

Statement by Mr. Jacek Jankowski, Ambassador of the European Union to Zambia and COMESA at the 43rd Intergovernmental Committee

- *Ms Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe, Secretary General of COMESA;*
- *Honourable Chipoka Mulenga, Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industries;*
- *Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Committee (name tbc);*
- *Honourable Permanent Secretaries from COMESA member states present;*
- *Senior Government officials;*
- *Distinguished guest, Ladies and Gentlemen;*

I am delighted to attend this year's **COMESA Intergovernmental Committee Meeting** physically after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The unprecedented crisis we went through sends a strong call to **a) increase our resilience** and to **b) recover our economies in a more sustainable way**. Hence, the topic of the meeting '*Building Resilience through Strategic Digital Economic Integration*' is timely and well chosen.

However, in addition to COVID-19, which is once again on the rise in China, **Russia's war against the Ukraine** has sent shockwaves, negatively affecting our economies, throughout the World. In addition, the negative effects of **climate change and environmental degradation**, which increasingly threaten the sheer existence of humanity, put possibly the largest threat to our economies and societies.

The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** and the **Secretary General of the United Nations** have been ringing the alarm bells loud and clear for quite some time. We are heading towards tipping points, where climate change will accelerate and become uncontrollable. Yet, **parties could agree at COP27 neither to more ambitious mitigation targets, nor to phase out coal and fossil-based energy. To the contrary, we see worrying signals that new oil and gas fields will be exploited in Africa and elsewhere.**

I would like to use this occasion where all COMESA countries gather, to reiterate once more that the **European Union remains firm on its strong commitment** to 1) cut down Green House Gas emissions by 55% as compared to 1990 levels by 2030 and to 2) become the 1st climate neutral continent by 2050.

Secretary General,

Honourable Minister,

Distinguished guest, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Europe responds to the global and regional challenges outlined above and continues to strengthen its internal partnerships with Africa. However, times are different and we must approach things differently than in the past. Business as usual is not an option.

EU's cooperation and international partnerships will therefore increasingly focus on transforming economies to become more fair, green, digital and resilient. This is the future and we must walk the talk and translate potentials in various sectors, such the agriculture, forestry, renewable energy, circular economy, water, tourism and other promising sectors into concrete investments. This is about diversifying our economies, along the **social, environmental and governance (in brief the ESG) framework.** This is about the **triple bottom line of Planet, People and Profit.** Moreover, this is above all about the future of our children and grandchildren.

This is the time for COMESA member states to start building and **investing in green, digital, resilient, in brief sustainable economies.** We all need and invest in our citizens to have basic digital skills, provide sustainable digital infrastructure and promote digital transformation of the private sector. And, this applies to both, goods and services.

The European Union will, under its **regional 2021–2027 financing framework,** continue to support COMESA countries to deepen regional integration, to facilitate trade across major transit routes and corridors, and to invest in sustainable value chains development.

Under the **regional Annual Action Plan 2022,** we have in our joint pipeline programmes on ***“Trade Competitiveness and Market Access” (EUR 40 Million)*** and on ***“Trade in Services” (8.5 Million)*** for the COMESA region.

In addition, under the **AAP 2023,** COMESA countries will benefit from regional programmes on ***“Trade and Transport Facilitation along strategic corridors”***, on ***“Digital Trade”***, on ***“Regional Competition”*** and on ***“Circular Economy”***.

The **World Circular Economy Forum 2022** will take place from 6 to 8

December in Kigali, Rwanda. This is the first ever Africa Circular Economy Forum. We will use this occasion to present and kick-start the formulation of our regional pipeline Action to “*Promote and Invest in Circular Economy in Eastern and Southern Africa*” (EUR 40 million). Linear economies have exploited natural capital and resources unsustainably over too many decades, which did not only accelerated climate change and environmental destruction (including biological diversity), but also created unmanageable amounts of waste, which end up in landfills, out oceans and in our food chain. It is high time to change and transform towards circular economy. African countries can leapfrog, just as they did when introducing smart phones. In addition, **the digital economy is an integral part of the circular economy.**

Secretary General,

Honourable Minister,

Distinguished guest, Ladies and Gentlemen;

You can see that a **lot of work lies ahead of us** in the coming years. The EU remains committed to support your efforts to build resilience of the COMESA economies. We continue working hand-in-hand with the COMESA Secretariat. However, without sufficient drive from COMESA Member States to implement regional commitments at home, there is no regional integration, and the huge benefits that can come along with it, will not materialise.

These are times of change, times of change to invest for our children and grandchildren.

And with this, I wish you all the best for your deliberations in the coming two days.

Thank you

