



Opening Remarks by EU Ambassador Karolina Stasiak

Dear Secretary General of COMESA, H.E. Chileshe Kapwepwe,

Assistant Secretary General, Amb. Mohamed KADAH,

Fellow Ambassadors, EU Member States representatives

Distinguished Guests,

It is my pleasure to lead the EU Team for our first **EU-COMESA Strategic Dialogue**. I am happy that a few of my fellow EU Member States Ambassadors have joined us today. All of our Member States are also Special Representatives to COMESA, so it is a good opportunity for all of us to engage at high level, a strategic level, with you as leaders of the organisation.

The European Union and COMESA have a **long-standing relationship, dating back to COMESA's creation in 1994**. This relationship is built cooperation and a shared vision for development through a more close regional integration.

Our collaboration and partnership has over the years translated into numerous and very concrete successful programmes that have advanced integration among COMESA member states, and I am happy that today we will be able to take stock of these achievements.

But beyond concrete programmes on which our teams work together on a daily basis, today's primary objective is to hold discussions on the current **institutional developments within COMESA and within the European Union**, and on **each other's political priorities**.

Following the European Parliament elections, the European Commission President Ursula VON DER LEYEN was recently re-elected for another 5 years term until 2029. The **new European Commission will take office soon**; we are in the process of nominating the representatives of each member state to the College of Commissioners.

So a transition period on who will take which portfolio, but with the President elect there will be a continuity and therefore renewed focus on sustainability, green and digital transformation, and on resilience of the European economy in the face of global challenges.



And there comes the need for stronger partnerships, more cooperation, not less, being able to count on more trading partners, diversify the suppliers and the markets in partner countries.

Similarly, COMESA has been advancing its **regional integration agenda**, focusing on increased coherence, on economic growth and social development.

I would also like to congratulate you on the recent entry into force of the **Tripartite Free Trade Agreement** with SADC and EAC, which is now becoming a reality. I would like to commend COMESA for its constructive leadership role in this process. We see this as an important milestone towards the implementation of the **Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)**.

Our **joint regional programmes** have been instrumental in addressing key issues, such as trade facilitation along key transport corridors, development of regional value chains, facilitating market access, infrastructure development, and capacity building. These initiatives have not only strengthened our partnership but have also contributed to upgrading the lives and increase prosperity in our regions.

This Strategic Dialogue is also **an opportunity to align our political priorities**. The European Union's **Global Gateway Strategy**, which is an investment strategy in key infrastructure to increase resilience and build prosperity in our partner countries. We aim to mobilise up to 150 billions euros for Africa.

Other political priorities include the **Green Deal, the Digital Strategy, and the Africa-EU Partnership**. They form part of our high-level political framework, which resonates with COMESA's vision of sustainable development, economic diversification, and regional integration.

The world is changing rapidly, and new global challenges and opportunities constantly arise. Climate change, geopolitical tensions, which result in market disruptions and economic uncertainties. These challenges require us to adapt and innovate and partner with our allies.

Today, we have a good example of such innovation and adaptation to new challenges, in this particular case, climate change, with a signature of the financing agreement on the **SWITCH to Circular Economy in East and Southern Africa** programme.

This **EUR 40 million investment by the European Union** aims to boost an inclusive **transition from a linear to a circular economy** by promoting green and circular business



models. It will reverse environmental degradation and recover natural capital, improve resource efficiency, reduce waste and pollution, create economic opportunities and the jobs for the future.

The **SWITCH-2-CE in ESA** programme specifically targets the following two sectors:

1) Packaging & Plastic Waste;

2) Electronics & E-Waste;

The latter establishes also a close link to the **sustainable sourcing of critical raw materials** in East and Southern Africa. The EU-COMESA partnership is very critical on this geopolitical challenge, as the EU has signed MoU on CRMs with a number of COMESA and SADC member states, including with DRC, Namibia, Rwanda and of course Zambia.

The **SWITCH-2-CE in ESA** will

- help **improve the regulatory framework to attract more investment into this sector**
- help with upskilling and training people into jobs in circular economy sector
- and support **access to finance for actors in this sector** through a matching grant facility including with companies from EU member states.

The **EU-COMESA partnership** underscores a shared priority and commitment to climate action, which positions the region as a leader in innovative and sustainable economic practices in Africa.

Thank you for your kind attention and I look forward to a fruitful morning of discussions over our shared priorities.

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