

---

# OPINION & COMMENTARY

---



## EDITORIAL

# Opportunity for region in EPA alliance

ONCE THE full text has been published, we expect there to be substantial discussion about the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) reached between Caribbean countries and the European Union (EU) a week ago to take effect at the start of the New Year.

Hopefully, the discourse will be fact-based and rational, devoid of the emotionalism that usually attends an erosion of the region's preferential market access. Usually, there is a sort of despairing, hand-wringing and portents of doom and collapse.

There are those of that disposition who will argue that the Caribbean should not have signed this EPA and hold out for a better deal. Anything, of course, remains in the realm of possibility, but people have to be practical about what is achievable in the immediate circumstances. In this regard, the region acted in its best interest.

First, to prolong the negotiations and to leave the table without a deal would have meant that with the lapse of the trade portion of the Cotonou at year-end, there would be no formal trade arrangement between the EU and the Caribbean.

The upshot, as has been explained by Prime Minister Bruce Golding, is that exports from the Caribbean would fall under the General System of Preferences, adding billions of dollars to the cost of Jamaican goods entering the EU. Moreover, if the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) states had held out, in all likelihood, the

Dominican Republic, with which they form CARIFORUM, would have bolted and signed its own EPA with the EU.

But hold out for what? It is inevitable that the region has to offer some form of reciprocity in its trade arrangement with Europe, and, eventually, other countries with which it will negotiate deals. The fact, though, is that this EPA is not asymmetrical; this is not a one-to-one reciprocity.

Almost every product from this region – with the exception of sugar and rice – will enter Europe duty- and quota-free. This region, too, will have easier access to the European market for services, including culture and entertainment.

On the other hand, products which the Caribbean considers sensitive (20 per cent of the market) have been excluded from reciprocal competition by the Europeans. For the remaining 80 per cent, while tariffs will begin to go in three years, it will be seven years before "other duties and charges" have to be eliminated. Further, full liberalisation will not occur for 25 years.

The region, in the context of a negotiation, got most things it asked for, Europe, less than it hoped.

This EPA, therefore, ought not be viewed as a danger, but an opportunity, starting with access to a market of 450 million – access not only for raw material but goods and services. The issue is for the region, including Jamaica, to put itself in a position to take advantage of what is on offer.

---

The opinions on this page, except for the above, do not necessarily reflect the views of The Gleaner. To respond to a Gleaner editorial, email us: [editor@gleanerjm.com](mailto:editor@gleanerjm.com) or fax: 922-6223. Responses should be no longer than 400 words. Not all responses will be published.