

## OCTA MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

Brussels / virtual platform, December 8<sup>th</sup> 2020

### POLITICAL DECLARATION

#### **PREAMBLE**

In the context of the ongoing worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, the Representatives of the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) met virtually, on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2020 on the occasion of the OCTA Ministerial Conference. They exchanged on the impact of the crisis in the OCTs, during this last year of implementation of the 2013 Overseas Association Decision (OAD), on the upcoming revised partnership for 2021-2027 and on the impact of Brexit. They also reviewed the implementation of the OCTA roadmap for 2020 and the proposal for 2021.

1. Deploring the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic which has led to a dramatic loss of human life in OCTs and worldwide, and triggered a deep health related, social and economic crisis with high risks of long term effects on OCTs citizens, on the main economic sectors taking into account their high dependency on tourism, connectivity, and on public finances;
2. Reaffirming the concept of OCTs “belonging to the same EU family” as the keystone principle for the OCT-EU partnership;
3. Reiterating the mutually beneficial partnership between the European Union (EU) and OCTs, taking into account the geostrategic role played by the OCTs, their contribution to the international, territorial and ocean dimension of the EU, their immense Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and marine resources, their exceptional biodiversity and the potential of their contributions to tackle major global and EU challenges such as the adaptation to climate change and ocean protection, and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
4. Welcoming the upcoming implementation of the Council Decision on the Association of the Overseas Countries and Territories with the European Union including relations between the European Union on the one hand, and Greenland and the Kingdom of Denmark on the other (Overseas Association Decision, including Greenland) which shall enter into force in 2021 in coherence with the next multiannual framework for 2021-2027; as well as recognizing the progress achieved through the implementation of the current OAD since 2014, which has allowed to modernize and further differentiate the EU-OCT partnership;
5. Noting that the COVID 19 crisis has had an important impact on the gathering of the instances of dialogue in 2020, and underlying the concerns related to the evolution of the position of the OCT Unit within DG DEVCO;
6. Acknowledging the efforts made by the European Commission in the support linked to the COVID-19 crisis in the framework of 11<sup>th</sup> EDF and the effectiveness of the EU support measures

to OCTA which constitute an essential contribution to OCTA's activities, to the reinforcement of the capacities of OCTA and also to the EU-OCT dialogue through a common platform;

7. Recognizing the satisfaction expressed by the OCTs' stakeholders who participated in OCTA's activities in 2020, which had to be reviewed following the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the webinars on energy, biodiversity and life, the training on EU policies and institutions, and the modernisation of OCTA's communication tools;
8. Stressing the impact of the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU on the partnership established between OCTs and the EU, amongst OCTs and within OCTA and the measures needed to establish new basis for cooperation post 2020, and noting that UK territories are no longer considered as OCTs associated to the EU since 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020.

### **Under this political declaration, the OCTs :**

#### ***Concerning the 2021-2027 partnership***

9. **Remain** mindful of the finalisation of the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework negotiations and **Invite** all concerned stakeholders to implement successfully the revised EU-OCTs partnership, under the Overseas Association Decision including Greenland and other regulations of interest for OCTs, such as the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI).
10. **Regret** that their call for an increase of the global allocation dedicated to OCTs (from 500 million euros as proposed by the European Commission to 669 million euros as recommended by the European Parliament) has not been met by the Council, despite the support expressed by the European Parliament, as this would have been coherent with the ambitious objectives of the Overseas Association Decision including Greenland, and that no additional extraordinary funds have been secured for OCTs in the context of the COVID-19 crisis.
11. In this context, **Call for** a combined effort of all stakeholders to ensure that OCT's participation in all 2021-2027 EU financial assistance tools and programs to which they are eligible will be substantially reinforced, implemented and monitored.
12. **Reiterate** the importance of the following 4 main issues in the context of the upcoming implementation of the Overseas Association Decision including Greenland by:
  - **Securing** the same level of flexibility as under the EDF and adapted measures for the programming and implementation of the OCTs' financial assistance
  - **Ensuring** an efficient intra-regional cooperation through clear and adapted modalities for OCTs and their partners;
  - **Providing** for more adapted modalities to access EU programmes;
  - **Maintaining** the same level of support currently provided by the European Investment Bank (EIB) in the OCTs through dedicated tools, including through the reflows of the

current OCT investment facility, taking into account that future modalities shall not be less advantageous than current modalities.

**Concerning the EU-OCT dialogue:**

13. **Call for** a reinforced coordination by the DG DEVCO OCT Unit of all the Commission's Directorates General on OCT issues in order to ensure the coherence of the Commission's actions and initiatives which may be of interest for OCTs or have an impact on the EU-OCT partnership in particular on trade negotiations, regional cooperation and integration, Green deal (i.e. Biodiversity, Climate Change), resilience, research and innovation, oceans, fisheries, connectivity and investments, as well as reinforcing the exchange of expertise.
14. **Reiterate that** the specificities of the OCTs relationship with the EU require a differentiated and transversal treatment, in accordance with their geographical position in all parts of the world and shared characteristics and **Call for** a coherent approach in the position and transversal functions of the OCT unit within DG DEVCO, strengthening the political visibility of OCTs with the support of all relevant geographical units from different directorates and EU delegations, from the Pacific to the Caribbean, the Arctic, the Indian Ocean and the isolated OCTs.
15. **Urge** for the support of the European Commission to raise the profile of the EU-OCT partnership and its added value in 2021 through events and materials for the EU decision makers and facilitate the association of OCTs to EU events of interest (regional partnerships, blue economy, outermost regions) in close cooperation with the Executive Committee of OCTA under the Chairmanship of the Association.
16. **Underline** the need to reinforce the instances of dialogue in 2021 (Tripartite and Partnership working parties), including through videoconferences, **Explore** the possibility to provide interpretation in French and English; and **Request** for the participation of the Commission at a high level to the next EU-OCT forum, planned in New Caledonia if the conditions allow it in the second semester 2021.

**Concerning the financial assistance:**

17. **Invite** the European Commission to closely **Associate** OCTA in the implementation of the 11<sup>th</sup> EDF thematic programme and in any decision to review the program as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.
18. **Invite** the European Commission to update OCTs on the guidelines and the official launch of the new programming exercise for 2021-2027.
19. **Welcome** very positively the Commission's agreement on the support measures for OCTA for 2020 and the ambitious programme which will further contribute to improve the sustainable development of the OCTs and, at the same time, **Express** the need to maintain the same level of support into the grant contract for the activities proposed in 2021.
20. **Recognize** the added value of the updated report on the state of play of the participation of OCTs in the European Union programmes which establishes a baseline for monitoring progress

while outlining some of the challenges, opportunities and necessary steps to remedy the current low level of access, and **Call upon** the European Commission to support OCTA, in coordination with the Member States, in the finalisation of the action plan in 2021 to alleviate the obstacles faced by the OCTs to access those programmes.

21. **Stress** the expectations regarding the last call for proposals of the BEST 2.0 + programme launched in September 2020 and the necessary close involvement of OCTA in the governance of the programme.
22. **Welcome** recent Commission's initiatives dedicated to overseas such as the call for proposals on culture and the OCT component of the LIFE preparatory project.

***Concerning regional cooperation and integration:***

23. **Reaffirm** the need to closely associate OCTs in the Post Cotonou agreement, taking into account appropriately their observer status (as defined in the agreement), and in the regional partnerships of the EU with OCT's neighbours, part of the ACP States (OACPS) or not, **Recognize** the efforts made by the European Commission to rely on OCTs as EU outposts in their regions and **Reiterate** the need for a stronger technical assistance, on a long term basis, for the development of regional programmes.
24. **Welcome** the regional programming process to be launched which shall contribute to regional cooperation with ACPs, Outermost regions, regional organisations and other territories, and facilitate intra-regional cooperation.
25. **Welcome** the implementation of the KIWA Initiative, the joint Pacific Initiative for biodiversity, climate change and resilience launched in September 2018, co-funded by the EU (EUR 13,9 million€), France (EUR 13 million €), Canada (13 million €) New Zealand (0,65 Million €) and Australia (0,65 million €) and call upon the EU to identify additional funding for 2021-2027 to which Pacific OCTs will be eligible.

***Concerning our main areas of cooperation:***

26. **Highlight** the important role that OCTs shall play in the context of the Green Deal, for example on the protection of biodiversity or in clean energy transitions and **Strongly encourage** the Commission to develop flagship initiatives or projects dedicated to islands, including for the OCTs, such as the "Clean energy for the EU Islands" initiative.
27. **Welcome** the reflections engaged of the overhaul of the European Tourism Sector and to take into account adequately the OCTs in its international dimension.
28. **Emphasise** the need for the EU to better take into account OCTs in the EU commitments on oceans and to associate them more actively to discussions related to Climate Change, biodiversity and **Recognize** the progress achieved through very important references to OCTs

in the council conclusions on biodiversity in October 2020 and on Oceans and Seas in November 2019.

29. **Invite** the European Commission to maintain OCTs informed on trade negotiations which may impact them and to take into account their interests to limit the erosion of their preferential trade regime, **Ensure** their association to regional business events to promote trade regional integration and **Develop** the use of the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX) to promote learning exchanges.
30. **Call** on the European Commission to further support research and innovation in the OCTs, through the appropriate EU programmes and the available expertise developed for the EU regions, and develop support measures similar to those implemented in the Outermost Regions in the context of Horizon 2020.

#### ***Concerning the collaboration among OCTs and between OCTs and the EU***

31. **Emphasise** the importance to maintain the long cooperation between UK territories and OCTs associated to the EU, in particular through the next regional programming process and other activities of common interests.
32. **Decide** to further explore the future collaboration with the UK Overseas Territories with the objective of the finalisation and signature of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between UKOTA and OCTA by the end of March 2021.

#### **REFERENCE**

1. This Declaration shall be referred to as the “2019/2020 Political Declaration of the OCTA –2020 Ministerial Conference”.

Signed electronically after the Ministerial meeting

**The resolutions of this Political Declaration which only relate to OCTs associated to the EU, do not apply to the UK OTs.**