

## **EU and Overseas Countries and Territories strengthen partnership under Global Gateway at the 21st OCTs-EU Forum**

European Commissioner for International Partnerships Jozef **Síkela** represented the EU at the 21st Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) and EU Forum held in Aruba. The Forum marked a strategic shift in the partnership, towards structured investment and full integration into the Global Gateway strategy. This is a new phase in EU engagement with territories from the Arctic to the Caribbean and the Pacific.

Alongside the Commissioner, the Forum was attended by high-level representatives including Presidents and Prime Ministers of all 13 OCTs, Denmark, France and the Netherlands. It was followed by the first EU–OCT Investment Conference that brought together around 140 representatives of governments, financial institutions and the private sector.

Commissioner Síkela said: *“The OCTs and their one million EU citizens are part of the European family and Europe's frontline presence in the Arctic, the Caribbean and the Pacific. In a more contested world, that presence has real strategic value. At this Forum we committed to investing in it through Global Gateway: concrete projects, real financing, and a partnership built for today's geopolitical reality.”*

A central focus of this year's Forum was the launch of a new phase of EU engagement with the OCTs centred on delivery under the Global Gateway strategy, particularly in light of the European Commission's proposal to nearly double financial support for OCTs in the next EU budget cycle, from €500 million to €999 million, demonstrating its long-term commitment to the partnership.

The European Union, Member States and OCTs took stock of their cooperation and reaffirmed their commitment to advancing regional priorities. They initiated a structured process to identify and develop transformative investment projects to deliver concrete results on the ground. Building on their unique position across the Caribbean, North Atlantic, Arctic and Indo-Pacific, OCTs remain key partners in strengthening Europe's global presence, boosting resilience, and promoting sustainable growth.

Commissioner Síkela and OCT authorities signed five flagship programmes under Global Gateway, demonstrating a stronger, investment-driven and regional approach.

- **StormWatch Initiative on Disaster Risk Management (€3 million)**  
Caribbean OCTs will join the StormWatch Initiative, which entails support to the Caribbean Institute for Meteorology and Hydrology to become a Copernicus Competence Centre in the Caribbean. The OCTs and Caribbean countries will directly benefit from forecasting upgrades, as well as new technology and services for monitoring and forecasting, ensuring better protection of vulnerable communities.
- **Caribbean Regional Programme – Sustainable Management of Caribbean OCTs' Natural Capital (€21 million)**  
The programme aims to strengthen food and nutrition security to achieve resilient food systems, and to protect, restore and better manage biodiversity to ensure healthy ecosystems.
- **Intraregional Programme for the French Southern and Antarctic Lands and La Réunion: Management of Ungulates and Predators (€1.15 million)**

The project aims to reduce the impact of Invasive Alien Species by promoting the development of regional cooperation in the Southwest Indian Ocean.

- **BESTLIFE 2030: Supporting Biodiversity in the OCTs (approx. €3.90 million)**  
“Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European Overseas” is a granting mechanism focused on preserving and restoring biodiversity in the EU’s Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories, which host rich biodiversity but also face significant climate change threats.
- **OCTs-EU Partnership on Culture (€2 million)**  
This initiative aims to promote culture and creative industries across all thirteen OCTs, and to support sustainable tourism and local economic development.

Commissioner Síkela visited EU-funded projects and institutions on the ground, as well as the newly opened Directorate for EU and Kingdom Relations, the new office dedicated to the dissemination of information on all EU matters relevant for Aruba as an OCT and on the EU horizontal programmes. He also held high-level trilateral meetings with OCT and EU Member State representatives, which further guided the future of the partnership and strengthened a shared commitment to delivery, investment and impact.

### **Background**

The OCTs-EU Forum is the highest-level platform for annual dialogue between the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs), the European Union, and the EU Member States. Members of the European Parliament, the European Investment Bank and representatives of the EU Outermost Regions are associated partners.

Thirteen Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) are all islands, located in the Atlantic, the Arctic, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific. They are associated with the EU and constitutionally linked to Denmark (Greenland), France (6 OCTs) and the Netherlands (6 OCTs), on which they depend to varying degrees as non-sovereign countries or territories. Most OCTs have wide-ranging autonomy, covering areas such as economic affairs, public health, home affairs and customs, while defence and foreign affairs usually remain within the remit of the respective EU Member States.

### **For more information**

21st OCTs-EU Forum - International Partnerships - European Commission

Overseas Countries and Territories - International Partnerships.

Global Gateway