... informed of Uganda in the liberation struggle.

President leads EAC delegation to Brussels for EU economic talks

By Taddeo Bwambale

President Yoweri Museveni, the current chair of the East African Community (EAC) is in Belgium for regional talks with the European Union (EU) over Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs).

Museveni and a delegation from the EAC member states left for Brussels yesterday ahead of the talks to revive the stalled negotiations for the trade agreements.

EPA is an initiative by the EU to secure free market access and gain reciprocal access in the region, with expanded trade opportunities. Ugandan largely exports coffee, tea, flowers and fish to the EU.

The EU ranks second in Uganda's export destination with exports valued at $443m in 2015. Imports from the EU are valued $637.7m, representing a significant trade deficit.

A good agreement has potential to expand free and unlimited market access of Uganda and the entire EAC's exports to the EU market of 28 member states and 500 million consumers. The EAC heads of state agreed in principle to review the EPA before endorsing it, with concerns that its impact in one country would affect the neighbours.

Museveni has previously noted that all the EAC countries still need clarifications on several issues contained in EPA, before they proceed to ratify it.

It was reported that Kenya and Rwanda had already signed and ratified the EPA with the EU. However, all the other EAC members are required to sign up too, in line with the EAC Single Customs Territory.

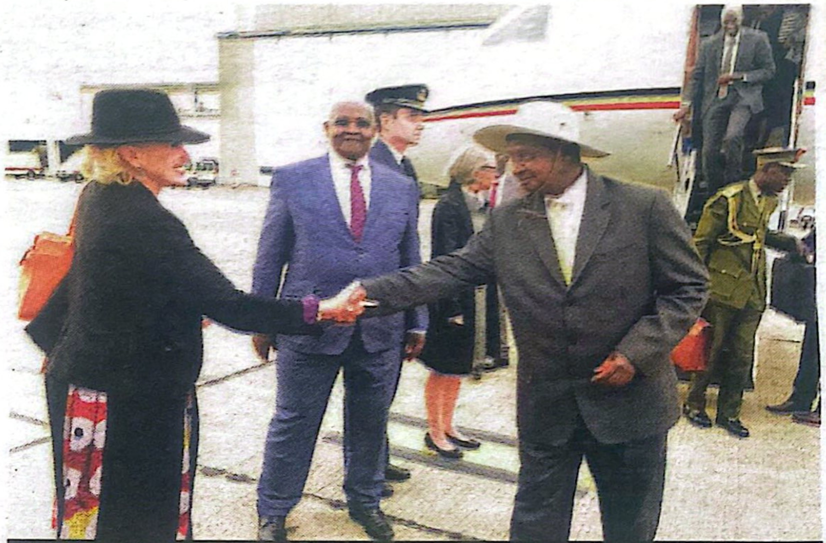
Key in the EPA talks in Brussels are sanctions on Burundi — one of the EAC states — and the decision by the UK to leave the EU.

African countries face a risk of losing out on preferential access to the UK market under EU agreements following the country's exit. The UK is among leading investors in EAC and Africa.

Regional trade

Uganda's export market is dominated by regional trade with her neighbours. Uganda's trade volumes in EAC have grown in recent years, with exports increasing from $627.4m in 2013 to $771.6m in 2015.

Imports from the EAC have also increased from $616.6m in 2013 to $630.1m in 2015. Within the EAC, Uganda's major exports include coffee, tea, spices, salt, cement, cereals and sugar. The COMESA is now Uganda's leading export destination representing about 50% export market share. Uganda's exports to COMESA have increased from $996.9m in 2011 to $1.2b in 2015. Exports are mainly coffee, tea and spices.



Museveni being received by Ambassador Mirjam Blaack (left) and foreign affairs minister Sam Kutesa (centre) at the Brussels Military Airport yesterday. Photo by PPU