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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 6 November 2017 (ECA) - 'Getting the Future Africa-UK Trade Partnership Right' was the subject of an expert group meeting held during the just-ended 10th Session of the Committee on Regional Cooperation and Integration that was held in Addis Ababa.

The meeting was organized by the African Trade Policy Centre (ATPC) of the Economic Commission for Africa and the London-based Overseas Development Institute (ODI), in conjunction with the 10th Session of the Committee on Regional Cooperation and Integration.

The objective of the meeting was to discuss the findings and recommendations of an ATPC-ODI Brexit Research Programme, which is part of a broader partnership funded by UK Department for International Trade and Development (DIFD) to look into the trade relationship between the UK and Africa.

In his presentation, David Luke, the Coordinator of ATPC, said the UK is an important trading partner for Africa. He said Brexit had seen legitimate concerns being raised in African capitals.

But at the same time, he noted, a new trade policy for the UK would offer an unprecedented opportunity for Africa and the UK to mutually explore options for a win-win relationship.

Mr. Luke noted that the UK's decision to exit the European Union (EU) has significant implications for Britain's trade policy relationship with Africa hence it was important for the continent to explore the future as Brexit negotiations continue in Europe.

Experts noted that while Africa may not be a top priority for the UK trade policy post-Brexit, the strong historical links and today's meaningful trade relationship between many African

nations and the UK suggest that Africa should not be overlooked by the British government.

"This is the time to establish the foundations of a strong and mutually beneficial long-term relationship between Africa and the UK in terms of trade," said Mr. Luke, adding urgent action was required to ensure continuity in the trade relationship.

Maximiliano Mendez-Parra, Research Fellow at the ODI, delivered a technical presentation on designing a new UK preference scheme post-Brexit.

The expert panelists stressed that the window for informing the UK government's decisions on its future trade partnership with Africa was rapidly closing.

In this context, it was recommended that Africa should be pro-active in engaging the UK

government on this issue, otherwise there was a risk that an EPA-type approach would simply be rolled over without any improvements.

The experts further highlighted the need to move beyond a focus on preferences and market access, to also consider progressive elements such as development friendly rules of origin, standards compliance, technical assistance, capacity building, and investment.

It was noted that this would help to inform the development of an Africa-UK trade partnership that is sensitive to Africa's integration, industrialization and development agendas.

The session also focused on the value of existing preferential access for African countries into the UK; lessons that can be learnt from existing EU Economic Partnership Agreements; expected

implications of Brexit for African companies' costs of complying with quality standards and integrating into global value chains and how future Africa-UK trade relations can be aligned

with Africa's regional integration, industrialisation and development agendas.

Representations from the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Organization of Standardization (ARSO), Traidcraft, Member States and the private sector attended the expert group meeting.

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