



## **6<sup>th</sup> MEETING OF THE EU-CENTRAL AMERICA ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT**

### **CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ON TRADE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**24 November 2020**

**Video conference**

**Joint Declaration**

#### ***Introduction***

On 18 and 19 November 2020, The European Union (EU), Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama (Central America) held the sixth meeting of the Trade and Sustainable Development Board (hereinafter the Board) under the EU-Central-America Trade Agreement. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting took place via video conference.

Each side made presentations on the progress made in implementing the TSD chapter, in particular on labour and environment & climate change provisions. The parties also discussed matters related to cooperation, the role and input by the Domestic Advisory Groups, trade favouring sustainable development and the planned ex post evaluation of the Trade Pillar of the Agreement. During the meeting, the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic were an important cross-cutting issue. The Parties agreed on the importance of continuing joint work on the various dimensions of the TSD chapter.

#### ***Exchanges on individual agenda items***

Presentations on *cooperation projects* in Central-America focused on ongoing preparations for the European Commission's new Programming Period 2021-2027 and activities under SIECA's Regional Economic Integration Project (INTEC).

In their exchange on *Domestic Advisory Groups* (DAGs) Parties shared information on the various arrangements and consultation modalities applied, and shared views on the recommendations made in the Declaration jointly submitted by the EU and Central-American DAGs. Parties welcomed the joint work conducted by the DAGs in the run up to the TSD meeting and encouraged them



to continue in this vein. They called upon DAGs to provide advice pro-actively stressing that this should not depend on governments' express requests for their views.

With respect to *labour matters*, Parties provided detailed updates of relevant policy initiatives. Specific attention was paid to COVID-19 response measures including addressing the most vulnerable groups; social dialogue; freedom of association and violence against trade unions; as well as child labour. The European Commission welcomed progress made in tackling various labour and social challenges in Central-America and offered to follow-up through bilateral contacts to deepen discussions on the most pressing problems in the different countries.

Parties also updated each other on key developments with respect to their *environmental policy*, again including in a COVID-19 context (“green recovery measures”). Climate change and biodiversity loss emerged as key shared concerns.

The exchange on the implementation of TSD provisions on “*trade favouring sustainable development*” highlighted the positive impacts that increased trade and sustainability efforts induced by the Agreement had had. At the same time, it underscored that efforts to address challenges in complying with standards and requirements in the EU market had to continue, especially in the case of small producers.

The European Commission briefly reported on preparatory work for its planned *ex post evaluation* of the Trade Pillar of the Association Agreement. The evaluation will start in 2021 and have an expected duration of 16 months. It will involve extensive consultations of public authorities and civil society organisations including in Central-America.

## **Conclusions and next steps**

As regards *cooperation*, the EU will keep Central-American partners informed about further steps in preparing the new programming period and will actively involve them in consultations. Central-American partners are invited to reflect on and formulate needs for possible EU interventions, both at national level and from a regional integration point of view, in line with SDGs.

With respect to the *Domestic Advisory Groups*, while recognising different approaches at national and regional levels, Parties encourage DAGs to take a pro-active stance in advising on the implementation of the TSD chapter and to continue joint work where appropriate.



On *labour issues*, further EU-Central America dialogue and work (both at region-to-region and bilateral level) to ensure the effective implementation of relevant TSD commitments would be very useful including with respect to COVID-19 response measures, child labour and violence against trade unionists.

Information exchanges on Parties' *environment and climate change* policies have also been valuable. Climate change and biodiversity loss are shared concerns and policy priorities.

As to *trade favouring sustainable development*, during the meeting inspiring examples have been presented of efforts made by agricultural producers in Central-America to lower their climate and environmental footprint. It is important to continue encouraging and supporting such initiatives, especially by small producers, also with a view to complying with European standards.

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