

Responses of the Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs to the Recommendations contained in the Ninth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Finance and Legal Affairs on an Inquiry into Trinidad and Tobago's Performance in negotiating/creating opportunities for trade outside CARICOM

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The Committee recommends that:

E. In light of the apparent contraction in markets for certain exports which were initially expected to have high yields e.g. cocoa, it is essential that local stakeholders undertake an assessment to determine what are the local conditions (if any) which may be contributing to the decline in export earnings.

The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs will intensify its engagement with entities in markets for cocoa to assist in identifying factors (such as the presence of cadmium) that deter potential buyers from purchasing product from Trinidad and Tobago and will liaise with relevant stakeholders in Trinidad and Tobago in this regard. The Ministry will also continue to seize every opportunity to promote cocoa from Trinidad and Tobago.

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The Committee recommends that:

C. Given the laudable success of Angostura Bitters TM as an exported commodity, consideration being given to using the brand recognition of this product as a catalyst to attracting exports for other Angostura Products.

The Ministry will seek and create opportunities to promote Angostura products through its participation in business and trade fairs, meetings and other opportunities that present themselves in the course of Trinidad and Tobago Overseas Missions' engagement in countries accreditation.

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The Committee recommends that:

A. To increase this country's potential of harnessing the benefits of the CARIFORUM-EU EPA, the GORTT as a leading economy in the Caribbean region should ensure that local businesses have access to adequate information and guidance to support their efforts to enter the EU market. With a view to achieving same the MTI should:

- i. Conduct periodic sensitisation programmes to inform the local business community about EPA rules and regulations (draft or approved), opportunities and risks associated with the EU markets, among other vital information;**
- ii. Conduct an assessment on how the terms of the agreement can be exploited to increase exports;**
- iii. Determine the aspects of the agreement that are in need of revision; and**
- iv. Establish the links between the ACP/EU post Cotonou regional negotiations.**

With regard to establishing the links between the ACP/EU post Cotonou regional negotiations, Trinidad and Tobago's relationship with the EU is largely governed by the provisions of the Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM) - EU Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) of 2008 with respect to trading arrangements, and the Partnership Agreement between the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) and the EU, also known as the Cotonou Agreement, which was adopted in 2000 and is due to expire at the end of 2020.

The Cotonou Agreement, as signed in 2000, had as its pillars political dialogue, development cooperation and trade cooperation. With the conclusion of the CARIFORUM – EU EPA in 2008, the trading relationship between CARIFORUM and the EU is now the exclusive preserve of the EPA which stands as a trade agreement separate and apart from the Cotonou Agreement.

The OACPS and EU are currently pursuing agreement on text for a post Cotonou agreement, with a view to concluding the negotiations after the summer break in Brussels, Belgium. It is anticipated that the new Partnership Agreement would include a Foundation Agreement, which broadly treats with All OACPS-EU issues and would be applicable to all Member States, and three Regional Protocols, specific to Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, which would govern the specificities of the political dialogue and development cooperation relationship between each Regional Group with the EU. The Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs will continue to engage in the ongoing negotiations.

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The Committee recommends that:

D. As part of the CARIFORUM-UK trade negotiations, the MTI should lobby for inclusion of non-energy exports that have been gaining market share in the UK that is distinct from the offerings of regional competitors, such as Trinidad and Tobago fine flavoured cocoa. Partnerships with major brand agencies to advertise and distribute products are also encouraged. The Committee acknowledged that some of the key issues relevant to the development of this country's cocoa industry was recently examined by the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

Trinidad and Tobago's trade relationship with the UK has largely been governed by the provisions of the CARIFORUM-EU EPA of 2008. With the exit of the UK from the EU on 31 January 2020 (Brexit), the UK ceased to be party to the CARIFORUM-EU Economic Partnership Agreement.

The UK is currently in an 11-month transitional period where it will adhere to most of the EU's rules but will have no representation within the bloc. Once this transitional period has ended, Trinidad and Tobago's trading relationship with the UK will be governed under the CARIFORUM - UK EPA, when ratified, which it signed on 1 April 2019. It is anticipated that the CARIFORUM-UK EPA Bill will be considered in the next Parliamentary session.