

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

TRADE SUMMARY

The U.S. goods trade surplus with the Dominican Republic was \$1.9 billion in 2009, a decrease of \$676 million from 2008. U.S. goods exports in 2009 were \$5.3 billion, down 20.1 percent from the previous year. Corresponding U.S. imports from the Dominican Republic were \$3.3 billion, down 16.3 percent. The Dominican Republic is currently the 33rd largest export market for U.S. goods.

The stock of U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in the Dominican Republic was \$960 million in 2008 (latest data available), up from \$766 million in 2007. U.S. FDI in the Dominican Republic is concentrated primarily in the manufacturing sector.

IMPORT POLICIES

Free Trade Agreement

On August 5, 2004, the United States signed the Dominican Republic-Central America-United States Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR or Agreement) with five Central American countries (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua) and the Dominican Republic (the Parties). Under the Agreement, the Parties are significantly liberalizing trade in goods and services. The CAFTA-DR also includes important disciplines relating to: customs administration and trade facilitation; technical barriers to trade; government procurement; investment; telecommunications; electronic commerce; intellectual property rights; transparency; and labor and environmental protection.

The Agreement entered into force for the United States, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua in 2006 and for the Dominican Republic in 2007. The CAFTA-DR entered into force for Costa Rica on January 1, 2009.

In 2008, the Parties implemented amendments to several textile-related provisions of the CAFTA-DR, including, in particular, changing the rules of origin to require the use of U.S. or regional pocket bag fabric in originating apparel. The Parties also implemented a reciprocal textile inputs sourcing rule with Mexico. Under this rule, Mexico provides duty-free treatment on certain apparel goods produced in a Central American country or the Dominican Republic with U.S. inputs, and the United States provides reciprocal duty-free treatment under the CAFTA-DR on certain apparel goods produced in a Central American country or the Dominican Republic with Mexican inputs. These changes further strengthen and integrate regional textile and apparel manufacturing and create new economic opportunities in the United States and the region.

Tariffs

Under the CAFTA-DR, about 80 percent of U.S. industrial and consumer goods now enter the Dominican Republic duty-free, with the remaining tariffs phased out by 2015. Nearly all textile and apparel goods that meet the Agreement's rules of origin now enter the Dominican Republic duty-free and quota-free, creating economic opportunities for U.S. and regional fiber, yarn, fabric, and apparel manufacturing companies.

FOREIGN TRADE BARRIERS

Under the CAFTA-DR, more than half of U.S. agricultural exports enter the Dominican Republic duty-free. The Dominican Republic will eliminate its remaining tariffs on nearly all agricultural goods by 2020. For certain agricultural products, tariff-rate quotas (TRQs) will permit some immediate duty-free access for specified quantities during the tariff phase out period, with the duty-free amount expanding during that period. Under the CAFTA-DR, the TRQs are to be made available for the entire calendar year, beginning on January 1 of each year. In 2009, the Dominican Republic did not make the TRQ on dry beans available until May. The United States has raised this concern with Dominican officials and is working to ensure that the Dominican government makes the CAFTA-DR TRQs available in a timely manner.

Nontariff Measures

The Dominican Republic's customs policies and procedures frequently provoke complaints by businesses, and arbitrary clearance requirements sometimes delay the importation of merchandise for lengthy periods of time. On July 1, 2001, the Dominican Republic agreed to apply the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Customs Valuation (CVA), whereby goods imported from WTO Members are assessed duties based on the transaction value, except under certain specified circumstances. The Dominican Republic requested and received a waiver from the WTO to exclude 31 items from application of the CVA. Duties on the excluded products are assessed on the basis of a minimum "reference value" assigned by the Dominican customs authority. However, U.S. exporters report that the Dominican customs authority has often used the list of reference values for products other than those covered by the WTO waiver.

On July 11, 2006, the Dominican customs authority announced that it would make adjustments to reference values due to high levels of undervaluation by businesses. Since that time Dominican importers and associations have complained to the U.S. Embassy that the Dominican customs authority has increased reference values for many products entering the country and refuses to accept an importer's commercial invoice as proof of the price paid and thus dutiable value. The United States has raised this issue with the Dominican customs authority each time it has been reported.

The 17 percent tax on the first *matricula* (registration document) for all vehicles, which was set by the government in 2006, remains in effect.

Under the CAFTA-DR, the Dominican Republic committed to improve transparency and efficiency in administering customs procedures, including the CAFTA-DR rules of origin. The Dominican Republic also committed to ensuring greater certainty and fairness in the administration of these procedures, and all the CAFTA-DR countries agreed to share information to combat the illegal transshipment of goods. On October 31, 2005, the United States and the Dominican Republic signed a Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement that allows customs officials to exchange information, intelligence, and documents designed to help prevent customs offenses. The agreement provides a basis for cooperation and investigation in the areas of trade fraud, money laundering, smuggling, export controls, and related security. The United States donated nonintrusive (X-ray) verification equipment that has upgraded and expedited the verification process. The Dominican customs authority is still in the process of expanding the project by either purchasing or leasing additional equipment, as well as through technical assistance.

GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT

The CAFTA-DR requires that procuring entities use fair and transparent procurement procedures, including advance notice of purchases and timely and effective bid review procedures, for procurement

FOREIGN TRADE BARRIERS

covered by the Agreement. Under the CAFTA-DR, U.S. suppliers are permitted to bid on procurements of most Dominican government entities, including key ministries and state-owned enterprises, on the same basis as Dominican suppliers. The anticorruption provisions in the Agreement require each government to ensure under its domestic law that bribery in matters affecting trade and investment, including in government procurement, is treated as a criminal offense or is subject to comparable penalties. Nevertheless, U.S. suppliers have complained that Dominican government procurement is not conducted in a transparent manner and that corruption is widespread.

The Dominican Republic is not a signatory to the WTO Agreement on Government Procurement.

EXPORT SUBSIDIES

The Dominican Republic does not have export promotion schemes other than the tariff exemptions for inputs given to firms in the free trade zones. Under the CAFTA-DR, the Dominican Republic may not adopt new duty waivers or expand existing duty waivers that are conditioned on the fulfillment of a performance requirement (*e.g.*, the export of a given level or percentage of goods). However, under the CAFTA-DR, the Dominican Republic was permitted to maintain such measures through 2009, provided that it maintained the measures in accordance with its obligations under the WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures. The U.S. Government is working with the Dominican Republic government in an effort to ensure it implements its CAFTA-DR obligation.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS (IPR) PROTECTION

The Dominican Republic was listed on the Watch List in the 2009 Special 301 report. Key concerns cited in the report included the need to enhance its IPR enforcement efforts by providing resources for and greater coordination between law enforcement entities.

The CAFTA-DR provides for improved standards for the protection and enforcement of a broad range of IPR, including protections for patents, trademarks, undisclosed test and other data submitted to obtain marketing approval for pharmaceuticals and agricultural chemicals, and digital copyrighted products such as software, music, text, and videos; and further deterrence of piracy and counterfeiting. To implement its CAFTA-DR IPR obligations, the Dominican Republic undertook legislative reforms providing for stronger IPR protection and enforcement.

The United States will continue to monitor the Dominican Republic's implementation of its IPR obligations under the CAFTA-DR.

OTHER BARRIERS

Some U.S. firms and citizens have found corruption in government, including in the judiciary, to be a significant concern and a constraint to successful investment in the Dominican Republic. The general perception is that government agencies and the judicial system are weak and subject to outside influence. Administrative and judicial decision making appear at times to be inconsistent, non-transparent, and very time consuming. Successful prosecutions of corrupt individuals and a general reduction in the civil case backlog are beginning to inspire business confidence, however.

