

OECS DELEGATION REPORTS TO THE WTO COMMITTEE ON TRADE FACILITATION IN DEDICATED SESSION

21.10.2020

Excellencies

Distinguished Delegates

Saint Lucia is one of six, sovereign-island nations along the Caribbean archipelago that form the OECS Economic Union, all of whom are long-standing Member States of the WTO. In addition to Saint Lucia, these countries include: Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada St Kitts and Nevis and, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. My presentation today will provide reflections on some of the main trade facilitation considerations that the region confronts as a consequence of the pandemic, as well as shed light on some of key regional interventions supported by development partners.

Individually and collectively the Members of the OECS Economic Union have committed to deep and far-reaching trade facilitation reforms. These reforms are key to unlocking the economic potential of the region through improved efficiencies in trade logistics, ensuring greater transparency and predictability in the management of trade flow, and minimizing disruptions and risks to critical supply chains. Critically, the Commitment to improved border agency efficiency by OECS authorities is supported by the public policy drive towards updating, and modernising the delivery of public goods and services, and more fundamentally, the building of economic resilience through improved economic and trade efficiency.

The on-set of the COVID-19 Pandemic has amplified the need to accelerate reform measures and update systems in-line with international best practice as well as the commitments undertaken through the TFA.

Some of the more recent trade facilitation measures adopted by Member States include:

- 1. New Protection of front-line workers, including customs workers – through improved systems and automation**
- 2. Streamlining of procedural formalities between and across border agencies [customs, bureau of standards, ports authorities, SPS authorities etc.]**
- 3. Strengthened Risk management to prioritize clearance of imports and exports of low-risk critical supplies**

4. **Border agency cooperation to facilitate the import of critical supplies (including medical supplies)**
5. **ICT to support trade (e.g., single windows and trade information portals)**
6. **Extending border agency working hours**
7. **Increased dialogue between industry and governments**
8. **Increasing the available of trade-related information on websites and through inquiry point**

Against this backdrop, allow me to share with you what these critical interventions aim to achieve.

Firstly, The establishment of a Maritime Single Window for the OECS

OECS Commission has secured funding through the Caribbean Development Banks to implement trade facilitation measures to address infrastructural and operational deficits and inefficiencies in shipping. More specifically:

- the implementation of an Advanced Cargo Information System (ACIS) in the OECS Protocol Member States, which will allow for electronic interface between Customs and the Port Authorities to facilitate information exchange on cargo moving into and throughout the Economic Union Area, and
- the establishment and integration of a Maritime Single Window (MSW) to allow for electronic clearance of vessels and the completion of formalities, in keeping with the **IMO-FAL** Convention.

UNCTAD will provide technical support for the implementation of the Advance Cargo Information System while CARICOM IMPACS will assist with the integration of the MSW into the platform. Overall, this project will enable the creation of a one stop facility at Port

Authorities which accommodates full-time access to all the relevant Border control agencies involved in vessel release and clearance.

Another headline trade facilitation project for the region is the Regional Risk Management Mechanism for the OECS

The OECS Commission has secured funding through our European Partners under the 11th EDF to Build the Institutional and Regulatory Capacity for a Regional Risk Management System (RRMS) for the OECS Economic Union. This project is geared toward enhancing risk analysis and management in the Economic Union by:

- building the capacity of Border control agencies to coordinate the identification and management of risks, as well as
- developing the institutional and regulatory framework at the national and regional level for a Regional Risk Management System to analyze and manage shared and common risks and threats.

This project is in keeping with:

- (i) the Guiding Principles for Establishing an OECS Customs Union and Regime for the Free Circulation of Goods, which was approved by the OECS Economic Affairs Council (EAC). This recommends the establishment of a regional risk management system which will identify, limit and counter internal and external threats to revenue, health and safety, security and general law enforcement of the economic union; and
- (ii) the CARICOM Strategy for Regional Implementation of The WTO TFA which identified a regional approach to implementation of seven of the common Category C measures, in particular, the establishment of a regional risk management system to identify, communicate, and evaluate results of controls on common regional threats, and an electronic system for the rapid and secure exchange of risk information among CARICOM members.

It was also agreed that this would be implemented at an OECS level before expanding to the wider CARICOM Community.

Another trade facilitation project which is being rolled-out in partnership with our European friends is the 11th EDF supported Programme to execute a project geared toward the Restructuring and Harmonization of Non-tariff Border Taxes and Charges in the OECS Economic Union. This project is aimed at improving the efficiency, predictability and transparency in the application of non-tariff border taxes and charges in an effort to (a)

comply with international trade rules and regulations and (b) strengthen the overall border tax management structure in the economic union.

The final, big-ticket headline trade facilitation project that the OECS Economic Union will be pursuing is the Establishment of a Trade Information and Facilitation Platform (TIFP)

Under our EU - ACP TradeCOM II Programme entitled: *Consolidating the OECS Economic Union through Sustainable Trade Capacity Building*, the OECS Commission will be developing an OECS Trade Information and Facilitation Platform for the Economic Union. The objective of this project is to mainstream the collection, analysis and utilization of statistical trade data as a risk management tool and critically, to accelerate efforts towards evidence-based decision making.

The Major outputs under this project are an Integrated Data Analytical Tool for usage by both public and private sector stakeholders, as well as a portal for the publication of relevant import and export requirements for trading within the economic union and with Third Countries.

The International Trade Centre is providing technical support for this project with counterpart support from the UK Trade Partnership Programme.

Chair, in closing, allow me to reaffirm the commitment of OECS Member States to advancing trade facilitation reforms within and beyond the legal precincts of the TFA.

Allow me to take this opportunity to thank the EU for their stalwart commitment and support. Allow me also to thank the UK for their partnership, the Caribbean Development Banks, UNCTAD, ITC and our myriad other partners.

While we have made positive steps towards implementing meaningful reforms, the journey is not complete, and we welcome new expressions of interest for partnership building in order to assist in building economic resilience in the OECS through trade facilitation.