

PETER MANDELSON

MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

LOUIS MICHEL

MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, 21 September 2007

CAB24/PM/PTH/ms A(07)2255-L(07)1185

President Dr Mohammed Ibn Chambas
ECOWAS Commission

President Soumaïla Cissé
WAEMU Commission

Dear Presidents,

We refer to your letter dated 4 September as well as our latest phone contacts on the way forward for the negotiation of the EC-West Africa Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA).

A full EPA remains our overall goal because this is the only way to deliver development through trade in West Africa, as well as the only legally secure solution. However, we understand that reaching an agreement over a full EPA within our agreed deadline is becoming increasingly difficult.

With a view to avoiding any trade disruption to West African economies, we could envisage negotiating a legally binding international agreement, containing, at minimum, market access in goods, and which would have to be in place on 1 January 2008. But this would have to be a clear stepping stone toward a full EPA, over which negotiations would continue for a short while in 2008.

We hope that you can agree to this approach with West African Ministers in the EPA Ministerial Monitoring Committee (MMC) of 5 October. This approach will involve us agreeing on reciprocal goods market access and knowing where we are going on the rest of the EPA.

Regarding our next Chief negotiators' meeting, we understand that it would be difficult to hold it in the afternoon of the 5 October as you need proper time to conduct your intra-regional deliberation. On the other hand, meeting you in Abidjan on the morning of 6 October is unfortunately impossible for us.

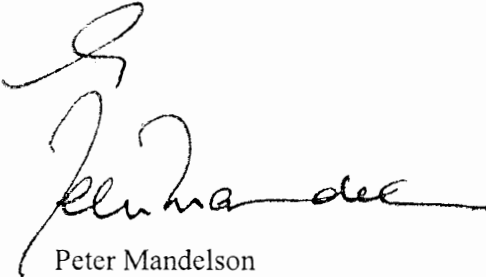
We therefore suggest that our Senior Officials meet in Brussels on 8 October (you had already proposed meetings this week) to agree on a joint accelerated work programme. Technical meetings could immediately follow on 9-12 October. In order to ensure continuity and even improvement of West Africa's market access to the EU and be WTO compatible, the agreement should contain at minimum a detailed liberalisation schedule of goods respecting

GATT article XXIV, accompanied by a chapter on the trade regime and provisional rules of origin.

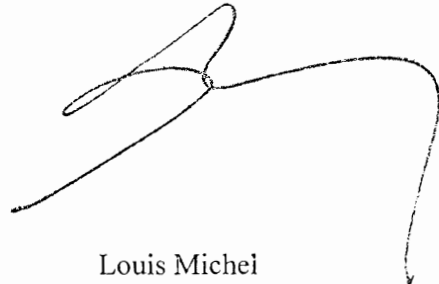
Technical work over this should be finalized by end-October as we need two months to go through the necessary EC legal and procedural steps to put in place a new trade regime on 1 January 2008. We therefore hereby invite you to hold the next Chief negotiators' meeting in Brussels on 30 October, with a view to finalising and endorsing the agreement.

As agreed in our last Chief negotiators' meeting of 5 February, work is progressing well on EPA accompanying measures, particularly on the analytical tool to evaluate the net fiscal impact of the EPA, the upgrading of industries' capacities and the creation of the EPA Regional Fund.

We trust that you will consider carefully our proposal. In our view, it is a balanced and realistic way forward taking into account the various sensitivities in West Africa, and it is feasible in a short time if technical work is accelerated and supported at political level. In addition, it will allow us to continue negotiations toward a comprehensive EPA in a constructive spirit in the first part of 2008.



Peter Mandelson



Louis Michel

Cc: The Commissioner of ECOWAS, Mohamed Daramy
The Commissioner of WAEMU, Christophe Joseph Dabiré