

## AN EVENT ON **HARNESSING INTER-REGIONAL INTEGRATION FOR SDGs**

### Concept Paper

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What	- A virtual meeting to discuss ways to maximise the contribution of inter-regional integration to SDGs attainment, and to facilitate regular and continuing collaboration among regional integration groupings
When	- 20 May 2021, 13:30 – 17:00 (Geneva time)
Who	- Organized by Belarus and Barbados in partnership with UNCTAD; participated by UN Member States, regional integration groupings, international organizations
How	- A virtual meeting (Zoom platform) - Registration link: <a href="https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_PjloUHcrQ5KgqMaVR9cacA">https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_PjloUHcrQ5KgqMaVR9cacA</a>

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Focal points	- Permanent Mission of Belarus at the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva +41 22 748 24 50 <a href="mailto:belarus.geneva@mfa.gov.by">belarus.geneva@mfa.gov.by</a> <a href="mailto:a.pytalev@mfa.gov.by">a.pytalev@mfa.gov.by</a>
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## Background

The socio-economic crisis ignited by the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed the progress towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. An initial proliferation of trade-restrictive measures, such as restrictions on the export of essential medical supplies and/or foodstuff, highlighted the need for a trading system that would safeguard vulnerable countries in times of crisis.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis hit the world, the international trading system was undergoing a structural change. While the multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization (WTO) remains as the foundation for promoting “a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable” (SDG Target 17.10) trading system, there has been a significant increase in the number of regional and sub-regional economic integration and trade agreements. Between 2005 and 2019, a number of regional trade agreements doubled from 150 to over 300. In recent years, about half of all trade agreements aim at “deeper” integration by addressing issues beyond tariffs and trade rules under WTO.

Regional economic integration aims to reduce trade barriers among members to foster region-wide socio-economic development in a meaningful manner. Regional economic integration at its best may help member countries to address collective interests on issues such as poverty and inequality, vulnerability, food security, debt, gender empowerment, energy, decent work, infrastructure, sustainable production, and “green” and “blue” growth, among others.

It is in this context that regional integration could play a crucial role in revitalizing growth and accelerating the pace to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Each regional integration grouping follows its own development path and accumulates unique experience in contributing to the attainment of the SDGs. Exchanging information on such unique experiences and best practices, including building institutional capacity and implementation of the integration agreements at the national level, will be mutually beneficial for all regional integration groupings.

The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) could be seen among prime examples in this regard. In particular, the EAEU is the only regional project that has provided a voluntary review of the presentation of its SDG activities in 2017 at the ECOSOC High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in New York.

Interactions among regional integration groupings are already underway but on a limited scale. A web of bilateral FTAs involving regional integration groupings are emerging, while large-scale multi-party RTAs evolved along South-South and South-South-North axis.

However, to date no framework or platform facilitates regular and continuous interactions among regional economic integration groupings.

## Proposal

Against the above background, Belarus and Barbados propose to organize an event to discuss ways to enhance horizontal cooperation and collaboration among regional integration groupings towards achieving the SDGs.

The event will:

- Bring regional integration groupings and their member countries together to exchange views on if/how regional integration has helped members develop collective solutions to common challenges, including those exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis, and ensure SDGs attainment.
- Be an integral element of the preparatory process towards the Fifteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD 15), to be held in October 2021. UNCTAD would substantively contribute to this event as a partner agency.
- Explore the possibility of a mechanism for interaction and sharing of best practices among interested regional integration groupings. The outcome could be presented at the 2021 ECOSOC High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and/or at the general policy discussion of the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, during UNCTAD 15, and the 7th UNCTAD World Investment Forum (WIF).
- Explore mechanisms to launch a regular dialogue between the interested countries and regional integration groupings.