21th Overseas Countries and Territories - European Union FORUM

21th OCTs-EU FORUM

Aruba, 9-14 April 2026

Joint 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 21st OCTs-EU Forum held on 13 April 2026 in Aruba. The Partners thanked the Government of Aruba for hosting the Forum and the European Commission for chairing and supporting this important event.

The Forum was chaired by the European Commissioner for International Partnerships, Mr Jozef Síkela.

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 11 April 2026.

The following Joint Conclusions were adopted:

1. The Partners emphasise the special relationship between the European Union (EU) and the OCTs, and their belonging to the same European 'family', based on shared objectives, principles, and fundamental values.

2. The Partners recognise the geostrategic importance of the OCTs for the EU, as reflected in the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, the Joint Communications "A New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean" and "A stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable and prosperous Arctic".

3. The Partners reaffirm that in a context of heightened strategic competition, geopolitical fragmentation and shifting regional dynamics, the OCTs' unique position as strategic outposts is critical to strengthen the European Union's global presence and strategic autonomy.

4. The Partners recognise the opportunities offered by the Decision on the Overseas Association, including Greenland (DOAG), to further develop and strengthen their relationship, by pursuing mutual interests while acknowledging and addressing specific needs and challenges of the OCTs. They 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.

5. 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. The Partners take due note of the European Commission's proposal for the DOAG envelope under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2034.

6. The Partners commend the progress made in developing and implementing the 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. Six action plans have been adopted since the last Forum including two regional programmes, a first intraregional programme, and an action on culture covering all OCTs. The Partners aim to maintain the momentum throughout 2026 and beyond, and to pursue with the implementation of the territorial, regional, and intraregional action plans, by ensuring synergies and complementarities among them.

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 organisations notably in their respective geographical basins. The Partners underline the catalytic role that the OCTs can play in their respective regions by promoting win-win partnership initiatives supporting sustainable development.

8. The Partners acknowledge the need to foster synergies and complementarities between the DOAG, the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe, the Interreg instrument and other EU programmes benefiting the OCTs, to strengthen regional cooperation among the OCTs, enabling them to further collaborate as neighbours, economic partners, and allies.

9. The Partners recognise the interest of the OCTs in gaining improved access to EU programmes beyond the DOAG including through tailored approaches such as targeted calls for proposal and acknowledge the need to continue capacity-building and training activities to further increase the number of OCTs and projects benefiting from these programmes.

10. The Partners recall the vulnerability of the OCTs and the particular impact of environmental degradation, extreme weather events, glaciers melting, and sea-level rises. They underline the importance of their collective engagement on climate mitigation and adaptation as well as biodiversity protection. They welcome the opportunities offered under the Green Overseas programme of the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), the BESTLIFE2030 facility, well as the Clean energy for EU islands initiative, which contributed to enhancing OCTs' resilience and advancing their green transition.

11. Building on their discussions at the Forum, the Partners reaffirm the importance of continuing to cooperate on issues such as waste management, water and sanitation, biodiversity protection and to exchange practices on sustainable tourism.

12. The Partners also reiterate the relevance of the EU Global Gateway strategy as a framework to strengthen the OCTs-EU partnership, while recognising the specificities of the OCTs and the need for a tailored approach reflecting their scale, geography and regional anchoring.

13. In this context, the Partners confirm the importance of setting up regional priorities to guide their cooperation and investment efforts: in the Caribbean notably, digital connectivity, energy transition, maritime connectivity, waste management, sargassum valorisation and disaster risk management; in the Pacific, notably digital and transport connectivity, the energy transition, and climate-resilient infrastructure as well as sustainable economic development including the green and blue economy and the nickel value chain. For Greenland, cooperation should include education and green growth, renewable energy, sustainable raw materials, digital connectivity, housing, sustainable tourism, environment, and infrastructure. For Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon and the French Southern and Antarctic Lands, connectivity and energy transition notably will guide future actions.

14. Building on these priorities, the Partners envisage to continue working towards the development of an investment agenda centred on transformative projects capable of operationalising these priorities and strengthening regional integration, value-chain development and economic resilience. This work aims to focus on identifying and structuring concrete projects that can deliver tangible impact while mobilising the EU's instruments in support of OCTs' needs.

15. The Partners welcome the organisation of the Investment Conference in the framework of the Forum as a first step towards the operationalisation of this agenda, enabling an initial exchange with European financial and development partners and private sector actors on possible implementation pathways. The Partners intend to pursue discussions with relevant stakeholders, with a view to maturing and financing the emerging project pipeline as well as providing financial tools and instruments to adequately address the OCTs needs.

16. The Partners recognise the importance of sharing information regarding the different strategies carried out by the European Commission which may concern the OCTs and the need to maintain constant exchanges to deepen their involvement in the framework of the institutional dialogue as set out in the DOAG Article 14.

17. In line with the DOAG, the Partners intend to take, where relevant, account of the OCTs impact analysis accompanying the launch and negotiation of the free trade agreements by the Union.

18. The Partners reaffirm the importance of relations with the ACP countries and welcome the provisional application since 1 January 2024 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.

19. The Partners welcome the communication campaign conducted in 2024-2026 to enhance awareness and create positive perception about the value and impact of the OCTs-EU partnership with a focus on young people.

20. Recognising the valuable contribution of youth to the objectives of the OCTs–EU partnership, the Partners express their appreciation for the OCTs' Youth Network

launched in 2022 that has helped increase ties between young people living in the OCTs and the EU.

21. The Partners intend to maintain and further strengthen the OCTs-EU partnership through a constructive, transparent, and permanent dialogue.

22. The Partners recognise the importance of the 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 the OCTs are linked.

23. The Partners would like to thank Aruba for its excellent work as Chair of the OCTA and to welcome St Barthelemy as the new Chair designate.

24. The next OCTs-EU Forum is scheduled to take place in Brussels.

The Joint Forum Conclusions are not intended to create rights or obligations under international or domestic law and do not have financial implications.