

Meeting of the Ministerial Monitoring Committee on the
Economic Partnership Agreement between
West Africa and the European Community

Meeting of Ministers
Dakar, 16 July 2005

**SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Dakar, 16 July 2005

The Ministers of Commerce and Finance of West Africa met in Dakar, 16 July 2005, under the aegis of the Ministerial Monitoring Committee on the EPA negotiations between West Africa and the European Union. The meeting was chaired by His Excellency Mr. Habi Mahamadou Salissou, Minister of Commerce, Industry, Handicraft and Private Sector Promotion of the Republic of Niger.

The meeting considered the report of the experts' meeting, which focussed on:

- the status of the EPA negotiations with the European Union
- the status of WTO multilateral negotiations
- the adoption of the ECOWAS Common External Tariff
- the 4th ECOWAS Trade Fair.

At the end of their deliberations, the Ministers made the following recommendations on the under-listed issues:

I. Negotiation of the Economic Partnership Agreement with the European Union

The meeting affirmed its commitment to an agreement founded on a partnership that responds the sustainable development needs of the States of West Africa, notably by building supply capacities that enable West African States to benefit from their participation in international trade.

Consequently, the Ministerial Monitoring Committee urges the European Commission to make an undertaking, in accordance with the simplified mobilisation modalities, to provide West African States with adequate resources enabling them to cover the adjustment costs relating to:

- the fiscal transition between customs duties and domestic taxation in West Africa;
- the gradual reduction of compensation arrears accumulated under the existing systems in West Africa;
- the loss of customs revenue resulting from the West Africa – European Union Free Trade Area;
- the up-grading and enhancement of the competitiveness of the economies of West Africa (capacity building and up-grading).

On its part, West Africa undertook to deepen its regional integration and to take necessary measures to ensure the establishment of an ECOWAS customs union by 1st January 2008 and the fast tracking of the reforms aimed at developing the national economies and ensuring their integration into the global economy.

As part of the accompanying measures for the EPA preparation process, the Ministerial meeting:

1. urged member States that were yet to set up their National Trade Negotiation Committees to do so. Such Committees, which should be composed of State actors and representatives of the private sector and civil society, would among other things, serve to popularise the EPA negotiations in member States;
2. emphasised the need to take into account the impact of the EPA on women and the vulnerable segments of the populations of ACP countries. To this end, the Ministers invited all countries that were yet to carry out their impact studies to incorporate gender in the terms of their studies in order to ensure that the interests of women and the vulnerable groups were not overshadowed;
3. urged the European Commission to support the submission of the ACP Group to the WTO, seeking to give greater flexibility to Article XXIV of the 1994 GATT;
4. recommended to the Region to accelerate work on investments and competition with a view to setting up a regional policy framework in those areas;
5. further direct the Executive Secretariat of ECOWAS to organise more regular meetings of the regional negotiations support bodies that have all the member States on their membership, such as the Technical Assistance Committee and the Ministerial Monitoring Committee;
6. requested all member States of the Region to sensitise the European Commission delegations as well as all other development partners operating on their respective territories, on the effective coverage of the costs of adjustment;
7. in view of operationalising the RPTF, set up a Secretariat composed of representatives of the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat, the EUMOA Commission and a group of three (3) member countries, that will serve on a rotational basis and in alphabetical order, taking care to ensure linguistic parity and representation on the bureau of the Ministerial Monitoring Committee. It is worthy to note that the effectiveness of the Regional Preparatory Task Force (RPTF) depends on the availability of the necessary support as well as on the accelerated implementation of the 9th EDF.

II. Multilateral Negotiations under the WTO - Doha Development Agenda

The meeting emphasised its belief that the new WTO trade negotiation cycles that was launched in Doha represented an important issue for developing countries, particularly for member States of ECOWAS.

Consequently, the Ministers insisted that development issues must retain a priority position in the on-going WTO discussions on the different issues that would form the key discussion points at the 6th Ministerial Conference scheduled to take place in Hong Kong, from 13 to 18 December 2005;

The meeting further reaffirmed that the negotiations must seek to establish an equitable multilateral trade system.

In order to better defend the interests of the countries of our Region and to ensure the coordinated participation of the Region in the on-going negotiations, the Ministers insisted on the need to set up a system of information exchange between the competent structures in ECOWAS member States, the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat and the Region's negotiators in Geneva.

The meeting reiterated its commitment to aligning the positions adopted by the member countries of ECOWAS with those agreed and defended by the Africa Group, the ACP Group and the G90, as well as with those of the LAC Group.

On the issue of cotton tabled before the WTO, the Ministers lauded the initiative taken by the American government to progressively remove agricultural subsidies. The Ministers expressed the conviction that the initiative was in the right direction, but felt that the measures adopted were insufficient, arguing that the objective should rather be the total elimination of the said subsidies within the timeframe proposed by the Africa Group in Geneva. The West African Ministers thereafter adopted a special declaration on the matter.

III. ECOWAS Common External tariff (CET)

Taking into account the deadline for the EPA negotiations, the meeting invited all member States and all regional integration organisations to take all necessary measures to ensure the entry into force of the ECOWAS-CET in 2006.

IV. 4th ECOWAS Trade Fair

Recognising the importance of Trade Fairs in the promotion of trade in general and intra-regional trade in particular, the Ministers invited all member States to finalise preparations for their effective participation in the 4th ECOWAS Trade Fair, which will hold in Lagos, Federal Republic of Nigeria, from 22nd to 29th October 2005.

V. Vote of Thanks

Sensitive to the warm and brotherly welcome, as well as the hospitality accorded us by the Senegalese authorities, the meeting expressed its profound gratitude to His Excellency President Abdoulaye Wade, the Government and people of Senegal.

Done at Dakar, this 16th July 2005

The Ministerial Monitoring Committee on the EPA Negotiations