

## The EU and Central America agree on a work programme with the aim of finalising an Association Agreement in May

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A Costa Rican farmer shows some coffee grains. EFE

Commercial negotiators from Central American countries and from the European Commission concluded an informal three-day meeting at which they agreed a work schedule with a view to finalising an Association Agreement in May.

The work plan includes a video conference between Central American countries on 15 February and a coordination meeting in Brussels on 18, 19 and 20 February, prior to a round of EU-Central America negotiations from 22 to 26 February attended by the negotiators of the three chapters contained in the Agreement: trade, political dialogue and cooperation.

Depending on the outcome of that round, either a further meeting would be held in March, or the process would move straight on to the final meeting, prior to signing the Agreement during April in Nicaragua.

The Spanish Presidency of the EU has proposed speeding up negotiations so that they are finalised in time for the Association Agreement between the EU and Central America to be signed on 18 May in Madrid, coinciding with the 6th EU-LAC Summit.

Negotiations have been suspended since last July because of the political crisis in Honduras. The formal resumption of negotiations is in the hands of European and Central American leaders, according to the Nicaraguan Chief Negotiator, Verónica Rojas, Deputy Minister for Trade, in a statement to the Spanish news agency Efe following the meeting in Brussels.

The European Commissioner for Trade, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, is confident that Honduras will be included in the future Association Agreement if the country's political situation continues to progress towards constitutional order.

The Association Agreement is the most advanced type of agreement the EU can sign with a country or region. It is proposed to non-EU countries with whom the EU intends to strengthen relations, and is based both on mutual trust and on values and principles.

The European Commission is negotiating the Agreement with the governments of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua in the name of the Member States. The first round of negotiations took place in San José, Costa Rica, in October 2007. The eighth round should have taken place in Brussels from 6 to 10 July.

The Commission announced the suspension of the eighth round of negotiations last 1

July due to the political crisis in Honduras, after consulting with the governments of the Central American countries and with the agreement of the Member States.

Panama, which participates in the negotiations as an observer, has asked the European Commission if it can form part of the Agreement.

[More information about this meeting](#)