

UDENRIGSMINISTERIET

Den 24. november 2008.

Spørgsmål nr. 34 (URU alm. del) af 18. november 2008 fra Folketingets Udenrigsudvalg til ministeren for udviklingsbistand.

Spørgsmål:

Vil ministeren oversende kopi af ministerens brev til Kommissær Catherine Ashton, som omtalt under samrådet den 18. november 2008 ?

Svar:

Teksten til brevet af 7. november 2008, der blev fremsendt sammen med udviklingsministrene fra Nederlandene og Irland, gengives nedenfor:

Rt Hon Baronesse Ashton,  
Commissioner for Trade at the  
European Commission  
BRUSSELS

The Hague, November 7, 2008

Dear Baroness Ashton,  
We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment and we look forward to welcoming you personally at next week's Development General Affairs and External Relations Council.

As you will be aware, negotiations between the EU and ACP countries on the Economic Partnership Agreements are at a critical stage. We welcome the comments you made at the recent European Parliament hearing, and particularly your commitment to giving a different character to ongoing regional negotiations.

By concluding interim agreements focusing on the trade in goods at the end of 2007, we were able to avoid trade disruption for most of the ACP countries concerned. However, as we are sure you will agree, we have much to do to ensure that EPAs genuinely live up to the goals

formulated in the Cotonou Partnership Agreement. We therefore need to ensure that EPAs will actively support regional integration and contribute to a regulatory framework that will stimulate economic development.

If we are to succeed in this, we must be prepared to show more flexibility towards the countries and regions concerned in the next rounds of negotiations. In May of this year, the European Council already underlined how important it is to take a flexible approach to the transition from interim agreements to regional Economic Partnership Agreements and called on the Commission to make full use of the flexibility and asymmetry permissible under current WTO law so as to reflect the different development levels and development needs of the ACP countries and regions. Judging by the vast majority of reactions received from the ACP over recent weeks and months, it is clear that as yet no sufficient degree of consensus has been achieved on the disputed negotiating issues as to allow negotiations to be brought to a successful conclusion. We would therefore like to urgently appeal to the Commission to make full use of all the flexibility available to us under current WTO law and to actively display that flexibility in current negotiations.

At the same time, we must also deal pragmatically with the reality created by the interim agreements. Due to the fact that not all the countries within each regional group have initialled interim EPA there are two different systems - the interim agreements and GSP/EBA - being applied. In some cases, it would appear that those different rules of origin and changes in the practice of cumulation have resulted in disruptions in trade. While we remain keen for the interim agreements to be signed as soon as possible, we call on the Commission to continue work with the ACP countries concerned to find an early, pragmatic solution to this issue as a coherent set of rules of origin will only be settled in the forthcoming EPA.

We share a common understanding that the EPAs should be instruments for development. That means we must take a coordinated approach that is specifically tailored to the needs of the ACP countries and regions and differs significantly from other trade agreements negotiated by the EU. With EPAs, the overriding goal is development by a carefully sequenced integration of the ACP countries into the global market that takes account of their respective levels of development. Our aim with the EPAs is to foster development through increased regional integration. If the goal of comprehensive regional agreements is to be achieved, the critical factor in the coming negotiations will be the extent to which especially the poorest ACP countries, the LDCs, are able and willing to negotiate and sign such agreements. We should make their decision easier by showing the necessary flexibility while moving towards regional agreements through, for example, setting reasonable transition periods in new regional liberalization schedules and/ or providing for review clauses in the text. Equally, in regions where ACP parties agree to include these elements in the EPAs, agreements on the trade in services and other trade-related issues must be designed in such a way that they primarily support development friendly regional integration whilst at the same time not placing excessive strain on the ACP countries' implementation capacities. With these topics, it is not a question of improving EU market access but of establishing more predictable regional trading rules that will stimulate sustainable economic activity.

To demonstrate our commitment to building trust and confidence with our ACP partners, we believe that the EU should build on the dialogue that has already begun over the past year by responding positively to the specific ACP proposal for an EPA meeting at joint ministerial level. An informal ministerial meeting in the near future would underpin the 'new approach' that you have eloquently referred to in the European Parliament and could bring a new political impetus to the ongoing negotiations.

We are sure that, with a renewed political emphasis and stronger efforts at the technical level to address the issues highlighted above, the negotiations can be brought to a conclusion that is conducive to development. Again, we look forward to meeting you in person at the development GAERC next week when there will be an opportunity to discuss EPAs further. We would be very interested to hear your views on the topics outlined above and look forward to a fruitful exchange of views.

Yours sincerely,  
Ms Ulla Tørnæs  
Minister for Development Cooperation  
Denmark

Peter Power T.D.  
Minister of State for Overseas Development,  
Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland.

Bert Koenders  
Minister for Development Cooperation  
of the Kingdom of The Netherlands