

NEWS: EAC high level workshop on WTO and EPA negotiations concludes

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ARUSHA, Tanzania, 17 February 2012/ APO: A four-day workshop by the East African Community (EAC) on the interaction between the WTO and EPA negotiations ended yesterday at the Ngurdoto Mountain Lodge in Arusha, Tanzania.

The ACP Group participated at the workshop, alongside Members of the East African Legislative Assembly as well as National Parliaments, EAC Ambassadors from the Partner States' Missions in Brussels and Geneva, Permanent Secretaries, representatives from the WTO, EABC, Business Community and Civil Society EAC. They called on the Council of Ministers to consider the possibility of empowering the EAC Secretariat to assume a leading role in the EPA negotiations as the case is with the European Commission (EC).

Participants said that supporting the EAC Secretariat would enable it become a strong think tank and support the Partner States trade negotiations with evidence based and research positions to ensure that trade agreements do not become a burden to future generations.

They called on the EAC Council of Ministers to explore the possibilities of having representatives in Brussels and Geneva and urged Partner States to strengthen their national institutional frameworks for international trade negotiations to ensure proper coordination and stakeholder involvement in the processes of trade negotiations.

They also asked the EAC Secretariat to produce periodic progress reports on EPAs and share them with stakeholders as well as exploring the use of the media including the EPA Website to expand reach and attract input from stakeholders.

Participants called for a structured coordination between Geneva and Brussels based ambassadors and make good use of their networks in those capitals to support the negotiations.

In addition, they also urged the Partner States to include the Brussels and Geneva based EAC Ambassadors and senior officials in the respective EPA negotiating teams.

They urged the EAC and African Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) Secretariats to lobby with a view to getting around the EC Regulation 1528 of 2007 and keep negotiations as a bloc of Least Developed Countries including Kenya.

They also asked the Partner States to coordinate and carry out an impact assessment of the EPAs on the long term industrial development of EAC. They also pointed out that there was a need to come up with a long term regional economic development plan to inform trade negotiations.

Partner States were also asked to sensitize the various stakeholders on the EPA text with a view to creating feedback and make the process of ratification smooth and to create synergies with civil society organizations and private sector to support the negotiations and where possible invite them to support the negotiations.

Details of the recommendations are below:

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NEGOTIATORS

The following recommendations were made with regard to ongoing EPA negotiations and the FEPA Text:

1. The Most Favored Nation Clause should not be accepted in the EPA;
2. The stand-still clause is WTO-plus, is not required for WTO compatibility and should therefore not be in the EPA Text;
3. In order not to undermine the EAC regional integration framework, the EAC should lobby for Kenya to be treated as an LDC for the purposes of EPA and be accorded DFQF;
4. Rules of Origin negotiated should be asymmetrical allowing for lower thresholds for EAC Partner States and should in addition allow for cumulation with all products originating in all ACP;
5. All the Singapore issues should be dropped off from the EPA negotiations;
6. Trade in services should not be negotiated under the EPA. However, provisions for capacity building of the EAC Services sector should be included in the economic and development cooperation chapter;
7. Export taxes need to be removed from the EPAs to be in line with WTO rules;
8. Any Safeguard measure that is negotiated and adopted in the WTO such as SSM should be available for use by EAC countries. The EAC-EU EPA should specifically mention this in the EPA text; and
9. Proposed standards governing environment, good governance and social accountability under the EPA should not be introduced without comprehensive consultations

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING TRADE COORDINATION AND NEGOTIATION STRUCTURE

1. There is a need to strengthen the EAC Secretariat to become a strong think tank and support the partner states trade negotiators with evidence based and research positions to ensure that trade agreements do not become a burden to future generations;
2. Need for structured coordination between Geneva and Brussels based ambassadors and make good use of their networks in those capitals to support negotiations;
3. Partner States be urged to include the Brussels and Geneva based EAC Ambassadors and senior officials in the respective EPA negotiating teams;
4. Need for EAC/ACP to lobby with a view to getting around the EC Regulation 1528 of 2007 and keep negotiations as a bloc of LDCs including Kenya;
5. Coordinate among partner states and carry out an impact assessment of the EPAs on the long term industrial development of EAC. In the same light, there is a need to come up with a long term regional economic development plan to inform trade negotiations;

6. There is need to sensitize the various stakeholders on the EPA text with a view to creating feedback and smoothen the process of ratification;

7. Partner States be urged to create synergies with civil society organizations and private sector to support the negotiations. Where possible invite them to support the negotiations;

8. EAC Secretariat be urged to produce periodic progress reports on EPAs and share them with stakeholders. Explore the use of the media including an EPA Website to expand reach and attract input from stakeholders;

9. Build synergies between WTO compatibilities and EPAs to get the most out of current EPAs as instruments that might be used in other trade negotiations;

10. The EAC Council of Ministers be urged to explore the possibilities of having representatives in Brussels and Geneva;

11. The Council of Ministers be urged to consider the possibility of empowering the EAC Secretariat to assume a leading role in the EPA negotiations as the case is with the EC; and

12. The EAC Partner States should strengthen their national institutional frameworks for international trade negotiations to ensure proper coordination and stakeholder involvement in the processes of trade negotiations.

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