

EC/Central Africa stepping stone Economic Partnership Agreement

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PURPOSE: to conclude the stepping stone **Economic Partnership Agreement** (EPA) between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and Central Africa, of the other part.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

BACKGROUND: as it was not possible to conclude before end 2007 a complete EPA with the whole Central African region, that is:

- § Cameroon,
- § Central African Republic,
- § Chad,
- § Democratic Republic of Congo,
- § Congo,
- § Equatorial Guinea,
- § Gabon,
- § Sao Tomé and Príncipe.

this stepping stone EPA has been negotiated in order to avoid disrupting trade between Central Africa and the European Community, pending completion of the comprehensive EPA with the whole Central African region.

At this stage, the Central African part is composed of **Cameroon** which is the only country to have initialled it up to now.

Following the initialling of this stepping stone EPA on 17 December 2007, Cameroon was added to the list of countries benefiting from the EPA trade regime established by [Council Regulation \(EC\) No 1528/2007](#) adopted on 20 December 2007. This Regulation provides for an advance application of the EPA trade regime. This ensured that there was no trade disruption for Cameroon upon the expiry on 31 December 2007 of the trade provisions set out in Annex V of the Cotonou Agreement and the WTO waiver that covered them.

The negotiation of a full EPA with all Central African states continues, consistently with the negotiating directives for EPAs with the ACP States adopted by Council on 12 June 2002. The stepping stone EPA initialled by Cameroon is intended to be available for the region as a whole. It will be extended by the outcome of negotiations for full EPA reached in 2008.

Pending its entry into force, the stepping stone EPA foresees its provisional application.

CONTENT: the stepping stone EPA, which the Commission request the Council to conclude on behalf of the Community, after assent by the European Parliament, contains provisions on:

- § trade in Goods, that is to say Customs and Non Tariff Measures;
- § trade Defence Instruments;
- § customs Regime and Trade Facilitation;
- § technical Barriers to Trade and Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures;
- § forestry Governance and Trade for Forest Related Products.

It also contains **Development Cooperation** provisions setting out priority areas of action for its implementation. The stepping stone EPA establishes a framework for development cooperation towards the strengthening of capacity and reinforcement of national economies in Central Africa. It also recalls the Commission's and Member States' intention to contribute to a regional development fund.

The stepping stone EPA initialled by Cameroon is intended to be available for the region as a whole. It will be extended by the outcome of negotiations for full EPA reached in 2008. It therefore foresees the continuation of negotiations at regional level on Establishment, Services and Electronic Trade and Trade Related rules.

Provisional application: pending the entry into force of the stepping stone EPA, the stepping stone EPA foresees the provisional application of the Agreement (see COM(2008)0445).

Lastly, the European Parliament will be called upon to give its assent to the conclusion of the stepping stone EPA.