

Pacific-EC EPA Ministerial Meeting

Joint Declaration

Brussels, 2 October 2007

1. Ministers from the Pacific ACP (PACP) States and European Commissioners met in Brussels on 2 October 2007 to take stock of the progress of Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations between the Pacific and the EC and to provide political impetus and guidance for the remaining steps in the negotiation process. The Pacific delegation was led by the Associate Minister for Trade Negotiations of Samoa, and the Lead Spokesperson of the Pacific Regional Negotiating Team Hon. Minister Hans Joachim Keil and included the following Ministers: Taito Waradi (Fiji), Martin Puta Tofinga (Kiribati), Bill Vakaafi Motufoou (Niue), Sam Abal (PNG), John M. Silk (RMI), Lisiate 'Akolo (Tonga), Lotoala Metia (Tuvalu) and James Bule (Vanuatu). The EU was represented by the Commissioner for Trade, Peter Mandelson, and the Commissioner for Development, Louis Michel.
2. The Meeting agreed that, in view of the short time available until the deadline of 31 December 2007, it was necessary to conclude a WTO-compatible interim agreement as a stepping stone to a comprehensive EPA. This agreement would include agreed goods schedules, rules of origin, safeguards and other necessary elements as identified in the meeting and, depending on the progress in negotiations, also fisheries, competition, development cooperation provisions and any other text that could already be agreed at this stage. It was agreed that the interim agreement would enter into force on 1 January 2008 and would remain in force until succeeded by a comprehensive EPA. It was also agreed that those PACP States not becoming party to the interim agreement at its inception could join at any future date on comparable terms and conditions.
3. The EC welcomed the goods offers submitted to date by PACP States and noted that additional offers were anticipated in the near future. Both sides agreed that liberalisation schedules should reflect needs to foster competitiveness and development as well as comply with the requirements of WTO.
4. The PACP States welcomed the EC's recent rules of origin proposal, including provisions relating to agro-processing, textiles and fisheries. The EC noted the PACP request to extend global sourcing to further fishery products with the proviso that the products are processed in onshore facilities and undertook to consider it positively. It was also agreed to review other rules of origin provisions with a view to facilitating greater access by PACP products to the EU market.
5. It was agreed to include trade defence instruments in the interim agreement while recognising that exports from the PACP States were very small. It was further agreed by both sides that an appropriate infant industry clause to the benefit of the PACP States would be part of the EPA.
6. The meeting agreed to include in the EPA adequate dispute settlement provisions which permitted PACP States and the EC effective redress.

7. The PACP States and the EC recognised the value of a human resources development scheme which would support and facilitate the temporary movement of Pacific nationals to selected EU Member States. The EC confirmed that human resources development could be an important part of the 10th EDF regional programme in support of EPA-related needs and invited the PACP region to finalise its programming as rapidly as possible. The meeting noted the EC's undertaking to assist the PACP States in their ongoing work with the Member States with a view to progressing the proposals contained in the PACP bilateral MOUs on temporary movement of persons.
8. Both sides committed to conclude a comprehensive EPA by 31 December 2008 that would include trade-related rules and services as mutually agreed. The meeting concurred that the market access arrangements in the interim agreement would remain in place until such time as the full EPA as mutually agreed would enter into force.
9. Both sides committed to work together to mobilise EU Member States' and other donors' resources in addition to those available under the Cotonou Agreement instruments. They underlined the crucial importance of the forthcoming EU Aid for Trade Strategy to achieve this objective and noted the EC's commitment to work to ensure that the PACP States receive their fair share of the resources.
10. The meeting noted the outcome of the inaugural meeting of the PACP-EC Regional Preparatory Task Force (RPTF) and stressed its important role in linking trade and development issues relating to the partnership.
11. The PACP States and the EC agreed that exchanges at technical level should continue and intensify. An additional negotiation round at technical level would be held as soon as possible in October with the intention of completing and approving the interim agreement by 9 November 2007.