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Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit

Building cooperation between the Commonwealth and European Union to support the African Union's NEPAD process

Note for the 23 May conference at 28 Russell Square, London WC1B 5DS

Object of day

1 The object of the day is to examine how the Commonwealth and the European Union can interface more effectively, and over the longer-term, with the African Union's socioeconomic development process, NEPAD. It will look at issues of complementarity, cooperation and coordination. It will attend to particular issues: the connection between grassroots and national and international development strategies; capacity-building and higher education; the approach of donors and their conditionalities; private sector questions; and the perspective of the African Diaspora.

2 The Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit (CPSU) is launching a study programme this year, when international attention is focused on African development – by the Africa Commission, at the G8, and in the work of the European Council of Ministers. The CPSU will present a report, with recommendations, in time for the Commonwealth summit in Malta from 25-27 November.

3 The CPSU is working with several partners, including the NEPAD Secretariat, the UN Secretary-General's Advisory Panel for NEPAD (chaired by Chief Anyaoku), the European Policy Centre, Brussels, and the University of Malta in Valletta. Following the Russell Square conference on 23 May the European Policy Centre will hold a one day event in Brussels on 12 July, and a similar conference will take place in Valletta in mid-October.

Issues being addressed in CPSU's 2005 programme

4 Numerous studies, most recently the comprehensive report by the Africa Commission, have indicated that the African continent has failed to benefit from the material improvement that other developing regions - notably East, Southeast and South Asia and the Caribbean - have enjoyed in recent decades. Worse still, parts of Africa have been severely affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and civil wars, with shortened lifespans, depleted workforces and social and cultural dislocation. African governments have responded to this predicament by creating the NEPAD process – by which they have initiated a partnership for progress with G8 and other developed nations. The need for outsiders to assist the NEPAD process has been recognised by both the European Union and by the Commonwealth's 2003 declaration at Aso Rock (paragraph 23). The issue to be addressed is how, working together in innovative ways, the Commonwealth and European Union may give strength and sustainability to the NEPAD process.

An African perspective

5 The African Union, which like the Commonwealth has 53 member states, is now responsible for NEPAD. This programme has several aspects: advocacy with developed states (eg for the opening up of their markets to agricultural produce, and for investment); stimulus for infrastructure projects for regional integration; a peer review mechanism to improve political and economic governance; encouragement for the private sector, to support development projects; and coordinated efforts against the scourges of AIDS and hunger. Historically, NEPAD is an amalgam of the Millennium Partnership for the Africa Recovery Programme (MAP) of Presidents Obasanjo and Mbeki, and the more Francophone-oriented Omega programme of President Wade of Senegal. Arguably NEPAD, which has a small Secretariat in South Africa, has had difficulty in prioritising.

6 President Obasanjo, currently Chair of the African Union, is also chairing the implementation committee for NEPAD. NEPAD interacts with the European Union and Commission via the ACP Secretariat in Brussels, through the European Development Fund and bilaterally between states. A multiplicity of international agencies are involved with NEPAD, including the Commonwealth Secretariat which has offered help with the peer review mechanism, and individual Commonwealth countries from outside Africa. Liaison with so many agencies can create problems for the NEPAD Secretariat.

7 So far Africa has been disappointed by the progress of efforts for debt write-off, and of its campaign for better access to developed markets for exports. It is estimated that Africa still owes \$293bn and pays \$15bn a year in interest and fees, and that only seven states have seen their debt reduce to sustainable levels. Some Africans regard the position of the European Union on agricultural subsidy, and the nature of its state-by-state negotiations under the EU-ACP Cotonou agreement (2000) as undermining rhetoric in favour of African development, and regional and continental integration.

8 Africans also note some inconsistencies in the outside concern for peace, security and good governance. While there has been external support for African Union peace-keepers in Darfur, the US Millennium Challenge Accounts, for example, which had budgeted \$5.5bn in 2002 for African development, had not disbursed any monies three years later due to the high conditionalities related to good governance.

A European perspective

9 The European Union, in a region with the closest geographical and historical links with Africa, has had a significant political and economic interaction with the continent since the signing of the Treaty of Rome. This has gone through various stages – initially the closest relationship was with the former French colonies, then the 1975 Lome agreement brought in a developmental partnership with Commonwealth states and the rest of the continent; more recently there have been free trade agreements with South Africa, and regional agreements, including with the Maghreb countries.

10 The EU, and the European Commission, have sought to assist in political solutions to crises, such as those affecting the Great Lakes, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Darfur. The European Parliament has maintained a continuing interest in

African issues. Increasingly the EU has offered its political and economic support to the AU, as a way of recognising that African problems require African solutions developed by an African political process.

11 Development cooperation is on a large scale – rising from \$27bn of official EU development assistance to the continent in 2001 to \$34bn in 2006. It is more than twice the aid and development assistance to Africa from the United States, and includes significant assistance to individual states. Cooperation has gone through various stages: whereas initial support for Africa lay in infrastructure construction the emphasis then moved to capacity building and assistance for sustainability, and on to concerns with democratisation, governance, human rights and promotion of the private sector. This development assistance should be seen against a background of human, political and economic links between Europe and Africa; these include the increasing use of the Euro for trade, the private sector, remittances, tourism, and education. The European Union is more than just the continent's major economic partner.

12 At the same time there are differences between European nations on the right way to support the NEPAD process. Germany, for example, has been less keen on debt write-off than the UK. EU countries which never had colonial relationships with Africa are keen to prioritise needs and programmes which are independent of Commonwealth or Francophone connections; they would like to see aid to go where it is most needed. However issues of human rights and governance, for instance with regard to President Mugabe's government in Zimbabwe, can cause serious ruptures in Europe's approach.

A Commonwealth perspective

13 The Commonwealth has a heavy political commitment to Africa, which is more recent than its historic role in decolonisation and the struggle against apartheid. Over a third of Commonwealth member states are African. The last Secretary-General, Chief Anyaoku, promoted ideas of democratisation, good governance and human rights after the Commonwealth Harare summit in 1991; this approach was underlined in 1995 when the military government of his own country, Nigeria, was suspended from Commonwealth membership, and a rules committee was set up, the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group. This year's summit takes place in Malta, geographically between Africa and Europe; the last summit was in Nigeria and the 2007 summit will be in Uganda.

14 The Commonwealth's approach is influenced by the high proportion of member states which are themselves developing, and the sense of ownership, understanding and kinship this can arouse. Hence, although the Commonwealth is not able to produce huge sums for African development even for its own members – though 82 per cent of UK's aid to Africa goes to African Commonwealth countries – the Commonwealth contribution lies in the area of ideas, processes and the building of human capacity.

15 For instance, the Commonwealth decision in 1995 that military leaders should no longer attend its meetings was followed by the OAU at Algiers by a similar ruling. Its collegial approach synchronises with the NEPAD peer review strategy, where Ghana has been one of the first states to volunteer for appraisal. Its theme of development

and democracy, for the Abuja summit in 2003, was designed to take forward a twin track progress for member states.

16 Development strategy is probably the area in which the Commonwealth can do most. India, Malaysia, Singapore and some Caribbean states have made enormous strides and, if these could be replicated in Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth African states over the next decade, Afro-optimism would flourish. UK parliamentarians have forecast that India will soon not need UK aid, and the Indian government has established a \$200M Indian-African fund for NEPAD; the Malaysian government and private sector have built significant commercial links with countries from Mozambique to Ghana over the last decade. Exchange visits of political leaders between Southern Africa and the Caribbean have added a political and democratic dimension.

17 Human capacity building, utilising bodies such as the Association of Commonwealth Universities, and Commonwealth expertise in the support of small states, are also relevant.

Some questions for the day

18 Are there priority areas for complementarity and coordination between the Commonwealth and European Union, and can the increasing collaboration between the European Commission and Commonwealth Secretariat be built on for African development? Is it possible to imagine the Commonwealth playing a role in helping the NEPAD Secretariat or processes in non-Commonwealth African countries? Is it possible for the Commonwealth and Francophonie to work more closely together, either in lobbying the European Council of Ministers, or in Africa? Can the private sector, domestic and international, play a bigger role in NEPAD? Can the Commonwealth and European Union work together to harness the African Diaspora behind development in African countries, in the way that the Overseas Chinese and Non-Resident Indians have worked for China and India? Is there more to be done for the governance, rights and democracy agenda – particularly with regard to local government and to the anti-corruption campaigns?

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