



# CARIFORUM-EU EPA

## *A Partnership that Counts*



### *Multilateral discussions on Electronic Commerce are moving ahead*

Ministers of Australia, Japan and Singapore — co-convenors of WTO e-commerce negotiations — have welcomed the substantial progress made in the initiative on electronic commerce in a statement issued on 14 December 2021. The Initiative on Electronic Commerce follows from a Joint Statement by 76 Members of the WTO in January 2019 to start negotiations on the trade related aspects of electronic commerce which aims to build on WTO agreements and frameworks and take account of the unique opportunities and challenges faced by Members. Whilst no CARIFORUM State was part of the Joint Statement, the European Union is a party and all WTO Members are encouraged to participate in order to enhance the benefits of electronic commerce.

The ministers said the outcomes already achieved in important areas of the negotiations such as online consumer protection; electronic signatures and authentication; unsolicited commercial electronic messages; open government data; electronic contracts; transparency; paperless trading; and open internet access would deliver important benefits, including boosting consumer confidence and supporting businesses trading online. They intend to arrange the initiative's work programme to secure convergence on the majority of issues by the end of 2022.

WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, commenting on the matter said, "The work undertaken promises more stability and predictability for consumers and businesses in a fast-growing sector of the digital economy. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of e-commerce as a tool for

inclusion, helping small business access international markets, particularly businesses headed by women. I encourage the initiative to continue to keep its doors open for other members of the WTO to join and to continue discussing development issues necessary to bridge the digital divide”.

In their statement, the co-convenors noted support by initiative participants for the continuation of the multilateral e-commerce moratorium. They said they considered it crucial that the initiative make permanent among participants the practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions.

The co-convenors emphasised the importance of supporting the engagement of developing members and least-developed country (LDC) members in the initiative, including implementation of commitments. They said they would deepen the discussion on capacity-building options and support for implementation for developing members and LDC members in 2022.

In the EPA, CARIFORUM States and the EU have committed to the further development of Ecommerce as a means to increase trade. They have also committed to maintain dialogue on regulatory issues and to further cooperation. Given the convergence achieved in the discussions and proposal to address capacity building and support for implementation of commitments, CARIFORUM States should continue to participate in these discussions, the outcomes of which can guide their dialogue with the EU on regulatory issues and development cooperation to improve e-commerce infrastructure.

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