



Negotiation of an Economic Partnership Agreement between West Africa and the European Community

Meeting of Chief Negotiators Brussels, 5 February 2007

Conclusion

West African and EU Chief negotiators met in Brussels on 5 February 2007 to take stock of the progress of Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations between West Africa (WA) and the EC and to provide political impetus and guidance for the next steps in the negotiation process. The West African delegation was led by the Presidents of ECOWAS and WAEMU Commissions, and included West African Ministers. The EU Commissioner for Trade and the EU Commissioner for Development represented the EU.

Chief negotiators finalized the preparatory phase of negotiations by adopting all outstanding technical reports produced during this phase. They further agreed to begin the next phase of negotiations immediately. This phase will focus on drafting the legal text of the EPA and negotiating market access offers. In parallel, work on the identification of EPA accompanying measures will progress within the Regional Preparatory Task Force (RPTF).

Chief negotiators also examined the draft joint report on the review of negotiations pursuant to Article 37.4 of the Cotonou Agreement. On the basis of the present conclusions, they instructed their negotiators to finalize this draft within the month with a view to adopting it by exchange of letters.

The EC and the WA region reiterate that the objective of the EPA is development. They commit to take all the necessary measures to design an EPA supportive of sustainable development, which promotes deep regional integration and good economic governance, facilitates trade and attracts private investment to the region, thus fostering growth and creating employment

The EC and WA recognize the importance of EPA related development cooperation and are committed to ensure the necessary priority to this under the Cotonou Agreement instruments and particularly in the 10th EDF RIP on the basis of the commitments contained in the EPA as well as complementary resources from EU Member States and other donors, and to facilitate access to them through, inter alia, the Regional EPA Fund and budget support.

In particular, the EC is ready to support competitiveness of productive sectors concerned by the EPA, to significantly contribute to absorb the net fiscal impact resulting from EPA

liberalization in full complementarity with fiscal reforms, and to support accompanying measures linked to the implementation of the rules included in the agreement.

EC and West Africa commit to cooperate in the RPTF and to increase its efficiency with a view to mobilize the necessary resources for the preparation and implementation of the EPA.

The Commission recalls the commitment made by the EC and EU Member States in the EU Council to provide 2 bio €per year in aid for trade by 2010, with a substantial part for ACP countries, and that the 1 bio €Member States contribution will be additional to the EDF.

EC and West Africa recognize the importance that WA puts in place a West African Regional EPA Fund, which can be a powerful tool to coordinate support by the EC, and possibly EU Member States and other donors for the implementation of the EPA in an efficient and timely manner.

The EC is committed to offer full duty free quota free access to the greatest extent possible for goods originating from West Africa, taking account of specific interests of West Africa.

With regard to the opening of the West African market, the EC is committed to use flexibility of WTO rules concerning both the duration of the transition period and asymmetry regarding the rhythm of tariff dismantling and the coverage of liberalization.

The EC is also ready to offer access for services including on mode IV in respect of cross-border movement of persons.

The EU and WA consider competition, investment and public procurement as key issues for development, as this will help securing the investment and growth in the region. These trade rules will be linked to West Africa's own regional reforms, priority being regional rules making with development assistance from the EU.

Concerning the end of the 2007 deadline for the signing of the agreement, West Africa and the EC reaffirmed their commitment as a prior condition:

- to define jointly the EPA accompanying programs and their funding by the EC,
- to formulate the market access schedules for the two sides,
- to draft the text of the agreement.

Concerning the implementation and phased introduction of all aspects of the agreement, both sides agreed to be flexible in their approach with a view to implementing an EPA that serves the interest of the peoples of West Africa. Chief negotiators agreed to meet again in July to take stock of progress towards this goal.