



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 30 March 2009**

**8161/09**

**ACP 79  
WTO 62**

**"I/A" ITEM NOTE**

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from : ACP Working Party  
to Permanent Representatives Committee / Council

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No. prev. doc. : ACP-CE 2105/09

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Subject : Proposal for an ACP-EU Heads of States/Governments Level Consultations on the Economic Partnership agreements (EPAs)  
- draft reply

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On 3 March 2009, the President of the Council received a letter from the President of the Republic of Ghana, President-in-the-office of the ACP Summit, H.E. John EVANS ATTA MILLS, with a proposal for ACP-EU Heads of State/Government level consultations on the Economic Partnership Agreements.

On 30 March 2009, the ACP Working Party agreed on the letter to be sent in reply to the above proposal.

The Permanent Representatives Committee is invited to advise the Council to approve this draft letter as set out in the Annex to this note.

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H.E. John EVANS ATTA MILLS  
President of the Republic of Ghana and  
President-in-the-office of the ACP Summit  
The Castle OSV  
Accra  
GHANA

*[protocol introduction]*

On 3 March 2009 I received your letter with the suggestion to hold ACP-EC Heads of State and Government consultations on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).

I would like to thank you for your desire to intensify the dialogue between the EU and the ACP Group on EPAs which are currently a very important issue on our common agenda. I can assure you that the Council of the European Union is equally committed to a successful outcome of the EPA negotiations. I would also like to express my strong support on the issue of regional integration, which remains a key element of the whole concept of the EPAs between the EU and the ACP Group.

Your proposal has been evaluated in the context of recent developments as well as planned activities up to the middle of 2009.

In our assessment, there have been some significant developments in recent months. Since taking up office as European Commissioner for Trade, Baroness Ashton has been following up actively on President Barroso's call in Lisbon in 2007 for region by region high level contacts. She outlined her approach to EPAs to the EU Council of Ministers in November 2008 and has intensified contacts, both formally and informally, with her political counterparts in various ACP regions. Important developments are taking place in the different regional EPA negotiations, each with its own characteristics and at its own pace, that will lead to a clearer picture of progress over the coming months.

Nonetheless, although the regional focus is crucial to establish progress tailor-made for the different needs of the different regions, I fully agree that the pan-ACP overview is essential. In my opinion, the joint institutions of the Cotonou Agreement are the best fora for a joint political debate on this issue. The joint ACP-EC Council of Ministers is scheduled to meet before the end of the Czech Presidency to the EU at the end of May. This occasion will allow for an open exchange of views on EPAs between the ACP and EU ministers and offer an appropriate opportunity for this dialogue.

Moreover, this follows the Joint Ministerial Trade Committee scheduled earlier that month, which will provide Commissioner Ashton and ACP Trade Ministers an opportunity to review the state of play on EPAs at the all-ACP level, in the presence of the European Union Member State representatives.

In summary, I share your view that a global vision of the different developments at regional level is desirable and suggest that, given the significant developments in the EPA dossier since the ACP Heads of State Meeting in October 2008, we jointly review the best way to hold such political debate in the context of the various high level meetings already scheduled. During or after these meetings, we can ascertain what next steps might be appropriate to further deepen and accelerate the EPA process, including a discussion of the pan-ACP aspects.

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union is always available for dialogue and confident that our objectives and views will converge in the open debate that characterises our partnership.

*[protocol conclusion]*

For the Council

Copy: Hon. William HAOMAE, President of the Council of the Ministers of the ACP Group  
Sir John KAPUTIN, Secretary-General of the ACP Group of States  
H.E. Ms Nana BEMA KUMI, Ambassador, Embassy of the Republic of Ghana