THE NEW **UEMOA COMMISSION**

The eight Commissioners of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) were sworn in on 9 May 2017. In accordance with Article 28 of the UEMOA Treaty, the swearing-in ceremony took place at the UEMOA Court of Justice in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Ms Joséphine Ebah Touré, President of the Court of Justice, recalled the responsibilities of the Commission as guardian of the Treaty and the effective implementation of acts adopted by the Union’s various bodies. The Commission is the Union’s executive body in charge of ensuring the proper functioning of the Union. It is composed of eight members, called Commissioners, who are nationals of UEMOA Member States. On the basis of one commissioner per State, they are appointed by the Conference of Heads of State and Government for a renewable, four-year term. The new Commission includes only one female member, Fily Bouraré Sissoko from Mali, in charge of the Department of Enterprise Development, Energy, Telecommunications and Tourism. Three former Commissioners have been reappointed: the Togolese Essowè Barcola who remains in charge of the Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DSAF); Ibrahima Dieme of Guinea-Bissau, who now heads the Regional Market, Trade, Competition and Co-operation Department, and the new Commission President, Abdallah Boureima of Niger, who was previously in charge of the Department of Economic Policy and Internal Taxation.
Organised together with the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development of the European Commission, SWAC’s presentation recalled that the challenges facing food security in West Africa should not be overshadowed by the resurgence of demographic, migration and security concerns on the international agenda. The food sector is of central importance; it is the largest economic sector in the region, far ahead of extractive industries, cash crops or the energy sector. The food economy offers huge potential for creating more jobs, stimulating stronger and more inclusive growth, opening up a wider field of opportunities - in rural and urban areas - for agricultural producers and entrepreneurs, and pulling the most vulnerable out of poverty and insecurity.

Over 200 young people gathered at the first African Youth Agripreneurs (AYA) forum that took place in Ibadan, Nigeria from 25 to 26 April. Organised by the African Development Bank (AfDB) and partners, the forum served as a platform to promote skills, creativity and innovativeness in agribusiness. It offered many opportunities for networking among young entrepreneurs and key stakeholders. An Agri-Pitch entrepreneurship competition gathered ideas on innovations in agriculture: “How can Africans improve the way they produce, process and distribute African agrifood product?”

In his speech on behalf of the AfDB President, Akinwunmi Adesina, Chiji Ojukwu, AfDB’s Agriculture and Agro-industry Director, announced that the AYA forum will become a flagship element of the AfDB’s initiative for youth employment in agriculture, the ENABLE Youth program: Empowering Novel Agri-Business-Led Employment. Launched in November 2016, ENABLE Youth aims to facilitate the creation of 300,000 agribusinesses and eight million jobs in 30 African countries during its first five years (2016-21). The programme’s objective is to enhance and modernise agricultural entrepreneurship in Africa through capacity-building and financing. It targets young Africans (aged 18-35), who intend to launch their business in the agricultural sector. The next AYA Forum will take place in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire in 2018.

Conakry has become the “World Book Capital” for a year. The Guinean capital is the first city in francophone Africa to obtain this status, which is awarded annually by UNESCO, and is the third African city to be named after Alexandria in 2002 and Port Harcourt, Nigeria in 2014. Through the programme, Guinea will organise monthly cultural events aimed at highlighting the country’s authors and culture. At the same time, authorities pledged to implement a community development project that will involve building a media library in each commune of Conakry and establish reading areas in each neighbourhood. This EUR 7 million citizen project is intended to be a way to fight illiteracy in Guinea, where 60% of the population cannot read, by helping young people and people from the rural areas get access to books. Their goal is also to sustain this initiative and make Conakry the African book capital, as Ouagadougou has done for African cinema through its Fespaco festival.
**SHE DECIDES IN BENIN AND SENEGAL**

The Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Development Cooperation Alexander De Croo travelled to Benin and Senegal with two Belgian celebrities working with the United Nations on issues related to the rights of women and children: Goedele Liekens, United Nations Population Fund Goodwill Ambassador and Axelle Red, Belgium’s UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. Their working visit was part of the “She Decides” initiative - led by Belgium, Denmark, The Netherlands and Sweden - which focuses on improving the rights of young girls and women, especially on sexual and reproductive health. In both countries, they met with authorities and visited several projects related to these issues. De Croo pointed out that the four founding countries launched the “She Decides” initiative last February at an international conference in Brussels in response to the US government’s decision to cut funding for organisations that help women in developing countries. They pledged to mobilise EUR 181 million for initiatives that invest in poor countries to promote female sexual and reproductive rights and health. These four countries have recently decided to broaden the “She Decides” movement to involve other countries and organisations, as well as businesses and individuals.

**BARRIERS TO EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

Of the millions of children who do not complete elementary school in West Africa each year, one third suffer from a disability. Their condition means they are confronted with many barriers to education. Firstly, children with disabilities are difficult to identify; many of their families hide them because they doubt the children will be able to integrate socially. Secondly, countries in the region generally do not have the infrastructure or care services needed to physically and psychologically prepare these children for school and support them while there. Moreover, teachers are not trained in teaching methods that would ensure the classroom integration of these children. As part of its inclusive education programme, Handicap International seeks to remove the many barriers to the education of 170,000 children with disabilities in nine West African countries. The activities include increasing awareness among families and communities about the challenges of being disabled, collecting data on populations with disabilities, and training teachers on how to individually support children with disabilities.

**AL-QAEDA CROWDS OUT THE ISLAMIC STATE IN WEST AFRICA**

The momentum of West Africa’s two jihadi theatres has started to favour al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The group, which operates in Mali and the broader Sahel region, succeeded in consolidating its position, while Boko Haram, which pledged allegiance to the Islamic state, is less active in the Nigeria/Lake Chad region. This evolution suggests that, in the long term, the Islamic state will find it difficult to compete with al-Qaeda in the region, particularly because al-Qaeda’s strategy of “localisation” seems to be better suited to the prevailing local and diffuse operational methods of West African jihadism. Its recent alliance in Mali with the Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin group illustrates al-Qaeda’s adaptive capacity as it seeks to function as a pan-Islamic movement - an umbrella organisation bringing together different local movements. Following this logic, AQIM’s integration of the Katiba Macina group into their alliance, a group led by Amadou Koufa, has allowed AQIM to extend its influence in central Mali. This territorial penetration creates an additional barrier for the Islamic State’s expansion strategy in West Africa. The territorial penetration appears to be less effective in Nigeria where Islamic State-affiliated groups follow operational patterns and ideological principles that are disconnected from the Islamic State as they continue to operate at a strictly local level. Under these conditions, it is likely that, if the Islamic State and its leader al-Baghdadi should disappear, Nigerian jihadist groups will eventually return to al-Qaeda’s orbit.
After a few months of suspense, ever since December 2016 when Cheikh Hadjibou Soumaré of Senegal resigned, the UEMOA heads of state have unanimously elected on 10 April 2017 a new president for the regional organisation's commission: Abdallah Boureima from Niger. The appointment of Boureima marks the end of diplomatic tensions between Niger and Senegal, who had both been actively campaigning to occupy the Union's presidency. According to the deal, Boureima will serve only one term, and Senegal will then take over the UEMOA Commission presidency as of 2021. Abdallah Boureima holds a master's degree in management sciences and a post-graduate degree in “banking and financial careers” from the University of Toulouse and the University of Rennes in France. Close to Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou, who chose Boureima as minister of economy and Finance when he was Prime Minister from 1993 to 1996, he has more than 30 years of professional experience in the administration and the private sector. He was the deputy director of the Nigerien Banking Company (Sonibank) and director of the Liptako Mining Company (SMI). He joined UEMOA in 1999 as a commissioner of the UEMOA Banking Commission. In 2011, he was appointed as UEMOA commissioner for the department of social development and then served as commissioner of the economic policy and internal taxation department.