

Europe is abusing poor countries, say MPs

A parliamentary committee looking at development issues has condemned the way Europe is negotiating new trade deals with poor countries.

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In their recent report, the International Development Committee accuses the European Union of 'abusing its position' by forcing poor countries to sign up to the deals with threats of penalties if they reject them.

As the name suggests, the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are supposed to be approached as an equal partnership, with the central aim of tackling poverty.

But to date the talks have been very one-sided, as the Europeans do not respond to proposals from the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, or dismiss them out of hand.

The report emphasises the urgent need to improve communication between the two sides, as well as for greater flexibility in the European stance. It also asks the UK government to ensure that the current review of EPAs 'allows the concerns of the ACP states to be aired fully and addressed.'

It goes on to attack the European Commission's determination to conclude the deals by the end of the year regardless of these concerns. In common with [recent statements by ACP governments](#), the committee recommends that negotiations are extended instead of rushing through deals that will increase poverty.

David Tucker, Traidcraft campaigns co-ordinator, said: "Traidcraft welcomes the IDC report, which explicitly recognises the importance of our founding mission - to make trade work for the poor.

"The way that the European Commission is threatening poor countries lays bare their aggressive tactics in these negotiations. The UK has a clear position on EPAs, and it is being ignored by Brussels. It is time for our government to stand up and be counted."

The British government has a relatively progressive position on EPAs, which has been heavily influenced by trade campaigners over the last few years. However, the government must now follow up its words with action.

As the report says, "the essential building blocks needed to secure fair and effective deals are clear. Political will is now needed to put those blocks in place."

Read the report

- [Full details can be found on Select Committee on International Development website.](#)