

Yellow Card Council of Bureaux edges closer to full autonomy



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The Yellow Card Council of Bureaux has edged closer towards full autonomy following the approval, of the relevant legal instruments, by the Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General from COMESA Member States.

In their 10th meeting conducted virtually on 29 September 2021, the Ministers and AGs approved the Charter of the Bureaux, Staff and Procurement Rules. Through the issuance of its legal instruments, the Council of Bureaux seeks to establish itself as a fully-fledged COMESA institution that will eventually be independent from the COMESA Secretariat operationally.

The Bureaux manages the Yellow Card, which is a regional Third-Party Motor Vehicle Insurance Scheme. The objective of the Scheme is to facilitate the movement of vehicles, goods, people and services within the COMESA region.

Currently, the scheme is operational in 13 regional countries and has growth exponentially over the years. These are Burundi, Djibouti, DR Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

In 2020, over 208,165 digital Yellow Cards were issued to travelling motorists, generating a total

annual premium income of US\$12.3 million. Over US\$1.1 million claims compensation were paid to road accident victims caused by visiting/foreign motorists.

During the meeting, the Ministers and AGs, also committed to ensure domestication and implementation of all decisions they issue to member States from to time.

One of the outstanding instruments is the ratification of the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) which brings together Member/Partner States of COMESA, the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

The TFTA was launched 2015 and to date, 11 instruments of ratification have been prepared and submitted against a minimum threshold of 14 ratifications to enter into force. These are Botswana, Burundi, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Some of the remaining Member/ Partner States have ratified the AfCTA but not the TFTA.

“Just as we managed to garner overwhelming continental instruments of ratification for the

African Continental Free Trade Agreement, may I encourage those Member States that have not yet ratified the Tripartite Agreement to do so as the delay in doing so is stalling regional trade, investment and development,” Zambia Minister for Minister of Commerce Trade and industry Hon. Chipoka Mulenga urged.

He added: “COMESA is in the era of implementing a digital economy in the region and for it to succeed, it needs the support of Ministers of Justice and Attorneys General in crafting the supportive legislation that will create an enabling environment for the full implementation of the digital economy.”

Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe also stressed the need for implementation of the legal instruments for an effective integration of the COMESA region's programmes, harmonization of policies and procedures.

“I strongly urge COMESA Member States who have not yet ratified the Tripartite Agreement to make a firm commitment to do so in the last quarter of 2021 to enable the Tripartite to become operational in 2022,” she said.

Judge President of the COMESA Court of Justice Lombe Chibesakunda addressed the meeting, highlighting its operations amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trade experts meet to speed-up negotiations on market access



File: Dr Kipyego Cheluget

Trade experts from Member States concluded a three-day virtual meeting, Thursday 30 September 2021, which reviewed progress on the liberalization of trade in services for enhanced market access under the COMESA Free Trade Area.

The meeting was the 10th for the COMESA Trade in Services Committee. It received updates from Members States on the progress they have made in their bilateral negotiations and tariff offers.

Further, discussions were conducted to finalise the negotiations on the priority sectors; communication, financial, tourism and transport services, and proceed to the implementation of the commitments made by countries. COMESA has prioritized and negotiated schedules of specific commitments in the four priority sectors.

The proposals emerging from the Committee's meeting will be tabled before the upcoming Trade Policy Organ Meetings when the final and legally scrubbed schedules will be submitted for approval and adoption by the Council of Ministers.

The Committee of trade in services leads in the negotiations as mandated by Council

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to spearhead the COMESA trade in services liberalisation programme

The Council adopted the COMESA Regulations on Trade in Services in 2009 and initiated negotiations on the progressive reciprocal removal of related barriers in seven priority sectors, focusing on only one major area of services negotiations; market access.

“The basis or general assumption at the time - and most Member States accepted that assumption - was that the most important and essential outcome for any trade in services negotiations was market access,” Dr Kipyego Cheluget, Assistant Secretary General of COMESA told the delegates.

The assumption and expectation of the Council was that the COMESA programme on progressive liberalization of trade in services, would be complete and operational so that the COMESA Free Trade Area covers both trade in goods and services as envisaged in the Treaty.

“Unfortunately, that has not been the case and the negotiations for market access under the schedules of specific commitments is still incomplete,” Dr Cheluget noted. “The lack of progress affects the implementation of the adopted commitments in 2014 and finalising negotiations on the remaining additional priority sectors.”

The liberalisation of services in member countries is expected to unlock many opportunities for all COMESA service suppliers. For example, many of the lesser developed COMESA countries, have a distinct shortage of quality and efficiently priced services to underpin all other economic activity.

It is also expected to lead to deeper integration, support regional markets, promote healthy competition of quality services, enhance COMESA's services sector and its access to other markets outside COMESA and create the basis for wider markets under the AfCFTA and the Tripartite Free Trade Agreements for the future.

Dr Cheluget implored the Committee to set timeframe for the completion of the process of negotiations so that Member States can start to implement the commitments made.

“Let us commit to finalise this process by mid-year, June 2022” he urged the delegates.

Steps to shield the youth from the pandemic sting

COMESA countries have come together to deliberate on ways to cushion the youth in the region from the negative impacts of the COVID-19 in the region. Subsequently, a two-day experience-sharing meeting and mitigation was conducted on 28 -29 September 2021.

In attendance were young people, youth experts from governments led by Permanent Secretaries, and representatives of regional and international organizations dealing in youth empowerment programmes.

This meeting was called for by Ministers in charge of the youth when they met in June this year – the first time ever. In their decisions, the Ministers noted that the youth had experienced the brunt of the Covid-19 pandemic. Limited youth access to education and opportunities in the job market were cited as some of the negative impacts.

The meeting was therefore aimed at addressing the specific impacts of Covid on the youth and learn what has best in shielding the youth from further negative impacts.


Zambia PS for Youth Affairs Dr John Phiri opened the meeting and urged COMESA to convene such forums more regularly.

In his address, Assistant Secretary General of COMESA in Charge of Programmes Dr Kipyego Cheluget stressed the need for policy interventions on the youth.

“Such interventions uplift our youth and consequently, contribute to a reduction in unemployment, crime and drug abuse,” he said.

The experience-sharing intervention is part of the recently adopted COMESA Youth Engagement Policy, which provides for direct engagement with youth-led or focused networks and organizations that are increasingly organising themselves along national and regional formations. The aim is to aggregate youth perspectives into the national and regional policy, strategies and programmes.

Through this strategy, COMESA will support Member States to institute their own specific youth engagement strategies using it as a model to further integrate young people in democratic governance and socio-economic processes.

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