

EU and West African EPA negotiators meet in Abuja, Nigeria (24-27 March 2009)

European and West African negotiators met in Abuja (Nigeria) from 24 to 27 March to discuss the way ahead in "full" Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations. Good progress was made on trade in goods, dispute settlement, general exceptions, institutions, and final provisions. Positive discussions were also held on the market access offer from West Africa, and on rules of origin. Services were also on the agenda. Next round will take place in Brussels on 20-24 April and will focus on development cooperation aspects, but also on market access and the text of the EPA.

West African negotiators reasserted their will to try to conclude a pro-development deal by June 2009, as requested by their Heads of States, with the involvement of all partners in the region including key countries such as Nigeria. Both parties are happy with the good progress achieved so far. It is the result of an improved mutual understanding, a constructive and trustful relation, and intelligent flexibility shown by both sides.

Background

The EU-West Africa bilateral trade is represented by import-export of goods worth €15 billion (both ways, 2006 data). The EU mainly exports industrial goods (80% of its exports), including industrial machines (22%) and vehicles (19%). West Africa's main exports to the EU are represented by oil from Nigeria (50% of West African exports) and tropical agricultural products (cocoa, bananas, pineapples, and wood) mostly from Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) and Ghana. Other West African countries produce and export commodities such as cotton (Benin, Burkina Faso and Mali) or gold and diamonds (e.g. Sierra Leone, Liberia). Only two West African countries, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, initialled bilateral "stepping stone (or "interim") EPAs" with the EU at the end of 2007: Côte d'Ivoire eventually signed the interim EPA on 26 November 2008. The Commission is committed to negotiating a full EPA, including chapters on services and investment, with the entire region by 2009.

Source: EPA Flash News, European Commission, 1 April 2009