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ONE) - COMMISSIONER PIEBALGS VISITS CÔTE D'IVOIRE TO ASSURE PRESIDENT OUATTARA OF THE EU'S FULL SUPPORT FOR A SWIFT AND SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY OF THE COUNTRY

As the first EU official to visit Côte d'Ivoire after the crisis, EU Commissioner for Development Cooperation, Andris Piebalgs, will meet President Ouattara on Friday 6 May in Abidjan to confirm EU's full support towards stability and recovery of economic activities. They will discuss the government priorities for short and medium term support to stabilise the country and to ease the conditions of life of the population. Commissioner Piebalgs and President Ouattara will also sign three projects worth €44 million in support of the agriculture sector (€26 million) and reform of the justice sector (€18 million).

Addressing the immediate and medium-term needs for development

On 12 April 2011, Commissioner Piebalgs announced a budget of €180 million to support the recovery of the country. He also announced a first identification mission to Côte d'Ivoire to initiate the dialogue with President Ouattara and his government. Ivorian authorities expressed their wishes to use a large part of the budget provided by the EU to support an aid package focussing on reform of the security sector; health; vocational training, facilitating the entry of young people into the job market; transport; non-governmental organisations, and governance.

The EU is also about to re-launch projects that were interrupted during the crisis and which focus particularly on the provision of energy and water in Côte d'Ivoire. Some projects, especially those supporting non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that worked for the well-being of the population, have been continued throughout the crisis.

Humanitarian aid

To help mitigate the immediate effects of the crisis, The European Commission's humanitarian aid department (ECHO) has been working in Côte d'Ivoire since the early days of the humanitarian crisis. In December 2010, the Commission adopted an emergency humanitarian aid decision to assist the refugees that fled violence in the country toward neighbouring Liberia and other parts of Côte d'Ivoire. The EU has provided about €55 million for humanitarian aid inside Côte d'Ivoire and for the refugees in neighbouring countries. Of that assistance, the Commission has contributed €30 million for humanitarian aid. Inside Côte d'Ivoire, the Commission's humanitarian work has focussed on civil protection, the provision of clean water, food and health services. The European Commission's humanitarian experts will stay in Côte d'Ivoire and continue to assess needs and to support the supply of basic goods and services. To ensure the crucial link between humanitarian support and longer-term development assistance, the Commission will open a humanitarian office in Abidjan.

TWO) – COMMISSION PROPOSES BETTER MANAGEMENT OF MIGRATION TO THE EU

Yesterday, the Commission presented initiatives for a more structured, comprehensive, rapid-response approach from the EU to the challenges and opportunities of migration, not least in view of the current developments in the Mediterranean. The initiatives cover various aspects of migration, including strengthened border control and Schengen governance, completion of the Common European Asylum System, more targeted legal migration, exchange of best practices for successful integration of migrants, and a strategic approach for relations with third countries on migration. These initiatives come in addition to the urgent short-term measures already taken by the Commission to deal with the migration situation in the Mediterranean and migration pressures on frontline Member States.

Whilst the events in the Southern Mediterranean bring hope for a better life for millions, they have also led to the displacement of over 650.000 people who have had to flee the violence in Libya. Very few asylum seekers have arrived in Europe so far. However, over 25.000 have chosen to seek a better life in the EU. Some EU Member States are more directly exposed to massive arrivals of migrants than others, but this situation cannot be handled at the national level alone. It requires the mobilisation of all Members States at the EU level.

The EU has responded swiftly to these challenges, with the operational and financial tools at its disposal. Funds have been mobilised to manage the humanitarian emergency generated by the sudden inflows of

refugees and displaced persons in the countries neighbouring Libya. Together with the funds provided on a bilateral basis, this support has made it possible to offer temporary shelter to refugees and displaced persons, to meet their basic needs and to assist many of them to return to their countries of origin. FRONTEX launched a Joint Operation (EPN Hermes Extension 2011), aimed at helping Italy deal with the situation of migrants and refugees coming to Italian shores. EUROPOL has deployed a team of experts to Italy, to help its law enforcement authorities to identify possible human smugglers among the irregular migrants having reached Italian territory. Those Member States that are most exposed to the growing flows of refugees and irregular migrants have also been assisted financially.

While the EU response to the emergency situation has been comprehensive, the current crisis has exposed the fact that there are still ways in which the EU can better deal with such situations and with migration management generally. Therefore, the Commission is proposing a series of initiatives covering the following aspects:

- Completion of the Common European Asylum System by 2012, in line with fundamental values and the Union's international obligations.
- Strengthened border control and Schengen governance to address irregular immigration, to ensure that each Member State effectively controls its part of the EU's external borders in line with the rules and the spirit of EU law, and to build trust in the effectiveness of the EU system of migration management.
- Better targeted legal migration into the EU to facilitate the immigration of persons with skills needed to assist the EU to fill expected labour and skills shortages and contribute towards redressing the expected decline in its working-age population.
- Sharing of best practices in Member States' approaches to the integration of legal immigrants in the EU, in a manner which will ensure that the economic benefits of immigration are maximised, and so as to ensure social harmony in the Union.
- A strategic approach to relations with third countries on migration-related issues, aimed at facilitating movement of persons through enhanced legal migration possibilities, combined with measures to prevent irregular migration.

The Commission Communication will serve as a basis for the debate at the extraordinary JHA Council called for 12 May, to be followed by a migration-focused discussion at the 24 June European Council. It will be followed by flanking initiatives in the coming weeks and months, notably a migration 'package' to be submitted to the College for adoption on 24 May.

Since the beginning of the year, there has been a massive displacement of populations from several North African countries, and in particular from Libya. According to the latest estimates, more than 650,000 persons have left the territory of Libya to flee the violence there. These people have found hospitality in neighbouring countries, primarily in Tunisia and Egypt, and many have since managed, or been assisted, to return to their respective home countries.

More than 25,000 migrants, mainly from Tunisia and, to a lesser extent from other African countries, have fled towards the EU, reaching the shores of Italy (most to the Italian island of Lampedusa) and Malta, both of which are now under strong migratory pressure. In addition to displaced people and migrants, a considerable number of refugees of different nationalities, including Somalis, Eritreans and Sudanese, have left Libya, some of whom have also reached Italy and Malta. These events have put the protection and reception systems of some of the EU Member States under increasing strain

THREE) – COMMISSION PROPOSES ALLOWING BORDER CONTROLS FOR MIGRANTS

La Commission européenne a proposé mercredi une plus grande latitude pour rétablir les contrôles aux frontières nationales au sein de l'espace Schengen, comme le demandaient les autorités françaises, préoccupées par l'arrivée de migrants tunisiens passés par l'Italie. Le rétablissement temporaire des contrôles aux frontières nationales pourra être autorisé en cas de "défaillance" d'un Etat dont les confins sont les frontières extérieures de l'Union européenne. Les contrôles aux frontières nationales pourront également être rétablis lorsqu'une partie de la frontière extérieure de l'Union européenne est soumise à une pression migratoire "forte" et "inattendue". Paris a immédiatement salué cet "effort", et les propositions mises sur la table ont été qualifiées de "contribution utile" et de "très bonne base de travail" par le ministère des Affaires

étrangères. "Nous sommes satisfaits, car Schengen manquait d'une arme de dissuasion" pour contraindre les Etats à respecter leurs obligations, a pour sa part confié à l'AFP un négociateur français. L'exercice avait tout de la figure imposée pour la commissaire chargée des questions d'immigration, Cecilia Malmström, une libérale, attachée au principe de la libre-circulation en Europe. Tout en défendant la proposition de la Commission, elle a critiqué "les solutions populistes" et a dit attendre en contrepartie des gestes d'ouverture de Paris en matière d'asile. Elle a en outre insisté sur le caractère "temporaire" du rétablissement des frontières nationales, autorisé dans des "circonstances exceptionnelles" et selon des règles à définir. Les autorités françaises assurent être sur cette ligne. "Tout doit être fait pour qu'on ne s'en serve pas", a expliqué le négociateur français. Actuellement, un pays peut temporairement rétablir les contrôles à ses frontières nationales en cas de menace grave à l'ordre public et à la sécurité. "Ce n'est pas très précis", a reconnu mercredi Mme Malmström. Les deux cas de figure ajoutés par la Commission étaient réclamés par la France. Ils sont directement inspirés par la défaillance de la Grèce dans le contrôle d'une partie de sa frontière avec la Turquie, pays de transit pour les immigrants clandestins, et par la décision des autorités italiennes de régulariser quelque 25.000 migrants tunisiens arrivés sur son territoire avec la volonté affichée de se rendre en France. **25,000 TUNISIANS NOT ENOUGH TO TRIGGER MEASURE** La France n'aurait pas pour autant été autorisée à rétablir ses contrôles. Cecilia Malmström a été catégorique: les 25.000 migrants tunisiens arrivés en Italie ne sont pas un flux migratoire énorme justifiant la mise en oeuvre de mesures exceptionnelles. Un premier débat est prévu lors d'une réunion extraordinaire des ministres européens de l'Intérieur le 12 mai à Bruxelles et un arbitrage politique est attendu en juin à l'occasion d'un sommet des chefs d'Etat et de gouvernement de l'UE. La France attend que cet arbitrage se traduise en faveur d'une proposition de loi. Ses négociateurs se disent confiants, mais s'attendent à des "débat difficiles" entre les 27. La Commissaire Malmström entend batailler pour imposer des critères "très précis" et veut que la possibilité de rétablir temporairement des contrôles aux frontières nationales soit "une décision européenne, sinon on risque de mettre en danger tout le système", a-t-elle averti. La France en convient. "Il vaut mieux que ces mesures ne soient pas unilatérales pour fonder la confiance", a assuré à l'AFP un de ses représentants. L'espace Schengen compte 22 des 27 membres de l'UE (le Royaume-Uni, l'Irlande, Chypre, la Bulgarie et la Roumanie sont en dehors) et trois pays non membres (Norvège, Suisse, Islande, et bientôt Liechtenstein). (AFP)

FOUR) - BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTER BLASTS EU EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE

Le chef de la diplomatie belge s'en est pris pour la première fois ouvertement à la haute représentante de l'UE pour les Affaires étrangères, Catherine Ashton, avouant sa déception et son "impatience" devant les faiblesses persistantes de la nouvelle diplomatie européenne. Dans un entretien au quotidien belge Le Soir publié mercredi, Steven Vanackere confesse "une certaine impatience" face "à la capacité de l'Union européenne de parler d'une seule voix", l'objectif affiché par Mme Ashton dès sa nomination en novembre 2009 à ce poste créé par le traité de Lisbonne. Face au "grand test que constitue le réveil arabe", en Tunisie, en Egypte ou en Libye, "j'ai quand même quelques réticences à être uniquement positif quand il s'agit de décrire comment nous avons géré cela jusqu'ici, parce que l'Union européenne n'a pas été unie", a-t-il avoué. Selon lui, le Service d'action extérieure de Mme Ashton devrait être "l'axe central autour duquel les Etats membres (de l'UE) peuvent s'organiser. Mais en l'absence d'un axe central qui répond, fait des analyses et tire des conclusions rapidement, les Allemands aujourd'hui, les Français demain ou les Anglais prennent une partie de ce rôle d'axe central", diagnostique-t-il. En conséquence, "c'est alors autour d'eux que les autres doivent s'organiser! Le résultat est centrifuge, pas centripète", déplore M. Vanackere. "Il est normal qu'Ashton ne soit partout en même temps", admet-il, soulignant qu'il fallait "faire des choix, se concentrer sur les vrais enjeux, éviter de se perdre dans les détails, et une bonne gestion d'agenda". "On peut accepter que certains réagissent plus vite qu'Ashton, mais à condition qu'elle puisse prouver qu'elle travaille sur le moyen et le long termes - et sur des thèmes hyper-importants comme l'énergie par exemple. Mais ça non plus, je n'ai pas encore vu non plus", a-t-il confié. Depuis son entrée en fonctions à la tête de la diplomatie européenne, Catherine Ashton fait régulièrement l'objet de critiques dans les cercles diplomatiques européens sur ses compétences et sa gestion politique. C'est la première fois qu'un ministre des Affaires étrangères s'en prend aussi ouvertement à Mme Ashton. (AFP)

FIVE) – EU WINS 'SUPER-OBSERVER' STATUS AT THE UN

L'Union européenne a obtenu mardi le statut de "super-observateur" à l'ONU, qui offre des droits spéciaux pour parler à l'Assemblée générale, après avoir surmonté les objections de petits Etats craignant de voir leur influence érodée. Un vote a rassemblé 192 Etats et deux abstentions à l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU après un lobbying actif mené par la haute représentante pour les affaires étrangères de l'UE, Catherine Ashton, et les ambassadeurs de l'UE. D'autres groupes régionaux tels que la Ligue arabe, l'Union africaine (UA) et la Communauté des Caraïbes (Caricom) pourraient maintenant rechercher un statut équivalent, ont indiqué des diplomates. L'UE avait tenté d'obtenir ce statut à l'Assemblée générale l'an dernier, lors de la présidence belge de l'Union, mais avait échoué après un vote négatif de petits Etats. Mme Ashton a conduit des discussions discrètes qui se sont poursuivies jusque dans les dernières heures avant le vote de mardi. L'ambassadeur hongrois à l'ONU (présidence de l'UE), Csaba Korosi, a déclaré à l'assemblée: "l'Union européenne espère apporter tout son poids pour soutenir et renforcer" la gouvernance mondiale. Certains petits Etats ont cependant exprimé leur inquiétude sur le fait de donner à l'UE des droits spéciaux pour parler à l'Assemblée générale avec les "grands groupes" et un droit de réponse dans les débats. L'ambassadrice des Bahamas, Paulette Bethel, a indiqué que le groupe de 14 pays des Caraïbes avait dans un premier temps lutté contre cette évolution, craignant la création "d'une nouvelle catégorie d'observateurs non-Etatiques" disposant de droits et de privilèges complémentaires qui pourraient marginaliser les petits Etats à l'ONU. Mme Ashton a, dans son premier discours à l'assemblée de l'ONU après le vote, indiqué que "des efforts extraordinaires" avaient été déployés pour se mettre d'accord sur un texte définitif. Jusqu'à maintenant, seules les missions d'observateurs du Vatican et de l'Autorité palestinienne avaient le droit de répondre lors des débats. (AFP-BELGA)

SIX) – AFRICA: CHILDHOOD BLINDNESS - CATCH THEM YOUNG

Every minute, somewhere in the world, a child goes blind according to the World Health Organization. Three in five poor children who go blind are likely to die within two years of losing their sight - yet half of cases of childhood blindness are avoidable.

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region with the highest prevalence of blindness in the world - 1.24 per 1,000 children, compared to 0.8 in India and 0.3 in Europe.

"In the East African countries of Kenya and Uganda, as well as Zambia for example, the commonest cause of childhood blindness is cataracts," says Dr Daniel Etya'ale, executive director for Africa for the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness's (IAPB) and a member of the Africa Initiative Steering Committee of ORBIS, a non-profit organisation committed to saving sight worldwide.

It has worked in 88 countries since its inception in 1982, including establishing 28 paediatric eye care clinics in India since 2007.

Blind children in sub-Saharan Africa face three major challenges: "Firstly, many are not being reached early enough for successful intervention; secondly these children are extremely vulnerable - about half are likely to die within two to three years of becoming blind; thirdly there is very little infrastructure and specialised medical help available to them."

Etya'ale says the high mortality rate of blind children may be linked to the medical conditions that cause their blindness. Xerophthalmia, for example, is caused by a vitamin A deficiency which is also associated with diminished ability to fight infections.

WHO recommends one paediatric ophthalmic centre per ten million people. But sub-Saharan Africa has far fewer. South Africa only has one such centre - at the Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town; only 11 other countries can boast any facilities for children's eye care.

Professor Colin Cook, Head of Ophthalmology at the University of Cape Town and the Red Cross Hospital, says prevention measures for childhood blindness vary in different regions, sometimes requiring surgery, sometimes children need glasses, or even community and primary health interventions such as immunisation and improved nutrition.

Congenital cataracts have been linked to the childhood disease rubella in a significant percentage of cases of cataracts in children in South Africa, Zambia and Kenya; in response, immunisation programmes have been stepped up to ensure girls are vaccinated against the disease before reaching childbearing age. Vaccinations serve both to avoid loss of eyesight and to minimise other risks rubella poses to developing fetuses, like deafness and cardiac malformation.

Early detection and correction of problems with children's vision calls for a more inclusive and holistic system to check eye health at community, district, provincial levels; for example training community health

groups to do simple eye tests.

"Whenever they see evidence of a cataract, they can immediately send the child for a proper assessment which can be the difference between a life of misery, or even premature death, and a full life," says Etya'ale.

ORBIS uses flagship tools such as its Flying Eye Hospital, a mobile ophthalmic training hospital aboard a DC-10 airplane, and Cyber-Sight, an online telemedicine mentoring and teaching resource. It relies on 450 expert medical volunteers to bring eye care and training to partners in developing countries - more than 12 million people have received care and 260,000 health care professionals have benefited from training. Dr Hunter Cherwek is the Medical Director of the Flying Eye Hospital and agrees that early screening is essential, with children examined annually as part of a routine paediatric checkup. "School screenings are important, but a lot of places we go to, there is no mechanism to screen vision, even for glasses. Nothing is in place."

Orbis is hosting 58 delegates from 15 countries at a two-day conference in Cape Town on May 4 and 5. Lene Øverland, Director of Programmes for ORBIS in Europe, the Middle East and Africa said, "All these people have an interest to provide eyecare services on a very high level to children on a primary and tertiary level. We want to define a plan of how to work together in the next five years on a comprehensive model to address childhood avoidable blindness in line with Global Vision Goals by 2020."

"Blindness and poverty create a very vicious cycle," said Cherwek. "It's like a double hit, and it's almost impossible for someone to overcome both as a child. Vision restoration and visual rehabilitation help break that cycle for quality of life, and for financial repercussions."

SEVEN) – ITALY SEEKS DATE FOR END OF LIBYA MISSION

Italy pledged on Tuesday to seek an end date for NATO's Libya operations as Premier Silvio Berlusconi sought to placate a key government partner opposed to Italian participation in the bombing missions. Foreign Minister Franco Frattini told reporters that Rome "will try, along with international organizations, and until, until I'm proven wrong, NATO, and its allies, to set an end" date for the operations. Rome recently agreed to allow its warplanes to participate in NATO bombing missions as a way to increase pressure on the Libyan regime of Moammar Gadhafi. Government officials quickly offered reassurances that Italy was fully committed to its role in the NATO operation. They suggested Frattini's comments reflected a reality that allies eventually need to discuss mission sustainability. Following Frattini's comments, foreign ministry spokesman Maurizio Massari said Italy's priority continue to be the NATO objectives that emerged at a NATO foreign ministers' meeting last month in Germany. In Berlin, the allies resolved to enforce a U.N. arms embargo, to protect civilians acting to push Gadhafi forces out of cities they have entered, and to get humanitarian aid in. "Objectives come first... The sooner the objectives are achieved, the sooner the mission can end," Massari told The Associated Press. Frattini was speaking on the eve of a vote in the Chamber of Deputies on various motions opposed to Italy's participation in the bombing missions, including a motion sought by Berlusconi's main coalition partner, Umberto Bossi of the Northern League. Berlusconi's survival in the premiership depends on support by his volatile ally, who fears that bombing will trigger an even bigger exodus of refugees from Libya to Italy. In the past few months, thousands of people, many of them Africans who live or migrated through Libya, have set sail in smugglers' boats from Libyan shores and landed on tiny Italian islands in the Mediterranean. (AP)

EIGHT) – NATO URGES PATIENCE WITH LIBYA CAMPAIGN

A senior commander of NATO's Libya mission on Tuesday rejected suggestions the war was in a stalemate and said the alliance was steadily achieving its goals. Italian Vice Admiral Rinaldo Veri, commander of the naval element of the operation, said the NATO mission would continue as long as it took for Muammar Gaddafi's forces to return to barracks and stop threatening civilians. "I personally don't think there is a real stalemate -- let's say we are going slowly but steadily," he said by video conference from the NATO mission headquarters in Naples. Veri said that after destroying Gaddafi's frontline forces, NATO was targeting his supply lines, ammunition depots, logistics and lines of communication. "This is a work that needs patience, needs determination, but we still have to keep going on and we are still moving forward," he said. "A mission of this type is a deliberate mission and therefore takes time." Western countries that launched the Libya campaign in March had hoped for a swift overthrow of Gaddafi, but his better-trained and equipped militias have halted rebel advances despite a supporting bombing campaign now led by NATO. The top U.S. military

officer, Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, used the term stalemate last month to describe the situation in Libya. Veri said the NATO effort was complicated as Gaddafi's forces had split up and were camouflaging themselves, making it more difficult to determine their positions. He said NATO was also taking great care to avoid civilian casualties. "Having said that, every day something positive happens and ... we take a step closer to the final objective we have to reach," he said. Veri said a strike on Tripoli at the weekend which the Libyan government said killed one of Gaddafi's sons, Saif al-Arab Gaddafi, was aimed at an installation being used to direct military operations against Libyan civilians. "I want to make it clear and I repeat what was said that we do not target individuals," he said. NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu said NATO could not confirm the reports the death of Gaddafi's son but added: "Obviously we regret any loss of innocent life in this conflict." She reiterated the need for a political solution in Libya and said prospects for that would be discussed at a meeting of the Contact Group on Libya in Rome on Thursday. (Reuters)

NINE) – EU'S PLANNED LIBYA MISSION COULD REQUIRE GROUND TROOPS, SAYS GENERAL

A military humanitarian aid mission the EU has offered to deploy in Libya could involve ground troops, requiring changes to the UN resolution on international action in the country, a senior military official hinted Tuesday. "If we are there with military units and the situation deteriorates, that is the only situation where I can see that we need military means," Swedish General Hakan Syren, the chairman of the [EU Military Committee](#), said when asked about potential ground troops. "But then we are outside (UN) resolution 1973," he said. Pressed further, Syren said he did not want to speculate, noting that a prerequisite UN request has yet to be issued for the EU to deploy such a mission. "It's not the will to do that," he said. "There must be a request for it and/or a change in the resolution ... For the time being, it's kind of a hypothetical question while we don't have the mandate." The EU has been planning a mission involving air and naval logistical support for humanitarian aid activities - codenamed EUFOR Libya - but has made its deployment conditional on a request from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). EU officials have warded off questions about a land-based EUFOR Libya presence in the past, noting the UN resolution specifically rules out the presence of an occupying army on the ground. Syren, who made his comments after a meeting of EU defence chiefs in Brussels, said OCHA has made clear that a military mission would only be used as a last resort. Aid groups have warned separately about mixing military operations and humanitarian work. He said an operations plan for the mission should be ready next week, to be followed by discussions with member states on what they would be willing to contribute. He declined to comment on how many troops may be involved in such a mission. A bulk of the international humanitarian assistance for Libya has been flowing into the under-siege western city of Misurata, which has seen pitched battles between leader Moamer Gaddafi's troops and rebels for two months. (Dpa)

TEN) – LIBYA DENIES GADDAFI HAS CASH IN SWISS BANKS

Libya said on Tuesday that Muammar Gaddafi had no personal money in Swiss bank accounts and that any cash held in the Alpine country belonged to the government's foreign investment arm. Switzerland said on Monday it had found 360 million Swiss francs (\$418.4 million) of potentially illegal assets linked to Gaddafi and his circle in Swiss banks. Libyan Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Kaim said that Libyan government entities had closer to 25 million Swiss francs in bank accounts in Switzerland. "The money in bank accounts abroad is part of the investment portfolio of the government abroad," he told reporters. "If there is a single penny of the leader's money ... you are free to take it and to give it to anyone." Relations between Switzerland and Libya soured in July 2008, when Geneva police arrested Gaddafi's son Hannibal on charges of abusing two domestic employees. The charges were later dropped after a confidential settlement was reached with the victims. Libya withdrew more than \$5 billion from Swiss banks at the time, halted oil exports to Switzerland and barred two Swiss businessmen working in Libya from leaving the country for more than a year. (Reuters)

ELEVEN) – SIERRA LEONE CUTS FUEL SUBSIDY, PRICES JUMP 30 %

Sierra Leone's government has slashed petrol subsidies to help meet its debt obligations, leading to an overnight 30 percent spike at the pumps. The move in the West African state comes amid rising street tensions across Africa over food and fuel inflation as surging world commodities prices hit. The World Bank

fears a flurry of elections may add to tensions. Sierra Leone Minister of Trade and Industry Richard Konteh said the move would cut the country's annual fuel subsidy bill to \$25 million from \$50 million and help it repay debt. "(\$50 million) is what government has been subsidising for the past three years plus. That is really not sustainable," he said in an interview with Reuters. "It has been at huge cost to the government. We are already hugely in deficit in the budget. We are almost at our point of jeopardy in programmes with the IMF," he added. Nine years after the end of a civil war, Sierra Leone remains one of the world's poorest countries. Its \$500 million annual government budget is less than a 50th the size of Nigeria's. The country is scheduled to repay to the International Monetary Fund loans totalling roughly \$120 million through 2025, including \$5.3 million in 2011, according to the IMF Web site. Prior to May 1, the Sierra Leonean government was paying a subsidy of around 5,000-7,000 leones per imperial gallon of gasoline to maintain a retail price of 17,500 leones. The government has also been foregoing 80 percent of 3 billion leones in weekly excise revenue from fuel imports. The new fiscal regime for petroleum products axes the direct subsidy and continues the excise holiday. The country's three oil marketing companies established a new price for petrol, diesel and kerosene of 5,000 leones per litre -- the equivalent of 22,750 leones per gallon. The May 1 subsidy cut coincides with a switch from imperial to metric units at the start of this month, leading to public confusion at filling stations. "I don't have a problem with the price change, I have a problem with the litre system and its being used as a disguise," said 32-year-old Fabundah Ansu as he filled his car in Freetown. (Reuters)

TWELVE) – GERMANY TRIES RWANDAN REBELS FOR CONGO MASSACRES

Two alleged Rwandan rebel leaders accused of ordering massacres and mass rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo went on trial in Germany on Wednesday. Congo's government welcomed the trial and called on other nations sheltering rebel leaders to follow suit. But there are doubts over how much impact it will have on the ground in eastern Congo, where civilians have endured years of abuse. The alleged head of the Hutu guerrilla group FDLR, Ignace Murwanashyaka, and the man accused of being his deputy, Straton Musoni, face 39 charges of war crimes and 26 of crimes against humanity committed in eastern Congo between 2008 and 2009. Murwanashyaka is charged with commanding or endorsing atrocities such as the murder of more than 200 people, recruitment of child soldiers, arson, and looting while he was living in the southwest German city of Mannheim. On the first day of the trial in Stuttgart, the defence demanded a dismissal of the proceedings, alleging bias on the part of state prosecutors -- who rejected such charges, a court spokesman told Reuters. "This is a purely politically motivated trial," Ricarda Lang, Murwanashyaka's lawyer, told reporters. "An acquittal is the only possible outcome after conclusion of this trial." The two men were arrested in Germany in 2009 in response to U.N. pressure for international action against the leadership of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). Congo's information minister Lambert Mende said his government would provide information if asked. "We urge other countries giving refuge to FDLR leaders to follow Germany's example." (Reuters)

THIRTEEN) – CLIMATE CRIME THREATENS BILLIONS IN AID

Billions of euros could be plundered unless climate change mechanisms are strengthened and made more transparent, according to Transparency International (TI).

In March 2001, the European Commission proposed a [Directive](#) establishing an EU-wide minimum standard to combat environmental crime. It obliged member states to ensure that serious breaches of EU rules on environment were treated as criminal offences.

In January 2003, the Council adopted a [Framework Decision](#) on the protection of the environment through criminal law, establishing cooperation mechanisms between member states to combat serious environmental crime. But the Commission contested it, and the European Court of Justice later annulled the decision, opening the way for a [new proposal](#) by the Commission. With a turnover of some €90 billion last year, the EU's [Emissions Trading Scheme](#) posed a trickier problem to regulate. The world's largest carbon market, it encourages companies to invest in low-polluting technologies by allocating or selling them allowances to cover their annual emissions. The most efficient companies can then sell unused allowances or bank them.

After a series of VAT "carousel" and "phishing" frauds last year, the Commission proposed tighter security measures. But a number of member states declined to implement them because they said they could not afford to. In early January 2011, the [biggest carbon theft](#) in history netted up to €28 million from the EU's ETS exchanges in the Czech Republic, Greece, Romania Estonia, Poland and Austria.

The Berlin-based international watchdog released a [report](#) on 30 April, called 'Global Corruption: Climate Change', based on contributions from more than 50 experts. It found that stronger oversight was needed to counter the threat of embezzlement in the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change.

International grants and aid are steered towards these countries, but they are also among the most corrupt in the world, according to TI. "Where huge amounts of money flow through new and untested financial markets and mechanisms, there is always a risk of corruption," the report said.

It is estimated that total global climate change investments will reach almost €471 billion by 2020. Corruption risks are high because of the complexity, uncertainty and novelty around many climate issues. Massive frauds have shaken carbon markets, the main financial tool for combating climate change, particularly in Europe.

The European Union's €90 billion Emissions Trading Scheme has been [blighted](#) by the re-sale of used carbon offsets, hacking, theft and continuing value-added tax fraud.

Equally, the integrity of the UN's [Clean Development Mechanism](#), which encourages emissions cuts in poor nations, has been tarnished by accusations of commercial exploitation, opacity and ineffectiveness. "It is imperative that these lessons be considered in establishing new markets, and used to improve and reform the existing mechanisms," the report said.

The forestry sector is especially vulnerable to corruption due to high international demand for timber, weak land ownership rights and marginalised indigenous communities.

The World Bank estimates that between €7 billion and €15 billion worth of timber is felled illegally or comes from suspicious origins each year. This needs to be tackled before a UN-backed forest preservation scheme, called REDD, can work, according to the report.

The REDD scheme is expected to be established as part of a broader global climate pact from 2013, from when it could generate around €19 billion a year of funds.

Better oversight of forestry is essential to ensure projects are verified properly and carbon credits are not double counted or fraudulently-traded.

FOURTEEN) - EU GIVES 3 MILLION EURO TO 32 EASTERN AFRICAN FISHERIES PROJECT

The European Commission has donated 3 million Euro (Sh6.3 billion) for implementation of about 32 national and regional fisheries projects in Eastern Africa. The projects, eleven of which will be completed by May this year, are geared at achieving sustainable and equitable management of the fisheries industry in Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. The projects are being implemented under the ACP Fish II programme.

The beneficiary countries met in Kisumu last month to review the progress of project implementation to date and plan for future tasks for the Eastern Africa Regional statement released yesterday in Dar es Salaam by ACP Fish II Programme Regional manager for Eastern Africa Koane Mindjimbthe said the total funding for the programme is 30 million euro from the European Development Fund (EDF).

The programme has five components which deal with issues such as improved fisheries policy and management plans at regional and national levels; control and enforcement capabilities; national and regional research strategies and initiatives; regulatory framework and private sector investment; and knowledge-sharing on fisheries management and trade at regional level.

“Component one is the cornerstone of the programme as devising sound fisheries policies and management plans is critical in ensuring the sustainable utilisation of fishery resources and the development of value-added activities in the fisheries sector,” the statement said.

The other components will result from the adoption of sound fisheries management instruments, primarily at national but also at regional level, the statement added. Tanzania is currently receiving support from the programme either singly or alongside other countries of the region through a number of projects for its fisheries sector management and development.

These include, support to preparation of a draft aquaculture policy, regional training on co-management, training for monitoring, control and surveillance on Lake Victoria alongside Kenya and Uganda and action planning for improved regional fish trade for sustainable fisheries management.

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