

EPAs update: February 2009

“The mood music (from Baroness Ashton) has changed, but there is no change yet to the mandate from the member states of the European Union” - Colin Roche of Oxfam International.

Summary

- 14 countries have signed a full comprehensive EPA (Caribbean region countries with exception of Haiti who have ‘initialled’ a comprehensive EPA)
- Cote D’Ivoire has signed an interim EPA
- 20 countries have initialled an interim EPA
- 30 countries have neither signed nor initialled an EPA – instead they are on the Everything But Arms arrangement for least developed countries
- 10 countries are on the GSP trade system and have neither signed nor initialled an EPA.

Key

Signed= legally binding

Initialled= a commitment to sign, but not legally binding

Interim EPA= agreements that do not yet include services or investment

Comprehensive EPA= agreements that include trade in goods and services and investment

Latest News

On 15 January 2009, Cameroon signed its interim EPA, undertaking to remove 80 percent of the tariffs it levies on imports from the EU within a 15-year period. However, Cameroon is the only country of the eight in the central Africa regional grouping to have signed such an agreement, and negotiations with the other countries are progressing slowly. Moreover, MEPs are actively seeking a guarantee that Cameroon’s trade deal will not be applied to the other Central African countries and that instead flexibility will be shown towards them, as all are poorer than Cameroon.

Recent resistance from South Africa, Namibia and Angola includes the ambassadors of these countries writing to the EU in January to re-iterate their concerns about their interim EPA, and asking for more time before the pact is signed.

On 27 January 2009, the EU trade commissioner, Baroness Ashton held informal talks with representatives of the EU’s former colonies under the auspices of the Commonwealth Secretariat to try and make progress. South Africa and Nigeria representatives attended this meeting which may be significant as these were two countries who had expressed significant concerns about the EPA deals.

In December 2008, the Kenyan Human Rights Commission and the Kenyan Small Scale Farmers Forum (KESSFF) had the first panel of judges appointed to hear their case against the Kenyan Government. Their case challenged EPAs on violations of fundamental rights and freedoms as laid down in the Kenyan constitution and international instruments. The Kenyan Government has been given until March 2009 to prepare their case. The Kenyan Human Rights Commission and the Kenyan Small Scale Farmers Forum (KESSFF) had first tabled their case in October 2007.

MORE INFORMATION

See articles below for more details on this month’s EPA developments.

New Urgency, BBC: 30 January 2009

<http://perspicacious.co.uk/uncategorized/new-urgency/5762/>

East Africa passes new law on trade negotiations, Business Daily, Nairobi: 23 January 2009

http://www.bdafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12475&Itemid=5813

Africa: European Parliament softens position on EPA trade deals, IPS: 21 January 2009

<http://www.ipsterraviva.net/Europe/article.aspx?id=6976>

SA leading charge to amend EU trade deal, Business Day: 19 January 2008

http://www.bilaterals.org/article.php3?id_article=14218