



Dear Member of the European Parliament,

We are writing to you with concern over the ratification of the Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Southern Africa Development Community group (EU-SADC EPA) that is due to go through the European Parliament in September.

After ten years of negotiations that were concluded in 2014, the Parties signed the agreement on June 10, 2016. The European Commission adopted a Delegated Act that sets October 2016 as a deadline for the ratification of the EPA by Southern African countries. If the Agreement was not ratified by the deadline, the EC would initiate the withdrawal of market access benefits enjoyed by Botswana and Namibia that are upper-middle income countries. In view of this pressure, Namibia ratified the agreement and Botswana, Swaziland and South Africa have already taken the first steps to do so.

The European Commission is threatening the countries refusing to sign EPAs with the removal of market access privileges. African and European trade unions object strongly to such an approach from the Commission and call on you to put pressure on the European Commission to refrain from the use of such tactics.

Furthermore, we are worried that the EPA does not have a strong Sustainable Development chapter that would enable us to put forward social, labour and environmental concerns stemming from the implementation of the Agreement. In particular, the chapter does not explicitly establish monitoring bodies with the participation of trade unions, and satisfactory procedures for the enforcement of the sustainable development provisions are lacking.

An ambitious Sustainable Development chapter is needed in order for our countries to make progress in conducting the necessary legislative reforms to bring labour laws in line with the ILO Conventions and invest into improving inspection and enforcement of labour laws. SADC countries do not adhere to labour standards in law and in practice, and numerous violations have been reported by our unions especially with regards to the right to organize, collectively bargain and strike. Also, the prevalence of child labour, including in its worst forms, and forced labour in the region is high.

Governments do not always have the political will to improve labour conditions and guarantee their enforcement. For instance, the US withdrew trade preferences (AGOA - African Growth and Opportunity Act) from Swaziland after repeated years of failure to mark progress in the respect of labour rights, among other things.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Summit of the African, Caribbean, Pacific Group of States (ACP) Leaders stated their concern that not all ACP countries were able to conclude EPAs “due to the excessive demands from the European Union that has weakened regional economic integration processes” and urged the EU to commit to Agreements that enhance and compliment regional integration. We support this call, and we plead the EU to rethink its approach when negotiating with regional blocks.

The EPA in the current form would jeopardise food security and have an adverse impact on the agricultural sector of the SADC countries. In the long term, the EPA could impede industrialisation, either by direct import competition or by trade deviation from intra-regional to inter-regional. The Agreement will also lead to a loss of government tariff revenue that is used to, among others, finance social protection.



Further to these preoccupations, the Agreement does not provide any additional benefits to the least developed countries in our region, like Mozambique, to the ones already enjoyed under the Everything But Arms (EBA).

In view of our concerns, **we call on you to consider to vote down** the EU-SADC EPA when it is submitted for ratification to the European Parliament and to urge the EU to engage in negotiations that put the respect of labour rights, the goals of Agenda 2030, the growth and development of SADC countries, food security, social protection and the environment on the top of the priorities.

Yours sincerely,

African Regional Organization of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC – Africa)

Southern Africa Trade Union Co-ordination Council (SATUCC)

European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)

Botswana Federation of Trade Unions (BFTU), Botswana

Organização dos Trabalhadores de Moçambique (OTM-CS), Mozambique

Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), South Africa

Federation of Unions of South Africa (FEDUSA), South Africa

Trade Union Congress of Swaziland (TUCOSWA), Swaziland