



# CARIFORUM-EU EPA

## *A Partnership that Counts*



### *Lessons from the review of the WTO TFA*

WTO members completed the first-ever review of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) on 26 November 2021, four years since the landmark deal entered into force on 22 February 2017. The review took stock of members' progress in implementing the Agreement as well as implementation challenges.

“Completing the review is an important milestone for the Trade Facilitation Committee. Members have worked intensely over the past six months to look back at the significant progress made over the past four years, while also recognizing the implementation challenges faced by members, particularly least-developed countries (LDCs),” the Committee Chair, Mr Christopher O’Toole (Canada), said.

Mr. O’ Toole further addressed the work of the Committee in “identifying a number of means by which it can strengthen its work to support full implementation of the TFA” He noted that the Committee has therefore “ identified a good basis for a future work programme”.

CARIFORUM States and the EU participated actively in the review process by making proposals and sharing experiences. The review noted that not all members have notified the aid received for implementation of Category C commitments and/or identified gaps in required capacity building support. In order to ensure a timely receipt of these notifications, the EU indicated its readiness to participate in meetings, called and organised by the Members having notified category C commitments, in their capitals as it might be easier to streamline the process by discussing the matter locally. Category C commitments are trade facilitation measures that a developing country or LDC designates for implementation on a date after a transition period and which require implementation capacity through the provision of technical assistance and capacity building.

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted Members to intensify their experience sharing on this particular challenge that Customs had to face during 2020 and 2021. The EU was very interested in WTO members sharing their experiences related to COVID-19.

CARIFORUM States reiterated their commitment to actively implement their obligations under the TFA, and pointed to the natural dynamics of being small vulnerable states (SVE) which stymied implementation. The lack of human resources and capacity to prepare project proposals for Category C commitments was cited as an example.

The TFA seeks to expedite the movement, release, and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. It also sets out measures for effective cooperation between customs and other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance issues. It further contains provisions for technical assistance and capacity building in this area. Under the Agreement, members committed to review the operation and implementation of the TFA four years from its entry into force, and periodically thereafter. The next review of the TFA is expected to take place in 2026. CARIFORUM States as parties to the EPA are required to adopt the principles and measures outlined in the Trade Facilitation Agreement. As States are engaged in the Second Five-year review and the monitoring and evaluation of the agreement, the TFA review can provide some useful information.

*EPA Implementation Unit, CARIFORUM Directorate*