

ECCAS countries to prepare lists for continental trade in services under AfCFTA

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Yaounde, 02 Dec. 2019 (ECA) – The UN Economic Commission for Africa and the ECCAS General Secretariat have convened National experts from the eleven ECCAS Member States to a three-day regional workshop to prepare the subregion's comprehensive lists of services to be tabled for unhampered trade once borders open up under the African Continental Free trade Area regime by July 2020.

The exercise which will run from 3 to 5 December in Douala Cameroon will be presided over by the Assistant Secretary-General of ECCAS in charge of the Department of Physical, Economic and Monetary Integration (SGA-DIPEM).

It is meant to technically support the ECCAS Member States in the drafting of convergent regional specific lists of commitments, consistent with the regulatory frameworks, in the African Union's five priority sectors of services (financial services, transport, telecommunications / ICTs, professional services and tourism). The lists would be submitted to the AU by the start of 2020.

More specifically, the meeting will:

- 1- Promote the appropriation by the Member States of the techniques and tools for negotiation on trade in services within the framework of the AfCFTA;
- 2- Accompany ECCAS Member States in the definition of convergent positions which would be reflected in the creation of a free-trade area for services in Africa;
- 3- Build capacity and technically support ECCAS Member States to develop specific lists of commitments that are consistent with relevant regulatory frameworks.

This is considered a serious exercise as African countries are expected to be get fully integrated the exchange of services by July 2020 following the conclusions of the AU Summit of July 2019 in Niamey during which the operational phase of the AfCFTA was launched. This prospect is likely to materialize, on the basis of the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Services, the commitment of AU Member States to begin liberalization of trade in services at continental level through a process of specific commitments backed by harmonious regulatory frameworks in the five priority sectors.

However, owing to the methodological and technical requirements inherent in the preparation of such lists, the ECCAS Secretariat General is supposed to accompany and support its Member States in this exercise, in order to allow them at the end of this regional workshop, to come up with convergent regional lists of specific commitments in the five priority sectors of AfCFTA, consistent with the relevant regulatory frameworks.

ECA is working side by side the ECCAS General Secretariat, as well as all other statutory AU Regional Economic Communities, to compile these specific lists of commitments for continental trade in services.

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