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PRESS RELEASE

EAC-EU DEVELOP JOINT ROADMAP TO FOSTER DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN EAST AFRICA

East African Community Headquarters, Arusha, Tanzania, 5th October, 2023: The East African Community (EAC) and the European Union (EU) have today kicked off the 1st EU-EAC Regional Conference on Digital Transformation in the East African Community, in Arusha, Tanzania. Both sides committed and agreed to foster a human-centric digital transformation in East Africa to utilize digital technologies and innovations for regional integration.

The two-day conference, facilitated by the Digital for Development (D4D) Hub, unites key stakeholders from the EAC region and European partners. This collaborative effort aims to assess the current state of digital transformation in the region and explore opportunities through a “Team Europe” initiative, which includes the EU and its Member States. The conference’s attendees include representatives from the EAC Secretariat and other EAC Institutions, ICT Ministries of EAC Partner States, the EU Delegation to Tanzania and the EAC, and EU Member States.

The D4D Hub serves as an important instrument for the EU and its Member States to support transformational projects across the African continent. This aligns harmoniously with the ambitious goals under the Global Gateway, a new strategy for the EU. The strategy aims to mobilize EUR 300 billion in investment to boost smart, clean, and secure links in digital, energy, and transport sectors and to strengthen health, education, and research systems across the world.

The conference identifies seven strategic areas of engagement, aligning with the priorities of the 6th EAC Development Strategy, which seeks to expedite digital transformation in East Africa. These areas include connectivity, data governance, e-governance/cybersecurity, e-commerce, information communication telecommunication regulations, digital innovation, and digital skills.

Based on these areas of engagement, a joint roadmap has been developed with the purpose of guiding the cooperation between EAC and Team Europe. Among the identified short-term actions are: a proposal to boost data economy across borders as well as benchmarking and project development of green and secure data centers (data governance); establishing comprehensive electronic cross-border health services (e-governance/cybersecurity); development of systems to facilitate a cross-border e-payment system (e-commerce).

In addition, the significance of the conference is further underscored by the simultaneous launch of the Digital Economy Package by the EU Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen, set for Nairobi on October 5, 2025. This event emphasizes the EU's commitment to digital transformation in East Africa, reaffirming its dedication to nurturing innovation and fostering connectivity within the region.

The EAC Secretary General, Hon. (Dr.) Peter Mutuku Mathuki, who officially opened the two-day conference, stated that the EAC is keen on creating a single regional Digital Market comprising of an online market, a data market, and a connectivity market.

“This is underpinned by digital skills, innovation, infrastructure, financing, and a conducive legal and regulatory environment. Achieving this requires digitalization in various sectors and integration platforms,” said Dr. Mathuki.

Dr. Mathuki, who hailed the European Union as EAC's long-standing strategic partner, further stated that the EAC's primary goal is to develop a regional digital market for digital trade in East Africa. He added that the going digital initiative is crucial for the development of the region, as well as for the effective implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

"To achieve this, we must, among other things, establish political agreements and fair platforms for an interoperable regional digital market. Our Partner States also need to agree on regulations to foster digital markets, including data governance and artificial intelligence (AI) standards," said the Secretary General.

"It is also incumbent on Partner States to harmonize regulations and build capacity for data governance and AI standards," he added.

H.E. Christine Grau, EU Ambassador to Tanzania, emphasized Team Europe's determination in its commitment to supporting the digital transformation of East Africa and global partners. She believes that by working together, they can harness the potential of digitalization to address challenges, create opportunities, and build a more sustainable and prosperous future for all.

In her speech, she highlighted the European Commission's Digital4Development (D4D) approach which recognises the potential of digital technologies and services as powerful enablers for sustainable inclusive development and growth worldwide. "Our goal is to maximize the impact of digitalization as a driver for social and economic growth while working towards the achievement of the SDGs in our partner countries."

She added, "the Global Gateway program, launched in 2023, demonstrates our commitment to this approach. Through "Team Europe" initiatives between EU institutions and Member States, we aim to mobilize up to EUR 300 billion in investments in digital infrastructure, climate and energy, transport, health, education, and research. Within this framework, the D4D Hub plays a crucial role, focusing on the digital pillar of the Global Gateway strategy."

On behalf of Smart Africa, CEO Lacine Koné highlighted SMART Africa as a bold and innovative commitment from African Heads of State and Government to accelerate sustainable socio-economic development on the continent, ushering East Africa into a knowledge economy through affordable access to broadband and the usage of Information and Communications Technologies.

Background:

The EAC is a regional intergovernmental organization of seven Partner States: the Republic of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Kenya, the Republic of Rwanda, the Republic of South Sudan, the Republic of Uganda, and the United Republic of Tanzania, with its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania.

The Delegation of the European Union (EU) to Tanzania and the East African Community (EAC) is a key actor in the relations between the EU and Tanzania as well as the EAC. The EU has set out the Global Gateway, a new European strategy to boost smart, clean and secure links in digital, energy and transport sectors and to strengthen health, education and research systems across the world. Global gateway is implemented jointly under the Team Europe banner, meaning the EU institutions and EU Member States.

The Digital for Development (D4D) Hub is a strategic platform established by the European Union and its Member States with the aim of fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships and boosting investments to advance a human-centric digital transformation worldwide. The first region, where the D4D Hub started working, is Sub-Saharan Africa – including in several Partner States of the East African Community. Since then, the D4D Hub has provided an effective platform for regional multi-stakeholder dialogue, identification of win-win opportunities, and coordination in the implementation of digital initiatives.

CAPTIONS:

Pic 1: EAC Secretary General, Hon. (Dr.) Peter Mutuku Mathuki and EU Ambassador to Tanzania, H.E. Christine Grau converse during the opening of the 1st EU-EAC Regional Conference on Digital Transformation in the East African Community, in Arusha, Tanzania.

Pic 2: EAC and European partners pause for a picture during the opening of the 1st EU-EAC Regional Conference on Digital Transformation in the East African Community, on 5th October in Arusha, Tanzania.

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