

Amb. Dr Kipyego Cheluget, Assistant Secretary General-Programs, COMESA Secretariat affirmed this stating, “*COMESA’s response strategy is built on the key pillars of strengthening market integration, industrialization and infrastructure development also focus on the same; recognizing the development of practical measures to enhance regional value chains, industrialization, promote trade facilitation; and ensuring private sector development.*”

The Forum was lauded as an opportunity to not only deliberate on a number of critical issues impacting business performance in the region, but also learn about the recommendations put forward by the COMESA private sector, to tackle the challenges impeding intra-trade and investment in the region.

“Egypt’s assumption of the Chairmanship of COMESA takes place at a critical time due to the challenges brought on by COVID-19. While the pandemic poses many challenges to the integration process of the regional economy, it presents a chance to reshape regional and international value chains, linking the regional value of the industrial sector to the comparative advantages available to COMESA Member States,” said the Forum’s Guest of Honour, Hon. Mr. Yahya El Wathiq Bellah, Minister Plenipotentiary, Head of African Countries and COMESA Department, Egyptian Commercial Service, Ministry of Trade and Industry of the Arab Republic of Egypt, in his opening statement.

The CBC Regional Advocacy Agenda 2021 was presented by Dr. Eng. Sherif El Gabaly, Chairperson of the CBC Industry Board Committee, who is also Chairperson of the Africa Cooperation Committee, Federation of Egyptian Industries (FEI). *“It is my hope that the CBC Regional Advocacy Agenda will enhance our focus, continue give us guidance and bring about commitments towards effective implementation of CBC Strategy 2018-2022,”* said Dr El-Gabaly.

The Forum’s deliberations centered on the thematic areas of digital financial inclusion for trade; industrial competitiveness and illicit trade; harmonization of product standards and SPS regulations in the region; and promoting business linkages in COMESA.

Key recommendations, which are expected to feed into the COMESA Policy Organs to be held in November 2021, were put forward; Member States are urged to:

- i. Collaborate in tackling illicit trade towards enhanced intra-COMESA trade and industrial competitiveness.
- ii. Enhance public-private sector collaboration to improve industrial competitiveness and tackle illicit trade.
- iii. Adopt mutual recognition framework to reduce technical barriers to trade that result from multiplicity of compliance requirements with respect to standards.
- iv. Align Africa quality policy to national quality policies to allow for creation of one stop shops with respects to standards.
- v. Establish implementation framework for African regional standards.
- vi. Develop initiatives to provide support to SMEs within the agroindustry value chain, to enable them gain access to quality information and affordable finance, thereby becoming competitive in the regional market.
- vii. Smartly deploy subsidies from focus on production to the other parts of value chains.
- viii. Develop capacity building initiatives for enterprises that will enable them to meet the export readiness requirements.

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About COMESA Business Council

The COMESA Business Council (CBC) is a business member organization bringing together a diverse group of businesses and associations in the region from 34 sectors in 21 countries of COMESA. CBC is the recognized regional apex body of the private sector in the region. CBC as the key advocacy driver for business, provides a link between the private sector and organs of the Common market. We seek to improve the competitiveness and deepen the participation of the private sector in regional and global trade, through advocacy, business facilitation and enterprise development. This includes prioritizing and taking specific advocacy strategies to address key business impediments and measures that affect our industries and have a direct bearing on the participation of our businesses in trading in the COMESA region.

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