

Speech of

M. Philippe MAYAUX

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Team leader Environment, agriculture and climate change
**Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of
Cameroon and to Equatorial Guinea**

Ceremony of inauguration of Cross River Bridge

Ekok, 03rd November 2022

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Minister of works and housing of federal republic of Nigeria

Minister of public works, Republic of Cameroon,

Member President of Economic Community of Central African States

Member President of Economic Community of West African States

Member President of African Development bank Group

Member ministers of federal republic of Nigeria

Member ministers of the republic of Cameroon

Member Governor of Cross river state of Nigeria

Member Governor of south west Region of Cameroon

Mrs and members local authorities of Mfum and Ekok

Ladies and Gentlemen, in your respective ranks and grades, distinguished guests

It is an honour and a real pleasure for me to address you this morning, on behalf of their Excellencies the Ambassador of the European Union to Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, Mr. Philippe Van Damme, and the Ambassador of the European Union to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Mrs. Samuela Isopi, at the occasion of the inauguration of the Mfum-Ekok border crossing between Cameroon and Nigeria, and new joint border post at Mfum (Nigeria)

Inaugurating a bridge is often a symbolic event. In this very case, the 402-metre bridge is not only a key infrastructure, allowing the two way Bamenda (Cameroon) - Enugu (Nigeria) corridor to be now used at its full potential, it is also a bridge between two neighbouring countries that will facilitate the movement of people and goods. It is also a much-needed crossing between West and Central Africa, favouring interconnectivity between ECCAS and ECOWAS and more generally regional and economic integration in Africa.

This bridge is not just tangible infrastructure, it is a promise for greater economic integration and thereby, more trade opportunities and growth.

I believe this project is convergent with the African Union's strategy on infrastructure materialized by the Programme for Infrastructure development in Africa (PIDA) and with the regional strategies of ECCAS and ECOWAS. This cross-border infrastructure is also a perfect illustration of the sustainable investments that the EU is scaling up under the Africa-EU Global Gateway Investment Package announced at the EU-Africa Summit earlier this year.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests,

As just mentioned, the bridge we are inaugurating today was the last key missing infrastructure of an important 400 km Bamenda - Enugu corridor linking Central and West Africa.

As you know, the rehabilitation of the road network between Bamenda, Douala and Ekok in Cameroon has led to a very strong growth in traffic and trade volumes between Cameroon and Nigeria across the Cross River. But the old bridge was still a bottle-neck and it underlined the urgency to build a double lane bridge to reduce waiting times at the border.

This limited mobility had also local consequences, impacting on the living conditions of local populations, especially for women and young people, and constraining the development of economic value-chains and job creation, in particular in agriculture.

The opening of this bridge and the construction of urban and rural roads will boost the income of the population of Ekok and Mfum and further develop the agro-pastoral potential of the area and ultimately bring resilience and peace in the entire region.

The European Union has consequently contributed to the bridge construction with €25 million in grant which, in

turn, has allowed the leverage of additional contributions from the African Development Bank, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the International Development Agency (IDA-WORLB BANK) totalling €392 million for the entire Bamenda - Enugu corridor.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguishes guest,

In upcoming years, the European Union and its Member States, as Team Europe, will remain committed to Africa in support of economic and regional integration.

The European Union have identified transport infrastructures in Sub-Saharan Africa as one a key element of the "Global Gateway" strategy. A specific continental programme has mobilised a grant envelope of around €1 billion to leverage on public and private funds for the development of safer and greener infrastructure in all areas of transport connectivity.

Eleven strategic priority corridors have been identified under the African Union – EU partnership. Strategic Corridors are transport systems that facilitate sustainable, efficient, smart, resilient, fair, affordable, secure, and safe mobility and trade. Six of them are in West and Central Africa and this bridge will help to link two corridors.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguishes guests,

I cannot end my remarks without thanking our colleagues at the African Development Bank for their constant efforts in the implementation of EU funded projects through delegation agreements.

I would also like to underline the commitment of the Governments of Cameroon and Nigeria to complete the work despite all the difficulties.

Because our investments will always put people first, it is my duty to remind you of the importance of fully implementing the socio-economic infrastructures

identified, in order to enhance the significant impacts of this project in the localities it passes through, especially with regard to women and young people. Building quality infrastructure is essential: it is also essential for Cameroon and Nigeria to take appropriate strategic and operational measures to maintain and sustain the important investments unveiled today. I would like also to underline the necessity of a good coordination of customs in the perspective of future free-trade agreements. Trade needs infrastructure and good governance.

When I flew to Ekok from Bamenda, I have seen fantastic forests. Both countries have unique national parks here. The opening of the bridge should not mean the disparition of this forest, which is the condition for long-term economic development by the services it provides.

Today, we inaugurate a bridge between two municipalities, two countries, two regions of Africa for sustainable growth and decent jobs!

Last century, we have built too many walls in the world. Now, the time has come for bridges