

**INTRODUCTORY SPEECH – 41ST SESSION OF ACP-EU COUNCIL OF MINISTERS
AND ACP-EU HIGH LEVEL EVENT: "FROM LOMÉ TO COTONOU POST-2020: A
CHANGING PERSPECTIVE IN THE ACP-EU RELATIONSHIP"**

**NEVEN MIMICA - EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND
DEVELOPMENT**

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Mr President,

Mr Secretary General,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I feel deeply honoured to welcome you to this event in Dakar. I am particularly pleased to have such a panel of bright personalities around me.

The process of designing the future of the relationship between the Europe Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries is now in full swing and I am convinced that this debate will help finding common grounds to build our common future.

Let me please first underline that for the European Commission, the existing relationship between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific states has been a model for our relations with other countries.

The benefits that have accrued over the years of our cooperation have been made possible through a strong base that provides stability and predictability. The current Cotonou agreement is the most comprehensive example we have of political will being turned into legally enshrined commitments.

Nevertheless, our relationship must also be one that is flexible. It needs to take on board the evolving needs and interests of all parties. It also needs to be able to respond to changes in the surrounding international environment.

It is indeed now time to look forward, to explore different ideas in order to find the best model of collaboration for the future.

To do so, the Commission together with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, conducted at the end of last year, a public consultation on the future of our partnership. I will be pleased to say a few words on its outcomes later in the debate. But I would like first to underscore some fundamental facts.

Our partnership with the ACP countries goes beyond the past 15 years. ACP and EU countries jointly number almost 110 countries, which are a majority at the United Nations. This relationship is strength and an opportunity.

The current agreement is unique in its substance – there is no similar international treaty agreement. Its content is very ambitious and deals with a variety of aspects and objectives.

The countries that signed the agreement 15 years ago are not the same today. On the one hand, the number of Member States of the European Union has almost doubled. Priorities of current Member States may legitimately not be the same.

On the other hand, ACP countries have also changed. Their interests have also evolved throughout the years. When comparing interests, there is a simple fact that we should not forget: some of the European Member States' income per capita is lower than that of some of the ACP countries.

Concerning the scope of the agreement, some issues that were on the top of the list have been addressed, some remain – and have become even more pressing – and new ones have emerged.

Climate change, environment protection, migration, peace and stability, the fight against terrorism...should definitely be part of our common priorities. On top of that, the importance of trade and investment compared to Official Development Assistance is an important factor. Those challenges have to be dealt with hand in hand.

Beyond the European Union and the ACP countries, the main actors in the field of trade and development are not the same. Emerging economies play an increasingly major role. Interests are changing and parallel partnerships arise.

We need to take stock of the current situation and also reflect on the trends that countries and regions will follow over the coming decades. We should ensure that the successor framework strengthens our relationship.

The flexibility of the tools we will set up is an issue. The signature of the Cotonou agreement – but also the ratifications of its amendments – took several years, which delayed our action on the ground. We need to reflect upon that as well.

In a broader sense, this assessment should also point out the weaknesses in our ways of working. I am not afraid of leading a self-critical exercise. I refer to the European institutions, the joint institutions, and the mechanisms we have elaborated jointly, but we should also assess how we have performed and the extent to which we have stuck to our common goals.

Thankfully, the ACP-EU partnership is already aligned to face the current big challenges, some of which have become more obvious in recent times – as I already mentioned – security, climate change, international mobility and migration.

These issues are also prominent in the framework of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. It is clearly in our common interest to ensure that the delivery of the sustainable development goals by 2030 is fostered by the future development of our relationship. We should design our development policy referring to the goals, as well as to all of our international commitments. They should drive our reflections throughout this process.

In this context, I am also encouraged that we are making more flexible use of our existing funding instruments to ensure a more appropriate response to emerging challenges faced by partner countries. The ongoing migration and refugee crisis clearly shows the need for development assistance to be delivered in a flexible and responsive way.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We have a lot of work to do – today, tomorrow, in the coming weeks, months and years. On addressing the issues of today and ensuring that we are able to anticipate the needs and demands of the future for our peoples.

I hope that you will join me in that work and look forward to hearing your views on how we will do it together.

Thank you.