



Report EU/Africa Business Forum 2017, Abidjan
on EBCAM's activities at the Forum represented by Karen Taylor and Alex Lambeth

On Monday 27 November, Abidjan hosted the 6th EU-Africa Business Forum (EUABF), in advance of the AU-EU Summit taking place later in the week. Reportedly more than 2000 delegates attended the conference which sought to deepen and strengthen EU-Africa commercial ties. BCA-IA, represented by CEO Karen Taylor and COO Alex Lambeth, were in attendance as part of BCA-IA's 2017-18 Presidency of the European Business Council for Africa (EBCAM). EBCAM is the umbrella body that comprises many of Europe's leading Africa-focussed business organisations such as Afrika-Verein (Germany), NABC (Netherlands) and CIAN (France).

The programme included VIP keynotes and panel debates, followed by a range of interactive business-focussed sessions in the afternoon. The primary theme of the event was "investing in youth job creation". Other themes covered included: private sector engagement with the External Investment Plan (EIP), enabling investments in Renewable Energy and the role of digital in the agriculture sector. BCA-IA hosted a panel on developing the role of European Chambers of Commerce in Africa.

Karen Taylor gave a closing keynote speech on the final panel, which included the Ivorian Minister of Finance HE Adama Kone and HE Frederica Mogherini, Vice-President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Foreign Affairs. EBCAM, in collaboration with Business Africa, Business Europe, Eurochambres, European Entrepreneurs and the Pan-African Chamber of Commerce, led the co-ordination of the Joint-Business Statement which was given at the AU-EU Summit on 29 and 30 November. The document emphasised importance of continuity of sustainable economic development policies and the need to strengthen business organisations. It calls for improved access to institutional finance for SMEs and growing businesses and encourages improved public-private relationships.

On the occasion of the Summit, Karen Taylor stated:

"Europe and Africa should strengthen their cooperation in the field of trade and investment over the coming years. We ask the European Commission to speed up the implementation of the new External Investment Plan and to continue to incorporate the private sector as an integral part of its development strategy for Africa."

The main challenges to investment by businesses in Africa are the deficits in infrastructure, energy and professional and vocational education. Europe and Africa can mobilise public and private resources to strengthen these key factors to encourage more local production on the African continent.

EU and African governments should continue to push forward concrete financial instruments and improvements to business environments to promote the development of a strong private sector in Africa. This will ensure an increase of European Foreign Direct Investment into the continent which will create jobs and prosperity in Africa and Europe"

BCA-IA also undertook a range of side visits in Abidjan, meeting with the World Bank, the newly formed British Chamber of Commerce, British Ambassador Josephine Gauld and HE Jean-Clause Kouassi, Minister of Employment.

The EUABF 2017 was a clear example of the political commitment from African and European governments, multilaterals and DFIs to engage with the business community. There was an especially vibrant community of both European and African start-ups present, which given the youth focus of the conference seemed entirely appropriate. It is hoped by many that the event will kick start a new phase in Europe-Africa commercial relationships, built on the values of a true partnership working for the prosperity of both Africa and Europe. However, this will require continued and substantial efforts, particularly on the governmental side, to truly and honestly engage with private sector partners over the coming years.