

European Commission and West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) join efforts to tackle food crisis and boost regional integration

The European Commission and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (Senegal, Benin, Togo, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau and Ivory Coast) agreed to increase their collaboration in a number of sectors, including initiatives that can have a positive impact in food prices and regional integration. President of the Commission of the UEMOA, Soulaïma Cissé, met yesterday and today the Commissioner for Regional Policy, Danuta Hübner, and the Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, to discuss concrete initiatives to strengthen economic and political cooperation between UEMOA and the European Commission. President Cissé also met EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson, to discuss progress in the ongoing Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU and West Africa.

The food price crisis was at the centre of the discussions between Commissioner Michel and President Cissé. They both share concerns on the possible negative impact on the stability of the West African countries. They agreed to organise quickly a joint EC-UEMOA-ECOWAS meeting to agree concrete measures to help resolving the crisis.

Commissioner Michel underlined that *"in addition to short term actions that EC is already implementing as emergency food security, medium-long term programmes are necessary to restructure the agricultural sector and policies in order to ensure food self sufficiency and the transfer of a relevant portion of the price increase to the producers. The UEMOA has a long standing experience in common agricultural policy and I am confident that together we can work out viable solutions"*.

Commissioner Michel and President Cissé also discussed the implementation and programming of the 10th European Development Fund (EDF, 2008-2013) and stressed the importance of supporting the ongoing integration process of the West African region. In that sense, they reaffirmed that an Economic and Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the EU and West Africa would act as a tool for development and would enhance regional integration.

Commissioner Michel congratulated the president of UEMOA for the achievements reached in its economic integration process, in particular for its customs union and for the quality of its Regional Economic Programme (REP)

Commissioner Hübner and President Cissé launched a new area of co-operation between the Commission and UEMOA in regional policy.

Commissioner Hübner said: "The Union's history shows that economic integration needs to be accompanied by regional policy, that there is a link between the level of economic development and the capacity of countries and their regions to participate in common policies. UEMOA, which is advancing economic integration among its Member States, can benefit from this experience."

They also discussed the importance of involving local and regional actors in economic development and agreed to promote the European local and regional authorities sharing their experience in this respect through the co-operation with third countries. In this sense, the recently created Forum of Global Associations of Regions (FOGAR) is a good example of such approach. Commissioner Hübner added: *"I agree with what came out of the last FOGAR meeting: regional and national governance rules should be enhanced to enable the regions and local authorities to work together, in order to better reach people and improve their lives."*

Following these meetings with President Cissé, Commissioner Hübner, in coordination with Commissioner Louis Michel, will send a fact finding mission to the headquarters of the UEMOA Commission in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, in order to find concrete ways for the UEMOA to benefit from the experience of the European regional policy.

Local and regional authorities are also key actors for the eradication of poverty. They are essential for a development adapted to the needs of populations, and for economic growth. This is why they will be at the core of the third edition of the European Development Days, to be held on 15-17 November 2008 in Strasbourg.

After his meeting with President Cissé Commissioner Mandelson said: "President Cissé and I are both pleased that work on our Economic Partnership Agreement is now proceeding well and we are committed to maintaining a highly constructive atmosphere and to keeping up the current momentum".

Note for editors

The West African Economic and Monetary Union (or UEMOA (Union économique et monétaire ouest-africaine) is an organization of eight states of West Africa established to promote economic integration among countries that share a common currency, the CFA franc.

UEMOA was created by a Treaty signed at Dakar, Senegal, on January 10, 1994 by the Heads of State and Government of Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo. On May 2 1997, Guinea-Bissau became its eighth member state.

UEMOA is a [customs union](#) and [monetary union](#) between some of the members of [Economic Community of West African States](#) (ECOWAS). Its objectives are:

Greater economic competitiveness, through open and competitive markets, along with the rationalization and harmonization of the legal environment

The convergence of macroeconomic policies and indicators

The creation of a common market

The coordination of sectoral policies

The harmonization of fiscal policies

In terms of its achievements, UEMOA members have implemented macroeconomic convergence criteria and an effective surveillance mechanism; have adopted a customs union and common external tariff (early 2000); have harmonized indirect taxation regulations; and have initiated regional structural and sectoral policies. A September 2002 IMF survey cited the UEMOA as "the furthest along the path toward integration" of all the regional groupings in Africa. ^[2]

Further information on European regional policy is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.htm.