

## New Deadline set for Ratification of Tripartite Free Trade Area

Ministers from the tripartite group of regional economic communities in eastern and southern Africa have set June 2021 as the deadline to achieve the threshold of 14 ratifications required to enable the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) enter into force.

This was set during the 2nd Extra-Ordinary Meeting of the Tripartite Council of Ministers that took place virtually on Monday, 15 February 2021. The new deadline coincides with the sixth anniversary since the launch of the TFTA Agreement on 10 June 2015 in Egypt.

The tripartite group brings together Member/ Partner States of COMESA, the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

In their discussions, the Ministers noted that the commencement of implementation of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) this year, has provided the necessary impetus to countries that have not ratified the TFTA to do so.

"The countries that ratified the agreement earlier have not realized the benefits they had expected as they have been held back by those that have not," the Ministers said noting that some Member/Partner States have ratified the AfCFTA but not the TFTA.

The Agreement establishing the AfCFTA was signed in March 2018, (three years after the TFTA) and entered into force on 30 May, 2019 after attaining the threshold ratification of 24 countries. The work already done under the tripartite framework contributed to the speedy implementation of the continental trade regime.

Currently, 10 Member/Partner States have ratified the TFTA with four more needed to attain the ratification threshold. These are Botswana, Burundi, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa and



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Zambia.

The Ministers advised countries to delink ratification with the ongoing negotiations. Besides, the team of experts conducting the negotiations confirmed they will be concluded before June this year.

The COMESA, EAC and SADC Member and Partner States represent 53 percent of the African Union membership, constituting over US\$1.4 trillion Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which is roughly 60 percent of African continental GDP and a combined estimated population of 800 million, making the TFTA an important building block for the implementation of the AfCFTA.

Besides the TFTA ratification, the Ministers

adopted the guidelines for management and monitoring of safe cross border movement of persons and personal goods while mitigating the spread of the Coronavirus.

Speaking at the meeting, the Chairperson, Hon. Soraya Hakuziyaremye, Minister of Trade and Industry, Rwanda, urged countries to implement the guidelines.

"These guidelines will serve as a basis for all tripartite Member /Partner States to draft their national rules to facilitate the movement of people and goods across all countries," she said.

The guidelines will facilitate the harmonization of national guidelines for the re-opening of all modes of transport including air, land and sea borders for mass movement of persons and personal goods in line with national laws and regulations.

The meeting was also attended by the Chief Executives of the COMESA-EAC-SADC, H.E. Chileshe Kapwepwe, H.E. Ambassador Liberat Mfumukeko and H.E Dr Stergomena Tax and Senior Officials.

# Malawi Unveils 50 Million African Women Speak platform



Malawi became the eleventh COMESA Member State to launch the 50 Million African Women Speak (50MAWSP) platform in a colourful ceremony at the Capital Hotel in Lilongwe on 18 February 2021. The national launch was presided over by Malawi's Minister of Trade Hon. Sosthen Gwengwe.

Hon. Gwengwe applauded COMESA for launching the platform and stated that the Malawian government was committed to supporting the initiative.

"Women encounter challenges of financial and non-financial services which limit business growth," the minister stated, adding that the platform would help women to develop market intelligence skills and build networks with fellow businesswomen in Malawi and beyond.

Hon. Gwengwe challenged the local implementation team to find a way to reach out to women who cannot access the digital platform so that they too benefit.

The COMESA Secretary General, Chileshe Kapwepwe called upon Malawian women to take advantage of the resources the platform offers in order to improve their businesses.

"Your entrepreneurial journey starts with a dream, it will be sustained by your passion, but should be fueled by the right resources. The 50 Million African Women Speak platform is the one-stop shop for the resources you will need to succeed," she said.

Malawi's Minister for Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare Dr. Patricia Kaliati, who attended the event virtually, described the initiative as "an opportunity to uplift Malawian women" and urged the various stakeholders to play their roles in ensuring its success.

The African Development Bank Country Representative for Malawi Ms Eyerusalem Fasika said the platform would spur knowledge generation and sharing, adding that it has the potential to alleviate the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Launched on the continent in November 2019, the 50 Million African Women Speak platform aims to facilitate a dynamic and engaging exchange of ideas among women entrepreneurs, using in-built social media functionality to connect them with one another in ways that will foster peer-to-peer learning, mentoring and the sharing of information and knowledge within communities, and access to financial services and market opportunities between urban and rural areas, and across borders.

The launch event was held through a hybrid arrangement where a limited number of local participants gathered physically at the launch venue were joined virtually by several invited guests.

## COMESA Toasts African Union Appointments



Following the re-election of H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat (in picture) as Chairperson of the African Union Commission during the recent 34th Ordinary Session of the AU Heads of State and Government Virtual Summit COMESA has sent a message of congratulations.

"Your re-election demonstrated the high level of confidence and trust that the Member States have in your leadership and it provides an ideal opportunity for the continent to implement the various developmental programmes that are meant to uplift the standards of living of the African people," Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe stated in the message.

As the biggest Regional Economic Community (RECs) recognized by the AU, she said COMESA will continue to support the process of negotiations and implementation for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) towards its full and successful implementation.

Among the key COMESA-AU programmes are the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Trade Observatory Facility, peace and security and youth programmes among others.

At the same time, COMESA congratulated the newly appointed Deputy Chairperson of the AUC







## COMESA Bids Farewell to Departing Senior Staff



Mr Brian Chigawa



Mr. George Lipimile



Mr Innocent Makwiramiti

Three COMESA senior staff have left the organization after serving their contracts / attaining the mandatory retirement age of 60 years. They are Mr. George Lipimile, the Director and Chief Executive Officer of the COMESA Competition Commission, Mr Brian Chigawa, Director of Legal and Institutional Affairs, and Mr Innocent Makwiramiti, Senior Private Sector Development Officer

Mr Lipimile (Zambia) and Mr Makwiramiti (Zimbabwe) retired, while Mr Chigawa (Malawi) left after serving his full 12-year term as Director as provided for in the staff rules and regulations.

The COMESA Secretariat bid farewell to the three at a virtual send-off ceremony on Thursday 18 February 2021. The former staff were commended for their exemplary contribution to the COMESA regional integration agenda.

"You each played an important role to drive the COMESA agenda far and wide and through your hard work, we saw many programmes being implemented which have greatly benefitted the region," Secretary General Chileshe Kapwepwe said.

The ceremony was attended by a cross section of staff and the two Assistant Secretaries General

(ASG) for Programmes, and Administration and Finance Amb. Dr Kipyego Cheluget and Dr Dev Haman Respectively. The two ASGs commended the three staff for their consistent drive to ensure that COMESA programmes were implemented and the region made a mark on the continent.

They urged them to continue being ambassadors of COMESA in their next phase of life. Former colleagues in attendance wished them well in their future endeavours.

## COMESA Toasts African Union Appointments

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HE Dr Monique Nsanzabaganwa of Rwanda.

"Your ascendance to the position of Deputy Chairperson of the African Union is well deserved and a demonstration once again that women can lead high-level organizations and inspire confidence and a shift towards achieving gender equality through provision of opportunities for both women and men," the message read. "She added that many women of Africa, especially girls look up to women in such leadership positions as their role model which inspires them to strive against all odds including gender related challenges to rise to positions of leadership."

COMESA has also commended the re-election of Ambassador Albert Muchanga as Commissioner for Economic Development, Trade, Industry and Mining.

"Under your stewardship, our continent has achieved remarkable milestones, with the most epic being the launch and implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA)," the Secretary General said. "Your unreserved commitment towards the eventual realization of this challenging milestone which undoubtedly brings the vision of an African economic union closer, will constitute an important chapter in your career."

### COMESA Diary

Dates	NAME OF MEETING	VENUE	ORGANIZER
02-04 Mar 21	11 <sup>th</sup> Meeting of the COMESA Chiefs of Immigration and the COMESA Migration Dialogue	Virtual	Secretariat
18 Mar 21	Launch of the 50MAWSP in Ethiopia	Virtual	Secretariat
June 2021	21st COMESA Heads of State and Governments' Summit	Virtual	Secretariat



File/ One Stop Border Post infrastructure at Moyale on the Ethiopia-Kenya border (2017)

## COMESA, Ethiopia Signs €5.6m Sub-delegation Agreement for Upgrading Border Posts

COMESA and Ethiopia have signed a 5.6 million Euro sub-delegation agreement to improve coordinated border management, trade and transport facilitation at the Moyale and Galafi border posts. Moyale and Galafi borders link Ethiopia on one hand to Kenya and Djibouti on the other respectively.

The project will assist Ethiopia to upgrade the single window service system, to increase inter- agency connectivity and to improve the connectivity of the two customs systems. The project is funded by the European Union under the COMESA Trade Facilitation Programme.

The State Minister of Trade and Industry of Ethiopia, H.E. Ambassador Mesganu Arga, and COMESA Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Kapwepwe separately signed the sub-delegation agreement.

The EU will also finance the construction of the main building of the One Stop Border Post (OSBP) at the Ethiopian Galafi border post. Other components of the project include capacity building, training of the agencies' staff present at the borders and holding of sensitization workshops.

Appreciating the European Union for the support rendered, the State Minister said:

"The support is timely as the Ethiopian government desires to build on the current trade facilitation effort that will enhance the efficiency and ultimately reduce the cost of doing business as Ethiopia grapples with the

negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic".

The State Minister also thanked the COMESA Secretary General and her staff for the technical support rendered during the development of Ethiopia's project.

Explaining the modalities of implementation of the sub-delegated activities, the Secretary General said it is envisaged the Ethiopian government will take ownership and lead in the implementation of the activities.

"We foresee increased collection of revenue through increased trade flows" the SG projected.

She added that COMESA is committed to ensure that all borders are assisted to become more efficient and operate smoothly to deepen regional trade, which will lead to enhanced regional integration.

The Ethiopian government will proceed with the implementation of the sub-delegation agreement, which includes managing contracts, supplies and services, while COMESA will provide technical guidance. This is to ensure that implementation takes place in line with European Union procurement procedures, stipulated under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF).

The funds will also support capacity building for stakeholders on improved border operations and the implementation of a border information awareness campaign on customs cooperation and trade facilitation instruments.

The measures will lead to less bureaucracy, as traders will only have to submit their documentation once, and shorter clearance times will reduce the overall cost and time of transport. Likewise, non-tariff barriers, corruption and harassment along the two-border post are expected to reduce, with notable an increase in revenue collection through enhanced trade flows.

H.E. Jacek Jankowski, Ambassador of the European Union to Zambia and Special Representative to COMESA, acknowledged the development as a critical step towards seamless trade along corridors and at the Moyale and Galafi border posts.

"The sub-delegation agreement comes timely to boost trade flows within the Horn of Africa" he noted.

The Ambassador of the European Union to Ethiopia, Mr. Johan Borgstam added:

"Ethiopia, as a landlocked country, understands like no other, the importance of regional integration and trade. In line with Ethiopia's homegrown economic reform agenda, the EU therefore supports Ethiopia and its neighboring countries in strengthening coordinated border management, with the aim of enhancing import and export efficiency and reduce costs to improve competitiveness."



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