

DRAFT REPORT on regional integration and modernisation of customs for sustainable development in ACP Countries, in cooperation with the EU Co-rapporteurs: Piet Van Der Walt (Namibia) and Old ich Vlasák (ECR)

Dear Chairman/Chairwoman, distinguished colleagues,

I am representing my colleague Mr Old ich Vlasák, the EP co-Rapporteur for this joint draft report, who sends his apologies for not having the possibility to be with you today due to other commitments in his constituency, and whose speaking points I will now read out to you:

Honourable members, dear colleagues,

Let me start by thanking all of you for the opportunity that you have given me and my ACP co-Rapporteur to present you with our views on regional integration and modernisation of customs for sustainable development in ACP Countries, in cooperation with the EU.

This draft report is the first step in our joint work that will certainly be enriched as we proceed with the additional inputs of other members and finally a comprehensive motion for resolution that will be voted on in March 2014.

In my view, the key elements of the complex interaction between the modernisation of customs in ACP countries and the positive impact this may have on both regional integration and sustainable development therein are as follows:

Firstly, we have to take into account the vital role that customs play in collecting duties on trade in goods. This is a crucial source of revenue for the public budget, especially for a number of the ACP States that struggle with high levels of deficit and public debt. Customs administrations are in fact pivotal in enforcing trade measures, but also in the detection of crimes, particularly trafficking and tax crimes as well as bribery.

Secondly, we should not forget that the deepening of regional integration between the ACP countries as a result of their respective customs modernization, including the creation and maintaining of customs unions amongst them, necessitates good governance and transparency in customs matters as well as an efficient legislative framework to design and implement trade defence instruments. I therefore consider that ACP countries would greatly benefit from the strengthening of their customs authorities and their enforcement capacity.

Thirdly, as parliamentarians, we have to stress the importance of conducting the modernisation of customs, which also entails adopting or amending legislation that underpins these efforts, with the full involvement of respective parliaments and relevant domestic stakeholders.

Moreover, it is also through this democratic debate that each ACP country can define the scope and objectives of its customs modernisation process, in cooperation with the EU.

In my view, sound customs modernisation should therefore involve, amongst other:

- recruitment and training of customs experts;
- implementation of adequate technical infrastructure, including ICT connectivity, and;
- simplification and streamlining of customs procedures, especially for authorised economic operators (AEOs) proved compliant with the customs law.

I also consider it important to focus EU-ACP customs operation on the development of consumer-friendly customs processes to help fight against counterfeited and falsified goods, and thus contribute to improving consumers' choice and safety.

To achieve the this, cutting red tape and unnecessary administrative burden should be reduced, as well as the costs resulting from bureaucracy. This in turn creates a level playing field with other trading partners, which subsequently contributes to both regional integration and viable EU-ACP trade.

Finally, let me stress that as regards the future cooperation between the ACP countries and the EU, I would like to see a greater emphasis on budgetary support and technical assistance for the customs modernisation in ACP partner countries from the European Development Fund – well functioning customs are essential to ensure the sustainable development of legal trade flows and the regional integration of markets through intensified cross-border cooperation.

Thank you very much for your attention as well as your comments!
