

# EU commits sh2 trillion

Today Uganda joins all 28 European Union member states to celebrate Europe Day, an annual celebration of peace and unity in Europe. The EU and Uganda have enjoyed strong bilateral relations beginning 2009. The European Union and Uganda signed the 11th European Development Fund (EDF) in the sum of 578m euros for the period 2014 to 2020. The non-repayable grant worth sh2.2 trillion goes to three identified principal areas of transport infrastructure, food security and agriculture, as well as good governance. Gilbert Kidimu spoke to the EU Ambassador to Uganda, Kristian Schmidt about the EU's present and future development activities in Uganda

**Q** What are your focus areas in the 11th European Development Fund?

We had agreed to three sectors with the Government. I signed with the then Minister of Finance. The three sectors are transport infrastructure, agricultural development in northern Uganda and good governance.

**The Northern Bypass extension is part of a greater plan to connect all of East Africa. What do you want to realise once the project is finalised?**

We all would like to see easier, less congested urban traffic. The five flyovers hopefully will ease life for people living in Kampala.

Over the long term it will be supported by better urban transport in Kampala, using not just cars but also developing rail. This is one objective of decongesting Kampala and separating the regional traffic from Kampala's.

The main objective here is supporting regional integration and the northern corridor as the spinal cord of Uganda's economy. That is why it is part of our next 11th EDF. That we will continue with Kampala-Jinja, hopefully ending up with a public-private partnership to continue work towards the east.

And then we will also go into inter-modal transport, using other modes of transport. Along the way, the Northern Corridor should link up with rail traffic. You can get some of the containers off the roads as they are damaging the roads, are costly, polluting and they are dangerous. Bulk traffic should be through rail or ports on Lake Victoria, the less polluting modes of transport. That's the long-term vision.

**Your activities have concentrated a lot on northern Uganda especially Karamoja. What do you want effected in the area?**

We want to see the success of peace validated and made sustainable. It was hard work for the European Union and the Government of Uganda to drive out (LRA rebel leader Joseph) Kony and to stop the cattle rustling.

But we are also very aware that these are not irreversible achievements unless there is also development.

People who were uprooted had to start from scratch with mental scars and losing a generation of schooling; so, it is clear to us that this is something that continues to deserve close attention.

We hope to move from charity and emergency NGO-based development to treating northern Uganda and Karamoja as a region that is fully integrated into the normal system of governance. We don't want to see huge stand-alone projects that are driven from Kampala. We would like to see the Karimoja local governments empowered to become



EU Head of Delegation Ambassador Kristian Schmidt during the interview at his office on Crested Towers. Photo by Miriam Namutebi

actors of their own development, to move from passive beneficiaries to active citizens, where there are local leaders who set priorities and start the development of their region. These things take time.

In Karamoja, to move from pastoralism to agriculture, you cannot get results in just three years. We are there for a longer period knowing that these results are good.

**Uganda has for decades been christened a potential top tourist destination. How can we realise its true potential?**

If you keep talking about potential for decades, there is something worrying. Why is Uganda not moving from potential to actual success? Part of the problem is tourists.

Tourism is potentially very profitable but also very risky and volatile. It means that tourists, certainly those who come from Europe, are unpredictable. They are scared and worried about things such as conflict, security deployment, ebola because they are ignorant. They don't know that Uganda wasn't affected. The terrorism next door in Kenya. It is not just Uganda's fault.

Having said that, Uganda can do a lot to



President Yoweri Museveni and Ambassador Schmidt commissioning extension work on the Northern Bypass in 2014

avoid these headlines that are destroying the potential. European clients are sensitive to any human rights issues. They don't want to go to a country to look at beautiful animals if they think human beings are not respected. A perception of human rights violations and democracy under threat will hurt tourism.

**The European Union has mostly been of great benefit to its member states regarding trade. Do you think the same is likely in the East African Community?**

Absolutely; the size of your regional market matters. It matters for your domestic producers but it also matters for potential foreign investors. To know that if they invest in a factory in Uganda, they will potentially export to the rest of the region.

But real integration is hard work. It is not just summits. Behind that there is a lot of nitty-gritty work of harmonising legislation, which must be done by strong and accountable institutions in-between summits. It is not done once and for all but something that needs to continue.

**IF YOU LOOK BEYOND THE EAST AFRICAN MARKET, EUROPE IS UGANDA'S BIGGEST MARKET. IT IS OPEN IN TERMS OF NO QUOTAS, NO TARIFFS AND NO LIMITATIONS, BUT THERE ARE CERTAIN STANDARDS THAT ARE REQUIRED**