

The East African Community will deploy a verification mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to assess the country's suitability to be admitted into the Community.

The 31st Meeting of the Sectoral Council of Ministers of EAC Affairs and Planning (SCMEACP) held at the EAC Headquarters in Arusha appointed a verification team comprised of three experts from each Partner State to be funded by the EAC Secretariat and an additional maximum of two experts to be funded by the nominating Partner State to carry out the Verification Mission from 23rd June to 3rd July, 2021.

The Summit of EAC Heads of State at its 21st Ordinary Meeting held on 27th February, 2021 considered the application by DRC to join the Community and directed the Council to expeditiously undertake a verification mission in accordance with the EAC procedure for admission of new members into the EAC and report to the 22nd Summit.

The SCMEACP, which was chaired by Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for EAC and Regional Development, Hon. Adan Mohamed, further directed the Secretariat to submit the report of the Verification Mission to the Council of Ministers by November 2021.

The verification team will, among other things, review the current status of the DRC in international law and establish the country's level of conformity with the Criteria for admission of foreign countries as provided in the Treaty.

Under the Treaty, the criteria for the admission of new countries into the Community include: acceptance of the Community as set out in the Treaty; adherence to universally acceptable principles of good governance, democracy, the rule of law, observance of human rights and social justice; potential contribution to the strengthening of integration within the East African region; geographical proximity to and inter-dependence between it (the foreign country) and the EAC Partner States; establishment and maintenance of a market-driven economy; and; Social and economic policies being compatible with those of the Community.

On the status of implementation of the EAC Common Protocol, the Ministers directed the Republic of South Sudan to expedite the domestication of the EAC Common Market and Customs Union Protocols. The Ministers/Cabinet Secretaries had earlier been informed that South Sudan was yet to domesticate the two

protocols.

The Council also directed United Republic of Tanzania to ratify the EAC Sanitary and Phyto-sanitary (SPS) Protocol by 31st November, 2021. The EAC SPS Protocol was assented to by the Summit of EAC Heads of State in 2012 and was expected to be ratified by 30th June, 2014.

However, the implementation of the SPS is still pending due to the delay of in ratification by Tanzania, which will pave the way for its domestication and implementation at EAC Partner State level.

The Ministers adopted the EAC Common Market Scorecard (CMS) 2018 and direct the EAC Secretariat to develop an Action Plan for implementation of the recommendations contained in the Scorecard and report to the 32nd SCMEACP.

The CMS 2018 tracked compliance by Partner States in the Movement of Labour, Right of Establishment and Residence in the Community, as at 2018.

This Scorecard covers Protocol obligations on Free Movement of Workers related to: Harmonisation of Mutual and Academic and Professional Qualifications; Labour Policies; Laws and Programmes; Right of Establishment and Right of Residence and Regulations thereto and commitments made by each Partner State at three levels, namely: the Major Group, Sub-Group, and Minor Group.

They directed the EAC Secretariat to incorporate Partner States' legal reforms undertaken after 30th June, 2018, the data cut-off date for the Scorecard in the next edition of the Scorecard on Free Movement of Labour, Rights of Establishment and Residence.

The Ministers directed the EAC Secretariat to expedite the process of approximating labour laws. They directed Partner States to harmonize their national labour policies, laws and programmes in line with Article 12 of the Protocol.

On efforts to rebrand the Community by developing a new corporate identity, the Ministers approved and adopted the submissions by six youth (one from each Partner State) to give the EAC a new look and feel.

The Council adopted Aheebwa Job Atwooki of Uganda as the best design proposal/Brand Architecture, followed by Pierre Celestin Niyomugabo of Rwanda, Peter Assenga of Tanzania in third place, Tiffin Ntore of Burundi in fourth place,

Lutta Wandera of Kenya in fifth place, and Deng Chol of South Sudan in sixth place.

This was the culmination of the EAC Emblem and Logos Competition mounted by the Secretariat to produce a new emblem and logo for the Community and which involved the youth from all the six Partner States.

The rebranding efforts were aimed addressing identified gaps in the EAC corporate identity including: lack of a visual connection between EAC Organs and the Institutions; some EAC Institutions have adopted the EAC logo as their primary logo whilst others have developed their own unique logos, and; too many colours in the EAC logo and flag.

Other identified gaps include: the EAC logo and flag not being adaptable to the expansion of the Community both in terms of geographical location and colour scheme; lack of a common unique identifier for all EAC Organs and Institutions, and; two different visual identity symbols for the Community, that is, logo and flag.

On the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA) that brings together COMESA, EAC and SADC, the Ministers directed the Republic of South Sudan to sign and ratify the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement, and the United Republic of Tanzania to expedite the ratification of the TFTA.

Speaking during the opening session, Council Chairperson Hon. Mohamed commended the EAC Secretariat, Organs and Institutions who he said continue to do their best to ensure the success of the Community.

On his part, EAC Secretary General Hon. (Dr.) Peter Mathuki congratulated Uganda and Tanzania for the recent successful general elections, noting that this was an affirmation that EAC Partner States were committed to democratic ideals in the management of the region's political affairs.

Dr. Mathuki urged the EAC leadership at all levels to strengthen their support to the integration agenda so as to effectively face and deal with the challenges that the region has, and continues to experience.

The East African Community (EAC) is a regional intergovernmental organisation of six Partner States, comprising Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, with its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania.