

Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations between West Africa and the European Union progressing well, conclusion expected for June 2009

European and West African EPA negotiators met at technical and senior officials' level in Brussels from 20 to 24 April. They significantly progressed towards closing the new trade deal: compromises were found on export taxes and free circulation, and significant progress was achieved on the EPA-related development co-operation part of the Agreement. Other issues, such as services, competition and sustainable development have been addressed but need more work and should be tackled in forthcoming trade talks. Regional levies, the Most Favoured Nation clause and the "non-execution" clause are still issues where a compromise needs to be found, but both parties are committed to work seriously with a view to try to conclude the full EPA by mid June 2009, as West African Heads of States planned so.

The momentum for EPA signature has been building up since the positive meeting of the Regional Preparatory Task Force (RPTF) of December 2008 and during last three EU-West Africa's negotiation rounds of Dakar (February), Abuja (March) and Brussels (April). Issues ranging from Trade Defence Instruments, Sanitary and Phytosanitary rules, Technical Barriers to Trade, Agriculture and Fisheries, Trade Facilitation, export taxes and market access, as well as services, competition, the EPA Programme for Development, dispute settlement, general exceptions, institutional arrangements, EPA final provisions and other EPA-related issues were discussed there and agreed to a large extent.

The way ahead

Further negotiations on the EPA related development cooperation, on market access (a revised offer is expected from West Africa) and on the few remaining points of divergence will take place in the next round of negotiations scheduled for 8-11 June in West Africa. This round will possibly be followed by an EU-West Africa Ministerial meeting in June with a view to give a final push towards a conclusion of the negotiations. Concluding a full EU-West Africa EPA will be key to foster economic integration in the region (now split into three different trade regimes) and to boost competitiveness in a region which is very poor but also full of untapped potential. The "EPA Programme for Development" (PAPED) is an essential pillar of the deal. In combination with the West African pro-development liberalisation scheme (which will prioritize the liberalisation of industrial machines, certain vehicles or certain chemicals – products which are inputs not produced in West Africa and representing the bulk of EC exports to the region) and the new trade and economic disciplines, this substantial development assistance package will boost competitiveness of the region, reduce adjustment costs of the EPA, and support regional integration.

For further information please visit:

http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/acp/regneg_en.htm

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