



Summary of the discussion held during the joint meeting of the European and Central American civil society Advisory Groups

Tegucigalpa, 16 June 2016

Representatives of the European and Central American Advisory Groups, set up under the Trade and Sustainable Development Title of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Central America, held their third joint meeting in Tegucigalpa (Honduras) on 16 June 2016.

In accordance with the practice of previous meetings, representatives of several representative civil society organizations participated in the meeting as observers.

The participants exchanged information and experiences regarding the composition and operation of their Groups.

Functioning and strengthening of the Advisory Groups

The work of the Advisory Groups is carried out in a spirit of cooperation as stated in the Trade and Sustainable Development Title of the Association Agreement.

In order to have the Advisory Groups, which are able to fulfill their function, the Advisory Group members request the Parties:

- to ensure a balanced composition of the Advisory Groups among representatives of the three pillars of sustainable development;
- to ensure their independence and - to the extent possible - to provide technical and financial means to fulfill their mandate, particularly their participation in joint meetings;
- to convene at least twice a year a meeting with their respective Advisory Groups to communicate progress in implementing the Association Agreement and to listen to their recommendations;
- to improve the articulation of the Parties in defining priority areas for cooperation and that these are communicated in advance to the Advisory Groups to receive their recommendations;

- to involve the Advisory Groups in defining the Terms of Reference, and in the process of evaluation of the Agreement scheduled for 2018.

For their part, for the purpose of a better functioning, the Advisory Groups undertake:

- to take the responsibility for fulfilment of their mandate;
- to define and to update annually joint priorities and a work plan, and to coordinate well in advance before the joint annual meetings in order to meet their objectives;
- Central American Advisory Groups undertake to ensure that the contact points fulfil their coordination role at national and regional level and in cooperation with the EU side; to establish a rotating Presidency composed of contact points of the current, previous and future regional Presidencies with a view to facilitating communication with the EU counterparts.

The summary of the workshop content

Below, follows a summary of matters addressed at the workshop held the day before:

- Progress in regional economic integration in Central America, including the adoption of regional technical and sanitary standards, and harmonization of labor and environmental laws could contribute to increased trade flows and investment between the EU and Central America, and within the region, to employment creation and opportunities for SMEs, such as greater participation in value chains.
- Closer regional cooperation would facilitate compliance by small producers and SMEs, with a growing number of sustainability requirements put in place by foreign buyers. Given the high cost of compliance and audits it would be useful to support initiatives that facilitate joint audits.
- Taking note of the activities already undertaken by the governments of Central America and the EU, it would be useful if a continuous and coordinated support is provided to small producers, including participants in the fair trade system, and SMEs and their networks so that they can take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the Association Agreement. This includes easier access to information, training, and technical and financial assistance, as well as support for participation in trade fairs.
- Women have a key contribution to economic growth and sustainable development in both the EU and Central America. However, they face challenges that limit their opportunities. Therefore, appropriate measures should be taken to eliminate inequalities between men and women as regards access to resources and financial services, employment and training, information, technology and the ability to establish and manage their own enterprises.

- One should stress the importance of value chains that take into account the three pillars of sustainable development, and support their establishment and development.
- An example of good practices in promoting decent work in the value chain was presented at the workshop. In this context, one can note both, the progress achieved on these matters and the remaining challenges, as well as a need to promote such good practices to ensure respect for labor standards.
- In accordance with the provisions of the Trade and Sustainable Development Title, there is a need to take steps to fulfill the commitments to effectively implement the ILO fundamental conventions and the Multilateral Environmental Agreements, in law and in practice.
- It is considered necessary to promote and adopt measures related to mitigation and adaptation to climate change, which promote trade and responsible management of natural resources.

The Advisory Groups declare their readiness to cooperate with the Parties on the aforementioned matters.