

Ms. Roxanne Gibbs
Executive Editor
roxannegibbs@nationnews.com

Roy Morris
Managing Editor
roymorris@nationnews.com

Bryan Walker
Daily Editor
bryanwalker@nationnews.com

Dear Editors:

The Dominican Republic is very proud of its alliance with CARICOM Member States.

As CARIFORUM, we have placed firmly the priorities of Small and Vulnerable Economies (SVEs) in the agenda of the WTO. As a result, whatever the outcome of the ongoing Doha Round our economies will not have to liberalize further on a multilateral basis.

As CARIFORUM, we have placed the achievement of competitiveness as a central requirement for sustainable development of ACP States. This is reflected in the revised Cotonou Agreement; in a number of CARIFORUM National Indicative Programs (NIPs), as well as in the supportive programs of our 10th CARIFORUM Regional Indicative Program (CRIP), for an amount almost three times as big as the 9th CRIP.

As CARIFORUM, we fight incessantly in Brussels, in Geneva and everywhere else, the erosion of the market access we have achieved for CARIFORUM bananas, rum and sugar.

But it is the whole set of precedents achieved by CARIFORUM Member States in our EPA with the European Commission that truly stands apart.

Because our EPA is the first truly asymmetrical agreement between a region of developed and a region of developing countries.

The first to liberalize fully, from day one, the market of the more developed counterpart, preserving and enhancing on a duty-free, quota-free basis the market access we enjoyed as part of the ACP Group of States.

The first to allow for product exclusions from free trade.

The first to grant up to 25 years of tariff phase-out.

The first to liberalize on a quota-free basis the temporary access into Europe for our natural persons, either as business visitors, intra-corporate transferees, contractual service suppliers or independent professionals.

The first to include rules against the anticompetitive practices of tour operators and computerized reservation systems in tourism.

The first to commit the Parties to fight corruption in the negotiation of foreign direct investment contracts.

The first to include a meaningful development dimension with competitiveness at its core.

The first to create a regional development fund.

The first to have ensured full transparency for civil society during the process, and to build into the agreement such transparency by creating new parliamentary and economic and social consultative committees.

As a result, we in the Dominican Republic see our EPA as the first development-enhancing agreement.

You can understand, then, our enthusiasm for an appropriate and consensus-based implementation of what we, as CARIFORUM, have achieved together.

We fully recognize that the Dominican Republic is just one of 15 CARIFORUM Member States.

That is why in our Statement to the 5th CARIFORUM Ministerial (Guyana, 26 November 2008), we have tabled a non-exhaustive list of institutional options to perform the regional coordination of EPA implementation. I have attached a copy for your consideration.

Since the very beginning, the Dominican Republic has always insisted that all CARIFORUM States should contribute to this debate and that its outcome should be a decision by the explicit consensus of all of us.

We firmly believe that, if we do this right, the CARIFORUM region will stand a higher chance for increased and diversified trade and investment flows with Europe.

But most importantly, the CARIFORUM region will be able to deepen its integration, precisely in these difficult moments for the world economy, when domestic and regional markets are the only safe outlets for our products.

A powerful lever in this direction is the regional preference, by virtue of which CARIFORUM Members will take advantage of the extremely high degree of liberalization we in the Dominican Republic granted to Europe in our EPA.

There is already a positive trade balance for CARICOM States with respect to the Dominican Republic. This is the one undeniable achievement of the CARICOM-DR Free Trade Agreement.

The EPA should become, now, the 21st century response to the problems ahead, as we work together to join the exclusive club of developed countries in this generation.

But this is a response that requires to be coordinated effectively and efficiently by all of us with the help of a CARIFORUM institution that truly believes in CARIFORUM integration.

I hope these lines suffice to place our Statement to the CARIFORUM Ministerial in its

appropriate context.

I trust these lines will find some space in your most prestigious publications and I beg you to please feel free to contact me in case you need any further information.

Please receive, dear editors, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Federico Alberto Cuello Camilo
Ambassador of the Dominican Republic to the European Communities.
Member of the CARIFORUM College of Negotiators.
Former Chairman of the ACP Committee of Ambassadors (Geneva, 2002 and Brussels, 2006).
Former Chairman of the CARIFORUM Group (Geneva, 2001 and Brussels, 2006).