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Cuba Admitted to ACP Group

by LADB Staff

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On Dec. 15, 2000, Cuba became a full member of the Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific (ACP) group, which receives trade and aid benefits from the European Union (EU) through a series of accords. Cuba refuses to accede to EU rules for receiving benefits and will not participate in the accords. The group's general secretariat announced the decision in Brussels during a meeting of ACP trade ministers. Cuba has had observer status in the ACP since 1998. On the verge of admission in April 2000, Cuba withdrew its application after the EU members supported a UN Human Rights Commission resolution condemning Cuba for its human rights record (see CubaSource, 2000-05-10).

In August, Cuba renewed its interest in membership. The ACP secretariat said it had waived the requirement that Cuba would have to sign the most recent ACP-EU agreement adopted at Cotonou, Benin Republic, last June.

Cuban Ambassador to the EU Rene Juan Mujica said Cuba was willing to accept the ACP-EU agreements provided the EU withdrew conditions set on human rights and democracy. He referred to the political conditions adopted by the EU in 1996 as "pretexts" for not providing an agreement based on cooperation. Cuba's position is that the EU has cooperation agreements with many other countries that have questionable human rights records. "Nor is the European Union perfect," said Mujica. Membership without inclusion in the agreement means that Cuba finds itself in a special ACP category, blocked from taking advantage of the trade privileges conferred by Cotonou but otherwise considered a member in good standing.

ACP secretary general Jean-Robert Goulongana supported Cuba's objections to EU requirements. He said that for other members the EU had set only economic and legal conditions. Goulongana said Cuba's inclusion in ACP was important since, without it, the representation of the Caribbean was incomplete. He stressed the value for ACP countries of Cuba's inclusion and put less stress on the EU half of the cooperation agreement. Increasingly, the ACP has moved to define itself as an organization seeking advancement for its members, most of which are poor countries, and moved away from the era when ACP was essentially a group of ex-colonies looking for trade favors from Europe.

Sources reported that the secretariat is planning to develop a common position on trade to present at the December 2001 ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO). ACP members want a greater voice in WTO decision making, especially as it affects developing nations.

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