. *Analytical parallel with ORs and Access to EU programmes*

To acknowledge that even though the OCTs are, contrary to the ORs, not an integral part of the EU, they face the same challenges for their sustainable development, as a result of their similar characteristics, sometimes even in a more acute way, therefore needing stronger support.

To acknowledge that the OCTs, similar to the ORs, have limited capacities to access the EU programmes and other tools such as the EFSI to which they are in principle eligible (i.e. Horizon

2020, LIFE, COSME, Erasmus), and to follow a parallel principle in relation to the support the EC intends to provide to ORs in this regard, which should include OCTs or be replicated for them.

To ensure that, in the post 2020 framework, the regulations of the future EU programmes explicitly include OCTs; and possibly call for specific access modalities or dedicated calls for OCTs taking into account their unique situations (e.g. distance and cost of travel in ERASMUS) and limited capacities.

25. *Post 2020 regional programming*

To build capacities and reinforce the Regional Authorising Officer (RAO) with stronger technical support, not restricted to the programming period.

To focus the thematic envelope on areas which are not already strongly supported at regional level or in other EU financial tools, such as research and innovation, aid for trade or economic diversification.

REFERENCE

Signed in Brussels, Belgium, this 22nd February 2018

For the Delegation of **Anguilla**
The Honorable Victor F. BANKS
Chief Minister

For the Delegation of **Aruba**
The Honorable Guillfred F. BESARIL
Minister Plenipotentiary

For the Delegation of **Bermuda**
Ms. Kimberley DURRANT
Director and UK/EU Representative, London Office

For the Delegation of **Bonaire**
Mr. Edison RIJNA
Lieutenant Governor

For the Delegation of **British Virgin Islands**
Mr. Benito WHEATLEY
Director and UK/EU Representative, BVI London Office

For the Delegation of **Cayman Islands**
Mr Samuel ROSE
Cabinet Secretary, and Territorial Authorising Officer

For the Delegation of **Curaçao**
The Honorable Eugene Philip RHUGGENAATH
Prime Minister

For the Delegation of **Falkland Islands**
The Honorable Roger EDWARDS
Member of the Legislative Assembly

For the Delegation of **Greenland**
The Honorable. Suka K. FREDERIKSEN
Minister for Independence, Foreign Affairs and Agriculture

For the Delegation of **Montserrat**
The Honorable Donaldson ROMEO
Premier

For the Delegation of **New Caledonia**
The Honorable Philippe GERMAIN
President of the Government

For the Delegation of **Pitcairn**,
The Honorable Leslie JAQUES
Councillor

For the Delegation of **French Polynesia**
The Honorable Teva ROHFRIJSCH
Vice President, Minister for Economy and Finance, responsible for large investment
projects and economic reforms

For the Delegation of **Saba**,
Mr Rolando WILSON
Commissioner

For the Delegation of **Saint-Barthélemy**,
The Honorable Stéphane LENORMAND, President of the Territorial Council, nominated as
proxy by the Honorable Bruno MAGRAS, President of the Territorial Council of Saint-
Barthélemy

For the Delegation of **Saint Helena, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha**
Mrs Kedell WORBOYS MBE
St Helena Government UK Representative

For the Delegation of **Saint-Pierre-and-Miquelon**
The Honorable Stéphane LENORMAND
President of the Territorial Council

For the Delegation of **Sint Eustatius,**

For the Delegation of **Sint Maarten**
The Honorable Leona MARLIN-ROMEO
Prime Minister

For the Delegation of **Territories of the French Southern and Antarctic Lands**
On behalf of Mrs Cécile POZZO DI BORGO, Prefect, High Commissioner
Her representative, Mr Guillaume COTTAREL

For the Delegation of **Turks and Caicos Islands**
The Honorable Sharlene L. CARTWRIGHT-ROBINSON,
Premier and Minister of Finance, Investment and Trade

For the Delegation of **Wallis and Futuna**
The Honorable David VERGÉ
President of the Territorial Assembly