

Brussels cannot offer ACP unilateral trade access

Print

Published: December 12 2007 02:00 | Last updated: December 12 2007 02:00

From Mr Peter Mandelson.

Sir, Your report "[Poorer nations face import tariff rise as EU refuses to budge](#)" (December 11), on the European Union's current trade and development negotiations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, fails to give an accurate picture of them. I hope your readers will bear in mind the following points: The EU is offering 100 per cent duty- and quota-free access to the ACP's exports from January 1, far better than for other developing countries. Under World Trade Organisation rules we cannot offer access to the ACP unilaterally but on a WTO-compatible, reciprocal basis. If we do we will be challenged by other developing countries. Reciprocal ACP tariff liberalisation will be partial and gradual, with sensitive agriculture and industry products excluded or liberalised over very long periods of up to 25 years. Reform and adjustment will be assisted in ACP countries by €23bn over the next seven years. If, as sovereign nations, ACP nations choose not to use the terms of their access, the EU's only legal alternative is to offer the general system of preferences used by other developing countries. All but a handful of African countries are likely to see no change to their tariff preferences on January 1.

These facts barely do justice to the huge opportunities offered by these negotiations to harness trade for development. For 30 years, the EU's trade preferences for the ACP have not delivered a growing share of ACP exports to Europe. We have a chance to turn this round. But it has to be done in a way that is acceptable to other developing countries in the WTO.

It requires some effort from the ACP countries. This is hard but necessary and I welcome the leadership many ACP countries are showing in moving these discussions forward. We have more work to do next year, but I am glad to say that we are making significant progress.

Peter Mandelson,
European Commissioner for Trade

Copyright The Financial Times Limited 2007

"FT" and "Financial Times" are trademarks of the Financial Times. [Privacy policy](#) | [Terms](#)
© Copyright The Financial Times Ltd 2007.