

EUROPEAN COUNCIL

THE PRESIDENT

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Invitation letter by President Donald Tusk to the European Council

It is my pleasure to invite you to the meeting of the European Council on 25-26 May 2018 in Brussels.

Our second European Council in 2018 is dedicated to fundamental challenges that we face in today's world. In particular, we will discuss the relations with ACP countries.

With more than five decades of experience, development stands as a cornerstone of the European Union's engagement with the wider world, constituting a key tool for achieving its external relations objectives alongside trade, foreign and security policy. The EU is the leading donor of Official Development Assistance, providing with the Member States in excess of €75 billion in 2017 (57% of the global total). Nevertheless, notwithstanding the efforts of the European Union, the Member States and other ODA donors, positive developmental outcomes remain patchy and poverty in all its forms remains widespread. The Cotonou Agreement, which has provided the foundation for EU relations with the developing African, Caribbean and Pacific states since 2000 will expire in 2020, necessitating consideration of a replacement. In the view of the presidency, the time to do so is now.

In this respect, the presidency proposes two core issues for consideration by the European Council:

Issue 1: A Post-Cotonou Framework for EU–ACP Relations

A framework to replace Cotonou must be forward-thinking and cognisant of ongoing contextual challenges, as well as the European Union’s broader policy frameworks, and should seek to maintain the EU’s position as key partner with the ACP states. It must take into account:

- *The Sustainable Development Goals*: the EU has committed itself to achieving the global goals. A revised framework must therefore reinforce the SDGs, and additionally link the future development relationship with the ACP to other SDG-relevant EU policy frameworks;
- *The EU Global Strategy*: the future EU–ACP relationship must be cognisant of broader EU external relations goals, including particularly security and the Union’s place in a multipolar world order;
- *BREXIT*: the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European architecture will have significant implications in all policy fields, not least among them development. Issues of ongoing engagement with Commonwealth members of the ACP that have traditionally accessed the EU market via the UK, for example, must be addressed.

The presidency urges Member States to consider the appropriate framing of the EU–ACP partnership. Is the ACP the appropriate level of engagement, or are the seven EPA sub-groups to be preferred? Or might development goals better be achieved through existing autochthonous structures such as the African Union.

Finally, the presidency proposes that the issue of parallel frameworks be considered. Can the maintenance of the ‘Everything But Arms’ initiative alongside an EU–ACP relationship, for example, be justified? Do such parallel framework add to, or detract from, Cotonou or its future replacement?

Issue 2: Delivering EU Development Goals

The modalities by which developmental goals incorporated into a post-Cotonou framework are to be achieved must be at the heart of our discussions. The EU remains the leading donor of ODA, but is ODA sufficient for achieving development outcomes, or should emphasis be placed on other drivers such as trade. Relatedly, the presidency urges Member States to consider the ‘budgetisation’ of the European Development Fund as a mechanism for ensuring geographic and policy consistency. Finally, recognising the expansiveness of the SDG framework, the presidency urges Member States to consider the issue of prioritisation within the global goals, consistent with existing EU development and other policy frameworks.

I look forward to meeting you in Brussels to listen to your assessment of the situation and the proposal put forward. I would welcome your thoughts on the issue by **18 May**, well in time for our 25-26 May meeting.