21ST OVERSEAS COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES – EUROPEAN UNION FORUM
THE 21TH OCTS-EU FORUM
OCTS-EU FORUM, ARUBA, 9 TO 14 APRIL 2026
REPORT

1. GENERAL

The 21st OCTs-EU Forum, the highest-level platform for annual dialogue between the Overseas Countries and Territories, the Member States to which they are linked and the European Commission, took place in Aruba from 9 to 14 April 2026 to take stock of the OCTs-EU cooperation, discuss joint priorities and guide the partnership strategically. The Forum reaffirmed the importance of the OCTs-EU relation and the need for increased cooperation in the current geopolitical context. Its main event, the Plenary Session, attended by around 100 participants was chaired by Commissioner Síkela on 13 April and concluded with the adoption of Joint Conclusions confirming some key priorities for the future. It was preceded by 13 technical trilateral meetings between individual OCTs, EU Member States and the Commission, and by four High-Level Trilateral Meetings between the Commissioner, Member States and respectively Greenland, French OCTs, Dutch OCTs and French and Dutch Caribbean OCTs, all represented at high level. Parties welcome the closer alignment with Global Gateway priorities and the need to attract additional investment across the various regions.

The OCTs' Association (OCTA) Ministerial Conference took place on the 11 April and adopted a Joint Declaration on the future DOAG 2028-2034 welcoming the Commission's proposal to double financing for OCT under the next MFF while recalling some priorities. Held back-to-back with the Forum, the first-ever OCT Investment Conference represented a milestone, showing how the EU intends to roll out Global Gateway as both an investment multiplier and a convening platform. The next Forum will be held in 2028 in Brussels.

2. TRILATERAL TECHNICAL MEETINGS

Thirteen technical trilateral meetings enabled the EU, Member States and OCTs to review the ongoing cooperation confirming that implementation is well on track. Participants provided positive feedback on the Green Overseas and BestLife 2030 programmes and welcomed both the new thematic programme for OCTs on culture and the new Caribbean and Pacific regional programmes although regretting delays in the Pacific. Visibility of EU actions was also discussed.

The Commission presented the regional investment priorities for the Caribbean, namely digital and maritime connectivity, energy transition, sargassum valorisation and disaster risk management and for the Pacific, 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. OCTs presented some investment priorities already identified and raised questions about how these priorities could be supported. Pacific OCTs also confirmed the importance of territorial allocations and their preference for budget support as aid modality.

In addition, many OCTs expressed interest in continuing cooperation on waste and water management, sustainable tourism and biodiversity protection. They recall that they

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continue to face significant challenges, including dependency, vulnerability to climate change and external shocks, and need support to increase limited capacities.
For Greenland specifically, the discussions focussed on the upcoming high-level visits, including that of Commissioner Síkela in May and on the priorities for cooperation in terms of investments as part of the investment package but also in terms of policy dialogue.

3. HIGH-LEVEL TRILATERAL MEETINGS

The four High Level Trilateral meetings clarified available instruments and opportunities for coordinated investment under a Team Europe and Global Gateway approach. Commissioner Síkela recalled the growing importance of the OCTs, as reflected in the Commission's proposal to double the funding under the DOAG for the next MFF. This increased ambition goes hand in hand with a shift in the approach to cooperation, towards stronger regional and investment-driven partnerships. He invited OCTs to start preparing project pipelines to translate their priorities into bankable projects.

The OCTs presented their regional priorities while also reflecting specific territorial needs. They highlighted the need for tailored responses, additional technical assistance, capacity building and complementarity between regional and territorial approaches.
Parties called for a strong Team Europe approach with the EU, France, Danmark and the Netherlands mobilising their respective financial instruments and capacities to prepare and de-risk investments and underlined the importance of integrating neighbouring third countries and Outermost Regions when relevant to increase project viability and success.

4. OCTA MINISTERIAL

The OCTA Ministerial Conference gathered the 13 OCTs to define strategic orientations. It notably adopted a common position on the DOAG and agreed to clear the pending recovery order issued by the Commission signalling the willingness to close this chapter and to play a more strategic role in OCTs-EU relations. A specific session was organised on biodiversity featuring BestLife projects and calling for a continued cooperation on nature protection. The new OCTA chair was elected: Saint Barthélemy, with Curaçao foreseen as next chair in 2028. OCTA is expected to play a more active role in the Global Gateway agenda.

5. FIELD VISIT

A field visit in Aruba showcased EU supported interventions and local initiatives, including Arikok Park, cultural sites in San Nicolaas, the University of Aruba and the new Directorate for Kingdom and EU Affairs as an EU information hub. In parallel, Commissioner Sikela visited the former Lago oil refinery, as the repurposing of the site is central to reflections on future investment opportunities on energy, waste or regional connectivity in Aruba.

6. PLENARY SESSION

The plenary session in Aruba was opened by the Prime Minister of Aruba, the EU Commissioner and the Vice President of the European Parliament, followed by political statements from the 13 OCTs and Member States representatives as well as interventions from the EIB, the European Parliament, Outermost Regions and a youth representative. Discussions highlighted the importance of moving from dialogue to action notably on investment, agreeing on regional priorities and ensuring that cooperation delivers concrete benefits for the populations.

Parties reiterated that OCTs are part of the EU family and stressed the need to leverage the current geopolitical context to deepen cooperation between the EU, the OCTs and the Outermost Regions. OCTs expressed appreciation for the EU's proposal to double funding under the next DOAG and for the new opportunities offer under the Global Gateway strategy, while reflecting OCTs' specific needs.

Session 1, with the Dutch OCTs and the Netherlands underlined the importance of joint, ambitious action and confirmed broad alignment on priority areas for the Caribbean region notably digital connectivity, energy transition (including electricity integration), maritime connectivity, sargassum valorisation and disaster risk management.

Session 2, with Greenland and Denmark, recognised the EU's long-standing support in key sectors such as education, critical raw materials, renewable energy and research, noted the positive impact of the EU office in Nuuk, and underlined that OCTs, the EU and Member States are stronger acting together.

Session 3, with the French OCTs and France welcomed the EU's new cooperation approach, called for OCTs' specificities to be fully taken into account, and confirmed convergence on several priorities, including biodiversity and climate change, energy transition, digitalisation, waste/water management, sargassum and marine connectivity, while advocating to maintain territorial cooperation notably through budget-support alongside the new regional, investment-oriented approach.

Session 4 brought in associated partners (including the Presidency of the Conference of Presidents of the Outermost Regions, the European Parliament and the EIB), emphasising that delivering on the Global Gateway agenda requires engaging a broad set of stakeholders, and featured a declaration from the OCTs-EU Youth Network cohort announcing the creation of their association.

The Commissioner concluded by acknowledging the diversity of OCTs and their shared priorities, calling for a shift to investment, and inviting participants to continue engagement during the investment conference.
The plenary concluded with a signature ceremony launching five new EU supported programmes for OCTs. These were:

1. The Regional Programme for the Caribbean OCTs on the Sustainable Management of Natural Capital,
2. The thematic programme for all OCTs on Culture Creative Industries,
3. The Intraregional Programme for the French TAAF and la Reunion on the Management of Ungulates and Predators,
4. The StormWatch Initiative on Disaster Risk Management for Caribbean OCTs,
5. BESTLIFE2030 supporting biodiversity in the OCTs.

7. INVESTMENT CONFERENCE

The Investment Conference in Aruba marked a shift towards a more investment oriented and Global Gateway aligned partnership, aiming to mobilise investments in OCTs in key sectors of mutual interest. The conference was the opportunity to present the EU financial toolbox, discuss regional priorities and advance the preparation of an investment pipeline. It clarified how blending mechanisms, guarantees, grants and equity can support projects and called for a stronger partnership between OCT authorities, Member States, finance institutions, the private sector and the EU to develop pipelines of bankable projects.

8. NEXT STEPS

Follow up includes:

- The preparation of concrete project proposals and investment pipelines

- Follow up including a mission to Greenland in May, a tripartite meeting in June, a Pacific mission in autumn
- Stronger coordination between the EU, Member States, development finance institutions and the OCTs.
- Aligning efforts with Outermost Regions and neighbouring countries to explore complementary financing to implement the regional priority investments.