

## **Fifth Meeting of the EPA Trade Committee EU-Pacific States EPA**

**19 October 2017, Brussels**

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### **Joint Communiqué**

The fifth Trade Committee under the EU-Pacific States interim Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) took place in Brussels on 19 October 2017, bringing together the Independent State of Papua New Guinea (PNG), the Republic of Fiji, and the European Union (EU) (the Parties to the Agreement). Owing to their recent notifications of intent to accede to the existing EPA, Solomon Islands and the Independent State of Samoa were invited to participate as observers to the Committee meeting, which was preceded by a dedicated meeting on rules of origin on 18 October and bilateral meetings from 16 to 17 October.

The Committee was co-chaired by Mr Frazer Murray, Assistant Secretary, Market Access and Free Trade Negotiations, Department of Trade, Commerce and Industry, on behalf of PNG; Mr Kartik Pratap, Principal Economist, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism, on behalf of Fiji; and Ms Diana Acconcia, Head of Unit (EPA-ACP, Overseas Countries and Territories) of the Directorate-General for Trade of the European Commission, on behalf of the European Union.

Reaffirming their commitment to revamp the existing EPA as a framework for enhancing trade relations between the Pacific ACP States and the EU, the Parties undertook to finalise ahead of the next meeting of the Trade Committee, the Rules of Procedure relating to (1) the Trade Committee, (2) the Special Committees and (3) the Dispute Settlement, as well as a Code of Conduct for Arbitrators and Mediators, paving the way towards effective implementation of the Agreement.

The Parties exchanged views on trade and sustainable development; in particular PNG provided updates on labour, environment and the management of fisheries resources.

The Parties discussed EPA implementation progress, notably as regards Market Access Commitments (MACs). The EU undertook to assist Fiji, PNG and the acceding countries to update their MACs from the Harmonised Systems (HS)2007 to HS2017.

The Parties agreed to work towards promoting accession and enhancing development cooperation, in particular to strengthen productive capacity and competitiveness of export value chains enabling the operators to gain more from the EPA opportunities.

Samoa and Solomon Islands provided updates on national processes underway towards the finalisation of Market Access Offers, committing to submit formal accession requests together with the MAOs to the Parties for decision in due course.

The EU provided updates on development cooperation and support towards EPA accession and implementation under the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> European Development Fund (EDF) (2014-2020), including an overview of the various instruments and programmes that can be accessed to support EPA and other trade related assistance. The relative underutilisation of Intra-ACP funds by Pacific partners was noted and parties committed to finding ways of improving access. Pacific partners provided information on specific needs and the EU encouraged partners to engage with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) to ensure that such needs are taken into account in the Regional Programme for which trade support is now being

identified before detailed formulation. The EU also noted that, in line with the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the new EU Consensus on Development, it will also focus support on investments, the business climate, value chains and private sector development, which will complement the institutional trade related support.

On rules of origin, the Parties agreed on the proposals concerning the update of the list of Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) and the Croatian version of the invoice declaration. The Pacific States will provide comments on the alignment of Annex II to HS2017 and the EU proposal to delete Article 38 on free zones.

The Parties agreed to convene a special Trade Committee as developments unfold to consider the accession of Samoa and Solomon Islands in the first half of 2018.

The meeting took place in a cordial and constructive atmosphere.