



23rd EU-ECOWAS MINISTERIAL DIALOGUE

**Brussels, 6 February 2023
JOINT COMMUNIQUE**

1. The twenty-third Political Dialogue Meeting at Ministerial Level between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the European Union (EU) was held in Brussels on 6 February 2023 under the Co-Chairs of H.E Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and H.E. Suzi Carla Barbosa, Senior Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Communities of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, Chair of ECOWAS Council of Ministers.
2. The President of ECOWAS Commission, Dr Omar Alieu Touray actively participated in the meeting. The UEMOA Commission President, also participated as an observer, represented by Pr. Filiga Michel Sawadogo, Commissioner in charge of Regional market and Cooperation.
3. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to regional and international peace and security, as well as to the deepening of the regional integration process in West Africa. They agreed to further strengthen their cooperation, in the spirit of equal partnership, with a view to providing sustainable solutions to security, political, economic, humanitarian and environmental challenges in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the AU Agenda 2063, and the ECOWAS Vision 2050.

The international context

4. Both sides expressed deep concern about the adverse impact of global crises, notably the COVID 19 pandemic and climate change. Both sides noted that since February 2022, the war in Ukraine further adversely affected the economies of Europe and West Africa. They referred to national positions as expressed in the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly. Both sides reaffirmed their respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States, and their commitment to the relevant principles of International Law, including international humanitarian Law, and the UN Charter.
5. Both sides also expressed their deep concern about terrorism and violent extremism and their impact on peace and security as well as on protection and human suffering of civilians and called for concerted international efforts to counter this scourge.

6. Both sides reaffirm their commitment to address all aspects of migration and mobility, respecting national competences, in an integrated, comprehensive and balanced manner, including through the Rabat Process. Both sides reiterate their willingness to work in a spirit of solidarity, partnership and shared responsibility, in full respect of international law and fundamental human rights.

Political transitions, democracy and good governance

7. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to democracy, good governance, human rights, and the rule of law. In the context of the recent attempted coups in the Region and the unconstitutional changes of Government in Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea, both sides reaffirmed their zero tolerance for power obtained or maintained by unconstitutional means. Both sides welcomed the decision of ECOWAS to finalise the revision of the 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, with a view to strengthening provisions against the unconstitutional changes of government, including a strengthened sanctions regime.
8. Both sides called for the return to constitutional order in Mali (March 2024), Burkina Faso (July 2024) and Guinea (December 2024) in line with the different agreements reached with ECOWAS. ECOWAS reaffirmed its commitment and determination to accompany the ongoing transitions to their end, and the EU reaffirmed its support to ECOWAS's actions in that respect. Both sides welcomed the work undertaken by ECOWAS, took note of the steps taken, and called on the three countries to ensure the inclusivity of these transition processes in order to guarantee success.
9. On the General elections taking place in 2023 in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, both sides expressed their readiness to work closely together, including through their election observation missions, to ensure peaceful, transparent, inclusive, and credible electoral processes.

Peace and security in West Africa

10. Both sides expressed their deep concern over the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel, and the spill over to West African coastal States. Both sides underlined the importance of responding through an integrated approach to enhance counterterrorism, conflict prevention, mediation, stabilisation and development efforts, while respecting Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, and ensuring youth inclusion. Both sides expressed confidence that the recommendations of the work of the "High-level independent panel on security and development" in the Sahel led by former Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou will contribute to solutions to insecurity in the region.
11. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to regional peace and security, in line with the African Peace and Security Architecture. They underlined the importance of coordination of counter-terrorism initiatives in the region under the leadership of the ECOWAS Commission. Both sides confirmed the important coordination role that could be played by the effective implementation of the ECOWAS 2020-2024 Priority Action Plan to eradicate terrorism. The EU expressed its readiness to lend support to counterterrorism initiatives, at national and regional level, including the ECOWAS 2020-2024 Priority Action Plan.

12. Both sides expressed their full support and solidarity with the people of West Africa and urged all relevant entities to build trust by supporting national and regional counterterrorism efforts, while ensuring they are in line with Human Rights and International Humanitarian Laws.
13. Both sides acknowledged the importance of strengthening conflict prevention and mediation efforts in the region and agreed to establish a structured dialogue to reinforce cooperation on these matters.
14. Both sides shared the assessment that disinformation and misinformation play an important role in destabilising democracies and security. Both sides committed to jointly act by responding to this challenge by strengthening communication, reaching out to civil society, and exchanging information where relevant.
15. Both sides expressed concern about the role of private military entities under foreign influence, which are engaged in West Africa and responsible for violations of human rights and international humanitarian law and called for actions, including restrictive measures against countries of origin, individuals and entities involved in such violations.
16. On the implementation of the Yaoundé Architecture for maritime security and safety, both sides acknowledged its critical role on maritime security, and called for the urgent operationalisation of the Multinational Maritime Coordinating Centre (MMCC) in Cabo Verde, and the adoption of ECOWAS' "Supplementary Act" on the transfer of persons suspected of having committed acts of piracy. Both sides reaffirmed their respect and their commitment to the principles of international law of the sea and welcomed the engagement of the EU through its Coordinated Maritime Presence initiative and called for sharing of relevant information.
17. On the promotion of peace in the region, both sides acknowledged the important contribution of the ECOMIG Mission in The Gambia and Stabilisation Support Mission in Guinea Bissau. ECOWAS expressed gratitude to the EU for the support provided to ECOMIG, and to the Security Sector Reform (SSR) in The Gambia. Both sides called for the diligent implementation of the SSR in The Gambia.

Humanitarian crisis and food insecurity

18. Both sides expressed deep concern with the protracted and growing humanitarian and food security crisis and agreed to work together to mobilize additional support to address the increasing gaps between humanitarian needs, challenges and resources, and to promote the humanitarian-development-peace Nexus approach.
19. Both sides welcomed alleviating measures such as the Black Sea Grain initiative, the EU-led Solidarity Lanes, increased EU financial support for food security and assistance (EUR 1 billion engaged as Team Europe in 2022), and the EU guidance that confirms that exports of food and fertilizer from Russia to non-EU countries are not subject to restrictive measures.
20. Both sides also welcomed ECOWAS efforts to build more resilient economies in West Africa as well as the initiatives undertaken, in particular through, the Humanitarian

Emergency Fund, the Regional Food Security Reserve and other humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable populations in the region. Both sides further reiterated their commitment to strengthen the sustainability and resilience of food systems.

21. Both parties shared concerns about the increased difficulties faced in terms of protection of the civilian population, access to population in need of assistance, including by the humanitarian actors; and agree on the importance to respond to the needs of displaced population in line with the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention).
22. In this regard, both sides agreed to work together through appropriate follow up mechanisms and to associate relevant partners to: (i) address existing challenges and limitations to facilitate humanitarian access in conflict situations; (ii) enhance and uphold the respect of International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights; (iii) strengthen Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination; and (iv) exchange on disaster risk management, as well as on respective humanitarian policies and issues, jointly identified.

Regional Integration and Trade

23. Both sides acknowledged the potential benefits of a West Africa regional Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) for their competitiveness, industrial strategies and development, as well as the challenges presented by the multiplicity of trade regimes. Given the incomplete signature of the regional EPA, both sides expressed openness to explore all possible options that would take into account the ECOWAS regional integration efforts and the further development of its Customs Union.
24. Furthermore, in order to ensure effective access to EU market, both sides stressed the importance of adequate support measures by the EU for countries to progressively comply with EU regulations, particularly related to sustainability.
25. Both sides welcomed and noted the progress made in the negotiations of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which seeks to boost intra African trade, and expressed a shared interest in its successful and effective implementation. Both sides reiterated their commitment to support the ongoing continental negotiations and the implementation of the provisions of the Agreement.

Global Gateway: Boosting together investment to strengthen digital, transport and energy networks in West Africa

26. Both sides agreed to boost public and private investment in support for large-scale sustainable investments in West Africa, supported by Team Europe Initiatives, under the EU's Global Gateway strategy, as outlined in the 2022 EU-AU Summit, and in line with the priorities and needs of ECOWAS countries. They committed to boost investment by improving the business climate as well as promoting responsible investments.
27. Both sides looked forward to the roll-out of Global Gateway investments in West Africa, contributing notably to green growth, energy transitions, secure digitalisation,

sustainable value chains, decent jobs, improved transport, and human development. In particular, both sides welcomed the Global Gateway initiatives aimed at boosting connectivity and infrastructure development in West Africa, including investment in four strategic corridors (Praia-Dakar-Abidjan, Abidjan-Ouagadougou, Abidjan-Lagos, Cotonou-Niamey) with the close involvement of ECOWAS in the framework of the thematic consultative group on regional infrastructure.

28. The EU expressed support to the operationalisation of the West Africa regional electricity market (generation and transmission) - thereby increasing the share of renewable energy in the energy mix and reducing greenhouse gas emissions - and to boosting secure international digital connectivity to the West Africa region, notably through investment in submarine cables, and increased investment in research and innovation”.

Implementation of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)

29. Both sides welcomed the adoption of the multi-annual Action Plans (2021 and 2022) as an important step in the EU’s commitment on delivering on the implementation of NDICI and on the priorities of the Africa Investment Package. Both sides undertake to further strengthen dialogue through the EU-RECs Dialogue Platform, Thematic working groups and continue regular dialogue including in Tripartite format: EU, ECOWAS and UEMOA in order to further ensure the ownership and coherent implementation of actions at the regional level. In this regard, both sides recognised the important role of regional organisations, and their involvement in the process of design, steering and where relevant in the implementation of actions agreed for the West African region.

On green growth, energy and digitalisation

30. Both sides recalled the importance of accelerating the transition to a sustainable low carbon economy and to uphold their respective climate commitments under the Paris Agreement and the Glasgow Climate Pact. Both sides acknowledged the importance of fostering regional action in the EU and ECOWAS building respectively on the EU’s 2021 commitment “Fit for 55” by 2030 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 (compared to 1990), and on the ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy (RCS) and Action plan (2022-2030) to support the Member States in overcoming the challenge of the fight against climate change.
31. Both sides agreed on the importance of building the necessary synergies between improving climate resilience and countering biodiversity loss, by enhancing sustainable forests as well as the blue economy and marine management.
32. Both sides acknowledged the importance of a human-centric digital transformation for a better, open, free, secure access to the digital and data economy, and improving cybersecurity, all in line with ECOWAS frameworks and the 2022 EU-AU Summit commitments.

Next Steps on EU-ECOWAS dialogue

33. The next meeting of the Ministerial Dialogue will be held in Abuja at a date to be mutually agreed.