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The High-Level Retreat on the EAC Common Market : Reflecting on the Achievements, Challenges and the Journey Ahead Kenya



The High-Level Retreat on the EAC Common Market was held on 20thJuly 2022 at the EAC Headquarters in Arusha. The objective of the Retreat was to provide an opportunity for the Heads of State to take stock of the progress, challenges in the implementation of the EAC Common Market Protocol and provide strategic direction and impetus to accelerate implementation.

The objective of establishing a common market 11 years ago was to promote accelerated economic growth and development through the attainment of the free movement of goods, persons, labour, the rights of establishment and residence and the free movement of services and capital.

The retreat was attended by the Council of Ministers, Permanent/Principal Secretaries from the Partner States, Heads of Diplomatic Mission, Captains of Industry, Civil Society, academia, and media representatives.

During the extra ordinary summit that seceded this retreat, President Uhuru Kenyatta urged East African Community (EAC) leaders to fast-track implementation of programmes and projects that will deliver quick results for the benefit of EAC citizens. Acknowledging the progress the EAC has made since its re-establishment more than two decades ago, the President emphasized the need for the leaders to remain focused on the goals of the community to meet the desire for an inclusive, equitable and responsive integration process that addresses the daily needs of the EAC residents. "The citizens are looking to us to fast-track and implement programmes and projects that will transform our region. While the EAC is ranked as one of the most integrated regional economic communities (RECs) in Africa, our citizens are yet to enjoy the freedoms and rights of integration fully.. ..Therefore, our responsibility at all leadership levels should be to ensure that the objectives of establishing the community are on course," the President said.

The region has recorded several achievements in the implementation of the CMP including the use of an electronic EAC passport as a common travel document, removal of visa requirements for the EAC

citizens from one Partner State to another, issuance gratis student passes among others. The region has also witnessed increased regional trade and investment and many companies are expanding beyond their home countries in various sectors such Finance, Manufacturing, Hospitality, Tourism and Education. President Kenyatta took the opportunity to highlight some of the key EAC achievements during his tenure. The achievements included the ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA) ambitious trade pact by all EAC states and the deepening of financial integration where indigenous banks adopted a regional business model motivated by client-demand. Other achievements included the declassification of the seas along the East African coast by Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda to reduce the cost of insurance and shipping and lower the cost of doing business through the ports of Lamu, Mombasa and Dar es Salaam.

The retreat reflected on and provided a way forward on the CMP post negotiation activities which have been pending for the past 11 years including the harmonization of mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications, annex on social security benefits in the Community, additional commitments under the schedule on the progressive liberalization of services and additional commitments under the schedule on the Free Movement of Workers. The Retreat resolved to:

1) Put measures in place to increase intra EAC Trade from the current 15% to 50% in the next five years and direct Partner States to:

a) finalize the Regional Local Content Policy and prioritizing allocation resources in agriculture and industrialization to boost production;

b) ratify Article 24(2) of the Protocol on the Establishment of the Customs Union to operationalize the trade remedies Committee to handle disputes on trade related matters;

c) Fully implement the commitments made in Annex V on Schedule of Commitments on the Progressive Liberalisation of Services;

d) Prioritize the harmonization of domestic taxes by July, 2024;

e) Develop regional laws to enhance the implementation of the Common Market Protocol; and

f) Expedite the implementation of the One Area Network on voice and data.

2) Direct Partner States to fast track establishment of a single EAC Air transport market and harmonize fees, levies and taxes on aviation and support cargo services and lower air transport within the EAC region.

3) Direct Council to expedite the establishment of the Sectoral Council on labour, employment and migration to oversee implementation of commitments under the Sector including portability of public health and social security benefits.

4) Direct Partner States to strengthen national and regional capacity to implement the Consultative Dialogue Framework (CDF) to undertake regular interface with private sector, civil society and other interest groups.

5) Direct Partner States to reinvigorate standalone ministries of EAC Affairs for better coordination.

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