

20th Overseas Countries and Territories - European Union FORUM

20th OCTs-EU FORUM

Brussels, 29 February 2024

Joint Forum Conclusions

The European Commission, the Representatives of the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) and the Representatives of Denmark, France, and the Netherlands, hereinafter referred to as the "Partners", met on the occasion of the 20th OCTs-EU Forum held on 29 February 2024 in Brussels.

The Forum was organised under the auspices of the European Commissioner for International Partnerships, Ms Jutta Urpilainen, and hosted by the European Commission.

Members of the European Parliament, Representatives of the European Investment Bank (EIB) and Representatives of the EU Outermost Regions were associated with the Forum.

The Partners took note of the political declaration of the OCT Association (OCTA) presented by its Chair and adopted by the OCTA Ministerial Conference on 28 February 2024.

The following Joint Forum Conclusions were adopted:

1. The Partners emphasize the special relationship between the European Union (EU) and the OCTs and their belonging to the same European 'family', based on common objectives, principles, and shared fundamental values. They recognise the opportunities offered by the Decision on the Overseas Association, including Greenland (DOAG), to further develop and strengthen this relationship, by pursuing mutual interests while considering specific needs and challenges of the OCTs.
2. The Partners value the DOAG as a cornerstone of the OCTs-EU association, integrating political and policy dialogue, financial cooperation for sustainable development and preferential treatment in trade matters.
3. The OCTs acknowledge the EU's continued commitment to contribute to the achievement of the association's overall objectives through the provision of financial resources under the DOAG, which brings the 13 OCTs together

under a single instrument with a budget of EUR 500 million for the period 2021-2027.

4. The DOAG, together with the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe and other EU programmes benefiting the OCTs, has opened the door to a new era in which the 13 OCTs are increasingly working together as neighbours, economic partners, and allies.
5. The Partners commend the progress made in the 2021-2027 programming under the DOAG and the adoption of all 16 multi-annual indicative programmes that support the OCTs' sustainable development and contribute to the strengthening of the close and long-lasting ties between the EU and the OCTs.
6. The Partners commit to maintain the momentum throughout 2024 and to pursue with the programming and/or implementation of the territorial, regional, and intraregional action plans, by ensuring synergies and complementarities among them. In this framework, the Partners welcome the adoption of 5 territorial action plans and supporting measures in 2023, allowing for the forthcoming implementation of concrete initiatives.
7. The Partners stress the importance of regional and intra-regional integration and cooperation, not only between OCTs, but also between OCTs and the EU Outermost Regions, their neighbouring African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) and non-ACP states and territories as well as regional organizations. The Partners underline the catalytic role that the OCTs can play in their respective regions by promoting win-win partnership initiatives supporting sustainable development. They also emphasise that effective policy coordination, inclusive dialogue platforms and synergies between relevant EU programmes and funds are key to creating transformative impact.
8. In this context, the Partners confirm their ambition to formulate a first set of pilot actions under the adopted multiannual indicative programme on intraregional cooperation.
9. The Partners acknowledge the instruments and financial mechanisms offered by the EIB, more specifically the Invest EU instrument. They encourage the OCTs to inform the Commission about the effective use of this new financial modality.

10. The Partners recognise OCTs' interest in having better access to EU programmes beyond the DOAG. In this respect, they welcome the launching of BESTLIFE 2030 dedicated to OCTs and Outermost Regions. They agree on the need for more targeted information sharing, capacity building and dedicated training activities.
11. Confronting the climate crisis, the Partners welcome the opportunities offered under the Green Overseas programme of the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), which aims to enhance OCTs' resilience, advance their energy transition, and facilitate access to climate finance.
12. The Partners acknowledge the progress made in the fight against climate change during the COP 28 in Dubai, and the active role played by both the OCTs and the EU during the Conference. Further to the reduction of emissions, they underline the importance of the OCTs' initiatives concerning mitigation of climate change and adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change. They recall the vulnerability of OCTs and the particular impact on OCTs inter alia extreme weather events, glaciers melting, and sea-level rises.
13. The Partners recognize the importance of sharing information regarding the different strategies carried out by the European Commission which may concern OCTs and the need to maintain constant exchanges to deepen their involvement in the framework of the institutional dialogue as set out in DOAG Article 14.
14. In line with the DOAG, the Partners will take, where relevant, account of the OCTs impact analysis accompanying the launch and negotiation of the free trade agreements by the Union.
15. The Partners emphasise the role of the EU Global Gateway strategy as a major contribution to reducing the global infrastructure investment gap and enhancing the strategic autonomy of the EU and its partners. The Partners underline the importance of the Global Gateway strategy in fostering regional integration, including value chain integration, through developing joint regional initiatives to fight climate change, to improve connectivity and food security, to support energy transition and to increase workers and student mobility. Aware of the special relationship between the EU and the OCTs, the Partners acknowledge that OCTs-EU partnership fits inter alia into the frame of the Global Gateway strategy and supports the implementation of its priorities by enhancing regional and intraregional cooperation.

16. The Partners note that the Global Gateway strategy is consistent with the commitment made by G7 leaders in June 2021 to establish an infrastructure partnership to meet global development needs and is also fully aligned with the United Nations 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the Paris Agreement.
17. The Partners reaffirm the importance of relations with the ACP countries and welcome the signature on the 15 November 2023 of the Samoa Agreement between the EU and its Member States and the Members of the Organisation of the ACP States (OACPS). They also welcome the role foreseen for the OCTs as observers in the joint institutions established by the Pacific and Caribbean Regional Protocols under the Samoa Agreement.
18. The Partners recognize the innovative and forward-looking approach of the New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean, adopted in June 2023, as a source of inspiration for the OCTs-EU cooperation, notably in the Caribbean region.
19. Due to their geographical and geopolitical location, the Partners recognise that the OCTs in the Arctic and Indo-Pacific regions are part of the EU's geostrategic agenda, as reflected in the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and the EU's Arctic Policy, which highlight the role of OCTs in the implementation of these strategies.
20. The Partners welcome the European Commission's decision of 10 May 2022 and the progress made towards establishing the Office in Greenland, with an effective opening foreseen in 2024. This decision reflects the desire of Greenland, the Kingdom of Denmark and the European Commission to deepen and broaden their partnership.
21. The Partners also welcome the signature on 30 November 2023 of a Memorandum of Understanding between the European Union and the Government of Greenland on a strategic partnership on sustainable raw materials value chains.
22. The Partners welcome the Commission decision to conduct a communication campaign on the OCTs-EU partnership. The overarching objective of this campaign is to enhance awareness and create positive perception about the value and impact of the OCTs-EU partnership in the OCTs, the EU Member States and their neighbouring countries and territories.
23. In 2023, the OCT Youth Network initiative which promotes strong and long-lasting ties between the youth of the OCTs and the EU, saw a highly dynamic

implementation. This initiative echoes the OCT Youth Week organized in October 2021 by OCTA and supported by the EU. The Partners express their appreciation for the solid network that has been built and recognize the contribution of the youth to the objectives of the OCTs-EU partnership.

24. The Partners undertake to maintain and further strengthen the OCTs-EU partnership through a constructive, transparent, and permanent dialogue.
25. The Partners recognize the importance of OCTA in the facilitation of the political and policy dialogue and the coordination between the European Commission, the OCTs and the Member States to which they are linked. They welcome initiatives undertaken by OCTA towards the resolution of its administrative difficulties.
26. The Partners would like to thank Greenland for its excellent work as Chair of the OCTA and to welcome Aruba as the new Chair designate.
27. The next OCTs-EU Forum is scheduled to take place during the year 2025 in Aruba.