

During the 33rd meeting of the Tripartite Task Force held virtually on 8 June 2021, the Chairpersonship of this body was handed over from SADC to the EAC. The [Tripartite Task Force](#) serves as the Secretariat of the Tripartite Policy organs and its main role is to coordinate the implementation of the Tripartite Free Trade Area (FTA) work programme. It is made up of the Chief Executives of the three RECs and rotates annually among the three.

The Tripartite FTA was launched on 10 June 2015 to provide a platform to address the overlapping memberships of countries to the three organizations. One of its core aims is to integrate into an enlarged Free Trade Area (FTA) three of the major African Regional Economic Communities (RECs), i.e. COMESA, EAC and SADC, by gradually reducing to zero percent both the tariffs for all goods traded in the bloc, as well as obstacles to trade between members countries. The final objective is to reach full mobility of people, goods and services in such a regional area. Because of this, the TFTA can be considered an important building block for the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). So far, 10 States have ratified the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement (TFTA), still far from the minimum threshold of 14 ratifications required for the Agreement to legally enter into force. These countries are Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Botswana, Namibia and Zambia.

Another objective of the Tripartite is to reduce those obstacles to trade in the 3 RECs that act as barriers to industrial production. To this end, the Tripartite promotes joint planning, design, coordination, and implementation of policies and programmes across the three blocs, in 3 main focus areas: a) trade, b) customs and infrastructure development, and c) industrialisation. The Tripartite is also working on numerous legal instruments that are supposed to facilitate implementation of the Tripartite Free Trade Area Agreement (TFTA).

Among these instruments, the [Multilateral Cross Border Road Transport Agreement](#) (MCBRTA) worths to be mentioned. This is a multilateral convention whose aim is to eliminate all restrictions on road transport between the countries in all the 3 RECs, by abolishing the bilateral road transport permits and the current regulatory measures that restrict, limit or control the supply of transport of passengers and goods in cross-border road transport, replacing them with the registration of transport operators into an IT system called "Transport Register and Information Platform System" (TRIPS) on the basis of their capability to meet specific quality regulation criteria.

The development of quality regulation in transport, particularly for what concerns the criteria for

admission to the occupation of cross-border road transport operator, is a trend that has become common in many regional areas of the world, largely inspired to the [UNECE \(2004\) Consolidated Resolution on the Facilitation of International Road Transport](#) (R.E.4), that identifies 3 main qualitative criteria that should guide the access to the profession of transport operators: a) good reputation; b) adequate financial standing; c) professional competence.

Once the MCBRTA will be adopted and ratified by the Tripartite member States, each individual country will need to develop analogous quality legislation at national level. To guide them in this process, the Tripartite has developed five model laws, namely: 1) the Vehicle Load Management Model Law ; 2) the Cross Border Road Transport Model Law ; 3) the Road Traffic Model Law ; 4) the Road Traffic and Transport Transgressions Model Law ; and 5) the Transport of Dangerous Goods by Road Model Law. All these legal instruments will be presented to the next Tripartite Council of Ministers meeting for adoption, planned for July 2021.