

Ebrahim Patel — a tough but principled negotiator whose word is indeed his trust

My first engagement with outgoing Trade, Industry and Competition Minister Ebrahim Patel was in his role as General Secretary of the Southern African Clothing and Textile Workers' Union (Sactwu) and as a key Cosatu leader.

An arena of engagement was the Millennium Labour Council, created as a discussion forum for senior business and labour leaders. Here When Patel moved into government in 2009 in the newly created Economic Development Department, I had engagements with him in my role as Chair of Business Leadership.

An immediate area of engagement was the challenge of the 2008/2009 global financial crisis. A series of mitigating measures were agreed in the framework of Nedlac. Not all were equally successful. However, the engagement itself created a partnership between business and labour to address national challenges.

Two key national economic institutions reported to Patel in his Economic Development Ministry. These were the Competition Authority and the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). Minister Patel appointed me to the board of the IDC in 2011.

Patel has been an engaged shareholder representative of the IDC throughout my directorship. A development finance institution, particularly one that is self-financing, has to find the difficult balance between risk and reward: development outcomes and industrial sustainability. We have not got every judgment right. The need to achieve both economic growth and economic transformation was always what Minister Patel expected of us. It was also always the ambition of the board to meet his expectations in this regard.

Three particular interventions well illustrate how the goals of financial success and social development can be combined. The first was the response to Covid-19 and the need to develop local producers of critical medical supplies.

The second was the response to the [looting in KwaZulu-Natal](#). The third was the IDC's response to the [extensive flooding of that province](#) the I found Patel a tough but principled negotiator whose word was indeed his trust.

very next year.

On competition, Patel has emphasised public interest issues in regard to changes in corporate ownership. Significant commitments have been made by new foreign entrants to South African markets.

Industry policy gripes

An inevitably controversial dimension of his time as minister has been issues around industrial policy. This concept raises many issues and concerns. The development of industry master plans has never been without its critics.

And as with the dilemmas faced by the IDC, it is unrealistic to expect every element of such a plan to get things right. A strong characteristic of the development (and adjustment) of these master plans has been the very extensive involvement of the private sector.

In most industries, private sector interests are diverse: big versus small; importers versus exporters. Very extensive opportunities have been created by Minister Patel for

these diverse and often conflicting interests to be heard and, where possible, accommodated. Perhaps this creates a process of inclusive industrial decision-making, rather than a static plan.

Throughout his unusually long ministerial career, EP has been focused on not only growing but also deepening the South African economy, and in using every opportunity available to him to ensure that this is indeed an economy that serves all South Africans.

I very much hope that the person sitting behind his desk going forward will be driven by the same energy, commitment and vision. Our economy has been well served by Ebrahim Patel as its Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition.

Source: Bobby Godsell - <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2024-05-28-ebrahim-patel-a-tough-but-principled-negotiator-whose-word-is-indeed-his-trust/>

Date Published: May 30, 2024