Trade for Development
European Union – Caribbean Economic Partnership Agreement
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The 21st century offers new challenges and opportunities as old political and economic certainties make way for new patterns of trade and development. These changes affect everyone, in the European Union, the Caribbean, and everywhere else for that matter. We must face them together. We need to act now if we are to make the world into a place where people’s prospects are no longer blighted by poverty and unemployment, one where young people can look forward to a promising future.

The groundwork for making sure this happens between our two regions has already been laid, thanks to a long history of co-operation. The Cotonou Agreement is unique in linking development assistance and trade relations. Now the challenge is to link those two elements with a third, namely local efforts to create a regionally competitive market. Take the three together, and we have a powerful tool for development. That is the vision for each of the six Economic Partnership Agreements the EU is negotiating.

This brochure describes what has been done so far to make the vision for Economic Partnership Agreements a reality in the Caribbean. The issues at stake are not easy, and a well-informed debate about them is essential if we are to achieve outcomes that meet our aspirations. This brochure is intended to show that we are firmly committed to putting trade at the service of development. I hope it will be a useful contribution to informed debate.

September 2005
Europe and the Caribbean in a changing world

**The Cotonou Agreement**

The European Union (EU) and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) nations signed their co-operation agreement in Lomé, Togo, in 1975. After four such Lomé conventions, a broader partnership agreement was signed in Cotonou, Benin, in June 2000. Known as the Cotonou Agreement, this was signed by the Heads of State of all EU and ACP nations. This international treaty defines how the EU and ACP will co-operate on political, development and trade issues.

**Next step in a longstanding partnership**

Europe and the Caribbean signed their first trade and development agreements over 30 years ago. Then, in 2000, both agreed it was time for a major overhaul of their trade arrangements. Instead of the current trade regime, the time had come for negotiating a broader Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). This will enter into force on 1 January 2008, and will place development firmly at the centre of trade arrangements between Europe and the Caribbean.

**Towards an ambitious Economic Partnership Agreement**

The new Euro-Caribbean EPA will bring together two regions, each with their own history of regional integration. It will be one of the first-ever region-to-region, development-oriented North-South trade agreements.

And it will go beyond the current, limited trade arrangements for Caribbean goods entering the European Union. The EPA will be a means for Europe to help the Caribbean improve competitiveness, diversify its exports and build regional markets. Both sides will play their part. This is a joint answer to the challenges of globalisation and development.

Of course, both sides have high hopes for EPAs. On the one hand, there are the 25 countries of the European Union, and on the other, the 14 Caribbean Community countries and the Dominican Republic, the Caribbean Forum of ACP States (CARIFORUM). As negotiations intensify, this brochure provides an update for the citizens of the Caribbean and their elected representatives, business people and non-governmental organisations. It is intended to clarify the process and to contribute to an ongoing dialogue.
Towards sustainable development

To generate sustainable development, the Caribbean people need jobs and opportunities that allow them to take control of their future and take their rightful place in the world economy. Small and vulnerable economies can prosper – provided they cooperate to create a healthy environment for competitive business. Pro-development trade arrangements with Europe can help those businesses develop and compete internationally. That is the approach at the heart of the Economic Partnership Agreements that will define future EU-Caribbean trade relations.

Inevitably, EU-Caribbean relations have to change to reflect the world as it is now. The changes since 1975 have been dramatic. The cold war is over, Asian economies are booming, more and more countries are exporting commodities that compete with Caribbean products. There are new opportunities for an educated Caribbean workforce to provide services and intellectual skills.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) is now a key international forum. Its current talks on the “Doha Development Agenda” are intended to offer developing countries better trade prospects. Its dispute settlement procedures are very important for a number of traditional Caribbean export products, such as sugar and bananas. Finally, negotiations are underway for new regional agreements, such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas. All of these factors mean more options for the Caribbean – and it’s a complex matrix for Caribbean trade negotiators.

Europe is and will be an important trade and investment partner for the Caribbean. This relationship is set to develop, as there is untapped potential to increase trade in both services and goods. But if the Caribbean is going to realise this potential for exports both to Europe and elsewhere, it needs to improve its competitiveness and diversify its trade. One thing is certain – the Caribbean cannot go on relying on traditional trade links. It also needs to expand regional trade.
Regional integration: strength in numbers and diversity

Small and vulnerable economies can create more favourable conditions for trade, investment and growth if they co-operate within their regions. Such regional integration is vital to boost prospects for the Caribbean. Of course, there are different views on how far and how fast reforms should go, and what they should entail. But few would now argue the case for a future based on isolationist policies.

Founded in 1973, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is forging a regional integrated area, the CARICOM Single Market and Economy, and creating regional bodies such as the Caribbean Court of Justice.

A sub-group within CARICOM, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, was established in 1981 and has set up a single currency and central bank. The Dominican Republic and CARICOM have begun to put into practice a free trade agreement, signed in 1998, and this too should improve regional productivity and competitiveness. The EU is already supporting these endeavours financially. The Economic Partnership Agreement with the EU will reinforce Caribbean integration initiatives, using them as a basis for an international agreement, and sending a positive signal to traders and investors.

Trade between Europe and the Caribbean

The EU is the Caribbean’s second largest trading partner. Aluminium, rum, sugar and bananas (and oil) are the main exports to Europe. Trade in goods is worth just over €3 billion a year. This income is important for the Caribbean. But exports have not diversified into higher-value goods and services.
Towards an EU-Caribbean Economic Partnership Agreement

Not just about trade

The Economic Partnership Agreement will indeed improve the Caribbean’s access to EU markets. But it goes much further. As the 2000 Cotonou Agreement between the ACP and EU makes clear, EPAs are designed as response to globalisation and the need for development. They are about creating an economic area where goods, services and finance can be more freely traded. They will also provide a clear set of transparent, predictable rules, offering stability to traders and investors alike.

The CARIFORUM-EU EPA will be a single negotiated agreement governing how the two regions will co-operate on a wide range of trade-related issues in the future. They will include topics such as the duties charged on imports of goods, the market standards they are required to meet, trade in services, and related policy areas such as competition policy and intellectual property rights.

Moreover, the EPA will support the ambitious regional integration process that is already underway, helping to maximise its benefits. The EPA will build in flexibility to reflect the socioeconomic constraints of Caribbean countries. It will ensure stability because it will comply with WTO rules and prevent other WTO members from challenging the trade preferences enjoyed by the Caribbean. This is very important, as current trade arrangements rely on a waiver from WTO rules for protection from legal challenge. This waiver expires at the end of 2007. Without an EPA to replace it, the Caribbean will not be able to improve its access to the EU market.

Towards better market access: trade in goods

The Caribbean needs to keep its right to sell goods to the EU market. The EPA will also enable the region to improve this access where possible, a commitment clearly set out in the Cotonou Agreement. Among the topics that will come up are the rules that define products as genuinely Caribbean (called “rules of origin”) and technical issues such as product standards and food safety requirements.
So we are moving away from the traditional focus of market access discussions, such as duties charged on imported goods and the removal of the quotas that restrict their volume. Why? Because 98.5 per cent of current Caribbean exports can already enter the EU duty-free. But that has not been enough to help the Caribbean diversify its access, nor to guarantee market share. Yes, there are still some restrictions on products such as sugar, bananas, rice and citrus fruit. The EPA will certainly look at tackling these, but it’s likely that the biggest benefits will come from other aspects of trade.

One important change EPAs will bring about is that Caribbean markets will also have to open up gradually to EU goods, removing some duties and quotas. This new arrangement is essential, for both legal and economic reasons.

Legally, WTO rules require the Caribbean to liberalise “substantially all trade”. Economically, there is strong evidence that opening the Caribbean to EU products will increase efficiency, bring down costs and reduce consumer prices. This need not fuel fears – the changes will take place over time, and in ways that will ensure the Caribbean benefits from liberalisation. Regional integration and reforms required to build competitiveness will get priority. The EPA will allow long transitional periods for market opening, along with slower liberalisation on the Caribbean side. It will allow the Caribbean to exclude specified products, and to deploy safeguard measures for vulnerable economies.
Towards a new economy: trade in services

Trade in services is growing: this sector is a real success story. While Caribbean merchandise exports have fallen as percentage of their economies, services exports have increased. Caribbean tourism can take the credit for much of this growth. The region is well aware of the significance of trade in services. Tourism, insurance, construction, transport are all on the list of services that favour trade and economic development.

Liberalisation of trade in services trade can improve consumers’ lives, improve the quality and quantity of service providers, and help to make a region more competitive globally. The rules need to be simplified and harmonised to reap the benefits of this kind of trade. That is why Caribbean regional integration initiatives involve services. The EPA can build on these initiatives and reinforce them, to realise their potential, both within the Caribbean region and in trade with Europe. The EPA can set the scene for more, better services trade between the Caribbean and the EU.

Impact of EPA on Caribbean tourism

A Sustainability Impact Assessment of the EPA noted that improving market access for EU tourism services could have a positive impact on the Caribbean by giving local operators and consumers access to EU service providers. Improved transport and environmental services are among the benefits that would allow Caribbean tourism to further improve in quality and variety while reducing costs.

Towards a stable business environment: rules of the game

Any trader or investor will say that clear, stable and transparent rules are vital for doing business. If the rules can also be simplified and harmonised across an economic area, that can make business prospects even more attractive. What rules? Border controls such as tariffs, for instance, but also customs procedures themselves, to make trade easier. Negotiators refer to this aspect as “trade facilitation”. The EPA will address all of these issues.

But even if border controls are simplified and harmonised, there are other factors that need attention, to avoid a lucky few capturing all the gains from trade, or investment being undermined because of lack of protection for investors. That is why the ACP–EU Cotonou Agreement identifies competition policy, the protection of intellectual property rights, and environmental and labour standards as important for promoting trade and sustainable development. Governments also spend large amounts of public money on imported goods and public investment, so transparent rules for public procurement can improve value for the taxpayer. The Caribbean region is already tackling many such issues, and the EPA can build on and strengthen these efforts.
Towards a better deal for households

The EPA is not just concerned with high-level economics. Building regional markets and improving trade arrangements also translates into real benefits for families. They can expect a wider choice and better value in the shops, cheaper local business services and more competitive local industries, thanks to reduced costs of importing and exporting. These are significant benefits, particularly in small economies where many of the goods are traded.

Businesses too will benefit – they will be able to sell to both regional and EU markets. Ambitious Caribbean youth will have better prospects for marketing services and intellectual skills. Ultimately, the success of the EPA will depend on the extent to which it enables business to increase trade and promote local development.

Intellectual property in action: Blue Mountain Coffee

Intellectual property refers to issues such as copyright, patents, trademarks and geographical indications. Jamaica intends to use rules on geographical indications to make sure that only coffee grown in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica can be marketed as Blue Mountain Coffee. This makes sure Jamaican producers get the benefits of developing and promoting this brand.
Development, competitiveness and trade

As mentioned above, the EPA is not just about trade. It is about partnership and development. The negotiations have to be comprehensive and ambitious and they are very much part of a wider EU-CARIFORUM cooperation process. That is why development finance will accompany and reinforce the EPA.

The European Development Fund is the EU’s instrument for providing this development finance. All funds are provided as grants, supporting a regional programme and 15 national programmes in the Caribbean. There are over €500 million available for national programmes for the period 2003 to 2007. For the regional programme, there are €57 million, and this will cover support for economic integration and trade. The regional programme will make regional economic integration in the Caribbean a priority, help to improve the environment for business and strengthen negotiators’ capacity to take part in international trade agreements.

EU support will also help the Caribbean to diversify its exports and to compete more effectively, in line with EPA objectives. The Caribbean already gets specific support for its main commodities. From 1999 to 2005, the Special Framework of Assistance to the banana industry has sought to increase competitiveness and encourage diversification, to the tune of €216 million. For the Caribbean rum industry, a €70 million support programme started in July 2002. Its rice industry is the beneficiary of assistance worth €24 million. The European Commission has also offered support to help the ACP sugar industry cope with EU reform, starting with a €40 million allowance for 2006. This is set to increase from 2007 onwards.

And beyond these traditional sectors, there has also been support for the Caribbean private sector and services trade, €13.5 million under the most recent programme alone. For tourism, there has recently been a project worth €8 million.

In addition, Caribbean countries can access a range of all-ACP programmes. These cover investment, helping exporters meet EU food safety and plant health standards, and support for trade negotiators.

The EU recognises that ACP countries have limited resources to engage in trade negotiations, which is why it has been helping them take part in WTO talks and the EPA process since 2002. There are three programmes, worth over €85 million to help the ACP take part in both EPA and WTO negotiations. These funds are on top of regional and national programmes.
Practical support for Caribbean trade practitioners

The EU has provided aid for a network of regional and national trade advisers; a grant to set up an office for the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States at the WTO in Geneva, funds for the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery to take part in the EPA process; and funds for a range of impact studies, such as a report on the potential impact of an EPA on the most important industrial and agricultural sectors in the Dominican Republic.

Linking EPA negotiations and development finance

EU financial support is provided under the terms of the Cotonou Agreement. To make sure the EPA negotiations and this support are firmly linked, a CARIFORUM-EU task force has been set up. The members of this Regional Preparatory Task Force include a wide range of European and Caribbean experts, including national and regional development officials, representatives of regional universities and the Caribbean Development Bank, as well as NGO and private-sector representatives.

The job of this task force is to take the needs identified in negotiations and to translate them into operational ideas for assistance. The task force can suggest sources of finance, including money available under the European Development Fund, as well as bilateral and multilateral resources, e.g. from EU member states and international donors.

The task force has already started work. The needs identified during the EPA process will also figure prominently in the arrangement that succeeds the current European Development Fund, which runs until 2007.

Links to development assistance in practice

The Regional Preparatory Task Force is looking at what support the Caribbean needs to deal with Sanitary and Phytosanitary or “SPS” standards. These are the measures which ensure that traded goods do not pose risks for food, animal or plant safety.
Negociations
so far

The timeline

Economic Partnership Agreements negotiations began in Brussels in September 2002 between the EU and 77 ACP countries. This phase of negotiations continued until an ACP-EU ministerial meeting in October 2003, where ministers agreed a joint report that marked the beginning of regional EPA negotiations. Negotiations on the EU-Caribbean EPA began formally on 16 April 2004 in Kingston, Jamaica. That was the date on which both sides agreed the objectives, structure and handling of negotiations. On the Caribbean side, CARIFORUM represents the countries of Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Commonwealth of Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

The first part of negotiations focused on specific technical themes such as regional markets, services and investment, and related policy areas. The negotiators worked to get a common understanding on the priorities for both Caribbean regional integration and the EPA negotiations. Both sides agreed that this technical phase of negotiations would end at a ministerial meeting in St. Lucia in September 2005.

The next step is to address priority issues, agreeing the actual structure of an EPA and discussing the approach to trade liberalisation. Ministers will then meet towards the end of 2006 to launch the last negotiating phase. This will finalise the agreement so that it can start functioning on 1 January 2008.

Issues in the negotiations

There is broad agreement on the scope and priorities of the negotiations, and a better joint understanding of regional integration. Technical discussions on Caribbean and European economic integration have taken place on many topics. These include tariffs and quotas; food safety and technical standards; customs issues and trade facilitation; safeguard measures; trade in services; investment; competition policy; intellectual property; and government procurement.
The EPA negotiations are not happening in a vacuum. The context is influenced by a range of wider political and economic developments. Not all of these issues can or should be a part of the EPA negotiations, but they will determine how the EPA is applied and that is why they are the subject of ongoing dialogue and discussion. Some examples:

- The way CARIFORUM regional integration is developing, covering a wide range of issues and a diverse membership.
- Progress towards key structural reforms in areas such as government finances and the economy, regulation and incentives for new businesses, as well as training and education.
- Difficulties facing agricultural producers in rice, sugar and bananas, the related restructuring processes, and opportunities to secure future market access in a WTO-compatible EPA.
- Ensuring compliance with WTO rules, making use of existing flexibility covering regional trading arrangements, and progress on key WTO issues such as agricultural support, market access and trade facilitation in the Doha Development Agenda.
- Potential adjustment costs, such as loss of government revenue because of lower trade taxes; and opportunities to minimise those costs by measures such as excluding sensitive products from liberalisation, phasing in changes, and promoting customs and tax reform.

**Caribbean territories linked to the EU**

The EPA will also look at measures to enhance trade and co-operation between CARIFORUM States and territories in the region linked to the EU. They too will be affected by the EPA, and they form two distinct groups:

- French overseas departments (French Guiana, Guadeloupe and Martinique). They are part of the EU and will be part of the EPA.
- British and Dutch territories (Anguilla, Aruba, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Netherlands Antilles, Turks and Caicos Islands). They are associated with the EU, but are not formally part of it. They have yet to establish their relation to the EPA.

**Summary of CARIFORUM – EU EPA objectives**

- Promote socially and environmentally sustainable economic development.
- Help small Caribbean states play a meaningful role in the international community.
- Support Caribbean reforms to reduce economic vulnerability and promote new development.
- Ensure changes occur at a pace that protects economic and social development.
Consultations so far

The EPA negotiations are an ambitious, pro-development undertaking. They are not just a matter for negotiators and the governments they represent, as they must represent the needs and aspirations of the citizens of the Caribbean. That is why the negotiations include a number of ways to involve a wide range of stakeholders in the negotiations:

- A Regional Network of Non-State Actors, launched in Barbados in November 2004, which could include private sector umbrella groupings, trade unions, farmers and consumer groups, non-governmental organisations, academics and parliamentarians.
- An EU-sponsored Sustainability Impact Assessment of the EPA that consulted Caribbean stakeholders.
- Seminars for CARIFORUM government and non-governmental stakeholders, as well as representatives of territories linked to the EU, to explain the process of EPA negotiations.
- A proposed consultative network of donors and development agencies to make sure the EPA is taken on board when regional programmes and projects are designed.

What’s at stake in future discussions

The ultimate goal of the EPA is sustainable development, building a better future not just for the current generation, but for the next ones too, and this will mean changes affecting all citizens in the Caribbean. Here is what we hope the EPA will achieve:

- The EPA is about creating jobs and wealth through trade. It will do this by building regional markets and helping to build a clear and transparent framework for doing business in the region.
- The EPA is based on regional integration and gradually opening up markets to improve competitiveness and reduce prices. To manage the social impact of change or the sensitivity of small markets, the EPA will include special and differential treatment, including flexibility over what products and services the Caribbean will liberalise and when.
The EPA will mean the Caribbean keeps its access for products to the EU market. Where possible, that access will improve, and the rules that apply to it will be simplified.

The EPA is part of the ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement, which contains separate provisions for development assistance, programmed jointly with national governments and regional organisations. These funds will continue to provide financial support for the negotiations and regional integration process.

The way forward

Negotiations are well underway to secure an Economic Partnership Agreement by 2008. They are an ambitious attempt to gear trade policy towards development. They will be a positive force for development in the Caribbean, but there is no blueprint to work from and much to be done.

This means that the process is open to anyone with a commitment to the aims – not just the governments, but civil society and business too. There is no single consultation process, but many practical ways to get involved. They include, for instance, lobbying governments, negotiators and members of parliament, raising awareness and discussing the implications with trade unions, non-governmental organisations and business groups. If EPAs are to realise their true potential, this will mean ongoing dialogue. We hope this short overview of what is at stake can contribute to this process.
Why can’t we just leave things as they are?

That’s not an option. Times are changing and we cannot hide. Trade and investment in the Caribbean must increase to promote sustained growth and development. Regional arrangements are being put in place to help business generate jobs and wealth. Current trade arrangements with Europe only provide access for goods but contribute too little to Caribbean competitiveness. They also depend on a waiver from the WTO, to allow time for a new agreement to be put in place. The waiver expires in 2007, so the EU and the Caribbean have to have a new arrangement ready by then. A new waiver would require agreement from all other WTO members and come at too high a price.

But does the new arrangement have to be an EPA?

In theory, no. But after careful consideration the EU and the Caribbean decided that this is the best option for linking trade and development. So why accept second-best, a lowering of our joint ambition?

They say the EPA is just a way for the EU to force open the markets of Caribbean countries. Why should we want that?

‘They’ are wrong. The EU’s priority is to help the Caribbean boost its regional integration, so that business among its countries can thrive, making the region attractive to investors. The EU also wants to keep open and improve the Caribbean’s access to its markets. Once those key items are addressed, we can talk about the Caribbean opening its markets, at a time and pace that suit Caribbean circumstances. Selling more European goods and services to the region is not a priority.
I’ve heard that government revenue will plummet if we drop our tariffs. How can that be in our interests?

You might have a point if that were to happen overnight. But, as mentioned above, that is not the plan. Under the EPA, Caribbean countries will be able to open up gradually, leaving time to adapt and to promote tax reform to replace trade taxes and improve tax collection. Tax reform and more trade can even increase government revenue.

We are very worried about the future for our banana and sugar exports. Can the EPA offer any solutions?

The EU will not leave the Caribbean to struggle alone in facing these problems. It is well aware of these concerns and is working on answers both within the EPA process and outside it. One of the main things EPAs will do is to guarantee the best possible Caribbean access to the EU and shield it from legal challenge in WTO. In the longer term it can help to achieve diversification which will generate new sources of income. Diversification and competitiveness will be helped further by EU development aid.

The EU has some very strict health and safety standards for the food it imports. How are Caribbean countries supposed to meet these?

You mean our Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards. Yes, they are tough – that is what our consumers demand. Part of the EPA plan is to equip the Caribbean to meet those standards. This includes building regional capacity to set and enforce standards. There is funding to help the region in this.

What if I have more questions? How can I get involved in the debate?

Look at the following section for more information and people to contact.
Further Information

Useful links on the EPA Process
The following internet links contain useful information related to the EPA process:

- **ACP trade relations:**  
- **ACP trade statistics:**  
  [http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/acp/stats.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/acp/stats.htm)
- **Cotonou Agreement:**  
- **EU trade policy:**  

Links to the EU Trade and Development Commissioners’ internet sites
The following internet links contain recent speeches and articles on EPAs:


Suggested further reading on EPAs
The following internet links contain further reading on EPAs:


More information on Caribbean Development
The following contain a wealth of information on Caribbean trade and integration:

- [www.crnm.org](http://www.crnm.org)
- [www.caricom.org](http://www.caricom.org)
- [www.oecs.org](http://www.oecs.org)
- [www.caribank.org](http://www.caribank.org)

Information for exporters to Europe
The following is the website for the European Commission helpdesk for exporters looking to sell goods in Europe:

- [http://exporthand.europa.eu](http://exporthand.europa.eu)
Further contacts
If you are not online, information on the Cotonou Agreement and EU development cooperation with the Caribbean can be obtained at the European Commission’s delegations in seven Caribbean countries.

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BELGIUM
African Caribbean and Pacific States, a group of states with a partnership agreement with Europe, the Cotonou agreement

Caribbean Community

Caribbean Forum of ACP States

Partnership Agreement between the EU and ACP states signed in 2000 at Cotonou, Benin.

Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery

CARICOM Single Market and Economy

Département français d’outre-mer (French Overseas Department)

European Development Fund, the EU development financing mechanism for the ACP under the Cotonou agreement

Economic Partnership Agreement

European Union

Predecessor to the Cotonou agreements signed in Lomé, Togo.

Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States

A limit on the quantity of goods that can be imported

Regional Preparatory Task Force, the body tasked with linking EPA negotiations and development finance

Sustainability Impact Assessment, a study commissioned on the likely impacts of EPAs

Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards, measures to protect human, animal and plant health and life

A customs duty or charge on imports

Trade in physical goods like agricultural products and machinery

Trade in services like insurance, training and marketing

World Trade Organisation