

A Week in the Horn (08/06/2017)

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The sixth meeting of African Union Ministers of Trade (AMOT) was convened in Dakar, Senegal on Saturday (June 2). The two-day meeting was attended by Ministers and representatives from Member States, Regional Economic Communities and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. Preceded by the 11th Meeting of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) – Negotiations Forum, and the 6th Meeting of the AfCFTA Committee of Senior Officials of Trade, it deliberated on the protocols to the agreement establishing AfCFTA and on modalities for tariff liberalization. **(See article)**

The AU Commissioner for Trade and Industry Albert M. Muchanga attended the Africa-Russia Business Dialogue on Saturday (May 26) as part of the 22nd annual St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF 2018). This year's SPIEF was held under the theme "Building an Economy of Trust", aiming to foster a global "dialogue on how to resolve contradictions that reduce the potential for global growth." **(See article)**

IGAD's Mediation Support Unit organized a two-day regional consultation meeting with legal experts on development of a draft mediation protocol this week in Juba. This was to debate the need for such a protocol for conflict prevention and peacemaking and discuss the benefits for IGAD to have it in place. IGAD wants to establish regional viable mediation structures, to provide for predictability of processes and outcome, with the objectives of any mediation governed by the collective will and interest of all member states.

Ethiopia

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed arrived in Kampala, Uganda on Friday (June 8) at the invitation of President [Yoweri Museveni](#). The two sides are expected to deliberate on bilateral and regional issues. Among the pertinent bilateral issues to be discussed between the two leaders, are ways of further enhancing the people-to-people ties between the two countries.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy appointed General Seare Mekonen as the new Chief of Staff of the National Defense Force of Ethiopia on Thursday (June 7), replacing General Samora Yunis, who was awarded Ethiopia's highest military honor at the National Palace. Prime Minister Abiy also appointed General Adem Mohammed as Director General of National Intelligence and Security Services.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy met with a delegation of four US Senators and one Congressman led by Senator James Inhofe on Sunday (June 3). According to Fitsum Arega, Chief of Staff at the Prime Minister's office, the delegation welcomed Ethiopia's "mature political transition". The two sides discussed bilateral relations and shared regional peace and security concerns.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy and former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, on a visit to Ethiopia jointly addressed the young at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) on Friday last week (June 1) at an "Inspiring the Future Leaders of Ethiopia" event. **(See article)**

Foreign Minister Dr. Workneh Gebeyehu has been on an official working visit to Norway, Finland and Denmark this week. During his visit to Norway he met Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Søreide on Monday (June 4) and the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense of the Norwegian Parliament as well as business leaders. In Finland on Tuesday (June 5), the Minister met President Sauli Niinistö and Foreign Minister, Timo Soini and discussed bilateral relations. He also met with representatives of Finnish companies.

Dr. Workneh attended the Africa-Nordic Meeting of Foreign Ministers (June 6-7), in Denmark, hosted by Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs. The theme of this year's meeting is "*Common values – joint pathways*", with discussions focused on peace and security, investment and trade and unlocking the potential of the youth.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene on Wednesday (June 6) briefed the Diplomatic community on recent developments in the country. The State Minister laid particular emphasis on the bold decisions of the Executive Committee of the ruling coalition Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) at its meeting earlier in the week, and noted the developments on privatization and on Eritrea in particular. **(See article)**

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Professor Afework Kassu on Tuesday (June 5) conferred with the Ambassadors of the MIKTA Countries that comprises Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia. During their discussions, the two sides, reiterating the fact that Ethiopia enjoys longstanding and strong relations with the members of the MIKTA on a bilateral basis, they have capitalized on ways Ethiopia and the MIKTA could work closely in the areas of poverty reduction, energy development, regional peace and security

Ethiopia lifted the six-month state of emergency two months earlier than originally planned, and the decision was widely welcomed as one of the most significant reforms so far by the new Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, who has promised extensive changes in the country. The Council of Ministers in its regular meeting earlier had reviewed the security situation of the country, noting that law and order had been restored, and approving the draft law to lift the State of Emergency. **(See article)**

Djibouti

Prime Minister Abdoukader Kamil Mohamed welcomed Somali Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre and his delegation who arrived in Djibouti on Wednesday (June 6) on an official visit. He was accompanied by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Ahmed Isse Awad, the Minister of Post, Telecommunications and Technology, Engineer Abdi Anshur Hassan, the State Minister for the Ministry of Defense, Mohamed Ali Haga and a number of other officials. During his visit Prime Minister Khayre held talks with President Guelleh and other officials on ways to enhance joint relations between the two countries and discussed issues of common concern.

Kenya

The government has launched a pilot scheme to export crude oil through Mombasa. An agreement last month on revenue sharing between the government and the Turkana region administration, has allowed the passage of a law on petroleum production, enabling Tullow Oil to start shipping oil that has been held in storage tanks for a year. 2,000 barrels will be transported to Mombasa by road for shipment each day. Deputy President William Ruto said: “The benefits of the project will be shared, and no one will be left behind”. Tullow says the Amosing and Ngamia fields have estimated resources of about 560 million barrels. It plans a pipeline from the Lokichar’s fields to Lamu.

Somalia

President Mohamed Abdullahi met with UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary DiCarlo in Mogadishu on Thursday (June 7). It was Ms. DiCarlo’s first field trip since her appointment a month ago and she and President Mohamed reviewed the political, security and economic situation. The UN Under-Secretary-General expressed satisfaction with the progress achieved on the political and security fronts and noted recent efforts to expedite the constitutional review process. She assured the President of the UN’s continued support to Somalia. Ms. DiCarlo also met with senior UN officials and staff and with AMISOM leaders.

President Mohamed Abdullahi chaired the two-day meeting of the National Security Council in Baidoa this week (June 4-5). Attending were Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre,

the leaders of the Federal Member States and the Mayor of Mogadishu, the Governor of Benadir, as well as senior security personnel including the Federal Ministers of Defense, Internal Security and Planning. **(See article)**

Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre visited Balidoogle airport in Lower Shabelle region at the end of last week. The Prime Minister was accompanied by the new Minister of Defence, Hassan Ali, the Commander of the military forces and other government officials.

A delegation from the African Union was in Somalia at the beginning of this week for a three-day assessment (June 3-5) to evaluate some of the Quick Impact Projects implemented by AMISOM. **(See article)**

The US Africa Command in a statement at the weekend said a US airstrike targeting al-Shabaab militants near Bosasso, in Puntland had killed twenty-seven terrorists. The statement said U.S. forces would continue to use all authorized measures to disable terrorist threats. This included partnering with AMISOM and Somali National Security Forces in combined counterterrorism operations and targeting terrorists, their training camps, and their safe havens throughout Somalia and the region.

South Sudan

Sudan's Foreign Minister al-Dirdiri Mohamed Ahmed headed a delegation including Oil Minister Azhary Abdel Gader and the head of the National Intelligence and Security Services, Saleh Gosh to Juba at the beginning of the week. Talks covered joint cooperation for the resumption of oil production and security issues and joint cooperation to achieve security and stability in the border areas. The delegation also brought a message from President Al-Bashir to President Kiir.

The UN Security Council adopted resolution 2418 (2018) on Thursday (May 31) giving South Sudan's warring sides a month to reach a peace deal or face possible sanctions. It asks the Secretary-General to report by June 30 on whether a ceasefire agreed in December is holding, and whether the sides have "come to a viable political agreement." If not, the Security Council will consider," within five days of the report, sanctions on South Sudan's Defence Minister and five others and possibly impose an arms embargo.

Arnauld Akodjenou, Regional Refugee Coordinator and UNHCR Special Adviser for South Sudan said on Friday last week (June 1) that efforts to assist refugees fleeing South Sudan face a critical funding shortfall of nearly \$800 million. He said a Regional Refugee Response Plan designed to address the humanitarian disaster had raised only \$64 million out of the \$835 million needed.

Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), who is currently visiting South Sudan, said on Monday (June 4) that more civilians are without food in more places than ever before. UN Food security experts warned in February that unless aid and access were maintained, a record 7.1 million South Sudanese would face 'crisis' or worse 'acute' food insecurity between May and July. Mr. Egeland said from what he had seen, "a worst-case nightmare scenario" is already taking place. Since February, large areas of Unity and Equatorial states have seen an upsurge in violence.

Sudan

Salah Abdallah Gosh, head of the National Intelligence and Security Services met with Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi on Sunday (June 3). He extended President Omar al-Bashir's congratulations for President Sisi's second term as President which officially started on Saturday June 2. They discussed bilateral relations and regional issues of mutual concern.

The government welcomed a visit by the UN panel monitoring compliance with sanctions on North Korea to Khartoum on Wednesday (June 6). Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Garib Allah Khidir said: "The Government of Sudan would like to emphasize that Sudan's Military Industry Cooperation has cancelled all contracts signed between it and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and has stopped any relationship with it directly or through a third party." The Government is currently preparing a report on implementation of UN Security Council sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and it will be handed over to the UN experts on North Korea as soon as possible.

Sudan, Libya, Chad and Niger have signed a quadripartite agreement to control and monitor their borders. The agreement was signed in Ndjamena on Friday (June 1). This followed a meeting in April in Niamey when the four countries agreed to "coordinate the actions" of their armed forces to fight against the transnational "crime" in the region. Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb and Boko Haram are a threat to Niger and Chad, Sudan wants to prevent trafficking of arms to Darfur.

State Minister Hirut briefs the Diplomatic Community on current developments in the country

State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mrs. Hirut Zemene on Wednesday (June 6) briefed the Diplomatic community on recent developments in the country. The State Minister laid particular emphasis on the bold decisions of the Executive Committee of the ruling coalition Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) at its meeting earlier in the week, and noted the developments on privatization and on Eritrea in particular.

The State Minister, reiterating the fact that Ethiopia had registered fast and sustainable growth over the past 15 years, stressed the Committee's decisions, in light of a recent fall in economic performance, to enhance production capacity and the productivity of the agriculture and industry sectors with special emphasis on exports. This, Mrs. Hirut pointed out, included the possibility of either full or semi-privatization through shared ownership with the private sector in established firms. While the state would keep the majority of shares on such companies as Ethio-Telecom, Ethiopian Airlines, Electric Power Sources and the Maritime Transport and Logistics Enterprise, the remainder would be transferred to domestic and foreign investors.

In her briefing, Mrs. Hirut also stressed the Government's determination to unconditionally accept the Algiers Agreement and the decisions of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC). She noted that after closely considering the current Ethio-Eritrea situation, the Government is fully committed to the effective implementation of the Algiers Agreement on the basis of the relevant international legal instruments.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed said on Wednesday that “Many have called the enduring situation between Eritrea and Ethiopia as a “no war no peace” situation, but I believe it could better be coined as “a deathless war.” He noted that “By fully concurring to the Algiers Agreement we commit ourselves to end this costly belligerence and bring about a lasting reconciliation and tranquility.” He went on: “Not only as a Chair of the IGAD but also as a Nation with history and glory, we’ve greater responsibility to ensure peace and security in the country as well as the region. “Every Ethiopian should realize that it is expected of us to be a responsible government that ensures stability in our region, one that takes the initiative to connect the brotherly peoples of both countries and expands trains, buses and economic ties between Asmara and Addis Ababa,” he added.

Following the State Minister’s briefing, and in response to questions, Mrs Hirut stressed the Government had made it clear for years that it was ready for negotiations with the Eritrean government. She reiterated the Prime Minister’s renewed commitment for dialogue and his strong call for an end to what he called “the era of belligerence.” She noted Ethiopia had continued to demonstrate its goodwill by sheltering over two hundred thousand Eritrean refugees and by unilaterally providing compensation to Eritrean nationals whose properties were confiscated years ago.

Mrs. Hirut also emphasized the ongoing changes, praised by the international community, demonstrated the deep-seated determination of the Government to hone its capacity to address the grievances of Ethiopians at home and abroad. “Change in fact entails a deeper commitment”, the State Minister said. She stressed “We believe that we are moving in the right direction.” Concerning questions regarding shareholdings in public companies and other related details, the State Minister said further details would be given in the near future.

Ethiopia lifts the State of Emergency

Ethiopia lifted the six-month state of emergency two months earlier than originally planned, and the decision was widely welcomed as one of the most significant reforms so far by the new Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, who has promised extensive changes in the country. The Council of Ministers in its regular meeting earlier had reviewed the security situation of the country, noting that law and order had been restore, and approving the draft law to lift the State of Emergency.

The House of Peoples’ Representatives passed the draft bill forwarded by the Council of Ministers with only 8 abstentions this week on Tuesday (June5). A State of Emergency for six months was declared on February 16, and with current peace and stability in the country, MPs said lifting the state of emergency was instrumental for building a democratic political order in the country.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed in a statement issued at the end of last week, said a state of emergency is only the last option to be imposed in a situation when a government could not maintain the country’s peace and stability through a regular law enforcement mechanism.

Following the unrest in the past few years, a state of emergency was imposed for the second time. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister said, in the wake of the peaceful transition of power and the concrete reforms measures being implemented, the public has begun to develop trust in the government's will and capacity to alleviate the challenges. These encouraging developments coupled with the fact that the public has been the guardian of peace brought forth relative peace and stability in the country particularly over the last two months. This, he said, necessitated the lifting of the state of emergency.

Both the United Nations and the European Union welcomed the Government's decision as a "turning point" which would add impetus to the prominent transformation taking place. Ravina Shamdasani, Spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights said on Wednesday: "We are very encouraged by the lifting of the State of Emergency Decree in Ethiopia, two months ahead of its planned expiration date. We also welcome the release on 26 May of a number of political detainees, bloggers and other individuals who had been detained following their participation in protests in recent years." The Spokesperson also noted that during his recent visit to Ethiopia in April this year, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, had witnessed tremendous hope among civil society activists, traditional leaders and others in Ethiopian society that the new Government would act swiftly to secure human rights protections for everyone in the country.

A Spokesperson for the Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Maja Kocijancic, described the lifting of the State of Emergency as another positive step that would contribute to an environment in which all relevant stakeholders could take part in that process. She said the EU remains ready to assist the Government in its reform endeavors in view of the next local elections, including political dialogue and political reforms meeting the expectations of the Ethiopian people as well as economic reforms to facilitate the work of businesses as well as job creation. The Spokesperson stressed that the political transition in Ethiopia in the past few weeks had led to concrete reform efforts by Prime Minister Dr. Abiy and his Government and these would create a more inclusive society.

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed and former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair address youth

Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed and the former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, jointly addressed the young at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) on Friday last week (June 1) at an "Inspiring the Future Leaders of Ethiopia" event. Organized by the Prime Minister's Office and the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, the occasion attracted more than 1000 young participants from all corners of the country, from academia, civil society, business entrepreneurs and youngsters involved in science and technology and innovation.

Both Prime Minister Abiy and Tony Blair delivered motivational speeches to participants underlining the need for the young generation to invest in themselves in order to harness their potential for Ethiopia's future. They had both shared inspirations, challenges, and opportunities in their leadership journeys.

In his remarks, Prime Minister Abiy quoted Nelson Mandela: “The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow”, adding “and I say they are not only of tomorrow, but they are the leaders of today.” He said: “You must know your strengths, not just your dreams, otherwise you remain dreamers.” Tony Blair, the Executive Chairman of the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, noted: “Standards are immortal, an approach is a time bound. Stick up for what you believe is correct.”

Another speaker was Amrote Abdella, a regional Director for Microsoft, who was named one of ‘Africa’s Top 100 Young Business Leaders in 2017. Recently named among the 50 Most Influential Africans of 2018, she also shared her professional journey and experiences as a young black woman in leadership.

The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change is a non-profit organization that was set up by Tony Blair in 2016 and is dedicated to make globalization work for the many and address intractable global issues of poverty, inequality, extremism, and conflict.

Somalia’s National Security Council meets in Baidoa

President Mohamed Abdullahi chaired the two-day meeting of the National Security Council in Baidoa this week (June 4-5) together with Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre. The meeting was held in the presidential compound of the Southwest state in Baidoa under tight security.

It was the seventh meeting of the Council, formed in April 2017 in Mogadishu, and it was attended by the leaders of the Federal Member States and the Mayor of Mogadishu, the Governor of Benadir, as well as senior security personnel including the Federal Ministers of Defense, Internal Security and Planning.

The meeting focused on security reforms and rebuilding the national army as well as preparations for the proposed ‘one-man-one-vote’ general election in 2020, the health of the economy and the adopting of a new federal constitution as well as the sharing of the natural resources in the country, particularly on how to benefit the fish resources. It reached agreements on providing support for one person one vote in 2020, harmonisation of tax systems and on the Transitional Security Plan

The leaders agreed to extend the training and sharpening of the skills of the security forces, to restore peace in the country. The Council passed the Transitional Plan unanimously. This will facilitate the transferring of security responsibilities from AMISOM to Somali forces within four years as agreed at the London Conference in May last year. Somalia will have an army of 22,000 and a 32,000 strong police force. AMISOM is expected to gradually withdraw its 21,000 troops by December 2020, though the troop-contributing countries, Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda have warned that a premature withdrawal would undermine the gains made over the last few years.

After hearing (and assessing) the security threats to Somalia posed by terror groups, the National Security Council also emphasised the importance of carrying out the implementation of equipping the military forces and enhancing their skills. The point was emphasized by an ambush on Tuesday (June 5) when heavily armed Al-Shabaab fighters attacked a convoy near Balad, about 30 kilometres north of Mogadishu, killing five people including two regional lawmakers. The National Security Conference condemned the attack and demanded for swift action. The leaders called on Somali forces to reopen and secure the main supply route linking Baidoa and other towns. It said the operations should be conducted by Southwest Paramilitary Police forces, backed by national army units. The leaders also agreed that the Southwest State Darvish Forces should take part in the operations to reopen the main road linking Baidoa to Mogadishu.

The issue of security was also underlined recently by the operations carried out by national army units supported by international partners who train Somalia's security and the direct military assistance from U.S. Special Forces. In the past week, two separate U.S. airstrikes killed a total of 39 suspected Al-Shabaab fighters. According to the U.S. Africa Command, these were the 15th and 16th airstrikes this year against Al-Shabaab.

Somalia's international partners praised the leaders for reaching agreements on the Transition Plan, revenue sharing and the electoral model for the 2020 one-person, one vote, elections. In a statement on Thursday (June 7) envoys of the UN, the EU, the US, the UK, the African Union and other states, commended the National Security Council for building a consensus on critical issues. "As Somalia enters a new phase in its relations with international financial institutions, its partners encourage Somalia's leaders to continue working in the spirit of unity," they said. They called on the leaders to speed up implementation of the agreements. They said the conference had set the scene for a constructive Somalia Partnership Forum in Brussels on June 25-26, co-hosted by the Somali Government, the EU and Sweden.

AU Delegation evaluates Quick Impact Projects in Somalia

A delegation from the African Union was in Somalia at the beginning of this week for a three-day assessment (June 3-5) to evaluate some of the Quick Impact Projects implemented by AMISOM. These are projects in areas recovered by AMISOM operations and funded by the Crisis Management, Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development Division of the African Union Commission. In total, AMISOM has implemented 107 Quick Impact Projects to date, including 23 currently being implemented.

The team toured projects already implemented to assess whether implementation followed the AU's Quick Impact and Peace Strengthening Projects' procedures. It focused on six projects implemented in 2017 with funding from the African Union: a school project in Ceel Jaale, a refurbished police station in Kismayo, a rehabilitated Mother and Child Hospital in Merka, support provided to the local administration in Afgoye district, and a clean water project constructed in May 2017, for the out-patient department of the AMISOM Hospital community in Mogadishu. The project which benefits 76-households with 400-people, was prioritized by the

community after the successful completion of two other projects, the provision of electricity in the community and construction of a primary school.

In Kismayo, as delegation leader Mike Bugason explained, the team looked at a police station refurbished and equipped by AMISOM to evaluate whether it had improved the working conditions of the police in Jubaland; whether it had enhanced the maintenance of law and order for local communities and whether it had increased access to justice for women, children and for the general community. Locals and the station Commander agreed the station has improved the security situation and been effective in preventing crime and maintaining law and order. The Commander emphasized the importance of involving local communities in fighting crime and underlined the importance of his officers socializing with the local community. He stressed the community in turn worked closely with the station, sharing important information with the police.

The delegation also met with senior AMISOM officials in Mogadishu. Mr. Bugason said they wanted “to take note of the good practices, the lessons learnt, so that we are able to recommend how we can do it better and more quickly in future,” asking “What are the success stories that we can enhance, for future implementation, design or monitoring; and what are the challenges that have been encountered on the ground?” He said the aim was to assist communities to lead better lives, but also by doing so to improve the relationship between the communities and the leadership of AMISOM and also the operations of the military. He emphasized the need to ensure the projects had the desired impact on communities.

The delegation was received at the AMISOM Force Headquarters by the Deputy Force Commander of Operations and Plans Major General Tai Gituai, who underlined the importance of the projects in providing linkage between troops and local communities. He said: the projects were “crucial in winning the hearts and minds of the local people, and creating an enabling environment for our soldiers.”

The 6th meeting of African Union Ministers of Trade (AMOT) held in Dakar

The sixth meeting of African Union Ministers of Trade (AMOT) was convened in Dakar, Senegal on Saturday (June 2). In addition to ministers and representatives from Member States, the two-day meeting was also attended by Regional Economic Communities and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. The meeting was preceded by the 11th Meeting of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Negotiations Forum, and the 6th Meeting of the AfCFTA Committee of Senior Officials of Trade (STO).

The meeting deliberated on the protocols to the agreement establishing African Continental Free Trade Agreement and on modalities for tariff liberalization. It acknowledged the African Continental Free Trade Area’s ability to bring about macroeconomic stability for better economic integration and underlined the need for all state parties to AfCFTA to establish national consultative and coordinating mechanisms for regular dialogue.

The AU Commissioner of Trade and Industry, Ambassador Albert M. Muchanga, in his opening speech, congratulated the members of the new Bureau of the African Union Ministers of Trade. The Bureau, composed of representatives from Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mauritania and Cote D'Ivoire, will lead the AfCFTA process over the next twelve months. This includes completing the remaining tasks of the Phase 1 negotiations and starting the Phase 2 negotiations centered on investment, competition policy and intellectual property rights and possibly e-commerce.

Commissioner Muchanga noted the dangers of a trade war in the international trading environment. He urged work on the legal instruments of establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area and its operations in order to protect Africa from this looming trade war. He added fast-tracking these could mitigate the impact of a trade war which could affect Africa.

The Commissioner underlined the importance of macroeconomic stability to economic integration and urged trade ministers to work closely with ministers responsible for finance and development planning in promoting alignment of macroeconomic stability and adherence to the AfCFTA agenda. He reiterated the dire need for all State-Parties which do not already have national AfCFTA consultative and coordinating mechanisms to take steps to establish them.

The Trade Ministers urged the AU Commission, the Economic Commission for Africa and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to undertake further analytical work to inform the preparation of Schedules of Tariff Concessions for Trade in Goods. They asked these organizations to make this available to member states no later than the end of June 2018. This should then be followed by the preparation of templates for Schedules of Tariff Concessions for Trade in Goods and Schedules of Specific Commitments on Trade in Services by the end of July. The meeting of the 12th AfCFTA-Negotiating Forum, tentatively scheduled for September, is expected to approve the templates for the operationalization of the AfCFTA. The Schedules of Tariff Concessions for Trade in Goods and Schedules of Specific Commitments on Trade in Services will be submitted for adoption to the January 2019 Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government.

At the end of the two-day Ministerial Meeting, the Ministers adopted the recommendations of the Senior Trade Officers on the annexes to the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods and the Protocol on Rules and Procedures on the Settlement of Disputes. The conclusion of the annexes to these two protocols has been described as “a significant achievement”. They also agreed on the five priority sectors (transport, communication, financial, tourism and business services) and the approach to be adopted in developing Schedules of Specific Commitments on Trade in Services.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) was signed in March in Kigali by 44 countries, taking a major step towards a long-held dream of the African Union, free trade across the continent. If ratified by all the states, AfCFTA will become one of the world's largest trading blocs. Kenya, Ghana and Rwanda have already handed over to the African Union Commission the documents ratifying AfCFTA; other signatories are expected to ratify soon. A number of countries have yet to sign: Nigeria, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, Zambia, Burundi, Eritrea, Benin, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau.

Africa at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum 2018

The Russian City of St. Petersburg hosted the 22nd annual St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF 2018) towards the end of last month (May 24-26). This year's SPIEF was held under the theme "Building an Economy of Trust". Russia's Minister of Economic Development, Maxim Oreshkin, said the forum aimed to foster a global "dialogue on how to resolve contradictions that reduce the potential for global growth," through collaborative, ground-breaking work in the energy, demographic and technological sectors and other related areas.

As one of the largest economic international gatherings of heads of states, global leaders from several IGOs, international companies, experts, politicians, scientists, held under the auspices of President Putin since 2005, SPIEF plays a crucial role as a practical tool for businesses, helping them to overcome the barriers they face in the spheres both of geography and information. This year, discussions were held covering four major thematic areas: The Global Economy in an Era of Change, Harnessing Russia's Growth Potential, Technology for Leadership and Human Capital in the Digital Economy. French President Emmanuel Macron, Japanese President Shinzo Abe and Ms. Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) took part in the opening session.

The Africa-Russia Business Dialogue took place on Saturday (May 26). The AU Commissioner for Trade and Industry Albert M. Muchanga, represented the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat. Speaking during the panel session, Commissioner Muchanga underscored the need for fast-tracking Africa's move away from its perennial economic role with the rest of the world, as a supplier of raw materials and importer of manufactured goods. The Commissioner also stressed the need to discourage loans, pointing out they could perpetuate the age-old cycle of dependency. In place of loans, Commissioner Muchanga emphasized that what Africa needed the most was a continuous flow of Foreign Direct Investment into key sectors to fast-track industrialization and to realize Africa's own agenda of structural transformation.

The Commissioner noted that the signing of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) during the 10th Extraordinary Session of the Assembly in March 2018 in Kigali would gradually result in the creation of an intra-continental market of 1.2 billion consumers with a combined GDP of approximately USD 3 trillion. He said this also provided a great opportunity to increase the current volume of Africa-Russia trade, currently estimated at approximately USD 12 billion. Commissioner Muchanga added that with a growing middle class and a massively young population, accounting for more than 60% of Africa's population, all eager for new products, services and solutions, Africa was the best destination for businesses. He also emphasized the pivotal role the Single African Air Transport Market, launched in January 2018, would make the new continental market forged through the AfCFTA even more enticing than ever.

Commenting on the crucial role the Africa- Russia Business Dialogue plays in boosting Africa-Russia trade and investment, Anton Kobayakov, Presidential Advisor and Executive Secretary of the Organizing Committee of the SPIEF noted: "Economic cooperation between Russia and

African countries has been steadily on the rise over recent years. In particular, an upward trend has been noted in the sphere of trade with Ethiopia, Cameroon, Angola, Sudan, Zimbabwe and other countries.” He noted the Forum was taking place at a critical moment with Africa celebrating two important dates, Africa Day and the 55th Anniversary of the African Union.

The panel session on the Africa-Russia Business Dialogue was attended by a number of dignitaries including the President of the Central African Republic, Faustin Archange Touadera and Mr. Mikhail Bogdanov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation.