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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Fourth African Union - European Union Agriculture Ministerial Conference (22 June 2021, virtual) - Information from the Commission

Delegations will find in Annex an information note from the Commission on the above mentioned subject to be raised under "Any other business" at the meeting of the Council ("Agriculture and Fisheries") on 28-29 June 2021.

**Fourth African Union - European Union Agriculture Ministerial Conference
(22 June 2021, virtual)**

With a view to next year's sixth Summit of the African Union (AU) and the EU, as well as the upcoming 2021 United Nations Food System Summit, the AU Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment, Ms Josefa Sacko, and the EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Mr Janusz Wojciechowski, co-hosted virtually the fourth AU-EU Agriculture Ministerial Conference on 22 June 2021. The Portuguese Agriculture Minister and current chair of the 'Agriculture and Fisheries' Council of the EU, along with other Ministers and high-level representatives of the EU Member States, participated in the Conference.

More than 300 high-level representatives and stakeholders registered to the Conference from both continents and from different sectors (governments, science, the private sector and civil society) and more than 700 followed it via web streaming. Participants took stock of progress on the implementation of the AU-EU Rural Transformation Agenda launched at the third Ministerial Conference in 2019 and shared lessons learned and best practices with a view to further strengthening their partnership on agriculture. The concluding remarks made by EU Agriculture Commissioner Wojciechowski at the end of the Conference and the conclusions of the chairs of the thematic panels with the list of the implemented actions of the 2019 Rural Transformation Agenda are included in the **annexes** to this note.

The Ministerial Conference followed up on several of the commitments taken in the Joint Communication 'Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa', presented by the Commission and the High Representative in March 2020. That Communication calls for, inter alia, an EU-AU partnership on agriculture to address the challenges of nutrition and food security by boosting safe and sustainable agri-food systems, including through trade.

That partnership should also support the development of environment-friendly agricultural practices and integrate biodiversity concerns, improve quality services and modernise agriculture through a digital transformation. The Conference also took account of the responses to reinforce the post-COVID recovery of the global agri-food value chain and its resilience against future systemic shocks.

The Agriculture Commissioners and Ministers from both sides, along with the other participants in the Conference, took stock of the joint AU-EU initiatives designed to strengthen the intercontinental partnership at all levels of the food supply chain. In both Europe and Africa, there is an increasing demand for safe, nutritious and affordable agri-food products, with a prime focus on enhancing the sustainability of food systems. In the context of Africa's Agenda 2063 and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the agri-food sector has a key role to play in generating sustainable economic growth and creating jobs. The current economic situation puts responsible investment and innovation at the core of the recovery effort. Unleashing the full potential of the agri-food sector will require decisive government actions to strengthen governance institutions, promote investment in innovation as well as in both human and physical capital, and accelerate regional integration.

Continued high-level dialogue in the context of the biennial AU-EU Agriculture Ministerial Conferences is key to reinforcing the existing political relationship and the strategic partnership between the two continents. These Ministerial Conferences are also a good example of effective cooperation between the EU institutions and Member States, to be taken forward in the future.

The positive outcome of the fourth AU-EU Agriculture Ministerial Conference should provide a significant contribution to the preparation of the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit and also to next year's sixth Summit between the African Union and the EU. There is an opportunity to join forces and to take advantage of a common path towards a sustainable, resilient, ecologically responsible agriculture that is both adapted to local needs and mindful of global challenges.



Commissioner Wojciechowski

CONCLUDING REMARKS

- It is my honour to join Commissioner Sacko, who kindly opened the Plenary Session earlier this afternoon, and deliver the **closing remarks** on behalf of the European Commission, at this, the conclusion of this year's conference of AU and EU Ministers of Agriculture.
- I am glad to note that these conferences are becoming somewhat of a **tradition**, this being the fourth such conference since its inception in 2017. The continuation of these sessions, even under the current adverse conditions, is a testament to the enduring tenacity of the relationship between our two continents.
- Our conference today provided a valuable opportunity to **take stock of progress** made towards the initiatives of the AU-EU Rural Transformation Agenda. The exchange of views and sharing of best practices from the rich trove of AU and EU experiences with building more sustainable food systems also contribute to deeper regional integration.
- Discussions in the **thematic panels** were lively and focussed on some of the most pressing issues affecting the transformation of our respective agri-food systems.



- Participants have explored the **investment opportunities** and challenges for local producers and the competitiveness of the **agri-food** sector. We have seen that investments are more than mere tools for economic growth. The way we invest will guide the agricultural sector during the post-COVID recovery. Therefore, in order to “build back better”, we need to invest more and better.¶
- Some of the factors that any **future large-scale investment** in the **agri-food** sector will have to take into account are: their social, economic and environmental impact; their contribution to sustainability and the SDGs and their expansion of local opportunities for farming and food producing communities to improve their quality of life while also enhancing the nutritional security of the wider society around them.¶
- We have reviewed the state of play of the AU-EU cooperation in **agricultural research and innovation**. Both the EU Comprehensive Strategy for Africa and our Green Deal initiatives of course have a strong innovation component. As we seek to prepare our **agri-food** systems for the challenges of an uncertain future, we must also future-proof our cooperation on R&I. Agro-ecological and green business ventures are amongst the most exciting, yet largely untapped areas of opportunity for value-added growth in the **agri-food** sector.¶
- We also addressed the use of **digital solutions** in agriculture, and their potential to combat diseases and prevent food losses. We heard that agriculture, one of the oldest, most traditional sectors of the human economy, is now also caught up in the winds of technological change. These range from better data to support planning, forecasting and decision-making from farm to government level, to digital technologies that assist in reducing food losses along the

supply chain by improving facilities, storage techniques and logistics. ¶

- **Innovative devices** from drones to AI-assisted processing plants are revolutionising the way we grow, distribute and consume food. The AU and EU need to ensure that these changes happen in line with our wider societal ambitions for food security and nutrition and the sustainable transformation of agriculture. ¶
- We also reconfirmed that Research and Innovation can pave the way towards a **green transition** with innovative solutions for sustainable agriculture and food systems that are more resilient, equitable and with low carbon emissions. The existing EU-Africa partnership on Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture will be the instrument for joint actions that will provide new knowledge and opportunities for new business and markets for agricultural products. ¶
- Finally, we have discussed **regional trade integration** for improved food security. The most significant step forward in this direction is, no doubt, the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement agreed in 2019. The Agreement addresses a fundamental lesson we in Europe have learned through our historical experience over the past couple of decades. ¶
- Removing (some) tariffs alone does not guarantee the improved flow of trade — to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by regional integration, the parties involved must **harmonise their regulatory environment** (incl. sanitary and phytosanitary measures) and ensure that businesses are able to invest and trade across borders with a sense of legal certainty. Equally important to facilitate trade and increase regional integration is the removal of non-tariff trade barriers. ¶

- ➡ We call attention to the unprecedented rise in poverty, hunger and malnutrition and the role that the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by climate change and increased conflict and increased incidences of migratory pests and disease, play in driving these negative trends. Addressing food and nutrition security is a foundation for human development as well as stability and peace. We must act now to reverse these trends and make our aquatic and ~~agri~~ food systems sustainable. We have been working together in many ways to achieve this including through the African Union – FAO Task Force on the impact of COVID-19 on food security in which the EU contributes.¶
- ➡ In this context, we are aware that the key element of Africa's resilience is nutrition, as also confirmed by the African Union theme for the year 2022 "Building resilience in nutrition on the African continent to accelerate the human and socio-economic development". To that end, the European Union, acting as 'Team Europe', has already committed EUR 40.5 billion to jointly support partners in overcoming urgent needs and mitigating (the health, social, economic, and humanitarian) impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, while countering the aggravation of inequalities, food insecurity and malnutrition.¶
- ➡ Mindful of the AU's agricultural priorities, as per Africa's Agenda 2063 and the CAADP Malabo commitments, also duly reflected in our joint Rural Transformation Agenda, and the corresponding ambitions of the EU's Green Deal and Farm to Fork strategy, today's conference reinforced my belief in the **necessity of our partnership** to achieve more sustainable agriculture and food systems.¶
- ➡ These are more than mere words. Our agricultural sectors are **responsible for feeding our populations** and ensuring that safe,

nutritious and ecologically responsible food is available to all. Until that is achieved, a lot of work remains to be done. ¶

- I hope that our efforts here will serve as valuable input for the upcoming AU-EU Ministerial later this year, but most of all next year's **AU-EU Ministerial Summit**, which will need to take due note of the central role played by our partnership on ~~agri-food~~ ^{agri-food} systems in order to achieve an overall more robust and resilient economic equilibrium for the 21st century. ¶
- Agriculture is of course the main protagonist in our efforts to combat against malnutrition, calling to mind the ambitious, but altogether indispensable objective of 'Zero Hunger' by 2030 enshrined in the UN's **Sustainable Development Goals**. However, the ~~agri-food~~ ^{agri-food} sector contributes also to other SDGs - we may call to mind in particular the many millions of jobs supported by agriculture across Africa and Europe. ¶
- The production, value-added processing and distribution of food is a key factor also in the **post-COVID recovery** of the economy, not only by ensuring the food security of farmers and working populations, but also by providing an almost inexhaustible stream of opportunities for small & family enterprises, from farming to retail, from organic and artisanal products to rural tourism and hospitality. ¶
- It is fast becoming a cliché that we live in a post-pandemic world. Business as usual is the past. We need to **join forces** to take advantage of the opportunities ahead, which Africa and Europe could of course try and tackle on their own, but how much more can we achieve if we follow a common path towards a sustainable, resilient, ecologically responsible agriculture adapted to local needs but mindful of global challenges. ¶

- In this spirit, I look forward to working together with you across the full spectrum of international fora, with particular attention to the upcoming **UN Food Systems Summit**. Let's forge a path together that is worth telling the world about!





CONCLUSIONS

PANEL 1 Investment opportunities and challenges for local producers and the competitiveness of the agri-food sector

Message 1: Strategic investments will play a key role in ensuring we “build back better” after COVID-19 and make our agri-food systems more resilient and sustainable. Well-targeted investments are more than an agent of economic growth. They can spur the transition towards sustainable and integrated food systems that are capable of ensuring the continuous supply of safe, affordable, nutritious and environmentally sustainable food whilst improving the quality of life for millions of people.

Message 2: For sustainable agri-business and agri-food systems to reap the associated joint benefits of trade and foreign investments, decisive government actions need to be complemented by systematic public private dialogue, and capacity-building that will enable a green and digital transformation to take place.

Message 3: Participants stressed the importance that future sustainable and responsible investments focus on the achievement of the SDGs and the sustainable management of natural resources, whilst situating the smallholder, women and the youth at the heart of the policy concern.

Message 4: A deeper focus on human capital and well-targeted vocational education training will ensure youth enter the labour market with enhanced technical skills increasing employability. Smart public policies supporting also PPPs will also enhance the bankability of projects for sustainable investments in the agri-food sector. The access to microfinance for SMEs and smallholders should be strengthened. There also needs to be a multistakeholder approach in value chain analysis-linking small scale operators to final consumers with a strong role for civil society organization. Finally, the issue of illicit trade, which can hinder sustainable growth in the agri-food sector, should be given enhanced attention when discussing private investments -from both the enforcement and capacity-building angles to track and address.

Achieved deliverable:

- AU EU Agri-food business platform: in line with the Task Force Rural Africa recommendation and the Political Agenda signed at the 2019 AU EU Agriculture Ministerial Conference, we have started the work to set up Agribusiness platforms in targeted countries to boost private responsible investment through the identification of barriers to private investment and trade as well as the promotion of agri-business twinning. A pilot project has been launched in Ghana in July 2020 and its kick-off meeting was held in June 2021.
- Over the last two years, new innovative partnerships, based on African political and policy leadership and making use of European expertise and finance, improved the policy framework and created new opportunities for impactful investments. The Africa – Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs was taken to the next level. We are confident that this partnership will continue in the upcoming years to increase private investment from both Africans and Europeans, boost trade, enhance job creation and contribute to sustainable and inclusive development.
- African-European Farmers' exchanges: this capacity-building programme aims to supporting Farmers Organizations' institutional development, improving their capacity to influence policy dialogue and governance mechanisms of the value chains, as well as promoting knowledge sharing and peer learning in the areas of production, processing and marketing.
- Mobility scheme on agriculture/agribusiness between African and European VET schools: vocational education and training in Africa to improve the professional development of teachers and managers, their skills and employability.
- With its 'Team Europe' initiative, the European Union, has already committed EUR 40.5 billion to jointly support partners in overcoming urgent needs and mitigating (the health, social, economic, and humanitarian) impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, while countering the aggravation of inequalities, food insecurity and malnutrition.

PANEL 2 Agriculture research and innovation for soil health, agro-ecology and other innovative approaches

Message 1: Following the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the change in the EU's climate policy brought by the European Green Deal, the Taskforce Rural Africa (TFRA) updated its recommendations, and the AU set up a Task Force with FAO, EU and other stakeholders to address the impact of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition. It became clear that food and nutrition security has become of such fundamental political, economic and social importance that it must be at the centre of all future policy and planning.

Message 2: The EU-AU agricultural research and innovation cooperation is essential as we seek to embark on a "building back better and greener" path to address challenges such as food and nutrition security, climate change, pest outbreaks, land degradation and (emerging) crises such as COVID-19. The R&I Partnerships will contribute to a Green Transition for both Africa and Europe reconfirming the importance of green and sustainable investments. Future investment opportunities for innovative green entrepreneurship ecosystems –will also contribute to building capacities for cutting-edge and applied research for innovation through ~~multistakeholder~~ approaches, support to innovation systems and entrepreneurship on the African continent.

Message 3: A Green Transition in Africa can be supported through R&I activities, by unlocking the potential of new green business opportunities in areas of sustainable agriculture. Activities such as the implementation of agro-ecological approaches for sustainable food production and of circular approaches to reduce food loss and make better use of agricultural and other organic waste or the potential of the One Health approach and healthy soils are amongst the areas of opportunity for sustainable development in the ~~agri~~-food sector.

Achieved deliverable:

- In November 2019, the Pan-African Network for economic Analysis of Policies (PANAP) was launched. PANAP is a network among African academic/research and institutional partners collaborating with the European Commission Joint Research Centre to build research capacity on agricultural economics and policy issues with a focus on Africa.
- In June 2021 the EU Commission has adopted the main work programme of Horizon Europe for the period 2021-2022, whose first ever ambitious 'Africa Initiative' will include 4 topics (with a budget of around €69 million) relevant to the EU-AU Food Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture partnership: such as the implementation of Agro-ecology approaches in African agriculture



THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP
LE PARTENARIAT AFRIQUE-UE



systems or to explore the potential of One health approach for Food Nutrition Security and Sustainable Agriculture. In addition, the future EU Mission in the area of Soil health and Food will open up additional opportunities for cooperation with Africa in ensuring global soil health and reducing the food footprint of our food systems. This reflects the joint priorities as agreed in the 10 year roadmap developed under this partnership and in the EU-AU Research and Innovation Ministerial meeting in July 2020.

- The EU funded DeSIRA initiative (Development of Smart Innovation through Research in Agriculture), aims to contribute to a climate-relevant sustainable transformation of agriculture and food systems in low and middle-income countries. It is a central plank of intervention under the EU's Green Deal, applying science to rural development in new and exciting ways to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, research and innovation projects in Africa (as well as in Asia and Latin America) are already strengthening research capacities and research governance involving key actors at national, regional, continental and global levels; with a significant support to African CAADP ex-pillar organisations for agricultural research and extension (FARA, AFAAS, CORAF, ASARECA and CCARDESA).

The initiative is implemented with a core group of EU Member States and in partnership with national research organizations, European research organisations and international research organisations.

The first projects were signed in 2019. The EU pledge of €270 Million made during the 2017 One Planet Summit will be achieved and even surpassed. In 2020, DeSIRA and GCCA+ (Global Climate Change Alliance +) joined approaches and resources leading to a portfolio of about €100 Million (excluding MS co-funding) in support to 21 projects. The total expected number of projects is about 80 in total. Information of the DeSIRA initiative and the projects already started can be found at : <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/desira>



THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP
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PANEL 3 Use of digital solutions in agriculture to combat diseases and to strengthen rural communities

Message 1: Digital technologies, that include satellites, devices, networks, services and applications, offer tremendous opportunities for the sustainable development of future smart agrifood systems and for driving fair and inclusive economic growth, raising incomes and improving livelihoods in African rural areas. Digital solutions and applications should also target smallholder farmers' needs, especially as concerns market access. Building networks that include cooperatives, associations and extension services will help to raise awareness among farmers, increase knowledge exchanges and learn from previous experiences.

Message 2: Timely and accurate data and information is a sine qua non condition for policy makers, agri- managers, and medium and smallholder farmers in order to forecast and take the right decisions in the right moment at farm as well as at government level. Fair and equitable access to data, digital and extension services can empower farmers and their organisations and increase their negotiation power.

Message 3: As confirmed also during the discussion today, digital technologies have a great potential to combat diseases and to prevent and avoid significantly food losses, including by increasing recycling. Circular, holistic models and information related to production, processing and trade of agrifood products can contribute highly to build back better and greener and recover faster from the COVID 19 pandemic crisis.

Achieved deliverable:

- The proposal to support the creation of an international digital council for food and agriculture was adopted by the agriculture ministers at the Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) in Berlin in 2019. The Terms of Reference for the council were agreed end of April 2021. The Council will advise countries on digitisation issues and promote the exchange of ideas and experience.
- Data and information that will be provided by the Pan-African Network for economic Analysis of Policies (PANAP) launched in November 2019 can help policy makers taking timely decisions.
- Support to several African countries in developing an institutional and policy environment conducive to the sustainable use and conservation of biodiversity in agriculture. This kind of projects includes actions at national level (promotion of ecosystem-based agricultural practices, policy support), regional level (exchange of best practices, policy support) and global level (link with CBD). They are supported as part of a 10M EUR grant by the European Union, to the FAO component of the third phase of the Capacity Building Programme



THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP
LE PARTENARIAT AFRIQUE-UE



related to Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) in ACP countries, known as ACP MEAs 3 (2019-2024). FAO ACP MEAs 3 will also facilitate the transition to more sustainable, resilient and productive systems by promoting the application of ecologically sustainable practices and approaches.



PANEL 4 Regional trade integration for increased consumer access to safe food, improved food security and enhanced value chains

Message 1: The experience developed with the regional economic communities (RECs) suggested that reducing tariffs alone is not sufficient to boost intraregional trade. Poor trade logistics, including transportation infrastructure, border processes, customs practices, or typical non-tariff barriers such as quotas, licenses, complex or dissimilar rules of origin -as well as Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) rules, and technical barriers - also play a key role along with an inadequate business and regulatory environment. Trade policies should be combined with structural reforms that boost agricultural productivity to better leverage existing comparative advantage, also through targeted social programs and training programs to ease worker mobility across industries and promote employment. This will be key to the success of a free trade area.

Message 2: The AfCFTA is also expected to enhance competitiveness at the industry and enterprise level through exploitation of opportunities for scale production, continental market access and better reallocation of resources. A deeper integration level where production factors become mobile will have multiplier effects in improving continental food security sustainability from a trade perspective. Significant opportunities lying ahead of further regional trade integration could however be undermined either by structural feature (lower levels of income and economic size and generally longer distances compared with other regions) that would require a long-term commitment to change, or by the result of policy, such as tariffs, trade regulations, and regulatory requirements, whose removal would boost regional integration.

Message 3: Among the commitments of the CAADP Malabo Declaration, one clearly refers to boosting intra-African trade in agricultural commodities and services, not only to triple intra-Africa trade in agricultural commodities, but also to fast track continental free trade area and transition to a continental Common External tariff scheme. The EU is already supporting the AfCFTA through the EPAs, whose role as "building blocks" is consistent with the AfCFTA's drive for greater economic integration and fit into a reform agenda where partner countries put in place the necessary policies and measures that enable businesses to create wealth. Through the EU-AU partnership on agriculture, adopting a (sub) regional approach to address non-tariff barriers (NTB) and focusing on strategic agrifood value chains, AU and EU could join forces to contribute to regional integration.

Achieved deliverable:

- Since the last commitments taken in the previous Ministerial, the EU Delegation to the African Union and the African Union institutions have worked jointly on an action/intervention aiming to address the need for a **robust and**



performing SPS governance system at African continental level. This lays on the AU SPS Policy Framework, which is the agreed instrument to support the operationalization of Annex 7 (SPS) of the Protocol on Trade in Goods of the Africa Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). The proposed intervention of 13 million Euros foresees a structured four components - approach able to mobilise and integrate the contribution of the key stakeholders in the sector: **1)** The African Union thematic department DARBE (Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment) will be the body responsible for designing, coordinating and harmonizing continental policies and for ensuring their translation into political decisions through the AU Policy Organs and governance systems; **2) International specialised bodies** will provide expertise and technical guidance for SPS capacity assessment at national and regional level using internationally validated tools and develop costed investment plans to address capacity gaps and national and regional level; **3) Technical assistance and / or twinning style support** will be mobilised to ensure flexible support form technical expertise to be mobilised according to the needs.; **4) AfCFTA Secretariat:** DARBE will be able to liaise closely with other AU stakeholders in particular the AfCFTA Secretariat to advance harmonization of SPS measures for efficient trade. The involvement of the AfCFTA EU Task Force will ensure coordination and complementarity with the other mandates of the AfCFTA Secretariat.

- Since February 2020 the European Commission is providing financial support to the implementation of the **AU Strategy to develop Geographical Indications (GI)** in the continent, through the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Action under the Pan-African programme. In 2019, a GI digital hub has been established and a regional GI training has been organised in Yaoundé. The European Commission launched in December 2019 an initiative of EUR 8 million to support the development of an Intellectual Property Rights framework in Africa: GIs are one of the focus areas of this programme, which will support priority actions like GI pilot projects, training, improved legal framework on GIs, communication activities and studies. Examples of such actions: technical assistance to the GI registration *Cabrito de Tete* in Mozambique and *Poivre de Penja* in Cameroun, co-organisation of capacity building workshop on GIs in Nigeria on 22/04/2021. In addition, there has been recently good progress in the drafting of African GIs handbook and the identification of potential GIs from Africa to be further supported under the project.
- With the Sustainable Cacao Initiative launched in September 2020, the European Union already contributed €25 million to enhance the economic, social and environmental sustainability of cocoa production in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Cameroon who are, respectively, the first, second and fifth biggest



THE AFRICA-EU PARTNERSHIP
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cocoa producers, generating almost 70% of the world production. This funding is a first step for strengthening the partnership between Team Europe (composed of the EU, its Member States, and European financial institutions) and these three cocoa producing countries and aims at ensuring a decent living income for farmers and revenues for producer countries, halting deforestation and eliminating child labor, all together. The initiative will also aim at advancing responsible practices of EU businesses involved in cocoa supply chains and feed into other horizontal initiatives (e.g. on due diligence, deforestation) to respond to the growing demand from European consumers for sustainable chocolate products.

