



EAST AFRICAN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

**TALKING NOTES BY RT HON NGOGA KAROLI MARTIN, SPEAKER OF EALA ON
THE TOPIC TOWARDS A CLOSER POLITICAL CO-OPERATION AT THE ALDEPAC
ANNUAL CONFERENCE – KIGALI, MAY 18th -20th, 2018**

Excellences,

Speakers of Parliaments present

Members of Parliament and Heads of Delegations,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Afternoon!

I know you have been duly welcomed to Kigali this morning at the start of the ALDEPAC Annual Conference. However, since I am taking the podium for the first time, let me also take the singular opportunity to welcome all visitors to the East African Community and to Republic of Rwanda in particular. ***Urakaza Neza I' Rwanda***

Similarly let me thank the ALDEPAC in collaboration with the Parliament of Rwanda for putting together this important Conference under the banner “**Enhancing Regional Co-operation: A Liberal Solution**”. It is indeed humbling to be amongst the presence of leaders and great minds committed to enhancing the spirit of cooperation across the regional integration spectrum. I am accompanied here today by Hon George Odongo, EALA Member and Chapter Chair, Uganda. EALA is the regional Assembly mandated to legislate, provide oversight and representation of citizens of the EAC. The tenure of the 4th EALA for which I was elected Speaker in December 2017, runs until December 2022.

I propose to share with you some reflections on the topic “**Towards Political Co-operation**” by looking at the context of the national setting, and the regional perspective before sharing thoughts on how to strengthen the same.

1.0 The context of Political Co-operation in our national setting

- a) Political co-operation is not a new set of words to us; I believe, there has been political co-operation in one way or another over centuries and for as long as life has existed on earth and in various forms. What perhaps is necessary in today's setting, is the need to contextualize and to make it more meaningful as the world becomes a global village. Today, Africa's political, economic and institutional landscape is such that we must walk the talk and embrace dynamism. In this beautiful city of Kigali a couple of weeks ago, 44 African countries came together to sign the AfCFTA agreement – which is billed to create one of the world's largest trade blocs. While the AfCFTA anticipates a single market for goods and services, it is essentially a perfect step and another idea towards enhancing political cooperation. This move is a step in the direction towards creating a United States of Africa – a dream of the forefathers of the continent – who were Pan Africanists *par excellence*! However, before we realise that, we should strengthen our very own national set-ups.
- b) Today, our nations face a markedly changed political landscape. In certain instances, the Government of the day though with strong majority in the House contend with opposition parties that are becoming stronger by the day, with more vibrant ideas and that remain keen to outsmart them. Driven by the fact they are “Government's in waiting”, they often signal at weakening the ruling party so as to anchor themselves in readiness to fill the void. In politics, healthy and progressive competition is not necessarily a bad thing if it is **constructive**. However, political co-operation calls for closing in of ranks between the political antagonists in the bigger picture.
- c) The essence of political space is therefore vital. The opposition can work closely with Government and even join it for the benefit of the citizens of the country or the region. A political system that is holistic and all encompassing may provide space for those with opposing views to be part of the dispensation and in so doing, strengthen governance and political co-operation.
- d) I am a proponent of the hybrid system – where all share a piece of the national cake. For far too long, the mode of ‘Winner takes it all’ has been embraced in many systems. But how effective is it? Is it practical? Can a leader who scraps through an election by 51% be effective or should they seek co-operation and collaboration? Perhaps, all persons who are taxpayers have a stake in governance of their countries and even regions. I am of the view that Africa needs to re-think this strategy as part of harmonizing and moving closer to political co-operation.

2.0 The regional perspective

- a) Speaking as a regional enthusiast and head of a regional Legislative Assembly, political co-operation should cascade both ways and as a two-way traffic – from the leadership to the people and vice-versa. In furthering this vision, the East African Legislative Assembly, established under article 9 of the Treaty for the Establishment of the East African Community has a cardinal function to further EAC objectives, through its Legislative, Representative and Oversight mandate. One among the many functions bestowed upon **EALA**; Is to liaise with the National Assemblies of the Partner States on matters relating to the Community; This function in itself espouses what we are talking about – political co-operation. Consensus is key in building bridges for the regional blocs.
- b) The EAC has a vision of a successful, competitive, safe and politically united East Africa. Definitely, the EAC Partner States realized from the failures of the first EAC (1977) on need to be people centred but similarly lay firm foundation establishing regional frameworks and institutions that are linked to national structures and are complementary.
- c) As a first step towards political co-operation, Partner States have signed binding Protocols to shape the integration. The four pillars of integration call for hard-work, political commitment, goodwill and consensus-building. **The Political Federation** is the ultimate goal of the EAC Regional Integration. It is provided for under Article 5(2) of the EAC Treaty. It is worth noting that attainment of the Political Federation is a process, rather than an event. Though the process has been slow, the EAC Heads of State did resolve at a Special Summit held in Nairobi on 27-29 August 2004 to examine ways and means of deepening and accelerating the process through a fast-track Mechanism. On 20th May, 2017, the EAC Heads of State adopted the Political Confederation as a transitional model of the East African Political Federation.
- d) However, that said, other various levels of political co-operation have been realized between countries within the East African and are interspersed within the other integration pillars. Political co-operation is not just in the political arena but has spillover effects in the economic and socio-development strata. For instance, the **Northern Corridor and the Central corridor infrastructure master plans** are not just blue print for the development of infrastructure that interconnects the East African region – but key areas that require political co-operation.

3.0 Political co-operation is not an event – but a cross-cutting theme that ensures seamless Trade Agreements such as CFTA and EPAs:

Perhaps the most significant arrangement for Africa as I alluded to is the recently signed AfCFTA right here in Kigali – setting the basis for Free Movement of Persons, Right to Residence and Right to Establishment in the continent. More recently, the Republics of Rwanda, Kenya and Ghana have made significant steps towards ratification of the instruments. I would encourage Parliaments and the respective Cabinets to work towards ensuring ratification of the said instruments.

This is expected to be a perfect example of the nexus between political co-operation and realities of the globalization can play out. No country can be an island in this time and age and yet succeed.

Typically, trade agreements are designed to establish a 'free trade area,' where goods and services can be exchanged across territorial boundaries without imposing tariffs. The countries (regions) forming a free trade area impose a common tariff on goods and services sold to non-member countries.

Other typical arrangements include the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement, signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000, providing the framework for EU's relations with 79 countries from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP). In 2010, ACP-EU cooperation adapted new challenges such as climate change, food security, regional integration, State fragility and aid effectiveness. The EPAs under the Cotonou arrangements allow for development yet flexibility to negotiate at one's pace. As you may be aware, the EAC for example is negotiating the EPA as a bloc. Politically, under such arrangements Member states stand to co-operate, negotiate and develop.

3.2 Enhancing collaboration with requisite Ministerial Councils

Structures such as the Ministerial Councils bring together politicians of the highest echelons of various governments together to build a common political direction and these tentatively represent the highest level of political co-operation. For instance; at the EAC Level we have the Council of Ministers, that meets and reviews agenda as a precursor to the Summit Meeting of Heads of State of Partner States. The European Council established in 1992 and the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) established on 25th May 1981, for Gulf countries are other examples. The Council of Ministers generally adopts policy directives, gives directions and takes decisions on the implementation of agreements or areas of cooperation, therefore facilitating the integration process. Collaboration between them and the regional Parliaments should as a matter of fact be transparent, objective and above board.

3.3 Enhancing Partnerships:

The EAC at the regional level also engages with other countries by virtue of their membership to various global, continental and regional membership to various organizations. In addition; all the Partner States of the EAC are also Members of the United Nations (UN) at the global level and also members of the African Union (AU). The EAC is also looking at enhancing more co-operation with the SADC and COMESA economic blocs through the Tripartite arrangement. Great achievements are expected if the partnerships are strengthened and made more meaningful.

4.0 How do we move towards Political Co-operation?

Political Co-operation is a positive initiative – but one that can nevertheless face some challenges as already alluded to above. Fundamentally, we must walk the talk. Regional integration alone cannot resolve our problems but such initiatives must be supported by political willingness and commitment by countries. I therefore wish to propose the following five interventions:

1. **Ceding Sovereignty:** The issue of sovereignty is key. However, many also use the refrain to slow down progress or bracket challenges. To progress further, we should be able to cede some form of sovereignty to the supra-natural bodies.
2. Consolidating regional integration is not a norm anymore – but an area that calls for collective action and effort. Constant reviews of decisions arrived at during the Meetings are key but the Implementation is of absolute necessity.
3. The move by the African Union to push for harmonized and streamlined regional integration should be supported by all. In the same vein, implementing the AfCFTA will spur trade and economic integration for the region.
4. Regional Legislatures need more teeth to be able to pass laws which once assented to, take precedence over national ones on similar matters that revolve on integration. So far in the African continent, EALA has legislative powers while others are more consultative and advisory. I want to reiterate that EALA is ready and willing to work closely with other Regional Parliaments towards realization of the legislative powers.
5. Suspicion and mistrust have for many years being enemies of development, integration and political co-operation. RECs and the Partners in Development should aim to be transparent in our dealings and “play the cards above the table”.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I press on the need for all Leaders in this forum to continue the exemplary work they perform in their various countries. The need for political cooperation is very much needed to alleviate some of the top pressing issues in the world; Terrorism, climate change, migration to mention but a few, however our political cooperation must be matched by our political will to act on what is decided.

I encourage you to be determined and innovative, and to learn from our past and from each other. With the few remarks, once again, I thank you for the invitation and for your kind attention.