

Final Report

*XLIII Regular Meeting of the Latin American Council
Caracas, Venezuela
28 to 30 November 2017
SP/CL/XLIII.O/IF-17 Rev.1*

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A. RAPPORTEUR'S REPORT

1. In compliance with the provisions set forth in Article 12 of the [Panama Convention](#), the [XLIII Regular Meeting of the Latin American Council](#) was held on 28, 29 and 30 November 2017 at the headquarters of SELA in Caracas.
2. Participants included delegations from the following Member States: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela; the Permanent Secretary, His Excellency Ambassador Javier Paulinich, and officials from the Permanent Secretariat.

ITEM I. ORGANIZATION OF WORKS

3. On 28 November, before opening the Preparatory Stage, the Chairman of the Latin American Council, His Excellency Ramón Enrique Leets Castillo, Ambassador of the Republic of Nicaragua in Venezuela, started the XLIII Regular Meeting of the Latin American Council with a proposal on the conformation of the new Bureau of the Latin American Council for the period 2017-2018, stemming from the informal meeting of the Heads of Delegation. According to said proposal, which was approved by the delegations, the Bureau was made up as follows: Claudio Rojas, Representative of Chile, as Chairman; His Excellency Paul Byam, Ambassador of Trinidad and Tobago in Venezuela, as First Vice-Chairman; Alexis Villacrés, Representative of Ecuador, as Second Vice-Chairman; and Marcial Páez, Representative of Paraguay, as Rapporteur. Thus, the Preparatory Stage was formally opened.
4. The Chairman, on behalf of his government, expressed gratitude for his election and expressed his readiness and enthusiasm to fully support the activities of the Latin American Council and those of the Permanent Secretariat of SELA. Then, he congratulated the new members of the Bureau on their election and thanked the outgoing Bureau for its valuable work during the period 2016-2017. Afterwards, he submitted for consideration by the delegations the [Draft Annotated Agenda and organization of works](#) (SP/CL/XLIII.O/DT N° 2-17), which includes the following items:
 - I. Organization of Works
 - II. Annual Report of the Permanent Secretariat
 - III. Work Programme for the year 2018
 - IV. Budget of the Permanent Secretariat for the year 2018 and administrative matters
 - V. Institutional matters
 - VI. Other Matters

Since there were no further remarks, the Chairman declared the agenda approved and passed the floor to the Permanent Secretary to proceed with the remaining topics.

ITEM II: ANNUAL REPORT OF THE PERMANENT SECRETARIAT

5. The Permanent Secretary congratulated the new members of the Bureau on their election.

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6. The Permanent Secretariat submitted the [*Forty-first Annual Report of Activities of the Permanent Secretariat*](#) (SP/CL/XLIII.O/DT N° 03-17) for the period from October 2016 to October 2017, which describes the activities carried out in compliance with the *Work Programme for the year 2017*.
7. The Chairman thanked the Permanent Secretariat for the presentation of the aforementioned report and invited the delegations to take the floor for remarks on the matter.
 - i) The delegation of Bolivia congratulated the Permanent Secretariat and Ambassador Javier Paulinich on the report, highlighting the work done. He recalled the proposal that his country had made concerning a *Study on challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the trade facilitation agreement of the World Trade Organization (WTO) among the Member States of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA)*, (Annex IV) which, he said, he hoped would be considered by participants in the meeting.
 - ii) The Chairman informed that Bolivia's proposal was included in the next item of the agenda, referred to the Work Programme for the year 2018.

Since there were no further remarks from the delegates, the Chairman declared the [*Forty-first Annual Report of Activities of the Permanent Secretariat*](#) approved and passed the floor to the Permanent Secretary to continue with the next item on the agenda.

ITEM III: WORK PROGRAMME OF THE PERMANENT SECRETARIAT FOR THE YEAR 2018

8. The Permanent Secretariat presented the *Draft Work Programme for the year 2018* (SP/CL/LXIII. O/DT N° 4-17), whose contents, in accordance with Decision N° 440 of the Latin American Council, are divided into three areas, namely: Intra-Regional Relations, Economic and Technical Cooperation and Extra-Regional Relations. It was noted that in drafting the Work Programme, an analysis was made of the objectives contained in the Work Programme for the year 2017, and the recommendations of the Member States as regards the various activities and meetings carried out during the year were also included.
9. The Chairman thanked the Permanent Secretariat for submitting the Draft Work Programme and invited the delegations to take the floor and make comments on the matter. Then, an exchange of views took place, in which the delegations focused on the following aspects:
 - i) The delegate of Panama asked which would be the strategy to associate the activities of Area I, Intra-Regional Relations, with those of Area II, Economic and Technical Cooperation, since he considered that they were not easy to link.
 - ii) The Permanent Secretariat responded to the delegation of Panama and referred to the difficulty of clearly separating the two areas. It was noted that the overlapping is apparent, because such areas are complementary to each other. It was concluded that it is necessary to address simultaneously both the physical and the technological aspects, because they are all necessary for trade facilitation.
 - iii) With respect to the MSMEs, the Permanent Secretary pointed out that various regional institutions support them in accordance with some specific factors; however, he added that it is necessary to follow a multidimensional and comprehensive approach that allows for their internationalization. He cited as an example the lack of a clear definition of what are

micro and small-sized companies in the region, coupled with a lack of linkage with global value chains. In this connection, SELA, in its Work Programme for 2018, envisages to strengthen such link, taking into account the relevance of MSMEs for job generation in the region. Finally, he underscored the importance of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) as a mechanism for trade facilitation and insertion into new markets.

- iv) The Permanent Secretariat informed that SELA, together with organizations such as ECLAC, aims to work on organizing a reflection meeting on value chains within the framework of the Agenda 2030. In addition, the Secretariat referred to the Regional Meeting on productive integration and strategic alliances, held at the headquarters of MERCOSUR in Montevideo, Uruguay, in which participants expressed the need for an organization to coordinate activities related to the inclusion of MSMEs into global value chains.
 - v) The delegate of Mexico noted that the Work Programme for the year 2018 complies with the guidelines of the Latin American Council. She stressed the importance of funding from other international organizations and noted the lack of budget items and a mechanism to evaluate the impact of results of the activities to be developed. In this connection, he added, it could be possible to measure whether SELA meets its objectives. Such is the case of the priority themes, including: internationalisation of MSMEs; integration; trade promotion and global value chains (GVCs). Thus, she said, the duplication of efforts would be avoided with respect to other regional organizations. She suggested the conduction of a meeting of the Informal Working Group (IWG) in the first half of 2018 to consider the incorporation of this information in the section on expected results of the Work Programme. Finally, she suggested that the Permanent Secretariat should make a proposal concerning the way of taking actions for everything related to the evaluation of the work of the organization.
 - vi) The Permanent Secretary appreciated Mexico's remarks and said that they were in the same spirit of what his delegation had said, in the sense that the Secretariat is also interested in conducting permanent evaluations and avoiding duplication of activities. He also agreed with the proposal for the IWG to meet during the first half of next year to evaluate the activities carried out by the Permanent Secretariat.
 - vii) The delegation of Jamaica expressed its satisfaction with the work carried out by the Permanent Secretariat, particularly in ensuring that the interests of MSMEs are given priority in different international fora. Finally, the delegation reiterated its endorsement and support to the Permanent Secretariat.
 - viii) The delegate of Bolivia reiterated that the proposal submitted by his country is important, because it points to strengthening foreign trade in the region and offers advantages to MSMEs. The project is focused on facilitating trade and identifying customs difficulties, noting that the World Trade Organization (WTO) makes emphasis on trade promotion and mitigation of obstacles in this area. Finally, he read the proposal.
10. The Chairman invited the delegations to take the floor for remarks on the proposal.
11. The delegate of Venezuela joined other delegations in expressing gratitude for the Work Programme for 2018. On the proposal made by the delegation of Bolivia, he stated that his Government could not adopt a position and requested a clarification on the meaning of the project, stressing that only some of the members of SELA signed the WTO Trade Facilitation

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Agreement (TFA). In this regard, he said that consideration of the proposal could be postponed for the Ministerial Stage.

12. The delegate of Bolivia insisted that his proposal, as well as trade facilitation, is a priority for the region. He stressed the importance of providing all facilities for foreign trade to contribute to the economic development of the region. As regards the request by the delegation of Venezuela, he said that he would forward the documentation related to the proposal.
13. The delegate of Chile also expressed his gratitude to the Permanent Secretariat for the Work Programme for 2018. As regards the proposal by Bolivia, he said that his Government does not have sufficient elements for its consideration, such as costs and impact of its implementation. He stressed the need for the project to be consulted with the capital cities.
14. The delegate of Venezuela was thankful for the explanation offered by the delegation of Bolivia. However, he wanted to know if the participation in the project would be limited to the member countries of SELA that signed the TFA.
15. The delegate of Cuba congratulated the Permanent Secretariat on the Work Programme for 2018. As regards the proposal by Bolivia, he expressed that it is relevant, because trade relations are critical to the integration of the region and would allow for strengthening important technical aspects. He added that it would be desirable for the Permanent Secretariat to determine the costs of this project to better discuss on this topic.
16. The delegate of Bolivia insisted that his proposal would not only benefit his country, but the whole region. He reiterated that it aims to unlock all difficulties to facilitate the flow of international trade.

The Chairman thanked the delegations for their remarks on the Work Programme of the Permanent Secretariat for the year 2018. In this connection, the Meeting adopted Decision N° 1, *Work Programme of the Permanent Secretariat for the year 2018*.

ITEM IV: BUDGET OF THE PERMANENT SECRETARIAT FOR THE YEAR 2018 AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

a. Budget

17. The Permanent Secretariat submitted for consideration by the delegations the *Draft Administrative Budget of the Permanent Secretariat for the year 2018* (SP/CL/XLIII.O/DT N° 5-17).
18. The delegations of Mexico and Panama stressed the importance for the Permanent Secretariat to forward documents in advance to make the corresponding revisions in a timely manner.
19. The Chairman said that deadlines were duly respected in accordance with the established procedure. Since there were no further remarks from the delegates, the Chairman declared the draft Budget approved. In this regard, the Council adopted Decision N° 2, *Administrative Budget of the Permanent Secretariat for the year 2018*.

b. Administrative Matters**Audit Report on the Financial Statements of the Permanent Secretariat at 31 December 2016**

20. The Permanent Secretariat submitted for consideration by the delegations the *Audit Report on the Financial Statements of the Permanent Secretariat at 31 December 2016* (SP/CL/XLIII.O/DT N° 6-17), which was approved. The Council adopted Decision N° 3, *Audit Report on the Financial Statements of the Permanent Secretariat at 31 December 2016*.

c. Audit Proposal for the year 2017

21. The Permanent Secretariat submitted for consideration by the delegations the *Audit Proposal for the year 2017* (SP/CL/XLIII.O/DT N° 7-17).
- i) The delegation of Chile asked about the reason for the absence of major international auditing firms in the proposal.
- ii) The Permanent Secretariat indicated that, according to the Panama Convention, the Member States are responsible for the nomination of auditing firms.
22. In accordance with the criterion of rotation among the Member States, the Chairman submitted for consideration by the Council the designation of the consulting firm Conas-Consultores Asociados, S.A., of Cuba, which was approved. The Council adopted Decision N° 4, *Appointment of Auditors for the accounting year 2017*.

ITEM V: INSTITUTIONAL MATTERS**Election of a Member of the Administrative Tribunal of SELA**

23. The Permanent Secretariat informed that the term for which Mr Roger Yépez, of Venezuela, was elected as a member of the Administrative Tribunal will expire on 31 December. In this connection, the delegation of Venezuela informed about the decision of its government proposing the re-election of Mr Yépez.
24. The Permanent Secretariat submitted for consideration by the delegations the document *Election of a Member of the Administrative Tribunal of SELA* (SP/CL/XLIII. O/DT N° 8-17). The Council adopted Decision N° 5, *Designation of a Member of the Administrative Tribunal of SELA*.

ITEM VI. OTHER MATTERS

25. The Permanent Secretariat presented the prototype of SELA's new Web site, which was welcomed by the delegates, who expressed their interest and asked questions related to the functioning and the potential features of the new version of the Web site.
26. The Chairman submitted for consideration the Draft Declaration "Ending the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba", presented by the delegation of Cuba, and passed the floor to the delegates for its consideration. Since there were no further comments, he declared it approved.

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27. The delegation of Mexico stated that Bolivia's proposal should be discussed by the Informal Working Group (IWG), and that, if necessary, consultations should be held with the capitals for its possible consideration in other meetings.

Forum: Keynote Lecture on the "Current situation and prospects of regional economic integration"

28. Luis Carranza, Chief Executive Officer of CAF-development bank of Latin America, was in charge of this Keynote Lecture. Among the trends that can be observed in the development process of the region, Mr. Carranza underscored the following: inequality and political instability, increase in urban population, growth in middle classes of countries, and changes in the centres of power. Among the recent developments experienced in the region, he highlighted the following: the recovery of the global economy as a result of the drive of recently emerging economies, the growing share of Asia in global activity, the increase in growth with low inflation rates, and the stabilization of raw material prices. With respect to the challenges faced by Latin America, in his opinion, and after making some considerations on the so-called lost decade of the 1980s, Mr. Carranza referred to what he called the return to growth, which, he explained, occurred thanks to the political reforms that positively impacted on the macroeconomic context and favoured a return to economic growth, "albeit modest". He stressed that the greatest challenge faced by the region is moving ahead towards a Pact for Productivity that ensures sustained long-term growth and allows for consolidating the progress already made in this regard.
29. Finally, he made the following comments: The region has made a lot of progress. It has overcome deep fiscal crises thanks to the political agreements that have been maintained over time. Progress has been made in the field of social development, but it is not sufficient. We must continue our efforts to reduce poverty and inequality and, at the same time, strengthen the middle class. To that end, we must renew economic growth by consolidating the political pact for productivity, multiplying efforts to reduce the infrastructure gap, generating productive clusters, developing regional value chains, and investing more efficiently in education.

MINISTERIAL STAGE

30. On 29 November 2017, at 5:00 in the afternoon, the Ministerial Stage of the XLIII Regular Meeting of the Latin American Council was opened. Participants in the Opening Ceremony included Ambassador Javier Paulinich, Permanent Secretary of SELA; His Excellency Pedro Felipe Ramírez, Ambassador of Chile to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; the Honourable Luis Alejandro Sauce, Commissioner for Economic and Commercial Issues of the Vice-Ministry for Latin America of the People's Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on behalf of the Honourable Alexander Yáñez, Vice-Minister for Latin America.
31. The Chairman requested the Rapporteur to submit the Rapporteur's Report on the Preparatory Stage for consideration by the delegations.
32. The Rapporteur submitted the aforementioned Report for consideration by the delegations. Since there were no further remarks from the delegates, the Report was approved.

33. The delegate of Bolivia, referring to the proposal made by his country, said that he had received from his capital additional information to argue the inclusion in the Work Programme of the proposal submitted by his country at the preparatory stage, as contained in the document issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of that country entitled Aide Memoire – Arguments to support the terms of reference for the study on challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the TFA of the WTO among the Member States of SELA (Annex V), which was distributed among the participants. In insisting that it be considered by the Council, he reiterated its importance not only for Bolivia but also for the region.
34. The Chairman recalled that Bolivia's proposal had already been submitted to the Council and that a suggestion was made to discuss it at the Informal Working Group (IWG) during the first half of 2018. In this regard, he submitted this suggestion for consideration by the delegations.
35. The delegations agreed that the IWG should consider Bolivia's proposal during the first half of 2018. However, they made a consultation concerning the cost of conducting the study and its possible impact on the administrative budget for the year 2018.
36. The Permanent Secretary noted that the inclusion of Bolivia's proposal in the Work Programme would not have an impact on the budget, due to the existence of the item Direct Expenses-Work Programme, which, in any case, could be used to that end.
37. The delegation of Bolivia requested time to hold a consultation with its capital as regards the possibility for its proposal to be considered by the IWG during the first half of 2018. As a result of the consultation, he said that his Government, with the purpose of facilitating the continuity of SELA's Meeting, agreed that the subject be examined by the IWG at the designated occasion and appreciated the interest of SELA and the rest of the delegations in the TFA proposed by the Plurinational State of Bolivia. It also requested the Permanent Secretariat to forward to the capitals the documents concerning the proposal, which were officially consigned by his country.
38. The Chairman declared the approval of Decisions N° 567, Work Programme of the Permanent Secretariat for the year 2018; Decision N° 568, Administrative Budget for the year 2018; Decision N° 569, Audit Report on the Financial Statements of the Permanent Secretariat at 31 December 2016; Decision N° 570, Appointment of Auditors for the fiscal year 2017; and Decision N° 571, Appointment of a Member of the Administrative Tribunal of SELA.
39. Next, he submitted for consideration by the delegations the Declaration "Ending the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States against Cuba", which was approved with the modifications suggested by the delegations of Cuba and Brazil.
40. Since there were no other matters to be considered, the Chairman adjourned the XLIII Regular Meeting of the Latin American Council.

B. DECISIONS

DECISION N° 567**WORK PROGRAMME OF THE PERMANENT SECRETARIAT FOR THE YEAR 2018****THE LATIN AMERICAN COUNCIL,****HAVING SEEN:**

Article 5, paragraph 2, of the Panama Convention;

Article 15, paragraph 6, of the Panama Convention, and

The document "Draft Work Programme for the year 2018" (SP/CL/XLIII.O/DT N° 4-17).

CONSIDERING:

The contents and spirit of Decision N° 440, adopted by the Latin American Council at its XXVIII Regular Meeting, held in Caracas in April 2003;

The work carried out by the Permanent Secretariat of SELA during this year, in compliance with Decision N° 559 of the Latin American Council, regarding the Work Programme for the year 2017;

DECIDES:

Article 1: To approve the Work Programme of the Permanent Secretariat of SELA for the year 2018, taking into account the debates carried out during the Council Meeting, as reflected in the Report.

Article 2: In carrying out the various activities foreseen in its Work Programme, the Permanent Secretariat of SELA will keep regular contact with the members of the Bureau of the Latin American Council and the other representatives of the Member States.

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FOREWORD

The Work Programme of the Permanent Secretariat for the year 2018 is based on the guidelines established by the XXVIII Regular Meeting of the Latin American Council, through Decision No. 440, according to which the activities of SELA are structured into three areas, namely: Intra-regional Relations, Economic and Technical Cooperation and Extra-regional Relations.

Under its new management, the Permanent Secretariat of SELA submits a renewed agenda whose main axis focuses on the most important and urgent needs of the region. It is centred on joining efforts with other organizations within and outside the region in order to promote financial Inclusion, access to information technology and contributing with tools, so that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) get inserted into global value chains and, in this way, to lead the region on the path towards sustained and sustainable growth.

In implementing the Work Programme for the year 2018, the Permanent Secretariat intends to undertake new initiatives to ensure the strengthening of cooperation, coordination and complementarity with other regional integration organizations and mechanisms.

This programme is designed in accordance with the Draft Administrative Budget of the Permanent Secretariat (SP/CL/XLII.O/DT N° 5-16), particularly in terms of the costs indicated there, without any increase in the annual contributions from the Member States. However, it does envisage complementary funding agreements for technical cooperation with international and regional institutions. A detailed account of the direct costs for each of the three areas and their projects can be seen in the Chapter entitled "Budget – Work Programme of SELA for the year 2017 – direct costs", of the aforementioned document.

For 2018, the Work Programme includes 15 studies and 19 meetings with a diverse nature and coverage, five of which are courses, seminars, and meetings corresponding to the SELA-SMEs programme. Nine activities related to the promotion of the integration process and economic growth will be conducted, as well as other four concerning the strengthening the economic and technical cooperation among Latin American and Caribbean countries.

This Work Programme also envisages diagnosis workshops to carry out technical collaboration activities with those port communities related to the project on digital and collaborative ports, under the technical cooperation agreement signed with CAF-development bank of Latin America. Seventy-three percent of the 15 studies will be conducted internally, and the rest will be assigned to external consultants on the basis of the terms of reference outlined by the Permanent Secretariat for each case.

INTRODUCTION

The Work Programme for the year 2018 of the Permanent Secretariat of SELA was structured on the basis of the three main thematic areas envisaged in the Panama Convention establishing SELA: Intra-Regional Relations, Economic and Technical Cooperation and Extra-Regional Relations, as a mandate of the Latin American Council which is based on Decision No. 440, "Restructuring SELA" (XXVIII Regular Meeting. Caracas, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 07 to 09 April 2003).

The new management of the Permanent Secretariat envisages that the various projects and activities of the Work Programme should take into account the most sensitive and urgent requirements in the region based on its growth and sustained development. Some of the 29

activities included in the programme have been requested by representatives of the Member States, others continue with efforts previously undertaken by the Permanent Secretariat, and a third group responds to pressing needs in the region, such as the renewal of efforts to promote inclusive value chains to facilitate productive transformation and export processing of companies in order to favour their insertion into the global economy and to promote sustainable growth in the region.

Within this context, the need to promote the inclusion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) of the region into global value chains stands out. For such purpose, the Permanent Secretariat has planned, for the next year, an activity referred to the productive integration of SMEs into global value chains. This represents a continuation of an effort started in 2017 which is intended to become a long-term project. Such project is expected to count on the financial support from CAF-development bank of Latin America, with which talks have already been started in this regard.

In addition, the Agenda 2030 envisages the conduction of a regional meeting on the financial inclusion of MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean, which will assess potential alternative sources of financing for SMEs from those already existing. Another activity of particular relevance linked to MSMEs concerns the *Public Policy Index for SMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean (IPPALC)*, an instrument that aims at optimizing the decision-making process, which promotes the performance of such companies, through the evaluation of thematic areas deeply linked to their operation. This activity represents a task that has been jointly developed with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Similarly, it is worth noting the *Seminar on evaluation of the impact of public policies in Latin America*, with an emphasis on MSMEs. For organizing this event SELA expects to count on the support of CAF and the Latin American Centre for Development Administration (CLAD).

Through the activities planned for the upcoming year, the Permanent Secretariat complies with its mandates and maintains its commitment to the development of the region through initiatives that contribute to the Member States in the decision-making process with a view to strengthening the integration process. In this connection, as part of the **Area of Intra-Regional Relations**, upon its own initiative, the Permanent Secretariat has scheduled a high-level meeting of reflection among the Secretariats of integration and cooperation organizations and mechanisms of Latin America and the Caribbean in order to identify areas of convergence and promote synergies that allow for the joint preparation of programmes and projects, while avoiding duplication of activities. For this meeting, the Permanent Secretariat already counts on the Executive Secretariat of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the General Secretariat of the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) and the General Secretariat of the Andean Community (CAN).

Also, with the purpose of evaluating the integration process, the Permanent Secretariat will carry out a seminar on *prospective vision of integration* under the co-sponsorship of ECLAC. There, presentations will be made on some tools prepared internally by the Permanent Secretariat for monitoring the integration processes in the region. In addition, it will give continuity to methodological upgrades and updates to the integration index for Latin America and the Caribbean and the early warning indicators for Central America, as tools in times of crisis. Similarly, the Secretariat will continue with the reports that help understand and describe the integration process in the region and will highlight relevant case studies.

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In the area of trade facilitation, the Secretariat plans to continue with the *Programme for the Creation of the Latin American and Caribbean Network on Digital and Collaborative Ports, Phase III: Transition towards the Conformation of the Network*, which has been funded by CAF through a non-refundable technical cooperation agreement signed in November 2013. This third phase, planned for the period August 2017 - August 2018, proposes the extension and consolidation of the Network, with the involvement of six new ports that have joined the programme and the creation of a transitional organizational structure that will take the initial steps to move towards the effective establishment of the Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports, as an entity with its specific legal personality.

The conduction of the X Regional Meeting on Foreign Trade Single Windows, which is aimed at promoting the analysis and exchange of experiences in this field, with a view to disseminating best practices that contribute to consolidate foreign trade in the countries of the region. Another objective is to consolidate Single Windows throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, as part of the strategies for trade facilitation and e-government.

In developing Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and the Knowledge Society, the focus of the Permanent Secretariat for 2018 is to facilitate access to information and the use of digital tools in the production processes. Thus, it is also envisaged to hold a seminar on electronic commerce as a tool for the insertion of small and medium-sized enterprises into international markets. For this purpose, the Secretariat expects to count on the support of the World Trade Organization (WTO); the promotion of the formation of value chains based on digital economy and intelligent technologies and the development of an interactive system for management of economic statistics and databases, which is accessible through the Web site of the organization.

In order to enhance the usefulness of the Secretariat's Web site for different users, the Work Programme for 2018 envisages to strengthen and update various specialized portals which, along with other digital resources online, make up the offer made by Secretariat to provide specialized information through its Web site.

In the **Area of Economic and Technical Cooperation**, for 2018, the Permanent Secretariat will continue with the efforts it has made in international cooperation, which have been warmly welcomed by the Member States of SELA. In this regard, the following events are planned:

(i) the XXVIII *Meeting of International Cooperation Directors for Latin America and the Caribbean*, whose central topic will be cooperation in connectivity in the commercial sector in LAC, on the basis of a greater insertion into value chains; (ii) the *VIII Annual Meeting of the Working Group on Trade and Competition of Latin America and the Caribbean*, which will be organized within the framework of the UNCTAD-SELA Joint Project; and (iii) the *Meeting on Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean*, in partnership with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UN/ISDR) and the National System of Emergencies (SINAE) of Paraguay. It should be noted that a forum which will discuss the current opportunities for international cooperation in the region is also planned, with a view to promoting them.

In the Area of **Extra-Regional Relations**, taking into account the need for the region to diversify its exports, the Permanent Secretariat foresees, within the framework of the IV International Seminar of LAC-China, organized by CAF-development bank of Latin America, an activity aimed at highlighting that country's importance as an area of opportunity for the SMEs of the region.

Finally, the Permanent Secretariat has proposed, through inter-agency cooperation, forging partnerships, and adding up talents and resources, so as to facilitate the efficient compliance with the Work Programme for 2018 in order to obtain concrete and beneficial results in the medium and long term for the Member States, as the new management of SELA intends to do.

BACKGROUND: WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE YEAR 2017

During 2017, the Permanent Secretariat of SELA complied with the activities foreseen in its Work Programme, as approved by the XLII Regular Meeting of the Latin American Council (Caracas, 12 December 2016), through Decision No. 559. Thus, various initiatives were executed, such as meetings, workshops, seminars, digital courses, studies, and specialized portals, among others.

According to Decision No. 440, adopted at the XXVIII Regular Meeting of the Latin American Council (Caracas, 07 to 09 April 2003), the activities contained in the Work Programme for 2017 are framed within three thematic areas: Intra-Regional Relations, Economic and Technical Cooperation and Extra-Regional Relations.

In the period being reported, and within the Area of **Intra-Regional Relations**, the Permanent Secretariat delved deeper into issues of far-reaching scope and broad interest for the Member States, and it undertook the conduction of different research projects, workshops, seminars and documents, which allow for assessing the integration processes from different perspectives, covering the economic,-structural, strategic-institutional and empirical-conceptual areas.

Among the activities associated with economic-structural aspects are the following: i) the analysis of the productive structures and economic growth in the region, which included a study on the composition of international trade and its effects on the evolution of the sectoral labour market. In addition a study is being conducted on the determinants of the changes in total productivity of factors in the countries of the region; and ii) the evaluation of the integration process in Latin America and the Caribbean.

As for the studies related to strategic-institutional aspects, emphasis was made on the following: i) the evaluation of the integration process in Latin America and the Caribbean as a result of which, it is expected to have a prospective vision of integration Latin America and the Caribbean. Similarly, an assessment was made of the determining factors of migration flows in the region and their impact on the labour market, ii) in terms of the dissemination activities, noteworthy are the follow-up reports on the Subregional Integration Mechanisms, the case studies, and the Annual Reports on the Regional Integration Process.

From the point of view of its empirical-conceptual contributions, SELA concludes the year with the following activities: i) Development of an Information Database for strengthening regional trade and productive integration; ii) Closely related to the previous activity, a renewed boost has been given to the Network of Strategic Alliances for trade promotion in Latin America and the Caribbean; iii) The Integration Index was updated and the new results were monitored; iv) The early warning indicators for Central America were prepared as a tool for times of crisis; and v) The statistical information system of SELA's Web site was strengthened, by including an interactive system for the management of databases and economic statistics.

The activities concerning Information and Communication Technologies and Knowledge Society include those activities that promote e-commerce as a tool for trade facilitation, such as the

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Programme for the Creation of the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports (Phase III: Transition towards the Conformation of the Network) and the Regional Latin American and Caribbean Meeting of Logistic Port Communities. Activities in the field of Management and Coordination of Specialized Portals include the management and maintenance of the following portals: the Community of Latin American and Caribbean (CELAC), the International Cooperation Directors for Latin America and the Caribbean: Promotion of South-South Cooperation, the Specialized Portal for the Alliance between the Public and Private Sectors for Disaster Risk Reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Specialized Portal of Export Processing Zones.

In complying with its task of supporting **Economic and Technical Cooperation** among the countries of the region, the Secretariat plans: i) to strengthen economic and technical cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean; ii) A seminar on approaches and methodologies for the formulation, evaluation and monitoring of public policies in Latin America and the Caribbean; iii) The meeting on "Public-Private Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction in America Latin and the Caribbean"; iv) The macroeconomic impact of natural disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean; v) The Meeting of International Cooperation Directors for Latin America and the Caribbean: Cooperation on Intellectual Property (IP); vi) The Seminar on Opportunities for International Cooperation for Latin America and the Caribbean: Towards further strengthening of regional cooperation; vii) the joint UNCTAD-SELA project on cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean in the areas of trade and competition; and viii) the Annual Meeting of the Working Group on Trade and Competition of Latin America and the Caribbean (WGTC).

Finally, it is worth noting the relevance that the SELA-SMEs Programme has acquired and its key activities. In this regard, the Index of Public Policies for SMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean (IPPALC) stands out, as well as the workshop on support to entrepreneurs for the protection of intellectual property rights: Protection of trademarks and patents in the framework of Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs), the digital course on entrepreneurship in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Regional Meeting on Innovative Financing and Guarantee Mechanisms for MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean, and the training workshop for MSMEs on business and operations continuation vis-à-vis disasters.

In the **Area of Extra-Regional Relations**, SELA intends to continue delving deeper in the monitoring and analysis of preferential trade agreements with extra-regional countries that might influence economic, trade relations and investment with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. This includes the analysis of economic, trade relations and cooperation of Latin America and the Caribbean with: the European Union, the United States, and the Republic of Korea; i.e. their relations with the region's economies.

Through the activities developed as part of the Work Programme for the year 2017, the Permanent Secretariat complies with its mandates and commitment to the development of the region, by contributing to strengthening the Latin American and Caribbean integration process, and by providing Member States with the tools to facilitate decision-making so as to favour the process.

AREA I. INTRA-REGIONAL RELATIONS

PROGRAMME: INTEGRATION PROCESS AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

PROJECT I.1. Assessment of the Latin American and Caribbean integration process

Activity I.1.1. Reflection Meeting of the Integration and Cooperation Secretariats of Latin America and the Caribbean

A. Background and justification

As of the second half of the 20th century, regional and subregional integration organizations start to shape up in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the purpose of setting up concerted positions among the Member States that comprise them to defend their interests, but also to develop coordination, consultation and development tasks for the benefit of Latin American integration and unity.

In the current circumstances, and in order to bring about substantive benefits to Latin American and Caribbean countries that contribute to overcome their challenges – mainly in the economic and social fields – it is advisable to promote concrete actions among integration and cooperation organizations and mechanisms in order to substantially increase their potential and strengthen regional cooperation and integration.

Thus, a high-level meeting of the Secretariats of Integration and Cooperation Organizations and Mechanisms of Latin America and the Caribbean would foster a process of dialogue, reflection and coordination among them, which would make it possible to gain knowledge from a broader perspective about the situation of integration in Latin America and the Caribbean, to formulate a joint, convergent and efficient strategy as regards the efforts made by each institution, as well as the articulation of agendas, programmes and prospects among the various organizations, while overcoming fragmentation, dispersion of efforts and duplication of work.

B. Objectives

1. Describe the current situation of the regional integration process
2. Gain knowledge about the programmes and work of the Secretariats of Integration and Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean
3. Identify areas for convergence, and promote synergies that allow for progressively overcoming duplication of activities, by jointly promoting specific programmes and projects

C. Expected results

High-level meeting of the Secretariats of integration and cooperation organizations and mechanisms in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the purpose of establishing an economic and social cooperation system among regional institutions.

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Activity I.1.2. Prospective vision of Latin American and Caribbean integration

A. Background and justification

With a view to evaluating the integration process in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Permanent Secretariat of SELA has promoted research to deepen the knowledge about the progress of subregional integration mechanisms in all the matters of interest, by evaluating its commercial, institutional, political, regulatory, immigration and labour dimensions, among others. Thus, during the implementation of the Work Programmes for the years 2014 and 2015, several research works were conducted, which furthered the knowledge about the current status of the integration processes, as well as the major challenges and opportunities faced by the region.

In 2016, three issues were developed, which are of particular relevance for understanding the integration process in the region, which also allowed for creating a quantitative and comparative assessment of the reality of the various integration schemes. The analysis of asymmetries not only provided a compilation of a series of definitions drawn from various analyses associated with the evaluation of the conditions of integration, but it also confirmed a conceptual lack, which, beyond making a description of the types of asymmetries, can provide a definition that serves as a referential framework and contributes to quantify the asymmetries in the analysis of regional integration.

In this line of thought, the Permanent Secretariat, in 2016, submitted a proposal on the basis of a statistical and economic foundation with which it is also possible to make progress with measuring convergence in the region.

When the variable in question approaches in the long-term to the most representative values of the group of countries, asymmetries are considered to be reducing, and vice versa. In the event that the dimensions in the study show a gradual, but significant, reduction, and manage to enter the symmetry zone in the long term, it is said that series enter into a process of convergence.

With the integration index, an indicator of periodic updating was created, with which it is possible to establish and describe the phases of integration that each of the subregional mechanisms is going through; in addition, the behaviour in the various stages of integration identified in the economic theory is quantified and monitored.

Issues such as asymmetries, the integration index and the evaluation of convergence have paved the way for the Permanent Secretariat to propose the design of a tool that allows for generating various referential scenarios for medium and long-term prospects of the various integration mechanisms under study.

Objectives

1. Develop scenarios of prospects for integration for the years 2016-2017, based on the concepts generated by the Permanent Secretariat.
2. Assess the trends of integration mechanisms in the long run.
3. Monitor and evaluate the possibilities for the region to head towards higher levels of convergence.

B. Expected results

A document that explores the prospects and that highlights a long-term vision of integration, of the various subregional integration mechanisms, and well as the conduction of a seminar that exposes the aforementioned tool and the various methods for measuring integration from the perspective of SELA.

Activity I.1.3. Integration Index of Latin America and the Caribbean. Updates and revision of the methodology

A. Background and justification

In 2016, the Secretariat began to develop an indicator whose main objective is to quantify the degree of integration among the various integration mechanisms of the region, namely: the Pacific Alliance (PP), the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Andean Community (CAN), and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

This study was accompanied by a Regional Meeting on the Integration Index for Latin America and the Caribbean, which was held in Guatemala in the headquarters of the Secretariat of Central American Economic Integration (SIECA). It is a composite index based on simple indicators that include various levels of disaggregation, so that they incorporate variables within the economic, social, political, environmental and cultural sectors, which are also associated to regional integration, for a sample covering the period 1990-2014. The development of this indicator provides a tool to monitor progress regional integration.

In 2017, the Secretariat began a process of methodological revision of the indicator, with the purpose of optimizing its calculation and its strength. The revision of the methodology is aimed at reducing the number of indicators used in each dimension of the index, implementing the technique of Analysis of Main Components, and constructing ponderations.

In 2018, the Secretariat intends to complete the methodological revision of the index, to finally upgrade the indicator with a view to using it in the explanation of the behaviour of each of the dimensions used in its calculation. It should be noted that the Integration Index for Latin America and the Caribbean comprises five dimensions: i) Economic: which includes the main indicators of the economic activity related to trade in goods and services, capital mobility, financial capacity, as well as convergence of per capita income and the inflation rate; ii) Social: it covers indicators representing the level of poverty, income, and the situation of the labour market; iii) Political: this dimension assesses the status of the institutions in each country; it also evaluates the treaties and agreements facilitating the mobility of production factors; iv) Cultural: it provides access to media through so as to facilitate the dissemination of culture; and v) Environmental: It collects data on the form of coordination among the States as regards their policies for environmental preservation of and sustainable growth.

The assessment and monitoring of each one of these dimensions will pave the way for the creation of public policies designed to guide policy-makers as regards the control variables that can be used and should be incorporated in order to improve the instruments that will take them to the achievement of the objectives.

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B. Objectives

1. Conduct a methodological revision of the Index, in order to limit the number of indicators used and improve their strength and significance.
2. Continue with the periodic updating, which allows for quantifying the behaviour of the subregional mechanisms at the different stages of integration identified in the economic theory.
3. Identify the dimensions that provide signals for optimum management of public policies oriented towards subregional integration.

C. Expected results

A document updating the Index, which provides possible instruments for an optimum management of integration public policies.

Activity I.1.4. Vulnerability Indicators. Forecasts and evaluation of results

A. Background and justification

The importance of the economic history of countries lies in the generation of fundamental bases that contribute to the prediction of its future evolution process, since this determines the capabilities for development and the elements that generate the scenarios for economic policy. As pointed out by Reinhart (2003), "the history of a country in meeting its debt obligations and the management of its macro-economy in the past is relevant to predict its ability to sustain moderate to high debt levels, both at the internal and external levels, for many years in the future".

Over the last few decades, emerging countries have suffered recurring economic crises; which have been characterized by reductions in their levels of production, lower dynamism in foreign trade flows, high rates of inflation and unemployment, and low level of consumption of goods and services. In this regard, the financial crisis of 2008, which was caused by the collapse of the housing bubble in the United States and had an impact on the global economy.

Within this context, SELA submitted in 2017 the Work Document entitled "Early Warning Indicators for Central America: A tool for times of crisis", which selected a set of variables that allowed for designing an indicator capable of timely identifying episodes of high speculative pressure that could lead to the occurrence of a crisis. Analysis was performed for Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Dominican Republic, separately, in order to establish a monitoring system in accordance with the limitations as regards information about statistics for each country.

For 2018, SELA proposes to update the indicators used for creating the External Vulnerability Index (EVI) and the estimation of the behaviour of this indicator, in order to maximize the time available for each of the countries to forecast the occurrence of a crisis or of episodes of high speculative pressure. While the methodology used in the study of 2017 was developed by Kaminsky et al. (1998) and incorporates the contributions made by Supriyadi (2014), the update of this study will include new methodological contributions that strengthen the results obtained.

It should be noted that the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are not ready yet to carry out a process of coordination of policies that allows them to anticipate external shocks and mitigate their effect on the economy. Therefore, the measurement efforts through vulnerability

indicators are essential. These models and the analytical trials derived from them allow for identifying the moment in which a crisis starts in order to take timely measures, so as to prevent it or minimize its impact. Such trials are known in the literature as early warning systems, in which statistical methods are applied to quantitatively predict the probability of occurrence of a crisis, based on a series of economic and financial variables that are deemed to provide early signals of internal vulnerability to changes in the international environment and the external perception of the country.

B. Objectives

1. Update the indicators used for making up the External Vulnerability Index (EVI) for Central America.
2. Estimate the future behaviour of the External Vulnerability Index (EVI) for Central American countries.
3. Produce aggregate indicators for Central American countries that allow them to identify a profile of potential challenges from external origin, for the effective advancement of the integration processes in which they are involved.

C. Expected results

The update of the study and the forecasts will be made for the Central American countries selected in the document published in 2017, namely: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Dominican Republic.

Activity I.1.5. Follow-up reports on subregional integration mechanisms

A. Background and justification

In 2016, the Secretariat began to prepare the Follow-up Reports on Integration Mechanisms. These reports offer readers synthesized information about the regional dynamics of Latin America and the Caribbean, making emphasis on the analysis of the macroeconomic environment and the variables of the external sector of the five subregional integration mechanisms, namely: the Pacific Alliance (PA), the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), the Central America Integration System (SICA), the Andean Community (CAN), and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Published every six months, these reports gather updated statistics of the regional situation, as well as a description of the main events of interest during the semester and the situation of the mechanism with respect to the region in terms of population size, life expectancy, size of the economy and per capita income. They analyse the main facts about the macroeconomic performance of each mechanism, by using variables such as economic growth, the composition of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) according to the approach, expenses (specifically consumption, investment, public spending, and exports), inflation and unemployment. They also summarize the performance of the external sector through the analysis of the behaviour of the trade balance, foreign direct investments (both in flows and balances), the external public debt as a percentage of GDP, and the net international reserves.

The data published in the report come from the official institutions of each country, and they are appropriately supplemented with information provided by qualified institutions in the survey of socio-economic data at the regional level, such as ECLAC and the IMF. In 2018, the Secretariat will

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continue with the periodic updates of these reports, in accordance with the accessibility and availability of official data from the countries.

B. Objectives

1. Prepare descriptive reports that analyse the situation of key economic variables, within the context of each subregional integration mechanism.
2. Build up a consistent database of such variables for economic follow-up.
3. Keep the Member States, and the public in general, updated as regards the economic situation of the countries of the region, through the electronic portal of SELA.

C. Expected results

Descriptive reports on the economic performance of subregional integration mechanisms that allow the reader to be regularly updated as regards the regional dynamics and its prospects. These reports will add value to the portfolio of SELA by allowing the Permanent Secretariat to expand its base of readers.

Activity I.1.6. Case studies for integration

The case studies for integration are short articles that contain a rigorous analysis, but are written in a less academic tone. The logic behind these reports is to present decision-makers of the region various intra and extra-regional initiatives, which show policy initiatives that allow for assessing the relevance of said experiences in America Latin and the Caribbean.

In 2017, these reports were designed as a product to complement SELA's document base. Their structure has allowed for dealing with a variety of topics in an easy-to-read format aimed at the public in general.

SELA intends to continue conducting these case studies with the same purpose as in years before.

A. Objectives

1. Identify new initiatives to evaluate the economic situation.
2. Encourage debate to generate proposals for high-impact, innovative initiatives, that contribute to promote integration in the region.
3. Keep the Member States and the public in general updated as regards the economic situation of the countries of the region, through SELA's Web site.

B. Expected results

Quarterly reports describing the initiatives to promote cooperation, coordination and articulation among nations and integration mechanisms, which serve as a reference and news updates, for the benefit of the regional integration process.

Activity I.1.7. Report on the Regional Integration Process**A. Background and justification**

Regional integration is a matter of paramount interest for Latin America and the Caribbean. Since 1960 to date, at least seven economic integration projects have been launched, mainly focused on deepening intra-regional trade relations. In addition, several supranational organizations have been created with the purpose of offering spaces for coordination and cooperation among the States that make up the region. Within this context, it is envisaged that regional integration will continue to play an important role on the agenda of public debates both in the region and in the world.

Despite the efforts that have been made by various regional organizations to understand the integration process in Latin America and the Caribbean, today's challenges underscore the need for a regular and rigorous analysis of the regional economic and social dynamics. In this connection, a frequent monitoring of the evolution of integration in Latin America and the Caribbean has the potential to serve as a guideline for the formulation and implementation of action strategies, both joint and individual, among the countries of the region, so as to gain a detailed knowledge of the trends and the context of intra-regional economic and social relations.

The *Report on the regional integration process in Latin America and the Caribbean* seeks to bridge this gap of knowledge by providing a detailed technical report of the annual changes in the regional situation as regards the topics of business inter-relations, movements of capital and labour, coordination of economic policies, development of common regional institutions, among other issues related to regional integration. Therefore, the Member States of SELA and the public in general count on a regular consultation document, carried out by following the leading methodological practices in this area and on the basis of updated statistical information and documents that are relevant for the countries of the region.

B. Objectives

1. Provide the Member States of SELA with useful and up-to-date information for decision-making in relation to the extra-regional and intra-regional economic and social relations in Latin America and the Caribbean.
2. Present the States members of SELA possible lines of action for progressing with the regional integration process and achieving an optimal development of the economies of the region.
3. Position SELA as a leading organization in the analysis, coordination and cooperation related to the integration of its Member States, in particular, and of Latin America and the Caribbean, in general.

C. Expected results

A technical report which will contain an analysis of the changes that have occurred in Latin America and the Caribbean over the last year in terms of business inter-relations, movements of capital and labour, coordination of economic policies, development of common regional institutions, among other topics related to regional integration.

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Activity I.1.8. Impact of infrastructure on the effectiveness of trade integration in Latin America and the Caribbean

A. Background and justification

The empirical evidence available since the mid-20th century evidences the contribution of regional integration Programmes to the increase of trade volumes among the economies of the world. It has been documented, for example, that the reduction of economic barriers among countries in Asia and Europe has allowed for expanding trade in those regions, which in turn has opened up spaces for technological progress, structural changes and the economic development of the countries that make up those regions. In the case of Europe, the gradual deepening of its integration project has achieved that at present the bulk of its trade volume is within the region, thus exploiting highly profitable idiosyncratic complementarities of the European economies.

While the economic integration mechanisms created in Latin America and the Caribbean have led to greater trade relations among the countries of the region, the evidence seems to indicate that the effects of such programmes on trade have been limited.¹ In this connection, some authors have pointed out as causative factors of such ineffectiveness to the existence of high transaction and transportation costs, caused primarily by an insufficient quantity and quality of infrastructure and outdated institutional development within the region. However, such assertions have been kept at the level of hypotheses and little has been done to formally investigate the implications of those elements on the effectiveness that they have on regional integration.

The study on the *Impact of infrastructure on the effectiveness of regional integration and on intra-regional trade in Latin America and the Caribbean* seeks to cover the existing knowledge gap on this matter by investigating the limitations that can be generated by the absence of an adequate development of infrastructure in the commercial dynamics of countries. This project intends to broaden existing knowledge about the economic impacts of infrastructure and to provide useful background information for the formulation of joint public policies in favour of a more effective integration process, which benefits Latin American and Caribbean citizens.

B. Objectives

1. Determine the influence of existing infrastructure (aggregate and by components) on the effectiveness of the economic integration efforts in the promotion of intra-regional trade in Latin America and the Caribbean.
2. Examine the Latin American and Caribbean experience in the areas of infrastructure, economic integration and intra-regional trade in light of the experiences in Asia and Europe.
3. Identify the sectors of infrastructure that most affect the relationship between regional integration and intra-regional trade in Latin America and the Caribbean.
4. Suggest lines of action in the area of investment, in order to optimize the positive effects of the regional integration projects on intra-regional trade in Latin America and the Caribbean.

¹ See, for instance, Josef C. Brada and José A. Méndez, "Economic Integration among Developed, Developing and Centrally Planned Economies: A Comparative Analysis", *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 67, Number 4 (1985): 579-556, doi: 10.2307/1924798; and Francisco E. Thoumi, "Bilateral trade flows and economic integration in Latin America and the Caribbean", *World Development* 17, Number 3 (1989): 421-429, doi: 10.1016/0305-750X (89)90214-3.

C. Expected results

A report which will contain a review of the empirical evidence concerning the impact of infrastructure on the effectiveness of economic integration projects and on the promotion of intra-regional trade in Latin America and the Caribbean.

PROJECT I.2. Analysis of productive structures and economic growth in the region**Activity I.2.1. Ecotourism and its role in the promotion of sustainable development****A. Background and justification**

One of the goals and objectives outlined in the Agenda 2030, which has been agreed upon by the heads of State and senior representatives of the nations of the world within the United Nations Organization (UN) is the promotion of productive transformation of the economies in the region towards sustainable and inclusive growth. This promotes poverty reduction, the support to the economy of subsistence concerning primary goods and the incorporation of small States to the use the most modern technological tools.

Within this context, tourism is one of the activities that are constantly being subject to evaluation, due to the impact that it can have on the environment. This activity, according to the World Tourism Organization (UN WTO, 2016), generates more than 8.7% of the employment in Latin America and represents 9.3% of global GDP.

In addition to encouraging greater promotion to tourist destinations as an important activity for these countries, a mechanism of preservation and conservation of the environment must be encouraged. Thus, ecotourism emerges as a new way of continuing with tourist activities as a source of resources, while raising awareness about the need and importance of preserving the environment for future generations.

The International Ecotourism Society defines this new form of tourism as a responsible way to enjoy natural areas, which seeks to preserve the environment and improve well-being of local residents through the prevention and mitigation of the environmental impact of tourist activities and the promotion of environment awareness and culture.

Ecotourism aims at a sustainable growth, in the sense that it is aligned with the Agenda 2030, particularly in terms of its objectives, including: i) ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; ii) take urgent measures to combat climate change; iii) preserve and use oceans, seas and marine resources in a sustainable manner; and iv) promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems.

There are successful experiences in the development of this type of activities. Such is the case of the initiative of the Spanish Ministry of Industry, Energy and Tourism, which, in 2012, decided to aim at the transformation of the tourism model based on the concepts of innovation, sustainability and accessibility, in order to preserve the tourist capacity of this nation. It should be noted that Spain is the second country in tourism expenditure and the third one in the number of tourists received annually at the global level.

Within the region, several countries have worked to promote this form of tourism and implement best practices in environmental conservation.

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With this initiative, the Permanent Secretariat of SELA aims to open up a space for the generation of debates and discussions on ecotourism and sustainable development, so as to allow for expanding links with other regions that are more advanced in this field, and share experiences and best practices. Thus, this is a contribution towards the achievement of the goals of the Agenda 2030 through the promotion of the tourist activity and the increase of well-being of the communities linked to this activity.

B. Objectives

1. Disseminate regional and extra regional experiences and initiatives on Smart Tourist Destinations and Ecotourism, highlighting the barriers that have been faced in the implementation of these activities from the institutional point of view, and the different ways to find a solution through public-private partnerships.
2. Identify the benefits of ecotourism as regards environmental, economic, cultural and social matters, according to the objectives of the Agenda 2030.
3. Generate a space of encounter for cooperation between public and private organizations with the purpose of promoting ecotourism initiatives and Smart Tourist Destinations in the region, by collecting and disseminating statistical data (*Open Data*) for the design and implementation of more appropriate public policies.

C. Expected results

1. Holding a Regional Meeting that convenes tourist focal points of the Member States of SELA, with the purpose of promoting ecotourism in Latin America and the Caribbean as an engine for sustainable growth.
2. Establishing working groups between public and private organizations, which addresses the recommendations stemming from that forum.

Activity I.2.2. Determinants of migration flows in the region and their impact on the labour market

A. Background and justification

Migratory processes are, perhaps, the latest and deepest manifestation of regional integration processes. They have an impact on a variety of aspects, such as urban planning, labour market, capital movements and citizen security. However, their importance goes beyond any of these elements, because above all, migratory processes, put to the test the capacity of adaptation of peoples and recognizing each other as equals, so as to build relations for co-existence and tolerance.

Although it is a variable of enormous significance there are not many studies that analyse its determinants and evaluate their impact on the region. This is mainly due to two reasons. Firstly, the lack of studies on migration is explained by the difficulties faced in finding reliable statistical databases on cross-border people flows. The information available tends to be inconsistent and, in general, incomplete.

Secondly, the studies on migration have emerged as complementary information to the integration processes, and the emphasis of the governments has rather been on the analysis of intra-regional trade. Paradoxically, the latter continues to be relatively small, whereupon the

economies of Latin America and the Caribbean have integrated deeper with extra-regional markets, rather than with each other.

The region's economies cannot escape the globalization and productive transformation processes, which open up new opportunities for the integration of labour markets. These trends are expressly reflected in the constituent documents of the integration mechanisms, and they provide for the harmonization of economic and social policies with the free movement of goods, services, and productive factors among countries within the mechanism.

Thus, concerning mobility of factors and migration aspects, subregional integration schemes have made proposals ranging from the Residence Agreement as a key step in the integration process – since it offers equal treatment in terms of labour law and working conditions – to the promotion of programmes for recognition of higher education diplomas in foster the free movement of labour force and the best use of human resources.

Beyond the legal issues associated with the treatment of persons in the different integration mechanisms, there is a series of economic incentives that have an impact on migration processes. This meeting intends to discuss some of the elements that determine migratory flows and to describe the way in which they have an impact on the labour market of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. It also seeks to review, compare and characterize the available information on migratory movements in the region, which will be useful for the entities responsible for decision-making around this reality facing our nations.

B. Objectives

This event is intended to highlight the importance of migratory movements, as a significant manifestation of the regional integration processes, taking into consideration that their impact affects a variety of aspects, such as urban planning, labour market, capital movements and citizen security.

C. Expected results

1. A document on the determining factors of migration flows in the region and their impact on the labour market, which gathers the proposed indicators, with a methodology that allows for expanding and maintaining the database required on the process of migration flows in the region.
2. A Regional Meeting that presents, on the one hand, the main results of the study analysing the factors and causes of migration in the region and its implications at the level of the labour markets; and on the other hand, it intends to analyse migration policies in the region based on the experiences of integration blocs. Various experts will make presentations on immigration policy in the subregional blocs. Such an analysis will allow for gaining knowledge about the common and divergent points of migration policies in the region. This topic will be preceded by a presentation on the prospects of migration in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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PROGRAMME: TRADE FACILITATION

PROJECT I.3. Regional Meetings on Foreign Trade Single Windows

Activity I.3.1. X Latin American and Caribbean Regional Meeting on Foreign Trade Single Windows

A. Background and justification

Foreign Trade Single Windows are strategic tools to facilitate trade and promote an increase in trade flows, with a greater potential as progress is achieved in terms of interoperability at the regional and/or subregional levels. The appropriate application of ICTs for the development of Single Windows serves as a basis so that business information flows efficiently accompany the international movement of goods and can contribute to greater gains in competitiveness throughout the international supply chain.

The agreement on trade facilitation of the WTO includes a specific provision concerning the adoption of Single Windows and encourages to make progress in terms of their interoperability, as an effective means for streamlining, simplification, efficiency and transparency in commercial transactions of exports, imports and transit.

Continuing with the effort launched in 2010 with the first Latin American and Caribbean Regional Meeting on Foreign Trade Single Windows, carried out jointly with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism of Colombia, the Permanent Secretariat of SELA has systematically promoted these annual regional meetings with the purpose of fostering concertation processes that contribute to digital inclusion within the framework of the regional integration processes, as well as a permanent and proactive debate on issues of significance related to Single Windows, regarding regulatory, technical, technological and governance matters.

The IX Latin American and Caribbean Regional Meeting on Foreign Trade Single Windows addressed three thematic blocs that dealt with issues relating to the management of information on Single Windows and their use for risk management; the progress in the implementation of the WTO agreement on Trade Facilitation; the latest recommendation of the UN-CEFACT concerning public-private partnerships for trade facilitation; some elements pertaining governance of Single Windows; the importance of transport for trade facilitation; and, as traditional, sharing the progress and challenges of Single Windows in the member countries of SELA that participated in the meeting.

As with the previous meetings, with the X Regional Meeting on Single Windows, the Permanent Secretariat seeks to promote the analysis of strategic elements and relevant experiences in this matter, with a view to disseminating best practices and recommendations that contribute to strengthen programmes for the optimization of processes that facilitate and promote foreign trade in those countries that have incorporated this tool and that also support the efforts aimed at consolidating Single Windows in Latin America and the Caribbean, as part of the trade facilitation and e-government strategies.

B. Objectives

1. Discuss emerging and innovative issues with relevant impact on the design and development of Foreign Trade Single Windows in Latin America and the Caribbean, as an essential tool for international trade facilitation.

2. Provide cutting-edge analytical elements that contribute to the progress and deepening of Foreign Trade Single Windows in Latin America and the Caribbean and their relationship with other links in the supply chain.
3. Continue with the efforts to provide information that contributes to link facilitation of transport to the discussions and developments that are generated as regards Single Windows and trade facilitation in general.
4. Disseminate the best practices generated by projects and/or programmes dedicated to designing and implementing Single Windows, highlighting methodologies, procedures and resources of proven effectiveness in the area of cross-border trade paperless trade, following criteria of efficiency, compatibility of standards and security.
5. Generate convergences around the development of Single Windows, aiming at the unification of the criteria required for implementing common processes and deploying systems capable of exchanging information, oriented towards the development of the organizational and technological interoperability and harmonization of data on the basis of international standards in foreign trade.

C. Expected results

Conduction of the X Latin American and Caribbean Regional Meeting on Foreign Trade Single Windows as a space to analyse critical and emerging issues related to their development, and dissemination of the most significant regional experiences on this subject. For this purpose, as on previous occasions, the meeting foresees the participation of representatives of the Member States in charge of the design and execution of Single Windows, related instances such as customs, ports and ministerial bodies associated with imports and exports of goods and services. The participation of representatives of international and multilateral institutions related to these processes is also planned.

PROJECT I.4. Programme for the creation of the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports: Towards strengthening logistic port communities, standards of services and technological innovation

Activity I.4.1. Programme for the creation of the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports – Phase III: Transition towards the conformation of the Network

A. Background and justification

Through Resolution P.E. No. 0047/2017, dated 9 June 2017, CAF-development bank of Latin America approved a non-reimbursable technical cooperation fund to the Permanent Secretariat of SELA in order to support the programme for the creation of the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports, Phase III, which aims to consolidate and expand the Regional Programme for the creation of the Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports, launched in 2014 and continued in 2015-2016, so that progress can be made in the achievement of the ultimate objective of effectively establishing the Network, and the recommendations can be replicated in order to facilitate and encourage collaborative innovation projects in countries, port communities and logistic corridors in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The implementation of Phase III of the programme started on 15 August 2017 and it is expected to last one year. This Phase III proposes the expansion and consolidation of the Network, with the

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involvement of six new ports in the programme and the formation of a transitional organizational structure that will take the initial steps that will enable progress towards the effective establishment of the Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports as an entity with legal personality.

This programme has undertaken the task of strengthening various aspects of logistic competitiveness, from the institutional and logistic port communities standpoints, regional public-private partnerships around logistic national plans, and from operational point of view, with best practices for synchronizing ship-port-terrestrial transport operations and collaborative information technologies such as Port Single Windows, logistic coordination and logistic modules in interoperation with the Foreign Trade Single Windows.

To the extent that more countries and its port communities conform real trade and transport facilitation networks with emphasis on the reference model for competitiveness of logistic port chain designed within the framework of this programme, they should begin to make progress in minimizing the structural flaws present in our region.

In addition, the Network proposes a series of support subsystems, such as the strengthening of the Methodological Support Groups consisting of centres for research and innovation that technically support every port community in each region and country. Also, the programme intends to move forward in providing a greater regional institutionality to the Network, in such a way that there is a strategic plan that allows them to promote and influence public policies as regards trade and transport facilitation, digitalization of ports and greater cooperation in each country.

B. Objectives

1. Implement a temporary organizational scheme that supports the management of the governance structure and the collaborative activities proposed in the institutional model for the transition towards the establishment of the Network of digital and collaborative ports, made in Phase II of the programme and adopted at the first Regional Meeting on port logistic communities. This structure will be co-managed in an *ad honorem* manner, by representatives of the nine (9) countries and 15 ports participating in Phases I and II, on the basis of the signing of the terms of cooperation agreed upon in the Memorandum of Understanding for Phase III of the transition of the programme.
2. Make progress in the early stages of conceptualization, mobilization of members and strategic planning in six (6) new port communities during 2017: Puerto de Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico, Kingston in Jamaica, Lisas in Trinidad and Tobago, Barranquilla in Colombia, Buenos Aires in Argentina, and Santa Catarina in Brazil. A strategic diagnosis workshop on the logistic port community will be held in each port.
3. Continue with the training and capacity building activities in the workshops on "Management of the logistic port chain" in the ports incorporated in Phase II of the programme, and support specific programmes in governance, cohesion, connection and benchmark in the ports included in Phase I of the programme.
4. Structure some terms of reference (ToR) to address the analysis of competitive and institutional aspects, operations and information technologies enabling for a pilot port logistic corridor in the region.
5. Organize regional meetings of logistic port communities, in 2017 and 2018, in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia (2017), and Lima, Peru (2018), with the support of international and local partners.

C. Expected results

1. Conduct technical visits for making strategic diagnoses, strategic planning exercises and execution of workshops on management of logistic port chains, as appropriate, in the port systems linked to the various phases of the programme.
2. Design the Quantitative Model of indicators of productivity in the logistic port chain.
3. Apply and report the measurement of the Index of Competitiveness and Management of the logistic port chain, Version 2.
3. Conduct the Regional Meeting on Logistic Port Chains.
4. Prepare and submit the Final Report on Phase III at SELA.

Activity I.4.2 III Latin American and Caribbean Regional Meeting of Logistic Port Communities

A. Background and justification

Pursuant to the Work Programme of the Permanent Secretariat for 2017, the II Regional Meeting of logistic port communities was held in Cartagena, Colombia, from 26 to 29 July 2017. On that occasion, the central objective of the event was to consolidate the temporary working structure that serves as a basis for the effective creation of the Network of digital and collaborative ports, based on a new regional partnership around them, whose mission is to respond to the new challenges of port governance, technological modernization and trade facilitation, promoting the regional port ecosystem towards higher levels of technological interoperability, logistic integration, adaptation to the markets, as well as social and environmental sustainability.

Specifically, its objectives were: i) Strengthen links, networking and collaboration among institutions, professionals and academics linked to the logistic port chain; ii) Develop a high-level debate among representatives of international technical cooperation (CAF-development bank of Latin America, SELA and ECLAC), port communities, government, unions, academia and suppliers to the industry on topics that strengthen the ecosystem of digital and collaborative ports in the region; iii) Inform about the working plan of the Technical Cooperation Programme Phase-III with long-standing and new ports; iv) Socialize the organisational structure of the Network in its transition stage and its working plans for 2017-2018; and v) Create an initial strategic guideline for the Network in its formalization stage and make progress with a survey on adoption of technologies in the logistic port chain.

The Transitional Directive Committee, established in March 2017 and chaired by the national port authority of Peru, presented the working plan for each one of the committees and of the Expert Group, highlighting among their fundamental objectives the formalization of the Network as a regional non-profit association.

The II Meeting recommended to continue with these annual seminars and the delegation of Peru proposed to conduct the third Latin American and Caribbean meeting on logistic port communities in Lima, which was unanimously approved.

B. Objectives

1. Maintain levels of recognition, legitimacy and cohesion of port systems linked to the programme.
2. Promote collaborative work among those linked to the programme.

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3. Inform the members of the Network about the technical and methodological tools developed within the framework of the programme.
4. Promote the best practices identified for the logistic port community
5. Disseminate specific information and knowledge.
6. Foster debates in port communities, so that they include medium and long-term strategic definitions and lead to the creation of multidisciplinary teams according to priorities of competitiveness and sustainability.
7. Submit the results of the collaborative work carried out by the three technical committees and the Transitional Directive Committee.
8. Submit the proposal for the formal constitution of the Network of digital and collaborative ports.

C. Expected results

Conduction of the III Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on Logistic Port Communities, as part of the strategies for cohesion and dissemination of the work carried out during the implementation of Phase III of the programme, whose ultimate goal is to achieve the effective conformation of the Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports. The III Meeting foresees the participation of the representatives of the port systems linked to the programme, as well as officials from ministerial bodies related to this subject and other organizations interested in contributing to the collaborative work executed within this context.

PROGRAMME: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGIES AND KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

PROJECT I.5. Promotion of Innovation and technological development

Activity I.5.1. Electronic commerce and its development in Latin America and the Caribbean. Status and prospects

A. Background and justification

Since the end of the 20th century, electronic commerce has acquired an increasingly relevant role on the world economic stage. According to data collected by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), in the United States, between 2002 and 2012, the participation of business income from e-commerce doubled from 15% to 30% of the total income of companies in that country. In turn, companies in Asia, such as Alibaba Group (China) or Rakuten (Japan), have assumed the leadership in the provision of electronic commerce services in the region, which has enabled them to achieve milestones such as providing the greatest volume of goods in the world (in terms of their market value) and offer electronic mechanisms for placement of Asian goods in markets of other regions of the world.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, e-commerce also has gained spaces in regional economic relations, although unevenly and on a smaller scale in comparison with other countries of the world. In this connection, it has been reported that Brazil, Mexico and Argentina accumulate nearly 65% of e-commerce between businesses and final consumers in the region. Also, it has been reported that Argentina, Chile and Uruguay accumulate the largest proportions of online shoppers, reaching values close to 70% of Internet users in those countries.

Despite the challenges existing in the field of digital media in Latin America and the Caribbean, electronic commerce has the potential to become a very useful tool for the empowerment of the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises of Latin America and the Caribbean in international markets. The use of online trading mechanisms is accompanied by a significant reduction of the transaction costs incurred by both firms and consumers, in view of the presence of economies of scale derived from the flexibility in the flows of information without additional costs. Therefore, Internet trade offers a path outward to companies with scales of production so small that they could not take up the typical costs of export through traditional mechanisms.

As part of SELA's activities regarding the digital economy and the use of information and communications technologies for trade, the meeting *E-Commerce in Latin America and the Caribbean: Opportunities and Challenges for the internationalization of SMEs* seeks to take a first step in addressing the concerns of small and medium-sized enterprises with export potential in the region. Through this meeting, both business leaders as public policy makers will get a picture of the usefulness of electronic commerce as a tool for internationalization, and will envisage concrete solutions in this area, in accordance with the needs faced by small and medium-scale enterprises in the region.

B. Objectives

1. Identify the specific opportunities and challenges that must be addressed by the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean for the use of electronic commerce as a tool for the insertion of small and medium-sized enterprises into international markets.
2. Define a concrete framework of public policies for the use of electronic commerce in the insertion of small and medium-sized enterprises of the region into international markets.

C. Expected results

A document outlining the development of the participations in the meeting which gathers the results of the discussions about the use of e-commerce as a mechanism for the internationalization of small and medium-sized enterprises in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Activity I.5.2. Intra-regional value chains based on digital economy and smart technologies

A. Background and justification

The need to generate sustainable growth and decent employment through trade remains an important political goal for many developing countries. According to the International Trade Centre, 80% of world trade takes place within the value chains, and around 60% of this trade is of intermediate goods. Integration into value chains allows SMEs in developing countries to benefit from participation in world trade. Globalization, coupled with the rapid advance of new technologies and their disruptive business models, poses a series of challenges and opportunities for the internationalization of SMEs on a large scale, since the agreements of Bali in 2014 will allow for rules of the game aimed at trade and transport facilitation.

According to a United Nations and ECLAC document entitled "Digital Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean (e-LAC 2018)", derived from the V Ministerial Conference on the Information Society, in 2015, to the extent that ICTs, and particularly Internet, permeate all the economic and social fields, their relevance in terms of innovation, growth and development takes on a new

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dimension. After more than one decade of ICT policies, Latin America and the Caribbean shows progress in the establishment of legal frameworks, the levels of coverage of telecommunication services (mobile telephony and the Internet, mainly), the implementation of programmes in social areas (especially education and health) and the development of e-government. However, the countries of the region continue to advance at different speeds, with gaps within and between them, as well as differences vis-à-vis more developed economies.

The pillar of the digital economy on the Agenda promotes the development of the ICT industry, and proposes to increase growth based on innovation and productivity, enhance e-commerce, and strengthen the regional digital entrepreneurship ecosystem. Countries have begun to adopt the guidelines of the Regional Digital Agenda, where one of the bets is achieving efficient integration between the ICT industry and traditional and exporting companies, and each country bases its capacity for trade integration at the regional and global levels. It is the case, for example, of the "smart industries" programme, which is being developed by the government agency CORFO in Chile, and aims at creating an ecosystem of integration between ICT suppliers and the research and innovation centres, in strategic alliance with traditional exporting sectors, such as mining, salmon farming and agribusiness industries. Such integration is based on improving governance skills among public, private and innovation stakeholders, as well as strengthening marketing, promotion and improvement processes.

In Latin America and the Caribbean there is a significant lag with respect to the adoption of technologies in companies. According to the results of the Digitization Index (DIGIX), which is measured by the Research Team of the BBVA Bank (Cámara and Tuesta, 2017), there is a poor performance in the region.

The DIGIX evaluates factors and behaviours of the agents and institutions that allow a country to take advantage of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to increase their competitiveness and welfare. The DIGIX is structured around six main dimensions: (1) Infrastructure, (2) Adoption in households, (3) Adoption in enterprises, (4) Costs, (5) Regulations and (6) Contents. Each dimension is, in turn, divided into a number of individual indicators, for a total of 21 indicators.

A smart value chain is defined as an international supply chain involving suppliers, producers, logistic services networks, distributors and final consumers, who have achieved a degree of exchange of information based on digital enablers that allow them to reduce their response times to markets, take advantage of shared resources, minimize the carbon footprint from their operations, and continually improve their products in two-way collaboration with the final customer.

In its mission to support trade and investment, SELA aims at facilitating the internationalization of SMEs in intra-regional value chains and their integration into the ecosystem of the digital economy and smart technologies. For this purpose, it is necessary to undertake technical cooperation activities focused on disseminating global best practices in matters of regional integration of value chains, promote sectoral and transnational governances that integrate the ICT industry, innovation and entrepreneurship to the current and future needs of the internationalized SMEs and strengthen public policies for the promotion of such collaboration actions.

B. Objectives

1. Identify the best international practices for governance of “enterprises-digital platforms-government-innovation”
2. Characterize the main challenges, gaps and opportunities for a pilot group of intra-regional value chains, to then accompany them in their evolution into intelligent development ecosystems.
3. Promote collaborative work among providers of digital platforms (ICT companies, innovation centres and entrepreneurs), the internationalized SMEs, and decision-makers in governments and development institutions.
4. Develop a series of new instruments or reference models to promote region-wide smart value chains, increasing trade among our nations and raising the standards of employment and sustainability.

C. Expected results

Conduction of a Seminar and a document covering the intra-regional possibilities for international technical cooperation for strengthening a new ecosystem of collaboration between those SMEs participating in value chains, new service platforms based on the digital economy and public policies that generate the regulatory framework for promoting these new forms of collaboration.

PROJECT I.6. Strengthening the statistical information system on SELA’s Web site**Activity I.6.1. Development of an interactive system for the management of databases and economic statistics on SELA’s Web site****A. Background and justification**

The design and publication of statistical indicators for the analysis of the various economic and social phenomena that occur in the world has gained importance in the academic and public policy spaces in recent years. Thanks to the development of information technology, processing and storage of large volumes of information are carried out at an increasingly lower cost in terms of space, time and money. In addition, the evolution of the internet has fostered the dissemination of information at very high speeds, along with the creation and implementation of new strategies for data distribution, based on the pillars of openness and transparency of information.

Following the current global context, international organizations have taken on the challenge of creating the various statistical indicators and use tools for a more efficient dissemination of data, with the purpose of providing a necessary overview of our environment and contribute to create solutions to contemporary challenges based on information.

An example can be found in the experience of the World Bank, which has been expanding its range of statistical indicators on poverty, inequality and economic and social development in general, in addition to offering search tools and online access to its databases. In turn, the Inter-American Development Bank has made available a series of easy-access, online specialized databases, which share indicators covering extensive areas, such as public policies for the development of skills or social security systems in Latin America. Other organizations are also conducting similar actions, which points towards the consolidation of large networks of information driven by national and international public institutions in the next few years.

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In this connection, the *Interactive Portal of Statistical Indicators* of SELA seeks to strengthen the dissemination of information relating to the social and economic integration in Latin America and the Caribbean, by providing an interactive space that provides access to the various statistical products offered by the organization. By using this tool, the Member States and other users can timely access statistical information on the regional integration process and other economic and social interrelationships among the countries of the region.

B. Objectives

General objective

Offer the statistical indicators prepared by SELA through a simple, interactive platform.

Specific objectives

1. Provide an interactive and dynamic environment for visualization of statistical information produced by SELA.
2. Provide a tool to access and download the indicators estimated within the organization, together with their relevant statistical information base.
3. Facilitate the work to disseminate the resulting quantitative information of the activities conducted at SELA.

C. Expected results

A web site consisting of an interactive visualization environment and an advanced search tool, as well as download of quantitative indicators which will work on a detailed statistical information database compiled or estimated at SELA, which will be hosted on the Network.

PROJECT I.7. Management and coordination of specialized portals

Activity I.7.1. Management and maintenance of the specialized portal on the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)

A. Background and justification

The Latin American Council of SELA, at its XXXVII Regular Meeting, held in Caracas, Venezuela, from 19 to 21 October 2012, through Decision 527 "Support of the Permanent Secretariat of SELA and its Work Programme to the establishment of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)", instructed the Permanent Secretary of SELA to attach priority, in implementing its Work Programme, to the activities of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)"

As part of its efforts to comply with the aforementioned decision and, in order to help promote CELAC's initiatives based on fostering the processes of regional integration, the Permanent Secretariat created in its portal a site or subportal that reflects all the documents containing the intellectual production of CELAC, published by its Pro Tempore Secretariat. Also, the site includes a selection of information from regional and international media referred to the community.

B. Objectives

Continue with the process of dissemination of the regular activities and, in particular, the documents produced by the *Pro Tempore Presidency* and other instances of CELAC.

C. Expected results

Timely and effective access to updated documents produced by CELAC so that planners, scholars and, in general, those persons interested in the integration processes of Latin America and the Caribbean, know CELAC's vision of those processes, its initiatives and its contributions to its success.

Activity I.7.2. Management and maintenance of the specialized portal on International Cooperation Directors for Latin America and the Caribbean: Promotion of South-South Cooperation**A. Background and justification**

The creation of this portal, in 2012, was based on Decision No. 56 of the Latin American Council (IX Regular Meeting, Caracas, Venezuela, from 21 to 21 September 1983) through which the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA) was designated as "Regional Focal Point for the exchange of information on Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries".

Since its activation, this portal has been the channel through which the Permanent Secretariat has collected, systematized and disseminated selected information on international cooperation of interest for Latin America and the Caribbean, with special emphasis on South-South and Triangular Cooperation, surveying the documents, initiatives and most significant events associated with the progress of such modalities of international cooperation, as well as the value that they have gained for regional development.

B. Objectives

In 2018, one of the objectives of the Permanent Secretariat of SELA in the field of international cooperation is to maintain this portal as an observatory that registers events and situations associated with international cooperation, with special reference to South-South Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, and offers relevant, up-to-date and reliable information addressed, especially, to the International Cooperation Directors of the region and, in general, to stakeholders in such an important aspect to promote the development of the Member States of SELA and the region as a whole.

C. Expected results

A tool of relevant information, up-to-date and easy to use, in the field of international cooperation, with emphasis on South-South Cooperation, for the benefit of organizations, specialists, planners and decision makers, especially the International Cooperation Directors of Latin America and the Caribbean.

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Activity I.7.3. Management and maintenance of the specialized portal on Public-Private Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean

A. Background and justification

In Latin America and the Caribbean, there is a strong interest in fostering initiatives that promote and strengthen Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in various areas of regional development. At present, both sectors are involved in shared projects both in the phase of construction and financing and in the operational phase. In this way, these projects turn out to be more attractive to the private component because risks are also taken by the governments.

With respect to the area of disaster reduction, there is recognition of the need to exploit the potential of the private sector to support and complement government actions in planning activities for disaster risk reduction, as well as in the response and humanitarian assistance vis-à-vis disasters at the national and regional levels. It has also been acknowledged that the expertise and resources of the private sector can help to reduce disaster risk, strengthen community resilience and contribute to adaptation to climate change, especially in collaboration with the communities and the local and national governments. Hence, participants in the "V Regional Meeting on Partnerships between the Public and Private Sectors for Disaster Risk Reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean" (Santiago, Chile, 28 and 29 November 2016), organized by SELA, recommended to improve the message as regards public-private partnerships and DRR to the private sector, so that it can perceive clearly the incentives, encouragement and the benefits that can be obtained by participating in such alliances.

The issue of public-private partnerships is already critical for regional organizations such as the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UN/ISDR), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and SELA.

In 2018, the Permanent Secretariat of SELA intends to continue to promote partnerships for disaster risk reduction, underscoring the need to continue strengthening the relationship of complementation and joint action between the two sectors, in order to enhance the capacity of response and prevention in society and its institutions amid disaster situations.

B. Objectives

1. Collect, select, organize, systematize and disseminate information, initiatives, best practices and proposals about public-private partnerships to reduce disaster risk in Latin America and the Caribbean, with special emphasis on the information generated by entities specialized in the subject such as CAPRADE, CDEMA, CEPREDENAC, REHU, CELAC, UN/ISDR and OCHA, as well as the information stemming from instances such as the "Forum of Coordination and Cooperation of Subregional Mechanisms in charge of Disaster Risk Management of the Americas", the "Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction" and the "Regional Meetings on International Humanitarian Assistance Mechanisms (MIAH)".
2. Promote enterprises and guilds of the Latin American and Caribbean private sector interested in contributing to reducing disasters in the region, highlighting the actions of the "Volunteer Commitment of the Private Sector of Latin America and the Caribbean towards Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Building"

C. Expected results

1. Maintenance, update and enrichment of the portal on Public-Private Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean.
2. Effective dissemination of the actions undertaken by CAPRADE, CDEMA, CEPREDENAC, REHU and the UN/ISDR, as well as OCHA, and the "Volunteer Commitment of the Private Sector of Latin America and the Caribbean towards Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Building" in complying with their mandates.

Activity I.7.4. Management and maintenance of the specialized portal on Free Trade Zones in Latin America and the Caribbean**A. Background and justification**

Free trade zones, as a mechanism for economic modernization, have a direct impact on economic growth and income levels of the "host country". Therefore, they represent a valuable element for boosting competitiveness, economic growth, job creation and technology transfer. In addition, the development of the activity in free trade zones is directly related to the dynamism of flows of foreign direct investment (FDI), the promotion of foreign trade, the promotion of economies of scale, capital investment and the development of the productive, industrial and services system of the country.

Experts attending the First Conference of Government Authorities in charge of Free Trade Zones in Latin America and the Caribbean (Cali, Colombia, 20 and 21 September 2012), organized by the Permanent Secretariat, emphasized that free trade zones have become a significant instrument for the productive and industrial development of Latin American and Caribbean countries, especially for their potential to transform economically and socially depressed areas and towns into real development poles through the promotion of competitiveness, the formation of productive linkages and the development of technology-intensive activities producing goods and services, as well as logistics.

In addition, participants in the aforementioned event recommended that the Permanent Secretariat should create "a bank of knowledge and exchange of information on existing commercial and industrial free zones in Latin America and the Caribbean". In response to this approach, the Permanent Secretariat launched and maintains the specialized portal of Free Trade Zones in Latin America and the Caribbean.

B. Objectives

Continue gathering and disseminating relevant and up-to-date information on free trade zones in Latin America and the Caribbean.

C. Expected results

An updated tool that contains relevant and useful information for stakeholders involved in the development of free trade zones in the region.

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Activity I.7.5. Management and maintenance of the specialized portal on SELA-SMEs

A. Background and justification

The Permanent Secretariat of SELA, through its Latin American and Caribbean Regional Programme for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SELA-SMEs Programme), promotes the development of the public and private business structure of the Member States of the organization through the strengthening of the institutional capacities of governmental and business focal points, as well as other bodies concerned to promote and implement programmes to support micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Latin America and the Caribbean.

To that end, the Permanent Secretariat aims to develop projects that encourage the creation of new production units, the expansion of existing ones, partnerships, the technological transformation and the productive articulation of MSMEs, among other objectives. In addition, it encourages the preparation of documents on the subject by means of seminars, meetings, workshops, and in particular the specialized portal on SELA-SMEs, a tool created in 2015 to provide both public and private stakeholders in the area with relevant and up-to-date information, including documents of particular relevance and interest generated by third parties.

This tool also provides the user with links to regional and international institutions related to the issue of MSMEs, as well as a directory of business and governmental focal points of the Member States of SELA. It should be noted that this portal includes a search engine to access existing legal instruments in the Member States of SELA, which contain the national regulatory frameworks for MSMEs.

B. Objectives

1. Gather, select, systematize and disseminate up-to-date information on MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean, focusing on the relevant areas envisaged in the SELA-SMEs Programme, such as innovation; entrepreneurship, partnerships, internationalization, and access to financing, as well as on the directories of focal points and legal instruments related to MSMEs;
2. Contribute to the dissemination of best practices and lessons learned from the development of MSMEs in the region; and
3. Continue strengthening the network of contacts with both public and private entities related to the development of MSMEs in the region.

C. Expected results

Updated portal aimed at becoming a first-hand reference in terms of useful information to the different stakeholders linked to MSMEs in the region.

Activity I.7.6. Management and maintenance of the specialized portal on the Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports

A. Background and justification

In order to increase visibility and disseminate, transfer and share knowledge and information generated within the framework of the Programme for the creation of the Network of

Digital and Collaborative Ports, the portal on the Network was designed during Phase II of this Programme and is expected to become a key element that provides digital support at the stage of institutionalization of the Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports promoted by SELA.

Based on the first version of the design of this portal and specific feedback targeted in March 2017 with members of the Transitional Advisory Directory of the Network, focused on its features and tools for collaborative work, the optimization of the portal is considered necessary for it to respond in a more friendly manner to the needs of the public, private and academic stakeholders that are part of the community and thus support the collaborative work of the Programme.

B. Objectives

Optimize the specialized portal of the Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports, so that it becomes a real functional and friendly tool for the collaborative work of the community linked to the Programme for the Creation of the Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports and meets the goals of contributing to the dissemination, transfer, and share of knowledge and information generated within the framework of this Programme and in other related areas.

C. Expected results

A specialized portal as a functional and friendly tool for the institutionalization of the Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports and for the collaborative work of its members.

AREA II. ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION

PROGRAMME: SUPPORT TO ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION AMONG LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES

PROJECT II.1. Strengthening economic and technical cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean

Activity II.1.1. XXIX Meeting of International Cooperation Directors for Latin America and the Caribbean: Strengthening cooperation in commercial connectivity in Latin America and the Caribbean: Towards greater integration into value chains

A. Background and justification

The impact of international trade on economic performance is recognized, as long as this may cause greater accumulation of productive factors or increases in productivity through the dissemination of technologies and knowledge. In this regard, three characteristics of the trade structure are of fundamental importance: the industries involved, the form of production of traded products and trade connections with world growth poles.

At present, the dynamics of international trade has moved away from the traditional approach with the creation of global value chains (GVC), which have been defined by UNCTAD (2013) as cross-border production systems in which the countries involved incorporate value into products according to their comparative advantages.

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According to estimates of Hoekman, B. (2013, December), for the period 1990-2010, the countries with high participation in GVCs and high value added in exports reported an average annual growth rate of 3.4%, while those with high participation and low value added reached an annual rate of 2.2%.

In addition, according to OECD and ECLAC (2013), the lack of an adequate framework for logistics optimization in the production, transportation, storage and distribution processes affects the potential of relatively smaller economies to increase international competitiveness, and therefore logistics costs in Latin America and the Caribbean can exceed four times those of the countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The main element behind the low logistics performance of the region is the infrastructure deficit associated with the storage, distribution and transport sector. The Latin American and Caribbean region reports a high use of road transport with respect to other modes of transport, which affects the possibilities of complementarity and cost reduction. According to estimates from OECD and ECLAC (2013), the high concentration of road transport in the region is 15 times higher than that in the United States and originates an increase in logistics costs by 57%.

This situation presents a complex outlook, since, according to OECD and ECLAC (2013), the proportion of regional logistics-intensive exports is three times higher than in the OECD countries. For the region, the reduction in connectivity costs would facilitate its repositioning in GVCs by increasing intra- and extra-regional trade for a greater territorial interconnection and access to lower prices.

B. Objectives

1. Identify the main opportunities and challenges for international, triangular and South-South cooperation in strengthening trade infrastructure with a view to facilitating greater participation of the region in global value chains;
2. Generate synergy for the exchange of successful experiences and best practices in managing trade infrastructure with a view to reducing costs and time in foreign trade logistics;
3. Present the progress in managing trade infrastructure through the evaluation of the status of implementation of physical infrastructure works and the use of information and communications technologies for the modernization of logistical processes.

C. Expected results

1. Survey of the major cooperation initiatives developed by both Member States and regional and subregional institutions in the field of commercial connectivity;
2. Promotion of a public-private partnership that identifies and promotes investment in infrastructure, greater use of information and communications technologies and modernization of the regional transport network;
3. Strengthening regional governance for the achievement of institutional agreements that expand the spaces for cooperation regarding insertion in global value chains.

Activity II.1.2. Forum on opportunities for international cooperation for Latin America and the Caribbean: Challenges of the 2030 Agenda

A. Background and justification

Achieving sustainable development and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) will be the strategic challenges of this generation, and the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2015 expressed the will and the need to integrate economic development with social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

At present, and according to the World Economic Forum (2016), three major trends can be identified: i) the global economy is grinding to a halt due to the slowdown in production and trade rates; ii) inequalities in the global and domestic spheres threaten political and social cohesion of societies; and iii) environmental degradation and accentuation of climate change increase the potential of natural disasters and make countries more susceptible and vulnerable to conflicts arising from these events.

Given this scenario, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development creates the institutional framework for each country to manage to overcome the cross-cutting and multi-dimensional challenge that the development has raised for the 21st century through cooperation among States, the private sector and the civil society. However, the practical problem is how to coordinate the various initiatives and actions in a global framework adapted to local realities, with the necessary incentives to do so.

In this connection, Latin America and the Caribbean is at a crossroads: In a context of economic downturn, the region must urgently take measures that will prevent a greater economic backwardness with respect to the advanced economies while preserving the social benefits obtained during the commodity boom, under an umbrella that integrates, crosswise, a less predatory relationship with the environment.

For this reason, the achievement of the 2030 Agenda requires international cooperation schemes able to identify and respond to socio-economic and institutional, domestic and structural factors, which determine the success and failure of Latin American and Caribbean countries in their efforts to properly meet the SDGs.

Under these circumstances, institutional and inter-sectoral partnerships become an anchor point to obtain and mobilize the resources needed to implement the commitments in the area of Official Development Assistance (ODA), a fundamental tool to accelerate progress in achieving the SDGs. Said assistance is reflected in Goal 17 "Partnerships for the goal", Target 17.2: Ensure that developed countries meet the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for ODA to developing countries and 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of ODA to least developed countries.

In addition, the Permanent Secretariat of SELA since 1983 became a regional focal point for the exchange of information on technical cooperation among developing countries by Decision No. 156 of the Latin American Council, and in compliance with this mandate, it recognizes the opportunity to present to the Member States of SELA the major existing challenges in implementing the 2030 Agenda in the region.

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B. Objectives

1. Identify the main opportunities and challenges of international, triangular and South-South cooperation in implementing national and regional strategies to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda;
2. Contribute to the promotion of greater coordination and synergy among international cooperation focal points in Latin America and the Caribbean and bilateral and multilateral donors to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda;
3. Present innovative cooperation sources for sustainable development between regional and extra-regional stakeholders, linked to the public and private sectors, and civil society.

C. Expected results

1. Reduction in the information gap with respect to the main difficulties faced by the Member States of SELA, along with bilateral and multilateral donors who work with them, in implementing the 2030 Agenda;
2. Detection of regional hotspots demanding greater coordinated action among international cooperation agencies to facilitate the implementation of the SDGs;
3. Promotion of inclusion of non-State stakeholders in national strategies.

Activity II.1.3 VII Meeting on “Public-Private Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean”

A. Background and justification

Public-private partnerships for disaster risk reduction have awakened particular interest in recent years, due to the impact of natural disasters in the region and the need to develop contingency, continuity and prevention plans.

During the year 2017, and following the guidelines of the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*, the Fifth Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction brought together countries of the continent and intergovernmental organizations in the region to establish action guidelines that contribute to the compliance with the Sendai Framework. In the same year, the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) took place in Cancun and focused on the advances in the implementation of the Sendai Framework and on actions and plans aimed at reducing disaster risk.

In addition, the activities of the Permanent Secretariat of SELA in the context of partnerships for disaster risk reduction adhere to guidelines adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in its 2030 Agenda, among which are the end of poverty, sustainable cities and communities and climate action.

In this context, the Permanent Secretariat of SELA continues working, jointly and in a coordinated manner, with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) on providing spaces to continue promoting the creation of public-private partnerships for disaster risk reduction the continuity of Government and business operations during disaster situations.

In 2017, the “VI Meeting on Public-Private Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean: Business continuity and prevention plans for the tourism sector”, which will take place in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, on 7 and 8 December. This event is being

organized by the Permanent Secretariat of SELA, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Presidency and the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources of the Dominican Republic, and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR). This meeting aims to: i) Analyse the main variables that contingency, prevention, and continuity of business and operations plans should contain to deal with the priorities and essential and strategic issues of the tourism sector in the Member States of SELA; and ii) Exchange experiences and best practices on the development of contingency and continuity of business and operations plans within institutions and companies in the tourism sector.

For 2018, the Permanent Secretariat of SELA, in collaboration with the UNISDR, is scheduled to organize the VII Regional Meeting on Public-Private Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean in Montevideo, which is expected to be carried out in cooperation with Uruguay's National Emergency System (SINAE) in the field of action that the government authorities responsible for disaster risk consider a priority according to the interests of the region in this matter.

B. Objectives

1. Continue promoting the creation of public-private partnerships for disaster risk reduction with the help of governmental and private focal points in the region and the implementation of actions in the field;
2. Continue supporting the coordination and cooperation of the work carried out by the UNISDR in the field of strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors for disaster risk reduction, as well as in global and regional platforms; and
3. Further promote continuity of government, business and operations during disaster situations with the exchange of knowledge and experiences, collaborative environments among the various stakeholders in the field of risk management.

C. Expected results

Conduction of the VII Regional Meeting on Public-Private Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Activity II.1.4. Latin American and Caribbean cooperation in trade and competition. Joint UNCTAD-SELA project. VIII Annual Meeting of the Working Group on Trade and Competition of Latin America and the Caribbean (WGTC)

A. Background and justification

The Latin American Council of SELA, by Decision N° 519 (2010), decided to support the establishment of the Working Group on Trade and Competition (WGTC), with purpose of achieving the institutional strengthening of the countries in the region in the area of trade and competition by facilitating the exchange of knowledge and experiences, promoting regional consultation and searching for economic and technical cooperation from both the region and the relevant international organizations working in the area.

In addition, by Decision N° 530 (2011), the Council asked the Permanent Secretariat of SELA to further provide technical support to the organization and development of activities of regional interest related to trade and competition identified by said Working Group, which operates in cooperation with UNCTAD.

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The WGTC, in coordination with the Permanent Secretariat of SELA and the General Secretariat of UNCTAD acting as Executive and Technical Secretaries, respectively, has met in: Bogota, Colombia (July 2011); Lima, Peru (June 2012); Buenos Aires, Argentina (September 2013); Punta Cana, Dominican Republic (November 2014); Manta, Ecuador (December 2015); Roatan Island, Honduras (November 2016); and San Salvador, El Salvador (October 2017).

B. Objectives

1. Share experiences with authorities responsible for trade and competition in the Member States on priority issues of the regional agenda, as they emerge from deliberations among said authorities in the region; and
2. Develop an analytical study on the subject that the authorities responsible for trade and competition in the region determine by consensus.

C. Expected results

Conduct the VIII Annual Meeting of the Working Group on Trade and Competition of Latin America and the Caribbean (WGTC).

PROGRAMME: SELA-SMEs

PROJECT II.2. Latin American and Caribbean Regional Programme for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Activity II.2.1 Productive integration of SMEs into global value chains

A. Background and justification

The inclusion of countries in productive articulation systems allows greater interconnection, which could reduce operating costs of transnational corporations (TNCs), facilitating the entry of foreign direct investment (FDI) flows and technology transfer processes. In addition, a more active participation in international production systems will boost competitiveness and efficiency of local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for them to be adapted to the required quality standards and increase their productivity levels (Javorčík, 2012).

In general terms, Latin America and the Caribbean's share stands below that of developed, developing and transition economies. The Caribbean, with a domestic value added in exports exceeding 25% of its production level, reports the best performance in the region, being close to the levels of transition economies. Central America and Mexico, with a ratio of slightly more than 20%, and South America, with levels lower than 15%. According to Bhagwati (2013), the incorporation of Latin America and the Caribbean into GVCs occurs in early or late stages of the production process, where the value added is reduced and learning and technology transfer are lower.

Given the need of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to adapt to the new challenges posed by the latest-generation trade opening schemes, it is necessary to create a space for opportunities to promote the inclusion of SMEs in productive processes, identify the linkages and trade links that promote the diversification of small and medium-sized enterprises. In this way, it is possible to achieve the gradual incorporation of SMEs into global value chains, a process that

must be accompanied by a work programme aimed at training, associativity, improvement in access to credit and new information technologies of these companies.

The Permanent Secretariat of SELA proposes that regional production niches can be identified for the creation of a Network of Strategic Alliances, which will lead to the creation of SME clusters and interconnections that promote competition, collective learning and innovation as a strategy to enter global supply chains. Insofar as these interconnections among regional productive sectors are more complex, greater capabilities of innovation, new linkages and products will be generated to strengthen the productive transformation of SMEs at the regional level.

B. Objectives

1. Develop a set of indicators that assess and monitor regional trade, in order to identify potential complementarities in production between sectors and countries;
2. Create a map of niches where SMEs can be inserted into global value chains. To that end, it is necessary to coordinate the active participation of trade promotion agencies and guilds of the main industrial sectors, with the purpose of creating strategic alliances that promote a detailed information system about the business opportunities for SMEs at the regional level; and
3. Provide the countries in the region with a tool that assesses the degree of interdependence of national and regional markets, responding to specific needs of a country's productive sectors.

C. Expected results

1. Conduction of a regional meeting for: a) the promotion of strategic alliances among SMEs at national and regional levels; b) the identification of advantages and strengths of trade; c) the development of a preliminary mapping of production niches;
2. Creation of working groups for: a) the active participation of public and private sectors of each country; b) the exchange of qualitative and quantitative information on production niches; c) the provision of information that enriches the directory of SMEs for the regional Network of Strategic Alliances;
3. A document that shows: to) statistics of production niches; b) potential opportunities for SMEs in global value chains; and c) the renewal of the directory of the Network of Strategic Alliances for SMEs; and
4. Creation of a database for its publication on the portal, which will contain statistical information on production niches and the directory of SMEs at the regional level.

Activity II.2.2. Public Policy Index for MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean (IPPALC)

A. Background and justification

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) represent 90% of the production units in Latin America, generate 67% of regional employment and are responsible for 40% of the economic activity in our countries. However, their productivity levels range from 16% to 36% of that reported by large companies, and only 9% and 13% of small and medium-sized enterprises, respectively, export directly and indirectly.

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Despite their importance in generating employment and number of companies, MSMEs face great challenges in terms of productivity, efficiency, international competitiveness and informality. To overcome them, government intervention is required for the development of public policies aimed at creating and strengthening their capacities. In particular, it is necessary to encourage investment in research and development, develop training programmes and access to markets, facilitate access to funding, and simplify administrative procedures.

For this reason, the Permanent Secretariat has promoted the dissemination and implementation of the Public Policy Index for SMEs as a tool designed to optimize the decision-making process related to this productive sector. This index, created in 2006 by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), has been implemented in the Middle East and North Africa, in the countries of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), in South-Eastern Europe and Turkey, as well as in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

In 2015, when the document "Methodological considerations for developing an Index of Public Policies for SMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean" was prepared, the Permanent Secretariat made a proposal for conceptual and methodological adaptation of the indicator created by the OECD, according to the structural characteristics of the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean. This study was presented at a Regional Meeting held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, with the support of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism and the Chamber of Commerce of Cartagena.

This effort was maintained during the year 2016 with the conduction of two regional seminars. The first of them, called "Regional Meeting on the Update Study on the Public Policy Index for SMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean (IPPALC)", was held in San José, Costa Rica, with the co-sponsorship of the Ministry of Economy, Industry and Trade (MEIC). The second, called "Workshop on implementation of the Index of Public Policies for SMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean (IPPALC)", took place in Panama City, with the collaboration of the OECD and the Authority for Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises of Panama (AMPYME). Both activities aimed to promote the use of this tool and allowed the identification of countries with interest in adopting this indicator as part of their strategies to support MSMEs.

In May 2017, the pilot project of the IPPALC was launched in the Member States of the Pacific Alliance, Argentina, Ecuador and Uruguay, in a joint effort among OECD, SELA and CAF-development bank of Latin America. This launch took place during the development of the "Workshop to launch the Public Policy Index for MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean (IPPALC): Pacific Alliance and South America", which was held in Jalisco, Mexico, within the framework of the macro-event "Responding to the challenges of SMEs in the international context", organized by the National Institute of the Entrepreneur (INADEM) of the Secretariat of Economy of Mexico, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the International Network for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (INSME).

As part of the agreements of this pilot project, execution times and responsibilities of the agencies involved and the national coordinators of the countries were established. Thus, during the months of July, August and September 2017, assessments questionnaires of the IPPALC were answered and sent to the technical team (OECD-SELA-CAF). With this information, during the period October-January, the team will evaluate the results obtained and draft a preliminary report on each country

In addition, in October 2017, the “Technical Workshop on the Public Policy Index for MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean (IPPALC): Central America” was held in San Salvador, with the support of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the co-sponsorship of the National Commission for Micro and Small Enterprises (CONAMYPE) of the Ministry of Economy of El Salvador. This event aimed to achieve consensus among participating countries for the establishment of a concrete work plan that facilitates the implementation of the IPPALC in Central America in 2018 and the involvement of regional and international organizations in efforts that support the technical and financial work.

As a result of the development of the IPPALC project, three subregional seminars are expected to be conducted in 2018. The first of them, associated with the member countries of the Pacific Alliance, Argentina, Ecuador and Uruguay and scheduled to take place in April, will enable the validation and discussion of the results obtained. Then, a subregional event will be held for the official presentation of the final report of the pilot project with the participation of national and regional authorities. Finally, the third event will be linked to the launch of the IPPALC project in Central American countries and is scheduled to take place during the second half of 2018.

B. Objectives

1. Promote the exchange of best practices that allow the optimization of the process of formulating public policies for MSMEs in the participating countries;
2. Support the improvement of competitiveness and productivity of MSMEs through the recognition of opportunities and challenges faced for the strengthening of their productive capacities; and
3. Promote evaluation and comparability of the degree of development of public policies for MSMEs among participating countries and with regions internationally recognized for their successful practices.

C. Expected results

1. Publication of the final report on the Public Policy Index for MSMEs (IPPALC) implemented in the member countries of the Pacific Alliance, Argentina, Ecuador and Uruguay; and
2. Launch of the project on the Public Policy Index for MSMEs (IPPALC) in the countries of Central America.

Activity II.2.3. 2030 Agenda: Regional Meeting on Financial Inclusion of Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) in Latin America and the Caribbean

A. Background and justification

The adoption of financial innovation poses significant challenges for Latin America and the Caribbean, in particular for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Despite the progress made by the region, access to financing still represents the main obstacle faced by MSMEs.

During the “Regional Meeting on innovative mechanisms for financing and guarantees for MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean”, held in April in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, an emphasis was made on the need of MSMEs in terms of: i) Diversity of financial products and services, wider dissemination of them and more effective access to these financing possibilities; ii)

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Promotion of financial literature and training in ICTs (information and communications technologies) and incorporation of innovation into business management; iii) Optimization of the business climate in order to reduce the risks for financial institutions; and iv) Creation of subregional financing schemes.

Given the characteristics of MSMEs, which represent a large and economically important sector with huge financing needs, financial inclusion should be considered a productive inclusion policy. In this connection, achievements in financial technology have increased. However, little is known about the new microfinance platforms that have emerged, as the so-called Fintech or Crowdfunding, which are currently a viable financing alternative for MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Despite regional efforts aimed at formulating innovative strategies to mitigate risks, reducing costs and increasing attention to financial needs of MSMEs, it is necessary to strengthen rapprochement between regulatory entities and private-sector stakeholders to promote the search for effective solutions and better use of existing opportunities.

That is why the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System, through its SELA-SMEs Programme, offers a space for regional encounter that will enable follow-up of achievements in financing and new initiatives in Latin America and the Caribbean, highlighting the following themes: Cooperation between commercial banks and microfinance institutions for financing MSMEs, improvements in financial infrastructure in the region, role of national development banks in the financial inclusion of MSMEs and best practices and, finally, the potential of financing alternatives in MSMEs, such as "Fintech".

B. Objectives

1. Identify successful practices in financial education and inclusion of MSMEs: Issuance and use of electronic money, mobile banking, digital payment and simplification of procedures for both business registration and entry into the financial system; and
2. Identify successful practices in the design of financial instruments and schemes aimed at meeting the needs of MSMEs, in particular, potential financing alternatives, such as "Fintech".

C. Expected results

1. This regional meeting aims to expound on the main obstacles faced by MSMEs for financial inclusion. In addition, participants will present regional and extra-regional best practices, in order to contribute to the exchange of experiences for the strengthening of financing systems, with emphasis on the use of ICTs, such as issuance and use of electronic money, mobile banking and the new financing alternatives, known as "Fintech"; and
2. In addition, during this regional meeting, working tables for discussion and drafting of conclusions will be formed, in order to give continuity to the work done and assess the next steps to be taken by representatives of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Activity II.2.4 Experiences of formalization of MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean

A. Background and justification

MSMES represent a driving force for economic development, especially in the case of emerging economies. In terms of their contribution to international trade, it has been pointed out that they: i) form part of the value chain of large local exporters; ii) export products and services to more specialized market niches; iii) import and distribute products of foreign MSMEs; and iv) provide support services in the chain of international trade transactions (logistics, offices, etc.). In addition, they promote entrepreneurial activity, they foster innovation as well as diversification, and stimulate growth of employment. In Latin America and the Caribbean, MSMEs account for 90% of enterprises, generate more than half of jobs and one-quarter of countries' GDP. However, they contribute little to exports and tend to specialize in products with low added value.

In addition to the difficulties experienced by MSMEs to gain access to financial systems, another obstacle restraining their development is the informal economy in which many of them operate. Hence, some governments in the region have outlined public policies to promote the formalization of MSMEs.

The concept of informality has evolved into the definition of informal economy. Given that informal labour is also present in registered MSMEs, the policies to promote formalization of MSMEs should make emphasis on the regulatory adjustments, on the incentives for their formalization, and on improving their capacity to comply with regulations.

The formalization process is one of the biggest obstacles faced by MSMEs due to the transaction costs of the process, the lack of advice, the traditional models of registration and the lack of incentives. An effective strategy for the formalization of these enterprises should combine measures to reduce regulatory burdens and the cost of formality, as well as incentives for their formalization and improvements in fiscal terms.

It has been determined that an effective strategy for the formalization of these companies must consider aspects such as economic growth with quality jobs, improving the regulatory environment, promoting social dialogue, organization and representation, promoting equality and the fight against discrimination, supporting entrepreneurship, developing professional skills and funding, and enhancing social protection as well as local economic development (ILO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean).

In 2018, the Permanent Secretariat of SELA intends to convene focal points for MSMEs in the Member States, business associations and experts in the area so that, together, they can reflect on the present and the future of the formalization of MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean, and highlight the most significant experiences in this area. That would be the purpose of the regional meeting to be held in the first half of 2018.

B. Objectives

1. Share comparative visions of the formalization policies and programmes of MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean.
2. Highlight the most important experiences as regards formalization of MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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C. Expected results

To conduct a Regional Meeting to exchange ideas about the essential aspects related to the formalization of Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in the region.

Activity II.2.5 Seminar on evaluation of impact of public policies for MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean

A. Background and justification

In Latin America and the Caribbean, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for 90% of companies in the region, generating 67% of employment in the region (World Bank Group, 2014). However, they provide only 25% of the Latin American GDP (CAF, 2016).

Although unemployment in the region is relatively low, there is still a high incidence of informality, at around 50% (ILO, 2013), and the productivity gap with respect to advanced economies is increasing (OECD, 2016).

In order to meet these challenges, governments have identified key areas in public policy, such as human capital formation; improvement of the financial and commercial ecosystem; inclusion into the formal labour market; promotion of innovation and construction of adequate infrastructure for production, distribution and trade.

For this reason, a set of public policy initiatives have been developed with a view to promoting growth of SMEs by facilitating their access to financing, extending the technical and legal assistance services for their formalization, reducing their tax burden and implementing trade promotion measures.

Despite these efforts, the areas in which SMEs continue reporting major difficulties are access to financing, access to strategic resources and internationalization, with the latter being a very important point, since only 10% of them exports (CERALE, 2017).

In this regard, significant needs are observed in recognizing the efficiency of public policies. Therefore, the promotion of the impact evaluation methodology as a tool of governance is presented as an innovative strategy that aims to generate, through the methodological rigorosity in data and evidence, a process of learning that contributes to the identification of results of implemented policies.

That is why government authorities responsible for the promotion of business development of SMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean require a technical body specializing in impact assessment, in order to contribute to the proper measurement of benefits and results of public policies related to this area.

B. Objectives

For the institutions responsible for SMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of impact assessment of public policies:

1. Train the technical staff in the design, implementation and evaluation of such programmes;

2. Disseminate best practices and experiences related to the design, evaluation and implementation; and
3. Promote technical cooperation among the focal points for SMEs.

C. Expected results

The results expected from the seminar are divided as follows:

1. The identification of technical tools that enable an appropriate design and experimental implementation of public policies for SMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean;
2. The adoption of an impact assessment methodology that will contribute to greater efficiency in the implementation of public policies for SMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean; and
3. The creation of a space that fosters the exchange of ideas and best practices related to SMEs among policymakers in Latin America and the Caribbean.

To assess the impact of the seminar, this project should be carried out, preferably, on an annual basis in order to determine if what was learned is feasible and the objectives were achieved.

Activity II.2.6 Regional Meeting of business associations and MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean: Achievements for the construction of public-private partnerships in the region

A. Background and justification

The SELA-SMEs Programme includes, among its fundamental purposes, the promotion and development of public-private partnerships of the Member States of SELA, with a view to strengthening the entrepreneurial culture, business development and trade promotion through micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the region.

The private sector in Latin America and the Caribbean plays a key role for economic development and social welfare. In general, its strengthening contributes to poverty reduction and generation of opportunities for the most vulnerable sectors of society, thus favouring job creation and social inclusion. Therefore, the economic development and strengthening of MSMEs are priority objectives that complement each other.

For their part, public policies that are defined and implemented by the government have a significant impact on the performance of the private sector and determine the type of relationship and the potential of public-private partnerships, as well as the spaces and opportunities for cooperation and complementation.

In this connection, it is necessary to maintain the dialogue and take into account the views of the private sector, and specifically of business associations and MSMEs. These synergies may be beneficial for all parties involved and for society as a whole, since the goal is to build win-win relationships.

Entrepreneurs, guilds and MSMEs are precisely the entities that know their strengths and opportunities, as well as their weaknesses and threats they have to face to be able to travel successfully along the difficult path of the private sector in the process of creating a company.

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The issue of public-private partnerships is precisely one of the agreements reached within the framework of the 2030 Agenda and the sustainable development goals, which deal with “the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development” and, in particular, better “policy coherence for sustainable development” and promotion of “effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships”.

The construction of public-private partnerships and the participation of business associations and MSMEs in these efforts is not a new issue, but the economic and social challenges faced by the region today deserve the creation of spaces that facilitate and promote cooperation, coordination and complementarity of the various initiatives that are implemented in the region.

At present, various initiatives for the private sector are being developed and promoted from the area of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. However, these initiatives are little known by the stakeholders in the private sector, so the dissemination of such cooperation and networking opportunities is essential to create the necessary incentives to encourage public-private partnerships.

In this connection, it is important to publicize the progress made in public-private cooperation thanks to projects such as those being executed through the GIZ, AECID, USAID, among others, at the bilateral level, as well as initiatives conducted by the IDB, IIC, MIF and especially the European Union, through the AI-Invest Programme, among others, at the multilateral level.

B. Objectives

1. Identify the main constraints faced by the private sector, business associations and MSMEs in developing strong and long-lasting sustainable development-oriented partnerships between the public and private sectors;
2. Identify mechanisms that improve the opportunities for cooperation and complementarity between the public and private sectors;
3. Collect the main initiatives being developed by the private sector, business associations and MSMEs for the strengthening of public-private partnerships in the region;
4. Collect the main cooperation initiatives being promoted by bilateral and multilateral donors to encourage public-private partnerships and better use of them by the private sector, business associations and MSMEs; and
5. Analyse mechanisms for the establishment or strengthening of regional and/or subregional business associations to facilitate the exchange and dissemination of information to the private sector.

C. Expected results

1. Through the “Regional Meeting of business associations and MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean: Achievements for the construction of public-private partnerships in the region”, create a public-private meeting space to discuss issues of common interest;
2. Easily access information on the main programmes and initiatives being carried out by the private sector, business associations and MSMEs to promote public-private partnerships, as well as a survey of the main programmes and initiatives being implemented by bilateral and multilateral donors in this direction; and
3. Identify counterparts of the private sector, business associations and MSMEs to design future actions of public-private cooperation at the regional and/or subregional levels.

AREA III. EXTRA-REGIONAL RELATIONS

PROGRAMME: EVALUATION AND PROMOTION OF EXTRA-REGIONAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES

PROJECT III.1 Follow-up and analysis of preferential trade agreements signed among extra-regional countries that could influence their economic, trade and investment relations with Latin American and Caribbean nations

Activity III.1.1 Analysis of economic, trade and cooperation relations of Latin America and the Caribbean with China: A place of opportunities for SMEs in the region

A. Background and justification

During the past few years, China has steered its foreign policy towards strengthening cooperation with its main partners in the trade, financial and infrastructural areas. As evidence of this, noteworthy are the "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) and "International Production Cooperation" initiatives. Despite covering different geographical areas – OBOR is limited to Eurasia, while the second initiative is global – they share the goal of promoting the development of the parties involved, which reflects China's willingness to forge a new model of globalization based on mutual cooperation.

One of the key regions for this new aspect of China's foreign policy is Latin America and the Caribbean, with which the Asian nation has developed important bilateral and financial ties over the past years. These links have recovered strategic value as a result of the visit of Xi Jinping to the region in November 2016, which served to establish bilateral negotiations among the Chinese Head of State and leaders from the region, as well as to lay the foundations for a new framework for trade integration between China and the region's countries making up the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

The second document on foreign policy for Latin America and the Caribbean, published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China,² highlights the intensification of trade, the increase in China's industrial investment in LAC, and the strengthening of financial cooperation among authorities in the two regions.

As regards foreign trade, China in the medium term aims to increase bilateral trade in goods with high comparative advantages, high value added and high technology intensity, as well as to strengthen trade in services and intensify cooperation in electronic commerce (e-commerce). In the long term, trade cooperation between the two sides includes the negotiation of stable trade relations and bilateral agreements, including free trade agreements (FTA) or preferential trade arrangements (PTA).

In terms of industrial investment in LAC, the Chinese Government supports financial platforms, such as China-Latin American Investment Fund (CLAIFUN), which includes public and private companies intending to invest in the region and is administered by The Export-Import Bank of

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. China's Policy Paper on Latin America and the Caribbean.

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China. In addition, the Chinese Government promotes the participation of Chinese companies in the development of infrastructure and energy projects in LAC, as well as the inclusion of Chinese manufacturers of automobiles, electrical machinery and chemicals, so that said projects can complement the productive structure and the provision of local services, thus favouring local employment, the level of industrialization and economic development in the region.

The third axis of cooperation is financial cooperation. In this connection, China says that its financial institutions will strengthen trade and cooperation ties with international or local institutions in Latin American and Caribbean countries, in order to establish Chinese financing platforms in the region. As regards bilateral financing, the goal is to promote the role of the China-Latin American Cooperation Fund, of concessional credits and loans for infrastructure projects, development projects, and cooperation projects in productive capacities between China and Latin America.

The previous guidelines of Chinese foreign policy for the region are summarized in the manifest will to reach, by 2025, US\$ 500 billion in China-LAC trade and US\$ 250 billion in Chinese investment in the region.

In response to SELA's interest in focusing its activities on the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Latin America and the Caribbean, cooperation between China and LAC will be aimed at stimulating the direct or indirect inclusion of these companies into the global value chains that may arise in the region with the development of the aforementioned frameworks for commercial, industrial and financial cooperation, so as to design work programmes aimed at their progressive growth.

In this connection, it is necessary to make Chinese investment strategies compatible with industrial and regional characteristics of their potential partners. Thus, it is in the mutual interest of the parties involved to reach a high level of complementarity among the value chains of China and LAC, where SMEs can be playing important roles.

Given the political will of China and Latin American and Caribbean countries, the existence of investment platforms, trade relations and multilateral financing networks, it is necessary to maximize the impact of this cooperation on the local economic development. In order to incorporate small and medium-sized entrepreneurs in the region into this dynamics, the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System will provide the relevant focal points with the necessary logistical and technical information to take advantage of the status and future of cooperation between China and LAC.

An opportunity arises within the framework of the IV LAC-China International Seminar, which is being organized by LAC-China Network and CAF-development bank of Latin America and will be held in Mexico City in May 2018. This event will include presentations by representatives of public and private institutions interested in disseminating latent opportunities in the context of LAC-China cooperation, which makes it the ideal setting to establish strategic relations on which the Permanent Secretariat's future programmes of extra-regional relations will be based. In this context, SELA will actively participate in the design and creation of a session to discuss the opportunities for SMEs to participate in technical support programmes and various forms of support in order to be inserted into value chains in sectors with strong presence of Chinese capital or, in their absence, with high volume of demand in the market of this Asian nation.

B. Objectives

1. Create a group of leading experts in the area of internationalization of SMEs and LAC-China cooperation, who will represent the Secretariat with their participation in the IV LAC-China International Seminar;
2. Assess the opportunities for Latin American and Caribbean countries, in particular the SMEs in the region, to achieve higher levels of trade, financial and technological cooperation with China;
3. Create opportunities for rapprochement between the SMEs of the region and relevant cooperation agencies;
4. Provide China with opportunities to invest in LAC, based on sectoral settings and comparative advantages of the countries in the region;
5. Determine the possibilities for SMEs in LAC to be inserted into global value chains in sectors of strong presence of Chinese capital or high demand coming from China;
6. Provide information to SME focal points in LAC about their options for inclusion in multilateral agendas of FDI from China to LAC and in trade integration agendas promoted by China towards countries in the region; and
7. Promote closer relations between SME focal points in the region and organizations linked to trade and financial cooperation agendas between China and LAC, in order to establish working groups that lay the foundations for future cooperation programmes.

C. Expected results

1. Descriptive study about trade relations, technical cooperation, and financial cooperation between China and LAC, offering guidance and informing the SMEs in LAC about their options for inclusion in cooperation programmes between China and LAC;
2. Contribution of SELA to the design and creation of a session with a group of experts, who will be expected to make presentations at the IV LAC-China International Seminar, to be held from 28 to 30 May in Mexico D.F. by the LAC-China Network and CAF-development bank of Latin America; and
3. SELA stands as the creator of spaces and as a facilitating agent in effective networks of technological and financial cooperation between China and LAC.

DECISION N° 569

**AUDIT REPORT ON THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
OF THE PERMANENT SECRETARIAT AT 31 DECEMBER 2016**

THE LATIN AMERICAN COUNCIL,

HAVING SEEN:

Article 15, paragraph 5, and Article 31, paragraph 7, of the Panama Convention; and,

The Financial Statements of the Permanent Secretariat at 31 December 2016 and the Auditor's Reports that form part of document "Audit Report on the Financial Statements of the Permanent Secretariat at 31 December 2016" (SP/CL/XLIII.O/DT N° 6-17).

DECIDES:

Sole Article: To approve the Audit Report on the Financial Statements of the Permanent Secretariat for the fiscal year from 1 January to 31 December 2016.

DECISION N° 570**APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS FOR THE ACCOUNTING YEAR 2017****THE LATIN AMERICAN COUNCIL,****HAVING SEEN:**

Article 34 of the Permanent Secretariat Regulations which, among other provisions, stipulates that "in selecting the external auditor, an attempt will be made to rotate the position among the Member States, as far as it is possible, and considering the financial implications"; and

The audit services bids received by the Permanent Secretariat, encompassed in document "Audit proposal for the year 2017" (SP/CL/XLIII.O/DT N° 7-17).

DECIDES:

Sole Article: To designate **Conas-Consultores Asociados, S.A**, as the firm in charge of auditing the Financial Statements of the Permanent Secretariat for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2017, bearing in mind the rules that govern the System.

DECISION N° 571

DESIGNATION OF A MEMBER OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL OF SELA

THE LATIN AMERICAN COUNCIL,

HAVING SEEN:

Decision N° 370 from the Latin American Council; and

The document "Election of a Member of the Administrative Tribunal of SELA" (SP/CL/XLIII.O/DT N° 8-17).

DECIDES:

Sole Article: To designate Róger Yépez as Member of the Administrative Tribunal of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System for the period from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2020.

C. DECLARATION

DECLARATION
“ENDING THE ECONOMIC, COMMERCIAL AND FINANCIAL BLOCKADE IMPOSED
BY THE UNITED STATES AGAINST CUBA”

The Latin American Council of SELA, gathered in its Ministerial Session in Caracas on 29 November 2017.

RECALLING,

The mandate given by the Member States of SELA to the Permanent Secretariat (Article 4, Decision No. 377) to submit an annual report on the application of the Helms-Burton Law and the economic sanctions of the United States of America against Cuba;

That the adverse effects of such sanctions of the United States not only affect one Member State of SELA, but also impose certain rules to the international community as regards economic relations with Cuba;

Decision No. 112 of the Latin American Council, “Imposition of Economic Measures of a Coercive Nature”, as well as Decisions Nos. 356 and 360, which reject the implementation of unilateral measures that may affect the free development of international trade, in violation of international law and the most basic principles of regional coexistence;

Decisions 377, 390, 401, 421, 432, 438, 444, 453, 463, 477 and 482 of the Latin American Council, on the “Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba”;

The Declaration “Ending the economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed by the United States of America against Cuba”, adopted by consensus by the Member States of SELA at the XXXV, XXXVI, XXXVII, XXXVIII, XXXIX, XL, XLI and XLII Regular Meetings of the Latin American Council (Caracas, 29 October 2009, 28 October 2010, 21 October 2011, 18 October 2012, 28 November 2013, 28 November 2014, 28 November 2015 and 27 October 2016, respectively);

The corresponding resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly over the past 26 years urging to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial blockade of the United States of America against Cuba.

The measures adopted by the Executive Branch of the United States of America in 2015 and 2016 to modify some aspects of the application of the blockade, which are in contrast to the measures announced on 16 June 2017 to reinforce its implementation;

BEARING IN MIND,

The need to reaffirm, among other principles, the sovereign equality of the States, non-interference in the countries' internal affairs, and the freedom of trade and navigation, as established in numerous international legal instruments;

The declarations issued by Latin American and Caribbean Heads of State or Government at the Summits of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States concerning the necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial blockade against Cuba;

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The concern that laws and regulations, such as the "Helms-Burton Law," enacted on 12 March 1996, continue to be implemented by the Member States, and that their extraterritorial effects have an impact on the sovereignty of other States, the legitimate interests of entities or persons under their jurisdiction and the freedom of trade and navigation;

The declarations and resolutions arising from different intergovernmental forums, bodies and governments that reflect the rejection by the international community and public opinion to the enactment and implementation of such measures;

That during this year, harassment of Cuba's international financial transactions has been one the most significant features of the blockade. In addition to being the main obstacle to the economic and social development of the country, the blockade is the most important obstacle to further expansion of Cuba's trade links with the world and affects international cooperation with some countries;

That the decision adopted by the US President on 8 September 2017 to extend once again the Trading with the Enemy Act shows the determination of the Government of the United States of America to uphold one of the key elements of the legal framework on which the policy of blockade against Cuba is based;

That the regulations and provisions issued by the Departments of Treasury, Commerce and State on 8 November to put into effect the measures announced by the Government of the United States of America in June intensify the blockade, impose additional constraints to the limited opportunities for the business sector and further restrict the right to travel to the Republic of Cuba;

That the analysis contained in the document drafted by the Permanent Secretariat of SELA "Follow-up report on the application of the Helms Burton Law, 2016-2017" presents a detailed description of the impacts of the blockade on various economic sectors of the Republic of Cuba, as well as the extra-territorial nature of some of the measures and provisions adopted in this connection by the United States of America.

DECLARES:

1. The economic, commercial and financial blockade of the United States of America against Cuba violates International Law and is contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, the rules of the international trade system and the freedom of navigation;
2. The Latin American Council strongly condemns the application of any law or measure contrary to the International Law, such as the Helms-Burton Law, and in this connection, it calls upon the Government of the United States to put an end to their implementation;
3. The Permanent Secretariat must continue to examine this issue of special relevance for the external relations of the region, in accordance with Decision N° 482, and keep the Latin American Council informed about its evolution, by keeping the issue on its agenda;
4. The Latin American Council requests the Government of the United States to comply with the provisions of a number of consecutive Resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly to put an end to the economic, commercial and financial blockade that it keeps in force against Cuba.

A N N E X I

**SPEECH BY AMBASSADOR JAVIER PAULINICH, PERMANENT SECRETARY
OF THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN ECONOMIC SYSTEM (SELA)**

Honourable Mr Luis Alejandro Sauce
Commissioner for Economic and Trade Issues of the People's Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela;

Your Excellency Mr Pedro Felipe Ramírez
Ambassador of the Republic of Chile and Chairman of the Latin American Council;

Your Excellency Mr Paul Byam
Ambassador of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and First Vice-Chairman of the Latin American Council;

Honourable Elizabeth Méndez
Chargé d'Affaires of the Republic of Ecuador and Second Vice-Chairman of the Latin American Council;

Your Excellencies
Ambassadors and Charges d'Affaires of the Member States of SELA;

Your Excellencies
Ambassadors of the Diplomatic Corps and Representatives of International Organizations accredited to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela;

Officials of the Permanent Secretariat of SELA;

Ladies and gentlemen:

I am very glad to participate for the first time as Permanent Secretary of SELA in the Latin American Council Meeting, after taking over this Honourable position last August, thanks to the support and trust conferred to me with my election by the Member States.

With this new management, I intend to strengthen SELA and place it as a reference of Latin American and Caribbean cooperation and integration. In order to do this, we will count on a new Work Programme, aimed at executing relevant activities that contribute to the economic growth and development of member countries, so that they receive tangible and concrete benefits.

The Work Programme of SELA – which I am submitting for consideration by the Latin American Council for its compliance during the next year – responds to the principles and goals of the institution, which are clearly reflected in the Panama Convention establishing SELA; and has been formulated in accordance with the proposal that I presented to you during my nomination and on the occasion of the ceremony of my presentation to the diplomatic corps accredited to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

From the conceptual and programmatic standpoint, it is a programme of activities with clear priorities and useful proposals on specific themes of importance that suit the needs of the Member States of the organization.

In this connection, I wish to stress that it is of the greatest institutional interest to strengthen the SELA-SMEs Programme, with the purpose of promoting the development of Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) in Latin America and the Caribbean by reinforcing their institutional capabilities, formalizing their financial inclusion, identifying the impact of public policies, fostering their productive articulation and their insertion into global value chains, as well

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as their inclusion into the digital economy and the Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs).

Thus, in 2018, the development of activities aimed at the promotion and internationalization of MSMEs in the region should be the result of a multidimensional approach throughout the whole Work Programme of the Permanent Secretariat of SELA.

Similarly, priority has been given to the importance of linking SELA's work to the pertaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) contained in the 2030 Agenda, such as activities related to the promotion of economic growth, trade, investment, tourism, and public-private partnerships for disaster risk reduction, turning them into instruments to support the Member States in achieving their goals.

The Work Programme will keep those traditionally successful activities and issues focused on economic and technical cooperation, follow-up and assessment of regional integration processes, and trade facilitation.

I would also like to highlight a proposal submitted by the Permanent Secretariat to ECLAC to convene a high-level reflection meeting of the general secretariats of integration and cooperation organizations and mechanisms in the region, with the purpose of identifying areas for convergence and coordination, enabling synergies among inter-institutional works related to the integration process, and promoting a meeting space that will allow us to shorten distances, overcome the duplication of efforts and, fundamentally, promote cooperation in an interrelated manner.

The promotion of inter-institutional agreements with other mechanisms, regional and extra-regional institutions and organizations is essential to promote coordinated and efficient strategic partnerships that allow for not only executing joint and collaborative works in the area of cooperation, but also for counting on new and additional financial resources and know-how for SELA activities.

Within this context, in my capacity as Permanent Secretary of SELA, I have encouraged and formalized, among other things, the signing of the following technical cooperation agreements during my first months of management:

- i) With the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), an agreement that will allow us to join efforts for the development of policies on infrastructure, transport services and logistic port communities.
- ii) With the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a cooperation agreement for conducting projects, particularly one that will allow for implementing the Public Policy Index for MSMEs in Latin America and the Caribbean (IPPALC).
- iii) With the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding that will allow us to promote technical and institutional cooperation actions focused on digital trade facilitation.
- iv) With CAF-development bank of Latin America, we signed Phase III of the Non-Refundable Technical Cooperation Agreement for the creation of the Latin American and Caribbean

Network of Digital and Collaborative Ports, by which we will continue to strengthen logistic port communities in the region.

- v) Also with CAF-development bank of Latin America, we are making progress with talks to sign a new non-refundable technical cooperation agreement aimed at executing joint activities to support MSMEs, in order to provide them with the necessary tools to facilitate their insertion into global value chains within the context of regional and international trade.
- vi) Finally, we also plan to sign new agreements with the Andean Community, SIECA and CARICOM.

I would like to reiterate that I am committed to the decision to progressively incorporate modern organizational management procedures through the strategic planning granted by the process related to the Budget by Results methodology, the renewal of the institutional image, the revamping of SELA's Web site, the strengthening of the database, and the reformulation of an appropriate strategy for communications.

Within this context, over the next few months, we will witness the changes and innovations that I am sure will provide SELA with convincing elements, so that its Member States dignify its usefulness and renew their commitment to the integration process of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Thank you very much.

**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY PEDRO FELIPE RAMÍREZ, AMBASSADOR OF CHILE
TO THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA AND CHAIRMAN
OF THE LATIN AMERICAN COUNCIL OF SELA**

Mr Luis Alejandro Sauce, Commissioner for Economic and Trade Issues of the Vice-Ministry for Latin America of the People's Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela;

Ambassador Javier Paulinich, Permanent Secretary of SELA;

Members of the diplomatic corps;

Delegates;

Friends;

Ladies and gentlemen:

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the Member States for the confidence they have placed in my country to preside over the XLIII Regular Meeting of the Latin American Council of SELA, an organization of which Chile has been a member for 40 years now.

Chile firmly believes in the multilateral system, supports it and argues that, through common efforts, it is possible to achieve goals that are mutually beneficial and whose result is greater than the sum of the individual actions. That is why we reiterate our commitment to the essentially technical objectives and nature of SELA, set forth in its constituent treaty, especially through its three thematic areas: Intra-Regional Relations, Economic and Technical Cooperation, and Extra-Regional Relations, whose goal is to accelerate the economic and social development of its members.

We also welcome the emphasis that the Permanent Secretariat has made on the Work Programme for 2018, whose purpose is to improve and increase trade of small and medium-sized enterprises in our region through their inclusion into global value chains.

My country also welcomes and adopts the sustainable development goals and the 2030 Agenda. Last year, President Michelle Bachelet created a National Council for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda. That is why we support the inclusion of the 17 sustainable development goals as lines of action of SELA, since, as stated by ECLAC, they place dignity and equality at the centre and call for a change towards an environmentally friendly development.

Chile reaffirms its commitment to regional integration, generating initiatives and points of convergence among States, agencies and relevant stakeholders, while recognizing the diversity of models, mechanisms and instruments of development in the region.

Finally, I wish the Permanent Secretary and the staff of SELA every success in their work.

Thank you very much.

SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE LUIS ALEJANDRO SAUCE, COMMISSIONER FOR ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL ISSUES OF THE VICE-MINISTRY FOR LATIN AMERICA OF THE PEOPLE'S MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA

Your Excellency Ambassador Javier Paulinich, Permanent Secretary of SELA;

Your Excellency Ambassador Pedro Felipe Ramírez, Chairman of the Latin American Council;

Other members of the Bureau;

Ambassadors of the Member States of SELA;

Honourable Chargé d'Affaires of the Member States of SELA;

Representatives of various international organizations;

Officials of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System, to whom I extend special greetings on behalf of the Vice-Minister for Latin America;

Ladies and gentlemen:

First of all, I would like to apologize for Mr Alexander Yáñez Deleuze, who due to prior commitments in his official agenda is not present in Venezuela. He asked me to convey to you the following words that I am going to read:

"Greetings to the distinguished audience attending this XLIII Regular Meeting of the Latin American Council of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA); representatives of the Member States accredited to Caracas, Permanent Secretary and special guests from other multilateral organizations. I take this opportunity to extend, on behalf of the People's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Jorge Arreaza Monserrat, and myself, our desire for this event to be fruitful and successful during these three days of work.

In this process of renewal of SELA, led by the Permanent Secretary Ambassador Paulinich Velarde and accompanied by all Member States making up this mechanism, we hope that strengthening the system at the institutional level and the contents of the Work Programme continue to take shape and succeed for the benefit of all its members. In this connection, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela reiterates its commitment to work together in this renewal process, aiming to turn this mechanism into a body that encourages dialogue on the regional economic thought, contributing to the process of building unity in diversity, with full observance of the principles of international law that guarantee the co-existence and peaceful relations among the countries that make up the organization. Within the framework of the Bolivarian economic peace agenda, which is being actively implemented by our Foreign Minister, thus building bridges for us to overcome the difficult and complex economic situation of Venezuela with the collaboration of other partners around the world, we believe that a lot can be done from this space, as an instance of thought and consultation for the management of economic proposals for our region.

The constitutional President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela calls for the convergence of these currents of thought and not for contradictions that lead to disagreement in the process of building our American unity, reiterating, as pointed out by the national hero of Uruguay José Gervasio Artigas, "the principle of unity in diversity".

We are fully confident that SELA can become an instance that encourages integration and facilitates economic relations for the complementarity of our productive chains and the export of goods and services with the highest possible value added. On this specific point, the Vice-Minister asked me to emphasize this sentence: **fully confident that SELA can become an instance that**

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encourages integration and facilitates economic relations for the complementarity of our productive chains and the export of goods and services with the highest possible value added.

It is important that, in complying with these objectives, the Permanent Secretariat can work and enable comprehensive and logical cooperation programmes, sorted according to other regional and subregional integration mechanisms. In this connection, we welcome in particular the recent advances made with CAF-development bank of Latin America, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI).

We also welcome those efforts underway with the OECD and ALBA-TCP. We reiterate our commitment to develop and strengthen them, and it would be interesting to replicate this exercise with other organizations, such as Petrocaribe, which also share administrative headquarters in the capital city of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

I extend to you fraternal and cordial greetings and wish you the greatest success in this XLIII Meeting of the Latin American Council of SELA, always evoking the spirit of the Liberator Simón Bolívar, who noted: "The unity of our peoples is not simply the chimera of men, but an inexorable fate".

Thank you very much

**PROPOSAL SUBMITTED BY THE DELEGATION OF THE PLURINATIONAL STATE OF BOLIVIA:
STUDY ON CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE WTO TRADE
FACILITATION AGREEMENT AMONG THE MEMBER STATES OF THE LATIN AMERICAN AND
CARIBBEAN ECONOMIC SYSTEM (SELA)**

UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION**Plurinational State of Bolivia
Ministry of Foreign Affairs****EMBV-OIEV-050/2017**

The Embassy of the Plurinational State of Bolivia presents its compliments to the Honourable Permanent Secretariat of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System and informs hereby that the Office of the Vice-Ministry of Foreign Trade and Integration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Plurinational State of Bolivia very respectfully requests to submit and address the terms of reference for the "Study on challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement among the Member States of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA)", at the XLIII Regular Meeting of the Latin American Council, to be held in this city from 28 to 30 November 2017, a copy of which is attached hereto.

The Embassy of the Plurinational State of Bolivia avails itself of the opportunity to reiterate to the Honourable Permanent Secretariat of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System its assurances of its most distinguished consideration.

Caracas, 20 November 2017

To the Honourable
Permanent Secretariat of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System
Caracas.

(There appear an image of the coat of arms of the Plurinational State of Bolivia on the top of the page, and a seal of the Embassy, which reads: "Embassy of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Caracas, Venezuela", on the bottom of the page)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

*STUDY ON CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR
IMPLEMENTING THE WTO TRADE FACILITATION AGREEMENT
AMONG THE MEMBER STATES OF THE LATIN AMERICAN
AND CARIBBEAN ECONOMIC SYSTEM (SELA)*

I. BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

The Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) is the most recent and significant multilateral agreement of the World Trade Organization. The negotiations on this instrument concluded at the Bali Ministerial Conference of 2013 and it entered into force on 22 February 2017 after its ratification by two-thirds of the WTO members, becoming part of Annex I to the Marrakesh Agreement.

The TFA contains provisions to expedite the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. It also establishes measures for effective cooperation among customs authorities and other competent officials in matters related to trade facilitation and compliance with customs procedures, as well as provisions on technical assistance and capacity building in this area.

The text of the agreement is divided into three sections: Section I refers to the rules and obligations for trade facilitation for all goods, and Section II refers to the flexibilities foreseen for developing countries with respect to the time frames for implementing the provisions included in the agreement. Section III deals with the institutional agreements and final provisions, such as the creation of a National Committee on Trade Facilitation.

According to Section III, developing countries – including less developed countries – are not exempt from the application of the mandatory rules and obligations of Section I, but they are allowed to set their own time frames and needs for complying with such standards and specific obligations in accordance with their own individual capacities, needs and priorities for development. In other words, all developing countries have to classify the provisions of Section I into specific categories depending on the time frames they need for their implementation and, if required, technical assistance for such purpose.

- **Category A.** Each developing country should notify which provisions it will assign into Category A, which are obligations to be implemented when the agreement comes into force.
- **Category B.** The Member States classify the provisions that they are going to put into practice after a specific transition period. Upon the entry into force of the TFA, developing countries will establish which provisions will be included in Category B, and will detail dates for their implementation during the year following the entry into force of the TFA.
- **Category C.** Developing countries will classify into Category C those provisions that they will apply after a specific transition period, which will require training and technical assistance for their implementation, and will inform about it (Category C commitments, dates for implementation and need for assistance). Less than one year after the entry into force, the information on technical assistance agreements has to be provided to the Trade Facilitation Committee. From then on, within 18 months after the provision of the aforementioned information, developing countries must notify the definitive dates.

Therefore, the WTO members have established the mechanism for the TFA as a means to help themselves with technical assistance and support. Within the framework of the mechanism, the WTO Secretariat will provide the following technical assistance:

- Expand its existing technical assistance programmes.
- Provide information about the technical assistance programmes offered by donors and other international organizations.
- Facilitate contacts between donors and recipients in order to provide the best mechanisms for cooperation.
- Provide two types of donations for situations in which there is no other source of assistance.

Within the framework of SELA, there are 20 Member States that have ratified the TFA, namely: Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay.

By 9 March 2015, twenty Member States of SELA reported to the WTO their commitments within Categories A, B and C. This demonstrates that the TFA, in addition to the most recent multilateral agreement of the WTO, has become an issue on the agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean, and that its ratification and ultimate implementation have turned into a shared challenge.

While the Member States of SELA can benefit from the technical assistance available from the WTO Secretariat, they also have common characteristics and face very similar challenges that require South-South Cooperation actions that are more concrete and consistent with the reality of Latin America and the Caribbean, which could speed up the implementation of the TFA. Some SELA countries have a degree of important progress in implementing several commitments, whose experience can be easily shared and replicated in other countries where the level of progress with the same commitments can be improved. Within this context, the intention is to create a mechanism for the Member States of SELA to cooperate in order to efficiently implement all the commitments of the three categories, through the exchange of information, experience and technical assistance.

II. OBJECTIVES

2.1 General objective of the study

Identify opportunities for South-South Cooperation and Triangular Cooperation among the different Member States of SELA for the ratification and implementation of the TFA and proper compliance with the commitments of categories B and C.

2.2 Specific objectives of the study

1. Assess the situation of the TFA in each one of the Member States of SELA to determine whether its ratification or implementation is necessary.
2. Analyse categories A, B and C of the commitments of SELA Member States in order to identify the challenges and opportunities they face.
3. Design mechanisms for South-South Cooperation among SELA Member States and triangular cooperation with other countries or international organizations so as to facilitate the implementation of the agreement.

4. Propose a follow-up scheme within SELA to monitor progress within the mechanisms and the results achieved, in order to replicate them among the different members of SELA.

III. ACTIVITIES TO BE CONDUCTED

1. Carry out a thorough diagnosis of the situation of the TFA in the Member States of SELA, determining whether it is in the process of ratification or implementation and identifying the categories of commitments A, B and C.³
2. Identify and analyse the strengths of the Member States of SELA in implementing the TFA (commitments of Category A) and their weaknesses (commitments of Categories B and C).
3. Propose common areas for possible cooperation by contrasting the strengths identified with the weaknesses found in the Member States of SELA.
4. Design mechanisms for South-South Cooperation among the Member States of SELA that include technical missions from one State to others in order to exchange experiences, internships for professionals dedicated to foreign trade, international events where government agencies responsible for implementing the TFA can disseminate their applied methodologies and lessons learned, exchange training materials, national norms and regulations, as well as training for public sector officials and meetings among representatives of the private sector.
5. Develop opportunities for triangular cooperation with the WTO Secretariat and/or external donors, such as the World Bank, or international cooperation organizations for complying with the commitments of Category C, among countries sharing the same difficulties and opportunities, in order to replicate those experiences in the rest of the Member States of SELA.
6. Create a specific Action Committee to promote the conduction of the study, implement the economic cooperation mechanisms that it may propose, and take care of the corresponding follow-up.

³ The Annex contains a preliminary diagnosis of the possible areas for cooperation among the Member States of SELA, based on the commitments entered into by each one of them. Access to the commitments reported by each country is limited; therefore, it is not possible to make an exhaustive diagnosis of every country.

ANNEX**PRELIMINARY DIAGNOSIS OF POTENTIAL COOPERATION AREAS IN MEMBER STATES OF THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN ECONOMIC SYSTEM (SELA)****BACKGROUND**

As part of the Terms of Reference for the *Study on challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement among the Member States of SELA*, this Annex shows, on a preliminary and case-by-case basis, that the Member States face the following difficulties in their lists of commitments for categories B and C within the framework of the Trade Facilitation Agreement:

ARTICLE 1: PUBLICATION AND AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION

1.2 Information available through Internet (Argentina, Bolivia, Guatemala, Belize, Ecuador, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, Trinidad and Tobago)

1.2.1 Each Member shall make available, and update to the extent possible and as appropriate, the following through the Internet: a) A description of its procedures for importation, exportation, and transit, including procedures for appeal or review, that informs governments, traders, and other interested parties of the practical steps needed for importation, exportation, and transit; b) the forms and documents required for importation into, exportation from, and transit; c) contact information on its enquiry point(s).

1.4 Notification: Each Member shall notify the Committee on Trade Facilitation established under paragraph 1.1 of Article 23 (referred to in this Agreement as the "Committee") of: (Argentina, Guatemala, Belize, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guyana, Jamaica, Panama, Paraguay, Dominican Republic, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago)

a) The official place(s) where the items in subparagraphs 1.1(a) to (j) of paragraph 1.1 have been published:

Paragraph 1.1: Each Member shall promptly publish the following information in a non-discriminatory and easily accessible manner in order to enable governments, traders, and other interested parties to become acquainted with them:

(a) Procedures for importation, exportation, and transit (including port, airport, and other entry-point procedures), and required forms and documents;

(b) Applied rates of duties and taxes of any kind imposed on or in connection with importation or exportation;

(c) Fees and charges imposed by or for governmental agencies on or in connection with importation, exportation or transit;

(d) Rules for the classification or valuation of products for customs purposes;

(e) Laws, regulations, and administrative rulings of general application relating to rules of origin;

(f) Import, export or transit restrictions or prohibitions;

(g) Penalty provisions for breaches of import, export, or transit formalities;

(h) Procedures for appeal or review;

(i) Agreements or parts thereof with any country or countries relating to importation, exportation, or transit; and

(j) Procedures relating to the administration of tariff quotas.

b) The Uniform Resource Locators of website(s) referred to in paragraph 2.1; and

1.2 Information available through Internet

1.2.1 Each Member shall make available, and update to the extent possible and as appropriate, the following through the Internet: a) A description of its procedures for importation, exportation, and transit, including procedures for appeal or review, that informs governments, traders, and other interested parties of the practical steps needed for importation, exportation, and transit; b) the forms and documents required for importation into, exportation from, and transit; c) contact information on its enquiry point(s).

c) The contact information of the enquiry points referred to in paragraph 3.1.

1.3. Enquiry points

1.3.1 Each Member shall, within its available resources, establish or maintain one or more enquiry points to answer reasonable enquiries of governments, traders, and other interested parties on matters covered by paragraph 1.1 and to provide the required forms and documents referred to in subparagraph 1.1(a)

ARTICLE 5: OTHER MEASURES TO ENHANCE IMPARTIALITY, NON-DISCRIMINATION AND TRANSPARENCY

5.3 Test procedures (Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Belize, Ecuador, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Dominican Republic, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago)

5.3.1 A Member may, upon request, grant an opportunity for a second test in case the first test result of a sample taken upon arrival of goods declared for importation shows an adverse finding.

5.3.2 A Member shall either publish, in a non-discriminatory and easily accessible manner, the name and address of any laboratory where the test can be carried out or provide this information to the importer when it is granted the opportunity provided under paragraph 3.1.

5.3.3 A Member shall consider the result of the second test, if any, conducted under paragraph 3.1, for the release and clearance of goods and, if appropriate, may accept the results of such test.

ARTICLE 7: RELEASE AND CLEARANCE OF GOODS

7.9 Perishable goods (Colombia, Bolivia, Brazil, Belize, Ecuador, Paraguay, Dominican Republic, Suriname)

7.9.1 With a view to preventing avoidable loss or deterioration of perishable goods, and provided that all regulatory requirements have been met, each Member shall provide for the release of perishable goods: (a) under normal circumstances within the shortest possible time; and (b) in exceptional circumstances where it would be appropriate to do so, outside the business hours of customs and other relevant authorities.

7.9.2 Each Member shall give appropriate priority to perishable goods when scheduling any examinations that may be required.

7.9.3 Each Member shall either arrange or allow an importer to arrange for the proper storage of perishable goods pending their release. The Member may require that any storage facilities arranged by the importer have been approved or designated by its relevant authorities. The movement of the goods to those storage facilities, including authorizations for the operator moving the goods, may be subject to the approval, where required, of the relevant authorities. The Member shall, where practicable and consistent with domestic legislation, upon the request of the importer, provide for any procedures necessary for release to take place at those storage facilities.

7.9.4 In cases of significant delay in the release of perishable goods, and upon written request, the importing Member shall, to the extent practicable, provide a communication on the reasons for the delay.

ARTICLE 10: FORMALITIES CONNECTED WITH IMPORTATION, EXPORTATION AND TRANSIT

10.1 Formalities and documentation requirements (Guatemala, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Belize, Ecuador, Jamaica, Paraguay, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago)

10.1.1 With a view to minimizing the incidence and complexity of import, export, and transit formalities and to decreasing and simplifying import, export, and transit documentation requirements and taking into account the legitimate policy objectives and other factors such as changed circumstances, relevant new information, business practices, availability of techniques and technology, international best practices, and inputs from interested parties, each Member shall review such formalities and documentation requirements and, based on the results of the review, ensure, as appropriate, that such formalities and documentation requirements are: a) adopted and/or applied with a view to a rapid release and clearance of goods, particularly perishable goods; b) adopted and/or applied in a manner that aims at reducing the time and cost of compliance for traders and operators; c) the least trade restrictive measure chosen where two or more alternative measures are reasonably available for fulfilling the policy objective or objectives in question; and (d) not maintained, including parts thereof, if no longer required.

10.1.2 The Committee shall develop procedures for the sharing by Members of relevant information and best practices, as appropriate.

10.4 Single Window (Argentina, Peru, Belize, El Salvador, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Dominican Republic, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago)

10.4.1 Members shall endeavour to establish or maintain a single window, enabling traders to submit documentation and/or data requirements for importation, exportation, or transit of goods through a single entry point to the participating authorities or agencies. After the examination by the participating authorities or agencies of the documentation and/or data, the results shall be notified to the applicants through the Single Window in a timely manner.

10.4.2 In cases where documentation and/or data requirements have already been received through the single window, the same documentation and/or data requirements shall not be requested by participating authorities or agencies except in urgent circumstances and other limited exceptions which are made public.

10.4.3 Members shall notify the Committee of the details of operation of the Single Window.

10.4.4 Members shall, to the extent possible and practicable, use information technology to support the Single Window.

EXPLANATORY TABLE OF CATEGORIES A, B AND C BY COUNTRY

Country	Articles in which the same difficulties are faced	Category A	Category B	Category C
Argentina (Ratified)	Art. 1, Art. 1.2, Art. 1.4, Art. 2.1 Art. 3, Art. 3.1 Art. 10, Art. 10.4.4	It meets all subparagraphs of this category except 5	There is no access to the list.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Belize (Ratified)	Art. 1, Art. 1.2, Art. 1.4, Art. 2.1 Art. 3.1 Art. 5, Art. 5.3, Art. 5.3.2, Art. 5.3.3 Art. 7, Art. 7.9.1, Art. 7.9.2 Art. 7.9.3, Art. 7.9.4 Art. 10, Art. 10.1.1, Art. 10.1.2 Art. 10.4.1, Art. 10.4.2, Art. 10.4.3 Art. 10.4.4	It meets 15	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Bolivia (Not ratified yet)	Art. 1, Art. 1.4, Art. 2.1, Art. 3.1 Art. 5, Art. 5.3, Art. 5.3.2, Art. 5.3.3 Art. 7, Art. 7.9.1, Art. 7.9.2 Art. 7.9.3, Art. 7.9.4 Art. 10, Art. 10.1.1, Art. 10.1.2 Art. 10.4.1, Art. 10.4.2, Art. 10.4.3, Art. 10.4.4	It meets all subparagraphs of this category except 38	17	2
Brazil (Ratified)	Art. 7, Art. 7.9.1, Art. 7.9.2 Art. 7.9.3, Art. 7.9.4	It meets all subparagraphs of this category except 5	3	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Colombia (Ratified)	Art. 5, Art. 5.3, Art. 5.3.2, Art. 5.3.3 Art. 7, Art. 7.9.1, Art. 7.9.2 Art. 7.9.3, Art. 7.9.4	It meets all subparagraphs of this category except 7	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Ecuador (Ratified)	Art. 1, Art. 1.2, Art. 1.4, Art. 2.1 Art. 3, Art. 3.1 Art. 7, Art. 7.9.1, Art. 7.9.2 Art. 7.9.3, Art. 7.9.4 Art. 10, Art. 10.1.1, Art. 10.1.2	It meets 24	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
El Salvador (Ratified)	Art. 10.4.1, Art. 10.4.2 Art. 10.4.3, Art. 10.4.4	It meets 52	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Guatemala (Ratified)	Art. 1, Art. 1.2, Art. 1.4, Art. 2.1 Art. 3, Art. 3.1 Art. 10, Art. 10.1.1, Art. 10.1.2	It meets all subparagraphs of this category except 42	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Guyana (Ratified)	Art. 1, Art. 1.4, Art. 2.1, Art. 3.1 Art. 5, Art. 5.3, Art. 5.3.2, Art. 5.3.3 Art. 10, Art. 10.4.1, Art. 10.4.2 Art. 10.4.3, Art. 10.4.4	It meets 26	There is no access.	There is no access.

Honduras (Ratified)	Art. 5, Art. 5.3, Art. 5.3.2, Art. 5.3.3 Art. 10, Art. 10.4.1, Art. 10.4.2 Art. 10.4.3, Art. 10.4.4	It meets 26	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Jamaica (Ratified)	Art. 1, Art. 1.4, Art. 2.1 Art. 3, Art. 3.1 Art. 5, Art. 5.3, Art. 5.3.2, Art. 5.3.3 Art. 10, Art. 10.1.1, Art. 10.1.2 Art. 10.4.1, Art. 10.4.2, Art. 10.4.3 Art. 10.4.4	It meets 21	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Nicaragua (Ratified)	Art. 5, Art. 5.3, Art. 5.3.2, Art. 5.3.3 Art. 10, Art. 10.4.1, Art. 10.4.2 Art. 10.4.3, Art. 10.4.4	It meets 23	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Panama (Ratified)	Art. 1, Art. 1.2, Art. 1.4, Art. 2.1 Art. 3, Art. 3.1 Art. 5, Art. 5.3, Art. 5.3.2, Art. 5.3.3 Art. 10, Art. 10.4.1, Art. 10.4.2 Art. 10.4.3, Art. 10.4.4	It meets 36	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Paraguay (Ratified)	Art. 1, Art. 1.2, Art. 1.4, Art. 2.1 Art. 3, Art. 3.1 Art. 5, Art. 5.3, Art. 5.3.2, Art. 5.3.3 Art. 7, Art. 7.9.1, Art. 7.9.2 Art. 7.9.3, Art. 7.9.4 Art. 10, Art. 10.1.1, Art. 10.1.2	It meets 15	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Peru (Ratified)	Art. 5, Art. 5.3, Art. 5.3.2, Art. 5.3.3 Art. 7, Art. 7.9.1, Art. 7.9.2 Art. 7.9.3, Art. 7.9.4 Art. 10, Art. 10.11, Art. 10.1.2 Art. 10.4.1, Art. 10.4.2, Art. 10.4.3 Art. 10.4.4	It meets all subparagraphs of this category except 7	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Dominican Republic (Ratified)	Art. 1, Art. 1.4, Art. 2.1, Art. 3.1 Art. 5, Art. 5.3, Art. 5.3.2, Art. 5.3.3 Art. 10, Art. 10.4.1, Art. 10.4.2 Art. 10.4.3, Art. 10.4.4	It meets 25	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Suriname (Ratified)	Art. 1, Art. 1.4, Art. 2.1, Art. 3.1 Art. 5, Art. 5.3, Art. 5.3.2, Art. 5.3.3 Art. 7, Art. 7.9.1, Art. 7.9.2 Art. 7.9.3, Art. 7.9.4 Art. 10, Art. 10.1.1, Art. 10.1.2 Art. 10.4.1, Art. 10.4.2, Art. 10.4.3 Art. 10.4.4	It meets 8	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.
Trinidad and Tobago (Ratified)	Art. 1, Art. 1.2, Art. 1.4, Art. 2.1 Art. 3, Art. 3.1 Art. 5, Art. 5.3, Art. 5.3.2, Art. 5.3.3 Art. 10, Art. 10.1.1, Art. 10.1.2 Art. 10.4.1, Art. 10.4.2, Art. 10.4.3 Art. 10.4.4	It meets 9	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.	The State has not submitted its list in this category yet.

**AIDE MEMOIRE
ARGUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE STUDY ON CHALLENGES
AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE WTO TRADE FACILITATION
AGREEMENT AMONG THE MEMBER STATES OF SELA**

UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

AIDE MEMOIRE

**ARGUMENTS TO SUPPORT THE TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE STUDY ON
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE WTO TRADE
FACILITATION AGREEMENT AMONG THE MEMBER STATES OF SELA**

The TRADE FACILITATION AGREEMENT (TFA) is an agreement signed within the framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO), where the Member States committed to progressive and voluntary compliance with all their commitments. It is the most important of WTO's multilateral agreements over the last 20 years, which entered into force on 22 February 2017, with the ratification of 112 members of the WTO.

The Agreement was ratified through the adoption of a Protocol amending the WTO Agreement (known as the Marrakesh Agreement) of 15 April 1994. This Agreement is an umbrella, covering four Annexes and a set of Agreements:

- Annex 1 A: Multilateral Agreements on Trade in Goods (includes 13 Agreements); Annex 1 B: General Agreement on Trade in Services (1 Agreement); Annex 1 C: Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (1 Agreement);
- Annex 2: Understanding on Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes (1 Agreement);
- Annex 3: Trade Policy Review Mechanism (one Agreement); Annex 4: Plurilateral Trade Agreements (four Agreements).

Then, since the entry into force of the TFA, it forms part of the set of WTO rules in becoming the 14rd Multilateral Agreement on Trade in Goods (Annex 1A).

It should be noted that the TFA is not an ordinary Agreement; it should be strictly complied with, as set forth in Article 10 of the Marrakesh Agreement, which in its paragraph 3 reads as follows:

“Amendments to provisions of this Agreement, or of the Multilateral Trade Agreements in Annexes 1A and 1C, other than those listed in paragraphs 2 and 6, of a nature that would alter the rights and obligations of the Members, shall take effect for the Members that have accepted them upon acceptance by two thirds of the Members and thereafter for each other Member upon acceptance by it. The Ministerial Conference may decide by a three-fourths majority of the Members that any amendment made effective under this paragraph is of such a nature that any Member which has not accepted it within a period specified by the Ministerial Conference in each case shall be free to withdraw from the WTO or to remain a Member with the consent of the Ministerial Conference”.

Thus, the aforementioned provision entitles the Ministerial Conference to evaluate the behaviour of the Members with respect to the amendments that are made to the WTO Agreement (Marrakesh), and considering that the TFA has become a structural reform to

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this Agreement and has already entered into force, not ratifying it may bring negative consequences for the Member States.

In this context, and considering the importance and obligation to ratify and implement the TFA, the Terms of Reference for the base study presented by Bolivia aim to create a bridge of South-South Cooperation in order to facilitate the implementation of the TFA, overcome the obstacles faced by some Member States of SELA in their trade operations through cooperation with other Member States that show strengths in those same areas, since they share similar realities, but some have reported more significant achievements than others. For example, some countries, such as the Dominican Republic and Colombia, have already implemented a Foreign Trade Single Window, while Uruguay, Paraguay and Ecuador are still at a partial stage of implementation. The exchange of experiences between both groups of countries can be very valuable, as well as the potential exchange of relevant regulatory documentation already sanctioned, which was needed to support Single Windows, as well as international scholarships.

Other countries, such as Spain, have vast experience in issues such as advance rulings and de-bureaucratization of procedures. It is also possible to think of triangular cooperation mechanisms between SELA countries and Spain in order to set in motion such resolutions.

It should be noted that, thanks to the current level of compliance with the commitments of SELA countries, their experiences could be easily shared and replicated in other countries whose level of compliance could be significantly improved.

The project intends to create cooperation mechanisms to comply with the three categories of commitments of the TFA through exchanges of information, experiences and technical assistance, and its scope includes both members of SELA that belong to the WTO and those that are not members. All SELA countries that have ratified or are in the process of ratification of the TFA face Category C commitments, i.e., obligations with greater difficulties for implementation that require more time and technical assistance.

In addition, the study is in line with the purpose of SELA, as a forum for consultation and coordination to agree on common positions and strategies for Latin America and the Caribbean as regards economic issues vis-à-vis international organizations, and to promote cooperation.

Observations as regards costs

Bolivia submitted Terms of Reference to carry out a study, which, if it is executed, will involve costs to carry out its activities, but in a subsequent phase.

States that are not members of the WTO

The only Member State of SELA that is not a member of the WTO is The Bahamas. However, on 18 July 2001, a Working Group for its accession to the WTO was created, and it held meetings up to the year 2012. When the accession process concludes, The Bahamas must ratify the WTO Agreement and, as explained above, the TFA already forms an integral part of the WTO Agreement as Annex 1a on Trade in Goods.

At any rate, non-WTO States have been implementing the best practices included in the TFA. That is the case of Serbia and the institutionalization of the Authorised Economic Operators. Serbia began its process to adhere to the WTO in 2005, and in 2015 it started a governmental self-evaluation to implement the TFA and to be ready when it becomes a full member of the WTO.

Serbia has determined that 17 of the TFA measures can be implemented immediately, eight can be implemented in a substantial manner, 10 partially, and one does not have a concrete definition. This study could also help The Bahamas determine its compliance capabilities before becoming part of the WTO, in order to be in the position for implementation once it ratifies the WTO Agreement.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

I. DELEGATIONS**ARGENTINA****HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Eduardo Porretti
Chargé d’Affaires a.i.
Embassy of Argentina
Telephone: (58-212) 731.3311
Fax: (58-212) 731.
E-mail: evene@mrecic.gov.ar
politica_evene@mrecic.gov.ar

DELEGATES

Martín Alemandi
Secretary
Embassy of Argentina
Telephone: (58-212) 731.3311
E-mail: malemandi@live.com.ar

Matías Giménez Constanzi
Secretary
Embassy of Argentina
Telephone: (58-212) 731.3311
E-mail: gcz@cancilleria.gov.ar

BRAZIL**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Ruy Carlos Pereira
Ambassador
Embassy of Brazil
Telephones: (58-212) 918 6002
E-mail: despachobrasil@gmail.com

DELEGATES

João Marcelo de Aguiar Teixeira
Counsellor Minister
Embassy of Brazil
Telephones: (58-212) 918.6000 (master)/ 918 6002/ 6036
E-mail: joao.teixeira@itamaraty.gov.br

Moira Pinto Coelho
Counsellor
Embassy of Brazil
Telephones: (58-212) 918 60049
E-mail: moira.coelho@itamaraty.gov.br

Luis Alejandro Araque
Technical Assistant
Embassy of Brazil
Telephones: (58-212) 918 60014/
E-mail: luis.botero@itamaraty.gov.br

104**BOLIVIA****HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Javier Héctor Sucojayo
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.
Embassy of the Plurinational State of Bolivia
Telephone: (58-212) 263-3015
Fax: (58-212) 261-3386
E-mail: embaboliviaven@hotmail.com

DELEGATE

Geovanna Rodríguez
Commercial Attaché
Embassy of the Plurinational State of Bolivia
Telephone: (58-212) 263-3015
Fax: (58-212) 261-3386
E-mail: embaboliviaven@hotmail.com

CHILE**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Pedro Felipe Ramírez Ceballos
Ambassador
Embassy of Chile
Telephone: (58-212) 992.5364
E-mail: echile.venezuela@minrel.gov.cl;

DELEGATES

Claudio Rojas
Third Secretary
Embassy of Chile
Telephone: 0412-3365417
E-mail: crojase@minrel.gov.cl

Eduardo Pool
Third Secretary
Embassy of Chile
Telephone: 0412-3365417
E-mail: epool@minrel.gov.cl

COLOMBIA**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Carlos Gamboa
Counsellor Minister
Embassy of Colombia
Telephone: (58-212) 630 9500; 01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08
E-mail carlos.gamboa@cancilleria.gov.co

DELEGATE

Kely Johana Martelo Tordecilla
Third Secretary
Embassy of Colombia
Telephone: (58-212) 630 9500; 01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08
E-mail: kely.martelo@cancilleria.gov.co

CUBA**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Rogelio Polanco Fuentes
Ambassador
Embassy of Cuba
Telephone: 991-6661
E-mail: Ambassador@embajadacuba.com.ve;
oficinaAmbassador@embajadacuba.com.ve;

DELEGATES

Luis Cepeda
Counsellor
Embassy of Cuba
Telephone: 991-6661
E-mail: oc1@embajadacuba.com.ve

Emilio Berto González
Counsellor
Embassy of Cuba
Telephone: 993-5646/993-5695/991-9415
E-mail: oc1@embajadacuba.com.ve

ECUADOR**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Elizabeth Méndez
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.
Embassy of Ecuador
Telephone: (58-212) 265 0801/0414-1084621
E-mail: emendez@cancilleria.gob.ec

DELEGATE

Alexis Villacrés
Third Secretary
Embassy of Ecuador
Telephone: (58-212) 265 0801/0414-1084621
E-mail: avillacres@cancilleria.gob.ec

GUATEMALA**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Sandra Noriega De Kugler
Ambassador
Embassy of Guatemala
Telephone: (58-212) 952-5247/ 954-0146
E-mail: embvenezuela@minex.gob.gt;

DELEGATE

Beatriz Méndez
Counsellor Minister
Embassy of Guatemala
Telephone: (58-212) 952-5247/ 954-0146
E-mail: bemendez@minex.gob.gt;

106**GUYANA****HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Robert McKenzie
Counsellor Minister, Chargé d'Affaires a.i.
Embassy of Guyana
Telephone: (58-212-261-7745/267-7095
E-mail: embguya@cantv.net

HONDURAS**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Fernando Suárez Lovo
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.
Embassy of Honduras
Telephone: 261.4693 / 6741 / 263.3184 / 264.0606
E-mail: honduven@cantv.net; ehonduven@gmail.com

JAMAICA**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Monalee Gibbs
Counsellor
Embassy of Jamaica
Telephone: (58-212) -9916133/9916955
E-mail: counsellorconsul.embjaven@gmail.com;
assistant.embjaven@gmail.com

MEXICO**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Eréndira Araceli Paz Campos
Ambassador
Embassy of Mexico
Telephone: (58-212) – 9523003
E-mail: embvenezuela@sre.gob.mx

DELEGATES

Sylvia Sevilla
Minister
Embassy of Mexico
Telephone: (58-212) – 9522779
E-mail: ssevillam@sre.gob.mx

Sergio Juárez
First Secretary
Embassy of Mexico
Telephone: (58-212) – 9522779
E-mail: sjuarez@sre.gob.mx

NICARAGUA**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Ramón Leets Castillo
Ambassador
Embassy of Nicaragua
Telephone: (58-212- 977-3270 – 977-3289
E-mail: embanic@live.com

PANAMA**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Raúl Rolla Fontt
Political Attaché
Embassy of Panama
Telephone: (58-212) 992.9093
E-mail: rolla@mire.gob.pa

PARAGUAY**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Celso Santiago Riquelme
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.
Embassy of Paraguay
Telephone: (58-212) 264-3066
Telefax: (58-212) 263-2559 / 267-5543
E-mail: embaparven@cantv.net; embaparven@mre.gov.py

DELEGATE

Marcial Páez
Cultural Attaché
Embassy of Paraguay
Telephone: (58-212) 264-3066
Telefax: (58-212) 263-2559 / 267-5543
E-mail: mpaez@hotmail.com

PERU**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Eric Anderson Machado
Secretary General
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Peru
Telephone:
E-mail: eanderson@ree.gob.pe

DELEGATES

Jhonny Torres
Third Secretary
Embassy of Peru
Telephone: (58 – 212) 264.1672 / 264.1420 / 264.1271
E-mail: jtorres@embajadaperu.org.ve

Luis Vicuña
Analyst of the Economic Section
Embassy of Peru
Telephone: (58 – 212) 264.1672 / 264.1420 / 264.1271
E-mail: leprucaracas@gmail.com

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Adonaida Medina Rodríguez
Ambassador
Embassy of Dominican Republic
Telephone: (58 – 212) 264.1672 / 264.1420 / 264.1271
E-mail: embajadadominicanave@gmail.com

108**DELEGATE**

Pedro Vásquez
Counsellor
Embassy of Dominican Republic
Telephone: 0414-0197570
E-mail: pvasquez216@live.com

SURINAME**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Elsje Pawiroedjo
Second Secretary
Embassy of Suriname
Telephone: (58-212)-2631554 / 2612724 / 0412-9103659
E-mail: embsur1@hotmail.com; embsur1@cantv.net;
embsur1@gmail.com

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Paul Byam
Ambassador
Embassy of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Telephone: (58 – 212) 261.3748/261.5796/261.4772
E-mail: embassytt@gmail.com; paulcbyam@hotmail.com

DELEGATE

Dayne-Marc Chin Slick
Second Secretary and Consul
Embassy of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Telephone: (58 – 212) 261.3748/261.5796/261.4772
E-mail: dmchinslicktt@gmail.com

URUGUAY**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Verónica Ramírez
Chargé d’Affaires a.i.
Embassy of Uruguay
Telephone: (58-212) 285-1648 / 285-3549/2833326
E-mail: uruvenezuela@mrree.gub.uy

DELEGATE

Magdalena Germán
Business Adviser
Embassy of Uruguay
Telephone: (58-212) 286-6604 / 285-1648
E-mail: uruvenezuela@mrree.gob.uy

VENEZUELA**HEAD OF DELEGATION**

Luis Alejandro Sauce Navarro
Commissioner for Economic and Commercial Issues of the
Vice-Ministry for Latin America of the People’s Ministry of
Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

DELEGATE

Rafael Ravell Reverón
Analyst
People's Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Bolivarian
Republic of Venezuela
Telephone: (58-212) 993-5646/993-5695/991-9415
E-mail: rafaelravell013@gmail.com

**II. PERMANENT SECRETARIAT OF THE LATIN
AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN ECONOMIC SYSTEM
(SELA)**

Javier Paulinich Velarde
Permanent Secretary
Telephone: (58-212) 955-7100 / 955-7101
Fax: (58-212) 951-5292 / 951-6901
E-mail: sela_sp@sela.org

Virginia Cartaya
Director of Studies and Proposals
Telephone: (58-212) 955-71-53
E-mail: vcartaya@sela.org

Javier Gordon Ruiz
Director (a.i.) of Relations for Integration and Cooperation
Telephone: (58-212) 955-7137
E-mail: jgordon@sela.org

Eduardo Piña
Specialist of Studies and Proposals
Telephone: (58-212) 955-71-41
E-mail: epina@sela.org

Zulay Angarita
Manager of Administration, Personnel and General
Services
Telephone: (58-212) 955-7116
E-mail: zangarita@sela.org

Fernando Guglielmelli
Head of the Office of the Permanent Secretary
Telephone: (58-212) 955-71-37
E-mail: fguglielmelli@sela.org

Silvia Hernández
Analyst of Relations
Telephone: (58-212) 955-7123
E-mail: shernandez@sela.org

Milagros Cruz
Analyst of Relations
Telephone: (58-212) 955-71-17
E-mail: mcruz@sela.org

Javier Rodríguez
Analyst of Studies and Proposals
Telephone: (58-212) 955-71-03
E-mail: jrodriguez@sela.org

Marisela Alvarado
Press Official
Telephone: (58-212) 955-71-43
E-mail: malvarado@sela.org

Carlos Ortuño
Official of the Information and Database Centre
Telephone: (58-212) 955-7123
E-mail: cortuno@sela.org

Karla Sánchez
Analyst of Studies and Proposals
Telephone: (58-212) 955-71-45
E-mail: ksanchez@sela.org

Lisette Carrillo
Official of Informatics and Technology
Telephone: (58-212) 955-7125
E-mail: lcarrillo@sela.org

Lucimar Ponce
Analyst of Relations
Telephone: (58-212) 955-71-39
E-mail: lponce@sela.org

Laura Méndez
Analyst of Studies and Proposals
Telephone: (58-212) 955-71-23
E-mail: lmendez@sela.org

Daniel Roa
Analyst of Relations
Telephone: (58-212) 955-71-03
E-mail: droa@sela.org

Jesús Marcano
Analyst of Studies and Proposals
Telephone: (58-212) 955-7219
E-mail: jmarcano@sela.org

Ciro Castillo
Accounting Official
Telephone: (58-212) 955-7129
E-mail: ccastillo@sela.org

Cora Romero
Official of Travels and Arrangements
Telephone: (58-212) 955-7124
E-mail: cromero@sela.org

Antonio Peña
Translation Official
Telephone: (58-212) 955-7118
E-mail: apmarcial@sela.org

Rosanna Di Gregorio
Translation Official
Telephone: (58-212) 955-7127
E-mail: rdigregorio@sela.org

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Work Documents (DT)

DT1 Draft Agenda

DT2 Annotated Draft Agenda and organization of works

DT3 Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the Permanent Secretariat

DT4 Work Programme for the year 2018

DT5 Draft Administrative Budget of the Permanent Secretariat for the year 2018

DT6 Audit Report on the Financial Statements of the Permanent Secretariat at 31 December 2016

DT7 Audit Proposal for the Fiscal Year 2017

DT8 Designation of a Member of the Administrative Tribunal of SELA