



**ASSOCIATION OF THE OVERSEAS COUNTRIES AND
TERRITORIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (“OCTA”)**

ASSOCIATION PTOM

LGO ASSOCIATIE

OVERSØISKE LANDE OG TERRITORIERS ASSOCIATION

**OCTA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
ROAD TOWN, TORTOLA, BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS
26TH FEBRUARY 2015**

POLITICAL DECLARATION

PREAMBLE

The Representatives of the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) met in Road Town, Tortola, British Virgin Islands (BVI) on 26th February 2015 on the occasion of the OCTA Ministerial Conference 2014. They reaffirmed the solidarity between the European Union (EU or Union) and the OCTs based on their unique relationship and their belonging to the European Union family. They expressed their desire for the OCT-EU Forum to remain at the centre of political dialogue between the OCTs and the Union, complemented by other mechanisms such as trilateral, tripartite and Partnership Working Party (PWP) meetings; and recalled the importance of the Ministerial Conference in elaborating OCTs’ positions.

They also considered how OCTs can unlock their value by leveraging their special relationship with the Union, as well as international and regional partners, to create regional hubs and centres of excellence. They also reaffirmed their commitment to the sustainable use of natural resources, while emphasising climate change and sustainable energy.

They reiterated the OCTs’ economic, environmental, scientific and strategic value to the EU and the wider world that can be exploited further through the Union’s support for research and development and innovation in renewable energy, climate change, waste and waste water management, biodiversity, conservation, science and technology and other areas; and reinforced the OCTs’ competitive advantages emerging from their association with the EU which could be capitalised upon to make economic and other gains in their societies.

They also agreed to undertake the development of a new OCTA Strategy to maximize, as a priority, their relationship with the EU and to enhance international engagement for the 2015 – 2020 period.

POLITICAL RESOLUTIONS

The OCTs call upon the European Commission (Commission) to:

OCT-EU relations

1. Dialogue and partnership

Positively reinforce OCT-EU political dialogue and develop a more active partnership between the EU and the OCTs to achieve the objectives of the Overseas Association Decision (OAD).

2. Principle of equality

Support equal treatment of all OCTs under the EU's association agreement with the OCTs and maintain the traditional number of sponsored delegates per OCT at four for future OCT-EU Forums.

Unlocking the value of the OCTs

3. Centres of excellence

Actively promote the establishment of centres of excellence in the OCTs in the areas of science, education, health, renewable energy, climate change, biodiversity, financial services, tourism, fisheries and other areas listed in the OAD by facilitating institutional linkages between the OCTs and EU based academic and research institutions.

4. Regional hubs

Support OCTs' efforts to position themselves as regional hubs in services, higher education, healthcare, commerce, transportation, shipping, logistics, communications, scientific research and areas listed in the OAD by encouraging private investment from EU based companies and institutions.

5. Research, Education and Innovation

Assist OCTs to further develop and reinforce their existing thematic networks, facilitate better coordination and pooling of local research knowledge and leveraging of OCTs' knowledge transfer and sharing, specifically under OCTA's knowledge centre; and enable OCTs' research and education institutions to take advantage of potential regional and international cooperation activities through the support of research networks.

6. Territorial Strategies for Innovation (TSI)

To acknowledge the successful launch of the TSI project that is assisting OCTs with unlocking their value.

Union programmes

7. Awareness and access

Raise awareness and knowledge among EU institutions of OCTs' specificities and their specific challenges in accessing Union programmes; and continue to support and facilitate OCTs' full access to programmes such as Erasmus+, Horizon 2020 and COSME.

8. Participation

Welcome the proposed participatory strategy elaborated on the "OCT participation to EU programs", aimed at strengthening OCTs' knowledge, promoting OCTs' attractiveness, reinforcing capacities and quality of OCTs' proposals, and strengthening EU institutional awareness, which will feed in OCTA's 2015-2020 Strategy;

Take note that OCTs will endeavour to appoint local contact points to increase OCTs' local government EU programme expertise and enhance smoother coordination among actors.

9. Life+

Recognise the difficulties faced by OCTs with regard to the eligibility criteria of LIFE+; and adopt a broad interpretation of the eligibility criteria stated in article 6 of the LIFE+ regulation to facilitate wider participation by OCTs.

10. Remoteness

Take greater account of the extreme remoteness of some OCTs with regard to the Erasmus + programme's mobility and transversal actions elements; and facilitate fair access by providing a top-up amount for distances of more than 12,000 km regarding the support for travel costs, for all publics, for both Key Actions 1 and 2, and simplifying and harmonising the rules among all EU Member States.

OCTA strategy 2015 – 2020

11. EU engagement with the OCTs

Welcome the development of an OCTA strategy aimed at establishing the strategic response required to address key issues to the future of OCTs and OCTA in a consultative and

participatory manner as well as enhancing dialogue and cooperation between the OCTs and the EU at the levels of OCTA and the European Commission; European Council and particularly OCT Member States on the Council (United Kingdom, France, Netherlands and Denmark); Presidency of the European Union; and European Parliament to bolster EU support for the OCTs.

OCTA Technical Assistance

12. OCTA funding provisions

Welcome OCTA's readiness to use its funding provisions accumulated since 2008 to contribute to the extension of the Technical Assistance (TA) project under the 10th EDF; while supporting the association's efforts to analyse the financial resources at its disposal to finance activities that benefit the Association, which will be considered in the development of an OCTA Strategy for the 2015 – 2020 period.

13. Extension

Positively consider any future request for extension of technical assistance in light of the mid-term review of the Technical Assistance to OCTA Project.

Implementation of OAD and 11th European Development Fund (EDF) programming

14. Regional cooperation

Continue to support the regional programming process and encourage and facilitate where desirable OCTs cooperation with Outermost Regions (ORs) and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states on regional and bilateral projects and programming under the 11th EDF and European Regional Development Funds (ERDF).

11th EDF thematic envelope

15. Sub-sectors of concentration

Facilitate programming in support of the OCTs' efforts to sustainably manage their natural resources where it concerns climate change (including disaster risk management) and sustainable energy.

16. Measures of support

Facilitate the implementation of measures of support for OCTs under the thematic envelope.

17. Regional Authorizing Officer

Welcome OCTA as candidate/actor for the Regional Authorising Officer for the thematic component of the regional envelope of the 11th EDF.

Climate change

18. Sustainable Energy Roadmap

Support OCTs' efforts to implement the recommendations of the OCTs' report on renewable energy , as well as the outcomes of the OCT Renewable Energy workshops held in Aruba in October 2014, and to develop an OCT Sustainable Energy Roadmap that can help to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels and improve their energy efficiency.

19. Energy Summit

Support OCTs' planning of an OCT Energy Summit in line with the June 2015 EU Sustainable Energy Week in Brussels; and encourage OCTs to set ambitious, but realistic, Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency targets.

20. Energy network and data

Support OCTs efforts to continue mobilizing funding and building capacity to strengthen the OCT sustainable energy network; and encourage the Directorate General for Research and Directorate General for Energy to assist OCTs in the collection and analysis of energy data.

21. UNFCCC COP 21

Endeavour to take into account the OCTs climate change priorities ahead of the UNFCCC COP21 meeting in Paris in December 2015. OCT Ministers agree that the Commission and Member States should make efforts to accommodate the OCTs priorities in the climate negotiations and support OCTs' initiatives toward a fruitful outcome for UNFCCC COP21. OCTs ask the Commission and Member States for a partnership to increase the visibility of OCTs at the next UNFCCC COP21 in Paris.

22. Other programmes

Explore the inclusion of OCTs in Union programmes and initiatives related to climate change, such as the flagship initiative Global Climate Change Alliance.

Biodiversity

23. International policy coordination

