

## **European Union cements market access for ACP countries; takes important step in EPA negotiations - Brussels, 20 December 2007**

**The European Commission welcomed the formal adoption by the Council of the market access offer for African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries under the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). 35 ACP countries have signed either interim agreements or full EPAs with the Commission, with a further 32 nations receiving full access to European markets as Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The Commission intends to maintain the momentum achieved in 2008, turning interim agreements into comprehensive economic partnership agreements.**

EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson said: "Today marks an important moment in the relationship between the EU and the ACP. Working together, we have removed the threat of trade disruption that was hanging over us and put in place the foundations of a more ambitious and more sustainable economic partnership. Making this change has not been straightforward. But the leadership of many in the ACP and the unprecedented offer made by the EU mean that we have now secured one full regional EPA, assured the continued market access of almost all non-LDCs and ensured we remain firmly on the path to full regional EPAs."

EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel said: "I am pleased that EU Member States have agreed to set up a trade regime with duty free market access and improved rules of origin for the many countries that have signed up to these agreements. These agreements will help preserve their exports to the EU and enable them to develop their economies. We are now well set to work with our ACP partners in the New Year, supporting their political and economic regional integration efforts with full regional EPAs and putting trade at the service of development in an innovative and ambitious package."

The Commission has already agreed a full EPA with the Caribbean region, including trade in goods, trade in services, rules on trade related issues, as well as development cooperation. In 2008 the Commission intends to focus on:

- Turning sub-regional and multi-country agreements (eg in the Pacific, West, Central and Eastern Africa) into genuine regional agreements bringing in all countries, non-LDCs and LDCs
- Building up existing and emerging regional agreements to form full EPAs with the greatest possible coverage on issues like services and rules. In some cases this is foreseen as an on-going process linked to capacity-building and regional reforms;
- Following up on EU commitments on Aid for Trade by concluding the 10th EDF regional programmes and engaging Member States to deliver on their commitments.

### **Background**

The EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP) have been working to put in place new Economic Partnership Agreements by the end of 2007. On 1 January 2008 the legal waiver non-ACP developing countries have extended to cover the existing trade arrangements between the ACP and the EU will expire. EPAs aim at progressively removing barriers to trade and enhancing cooperation in all areas related to trade. They are also aimed at providing an

open, transparent and predictable framework for goods and services to circulate freely, thus increasing competitiveness of the ACP.

[Note](#) on the state of play in the EPAs negotiations

[ACP Market Access outlook](#)

[More](#) on the agreements reached to date by country and by ACP region

[More](#) on Economic Partnership Agreements