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**EPA Negotiations Coordination Meeting**

**24-25 July 2013**

**Libreville, Gabon**

**TI/TD/EPA/AM/01**

**Original: English**

**Aide-Memoire**

## A. Background

1. EPA Negotiations have been going on for already ten years in Africa; and yet no comprehensive EPA has been concluded. It was agreed in the Cotonou Partnership Agreement that the objectives of EPAs, are first, that they would serve primarily as instruments for the promotion of sustainable economic growth and development, second, support the gradual integration of ACP countries into the global economy, and third, reinforce the regional integration initiatives in ACP countries. Ten years on, more still needs to be done to align EPAs with the development aspirations of African countries and to make them consistent with Africa's integration agenda.
2. Negotiations for comprehensive EPAs are continuing at different speeds across the negotiating regions. Throughout the year 2012, some regions had intensive negotiating sessions while others did not. Divergences still exist in the following areas; binding commitments for development support, market access-the scope of tariff liberalisation and the time period for tariff reduction, export taxes, most favoured nation principle, modification of tariffs, removal of community levies, non-execution clause and agricultural safeguards among others. On most of these issues, it will be difficult to register technical progress because some of the differences are so fundamental that they cannot be resolved technically and would require political guidance.
3. The Interim EPA signed and ratified by Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles and Zimbabwe is under provisional application since May 2012 and implementation has since started. In the CARIFORUM, the only region that managed to conclude a comprehensive EPA by the original deadline of 2007, some countries are still challenged with implementation. It remains to be seen how African countries will cope with EPA implementation challenges.
4. As October 2014 approaches, countries that signed an Interim EPA but are perceived not to have taken necessary steps to ratify and implement the agreement will no longer have preferential market access to the European Union (EU). The EU also has a new GSP Scheme, which excludes countries classified as Upper-Middle Income Countries (UMICs) from benefiting. Among the countries that will be affected if they do not sign and ratify an EPA are Namibia and Botswana. As the deadline draws near, the pressure to conclude an agreement will rise.
5. In Africa, China is becoming an important trading partner for many African countries in a way that has the potential to change the direction of trade of many African countries. African countries have also realised the importance of strengthening regional and intra African trade as shown by their commitment to establish the Tripartite Free Trade Area by 2014 and the Continental Free Trade Area by 2017. It has been announced that the EU and the United States will start negotiations for an FTA by June 2013. The EC is also involved in FTA negotiations with other countries such as India and Vietnam. The conclusion of all these negotiations will erode the value of African countries' preferential market access to the European market.
6. The AUC is organizing this EPA Negotiations Coordination Meeting to review recent developments and assess the current state of play of the negotiations. The meeting will provide regions with Member States that are implementing interim agreements an opportunity to share their experiences. The private sector from the ECCAS region will also have an opportunity to share its perspectives on EPAs. The Commission will also update participants on the progress that has been made in the implementation of the recent Summit Decisions on boosting intra-African trade.

## **B. The main objectives of the workshop are the following;**

- i. Create a platform for the EPA Negotiating RECs/Regions in Africa to share notes and experiences as well as exchange information on the EPA negotiations;
- ii. Bring together EPA Negotiators and Technical Advisors, Researchers, and partner international organisations to review new developments in the EPA negotiations;
- iii. Share experiences on the implementation of interim EPAs.
- iv. Update participating stakeholders, on progress made on the implementation of decisions on boosting intra-African trade;
- v. Coordinate views on the way forward.

## **C. Participation**

7. The Coordination Meeting will be attended by EPA negotiators and technical advisors from the five negotiating regions in Africa and representatives of the RECs as well as the private sector from each of the five regions. The regional representatives of the negotiating groups in Brussels will attend the Coordination Meeting. Representatives of collaborating institutions: - UNCTAD, UNECA, UNDP, ACP, ILEAP, ECDPM, TWN, TRALAC, Commonwealth Secretariat, Organisation de La Francophonie and South Centre are also invited to attend the meeting.

## **D. Documentation and working languages**

8. The workshop shall be conducted in English and French languages only. Materials will be provided by the AUC, the speakers and collaborating institutions. Working documents for the workshop will be posted on the AU Website [www.africa-union.org](http://www.africa-union.org).

## **E. Venue and date of the meeting**

9. The Coordination Meeting will be held on 24-25 July 2013 in Libreville, Gabon. Specific details on the venue of the meeting will be communicated in due course.

## **F. Immigration Requirements**

10. It is the responsibility of the participant to find out in their home country the visa requirements for their entry to Gabon. Participants requiring an entry visa should obtain visas from the Gabonese Consular Missions in their respective countries before departure. For those without Gabonese Embassies in their countries of origin (departure), arrangements are being explored for the issuance of visa at the entry point.

## **G. Workshop Format**

11. The two day workshop will be divided into various sessions as detailed in the agenda annexed to this aide memoire. During each session, participants will have the opportunity to exchange views and share experiences.

## **H. Contact Persons**

12. For more information on the organisation of the workshop you are kindly requested to direct all your inquiries to Batanai Chikwene, [chikweneb@africa-union.org](mailto:chikweneb@africa-union.org) and Carolyne Tumuhimbise, [Tumuhimbise@africa-union.org](mailto:Tumuhimbise@africa-union.org) or fax to +251 11 518 29 70.