



21st ECOWAS-EU Political Dialogue Ministerial Meeting

Brussels, 4th April 2017

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The Twenty-first Political Dialogue Ministerial Meeting between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the European Union (EU) was held in Brussels on 4th April 2017 under the Co-Chairmanship of Her Excellency Marjon V. KAMARA, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Liberia and Chairperson of the ECOWAS Council of Ministers, and His Excellency George William VELLA, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Malta. The President of the ECOWAS Commission, HE Marcel A. De Souza, actively participated at the meeting. Mr Christophe Joseph Marie Dabiré, representing the President of UEMOA Commission also attended the meeting as an observer.

2. In their opening statements, the Co-Chairs underscored the close cooperation and joint action that characterized the relations between the EU and ECOWAS (hereafter referred to as the Parties). In particular, the Parties lauded the wealth of their shared principles and values as well as the convergence of views in the areas of peace and security, governance, migration and other political, trade and development-related issues. The parties reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening their relationship in addressing the political and security challenges and in ensuring the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) within the two continents.

A/ Political and Security Situation in West Africa

The Gambia:

3. The European Union commended ECOWAS for its decisive role and mediation efforts in achieving the pacific solution to the post-electoral stalemate in The Gambia. The Parties also acknowledged the commendable resolve, patience and courage that Gambians have displayed during a period of high socio-political tension. They expressed their full support to the agenda of democratic reforms and respect of human rights and the rule of law which is currently being pursued by the new government of President Adama Barrow.

4. The Parties agreed that the presence of the ECOWAS Mission to The Gambia (ECOMIG) is essential at the current stage for ensuring security and stability. The EU confirmed its willingness to favourably consider the ECOWAS request and to explore, in this regard, ways of supporting the ECOMIG. Both sides also agreed on the need for a thorough reform of the defence and security sector in The Gambia and their readiness to jointly assist in such a process, together with other interested actors such as the United Nations. Furthermore, the parties agreed to set up an International Contact Group on the Gambia, with the participation of interested partners (AU, UN), in order to support the reforms being engaged by the new authorities and the development process of the country.

Guinea Bissau:

5. The parties commended the ECOWAS mediation effort in Guinea Bissau under the leadership of H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, Chairperson of ECOWAS Authority and H.E. Alpha Condé, President of the Republic of Guinea and ECOWAS Mediator. ECOWAS and EU expressed strong concern over the continued political stalemate in Guinea Bissau as a result of non-implementation of Conakry Agreement and its implications for the socio-political stability and development prospects for the country. They emphasised that the Conakry Agreement, signed by all political stakeholders on 14th October 2016, remained the only framework and the basis for the attainment of a peaceful, consensual and inclusive solution to overcome the current crisis. In this regard, the parties recalled all decisions taken by UNSC, AU PSC and ECOWAS Authority. They reiterated the call on all parties to comply and strictly respect the provisions of the Conakry agreement, as this would pave the way for concretizing all development partners' commitment to support Guinea Bissau's development efforts. They commended the non-interference of the army in the political crisis and strongly urged it to continue in like manner. The parties agreed on the need to hold individuals responsible for impeding the implementation of the Conakry agreement.

6. ECOWAS informed about the commencement for the gradual withdrawal of ECOMIB and welcomed the support given by EU for its mandate in Guinea Bissau. The EU commended the important role that ECOWAS has played in maintaining stability through the deployment of ECOMIB. Both sides stressed the instrumental contribution of ECOMIB in this process of stabilization and the EU recalled its constant support to ECOMIB and pointed to the need for ensuring the appropriate conditions for its withdrawal. The parties welcomed and further encouraged the efforts of the International Community in Guinea Bissau, in particular through the P5 (UN, AU, ECOWAS, CPLP, EU), and expressed their readiness to fully support further action leading to a swift solution of the political crisis in Guinea Bissau.

Mali:

7. The Parties expressed their concern over the security situation in the north and center of Mali and strongly condemned the frequent attacks against Malian and international security forces as well as innocent civilians. While welcoming the latest positive developments, including the inauguration of interim authorities in the Northern regions and the holding of a Conference of National Entente (27th March to 2nd April), the Parties stressed the need for full implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Mali. To this end, they called on the parties to the Agreement to deliver on their commitments in a spirit of good faith and trust in order to create the conditions for peaceful development and the return of all displaced persons to their homes. In the same vein, they urged all parties to closely work together with a view to creating the necessary conditions for the consolidation of state authority and for the return of public administration and social services. They recalled that any act or initiative that would impede this process cannot be accepted. The parties reiterated their strong commitment to peace, democracy, development and the territorial integrity of the Country.

8. In order to strengthen actions in combatting recurrent terrorist attacks in Mali, ECOWAS stressed the need for a more appropriate mandate for MINUSMA in discharging effectively and efficiently its mission in Mali.

Terrorism and Maritime Security:

9. The parties commended Nigeria for the progress made in the fight against Boko Haram, and the good coordination of the armed and security forces of Lake Chad Basin Commission. They also welcomed the efforts being taken by other neighbouring countries (Burkina, Niger, Cameroun, Chad) as well as the regional initiatives undertaken towards tackling of the scourge. Referring to the support provided to the Multinational Joint Task

Force, the EU expressed its commitment to support the countries of the Lake Chad Basin in addressing the multiple challenges in this region through a comprehensive approach, including its reconstruction and development assistance. ECOWAS welcomed the EU support to these efforts, amounting to more than 600 M€ of funding mobilised at present, apart from the ongoing humanitarian aid.

10. ECOWAS and the EU strongly condemned the terrorist attacks perpetrated in West Africa in particular in Burkina, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. Expressing their deep concern regarding these recent spreads of terrorist attacks, both sides renewed their commitment to fight terrorism and organised crime. In this regard the parties stressed on the relevance of the ECOWAS Anti-Terrorism Strategy and called for its implementation. To this end, the EU reaffirmed its commitment to support regional initiatives and ownership in the region aimed at addressing these challenges.

11. The parties welcomed measures taken by member states in the region to prevent and fight against terrorism including the recent initiative under the auspices of the G5 Sahel to establish a joint Task Force to fight terrorism in the Sahel. In this context, the parties particularly stressed the need for greater coordination of efforts and between various initiatives in order to ensure a global and coherent approach in addressing effectively the challenges posed by terrorism and organised crime in the region. ECOWAS informed of the organisation of a strategic forum on security situation with a view to determining the most appropriate means of interventions that will ensure complementarity and effectiveness in fight against terrorism in West Africa.

12. Both parties exchanged views on the implementation of the Africa Peace and Security Architecture in the region. They agreed that ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) is one of the main security instruments for regional Peace and Stability, and a fundamental building block for the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The EU commended the on-going ECOWAS efforts to consolidate the Full Operational Capability of the ESF. The EU confirmed its readiness to support these efforts in strengthening and building up additional capacities with a view to enhancing rapid deployment and efficiency of the ESF, under the five-year African Stand-by Force Strategic Work Plan (2016-2020). Moreover, the parties, in light of the increasing terrorist threat in the region, underlined the importance for enhancing ESF capabilities in fighting terrorism during peace enforcement operations, when so decided by relevant mandating authority. The EU recalled the need to explore more avenues to increase the financial contributions by the AU and regional organisations such as ECOWAS to peace keeping and other security-related missions on the African continent.

13. The parties agreed to deepen discussions on innovative and flexible mechanisms for financing peacekeeping operations that reconcile the urgent aspects of such operations, the timeliness of procedures for access to resources, and respect for the principles of Subsidiarity, as necessary. In this regard, the EU expressed its readiness to associate ECOWAS to discussions on this matter in the run-up to the upcoming Africa-EU Summit.

14. The parties commended Togo for the successful organisation of the AU Summit on Maritime Security, Safety and Development. They lauded the adoption of the Lomé Charter marking a first step to address concomitantly both the challenges and prospects for protecting and developing the African maritime domain and encouraged member states to ensure its ratification. The parties noted that the ECOWAS Integrated Maritime Strategy, and the Yaoundé Code of Conduct represent a solid basis to fight against illegal and illicit acts at sea. They also noted that the EU Strategy and Action Plan for the Gulf of Guinea were adopted to support the Yaoundé process. Both parties recognised once again the importance of regional ownership and inter-regional coordination.

15. Both Parties noted with concern that 2016 has registered an increase in "kidnap for ransom" events in the region. The EU commended actions taken by ECOWAS to ensure the starting of the Inter-regional Coordination Centre (ICC) operations by providing effective staffing of the Centre, the operationalisation of CRESMAO and also the fact that the three

Multinational Coordination Centres (Zones E, F and G) are now officially hosted, and urged for their operationalization very soon. ECOWAS welcomed the EU's constant efforts in the region, be it in the context of the G7++ Friends of the Gulf of Guinea, in supporting efforts to improve maritime security. Both parties agreed again to ensure closer coordination in order to maximise coherence, consistency and synergies. Both parties shared the view that protecting oceans, and in particular the Atlantic Ocean, is a common responsibility. The EU and ECOWAS committed to work jointly for the success of both the upcoming UN SDG 14 Conference in New York (June) and the 'Our Ocean conference' in Malta (October).

Elections:

16. ECOWAS informed the EU about the upcoming elections in Member States, including presidential elections in Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as parliamentary elections in The Gambia and Senegal. The EU welcomed the regularity of electoral cycles in West Africa and commended the commitment of ECOWAS to ensuring credible accession to and exercise of state power in accordance with democratic principles and norms enshrined in ECOWAS relevant Protocols. The EU recalled its commitment to support election processes through its appropriate instruments, including support to civil society organisations and election observation missions.

B/ Cooperation and Regional Integration

17. Both parties reiterated their strong commitment to regional integration, trade and investment as drivers for growth and the generation of employment. They reaffirmed their commitment for regional EPA and stressed on the need to accelerate the process for its signing by all parties and its implementation, to establish a single, mutually beneficial trade regime. ECOWAS committed to active advocacy and communication towards Nigeria, The Gambia, and Mauritania. The parties agreed to continue jointly the preparatory work undertaken for the implementation of the EPA.

18. Regarding cooperation, the parties welcomed the level of commitment of the resources of the Regional Indicative Programme (RIP) of the 11th EDF, that reached 52%, with € 593 million euros out of the € 1,150 million allocated to the region for the 2014 – 2020 period.

19. The EU acknowledged and supported the region's efforts regarding regional integration. The parties agreed on the holistic and integrated approach to support investments in infrastructures, to enhance competitiveness, to boost intra-trade flows and to assist in fiscal reforms, aiming at promoting a more effective and efficient public expenditure and increasing domestic revenue mobilization. In particular, both parties acknowledged the importance of infrastructure, including transport, energy and digital networks, as key drivers for inclusive sustainable growth. In this regard, the parties stressed the important role of the private sector in financing investments and ECOWAS confirmed the availability of regional banks (ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development / Banque Ouest-Africaine de Développement) to participate in blending mechanisms. The new European External Investment Plan can play a key role in this respect,

20. The Parties also stressed the importance of strengthening resilience and food security in order to overcome the structural fragility of many of the countries in the region.

21. The Parties agreed to swiftly finalise the formulation phase of projects already identified and to deal urgently with the remaining actions in order to ensure the full absorption of the regional funds in line with the regional priorities and axis defined under the RIP. In particular, they agreed to use the forthcoming Strategic Orientation Committee meeting on 14-15th June 2017 to discuss and adopt further guidelines to ensure effective implementation of the 11th EDF RIP.

C/ Migration

22. The parties reaffirmed their commitment to the Valetta principles of solidarity, partnership and shared responsibility. The EU welcomed ECOWAS' active contribution to the Valletta Action Plan and the Rabat process, in particular through its common position on migration.

23. The Parties recalled the importance of making progress on all 5 pillars of the Valletta Action Plan and underscored the need to effectively tackle smuggling and trafficking human beings, leading to unacceptable suffering and loss of lives at the Mediterranean Route and in the desert. The parties also recognized the inter-regional nature of migratory flows in West Africa and underlined the need to take into account a regional approach in addressing migration challenges. The efforts and political leadership of West African countries to address these challenges were acknowledged. The EU welcomed ECOWAS efforts in managing mobility in the region, which are guided by its Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and the Right of Residence and Establishment.

24. The parties committed to work closer together with regard to the 5 Valetta pillars. They agreed to step up their dialogue and cooperation in concrete areas such as youth employment, the fight against smuggling of migrants and trafficking of human beings, the use of secure travel documents within the region and the fight against criminal networks. They also agreed to contribute to facilitating the safe return to their homes of those who are stranded as victims of smugglers or traffickers. The issue of return and readmission of irregular migrants was referred to as an area where the EU expected improved cooperation with many countries of the West African region, as part of the commitments taken on this regard. The EU committed to stay engaged in supporting ECOWAS' efforts regarding the free movement of people within the Community, the respect of existing regulations to this end, and the management of its external borders.

D/ Institutional Developments

25. ECOWAS took note of the latest institutional development in Europe presented by EU. ECOWAS informed the EU of the progress made with regards to its Institutional and Organizational Reforms expressing appreciation for the EU's consistent support in this area. The EU encouraged ECOWAS in its reform initiatives, aimed at enhancing its effectiveness and rendering more efficient, its administrative and financial policies and procedures.

26. The parties took note of the forthcoming **5th Africa-EU Summit** to be held between 29th and 30th November 2017 in Abidjan. They stressed the key importance of this landmark Summit as an occasion to further deepen and define Africa-EU relations in the framework of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy. The parties acknowledged the potential of young people as drivers of development and welcomed the proposed theme of the Summit: "Investing in Youth". They affirmed that the "Youth" is a holistic subject which touches upon all strands of Africa-EU interregional relations. Both parties emphasised its relevance to achieving the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063. They reaffirmed their commitment to work jointly in the preparation of a successful summit.

27. The EU and ECOWAS agreed that the next Political Dialogue Ministerial Meeting will take place in West Africa at a date to be determined by the Parties.

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