

EPA is about growing trade, expanding investment and creating jobs. The more you put in, the more you get out. That is why we need to re-double our efforts to get a full agreement in place. This full and comprehensive EPA is not something the EU is doing to Eastern and Southern Africa – it is what East and Southern Africa is doing for itself, with the EUs support. This is what partnership between Africa and Europe means in the 21st century. Moving beyond a relationship of dependency to one of genuine partnership, a partnership of equal trade negotiators and close friends. The EPA represents our future together.

We have had a good meeting today between Ministers from the Eastern and Southern African Region and the European Commission. We have reviewed the progress made in relation to the EPA and we have renewed our commitment to concluding a full EPA by the end of the year.

The logic underlying the EPA – in terms of trade, growth and regional integration- is compelling. I firmly believe in this logic – that we put trade at the service of development so as to grow both within the region and between us. My hope is that those who have not yet signed will do so soon and this will allow us to sign a comprehensive EPA with the whole region. Regional integration is a key priority for the EU.

The process leading to the interim EPA has not been easy for anyone. It has required courage and leadership from those countries who have tabled market access offers compatible with multilateral trade rules. We designed and agreed the EPA together. We now need to move quickly to sign, implement and defend this agreement together.

Less Developed Countries who did not have to sign have done so because they recognize that the EPA offers more than Everything But Arms. It offers added value through improved rules of origin and provides for the wider objective of regional integration.

We know countries of the region want to attract investors bringing world-class practices and know-how, in particular in infrastructure and growth sectors such as transportation, telecoms, financial services, construction, distribution, manufacturing and tourism. We want to support that, by negotiating on the crucial issues for development of services, investment and other trade rules and through development assistance.

Our overall objective throughout this long process has been the eradication of poverty and the promotion of growth in Africa. By far the best way to do this is by building effective regional markets and by removing the artificial barriers to cooperation between countries. It is a path that the EU itself has followed for half a century.

2008 will be an important year. We have agreed to continue our discussions on outstanding issues which should lead us to the signature of a full EPA. We need now to go beyond trade in goods and work towards a full EPA as the best tool for sustainable development and regional integration.

Our meeting today gave us the political impetus needed to keep the negotiations on track and to build common ground to continue the vitally important work we have already stated. Important work remains to be done. Let's do this together.