



**EUROPEAN UNION**  
**DELEGATION TO THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO**

***REMARKS OF THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES OF THE  
EUROPEAN UNION  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE PARLIAMENT WORKSHOP  
WEDNESDAY, 5 JUNE 2013***

- \* Senator the Honourable Timothy Hamel-Smith, President of the Senate,
- \* The Honourable Wade Mark, Speaker of the House,
- \* Honourable Cabinet Ministers,
- \* Other Members of Parliament,
- \* Mrs Arlene Mc Comie, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Planning  
and Sustainable Development.
- \* Mr. Larry Honeysett- Head of Financial Scrutiny, Scrutiny Unit,  
UK House of Commons,
- \* Mr. Gary Peters- Audit Director and Project Liaison Officer- Office of the  
Auditor General,
- \* Mr. Anthony Staddon, Consultant for this Project,
- \* Committees Staff of the Parliament,
- \* Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honor today to comment on the journey we started together one and a half years ago with the aim of adding a little contribution to the process of strengthening of the National Parliament.

Development of democracy is a founding concept for the European Union. I recall a statement made by the former president of Finland, Tarja Halonen, at the Celebration of 100 years of equal voting rights for men and women in 2006; she said : "*There is no room for complacency: democracy is never perfect.*" I feel privileged that the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago has invited us to partner on the journey of constantly improving and developing democratic structures in the country.

This initiative was triggered by a study funded by us on Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability in 2008, which pointed to the need to strengthen the role of the Parliament in the budget process. This was followed by a diagnostic on the Parliamentary Scrutiny and Existing Parliamentary Practice of the budget in the beginning of last year. While this second study recognized the particular case of Trinidad and Tobago, it also provided references to practices in other countries and thoughts on how to increase the independence of the Parliament, and to develop its capacity to contribute to the governance of the country. For example, it points to untapped potential with the three existing, but currently under utilized Joint Select Committees.

The EU-Trinidad and Tobago partnership continued in Tobago in July last year, where the Prime Minister hosted a discussion on the findings of the study. In January this year another workshop was organized with the aim of increasing the skills of the parliamentary staff in budget matters. Representatives of the civil society were also invited for a session to explore ways of establishing cooperation between them, other watch dog organisations and the Parliament. This approach requires good will and hard work on the part of the Parliament and its interlocutors, but has a real potential for strengthening of the fabric of democracy, with different methods of representation and decision-making supporting each other.

The next stop on this journey was in Europe, where a group consisting of 11 members of the Trinidad and Tobago Parliament and its staff toured Westminster and the National assemblies of Wales and Ireland. Key themes on this tour included the role of independent parliamentary commissions and the budget oversight.

It is my hope that the Parliament has benefitted from this partnership as much as we have. I would like, once again to express our appreciation for the openness and the commitment of this Parliament in pursuing a challenging path to tune in with the developments and global trends in the area of public governance and democracy. Indeed, a number of interesting reform initiatives are already underway in Trinidad and Tobago, in terms of increasing Parliament's administrative and financial independence from the executive. The current undertaking to develop a strategy for the

institution is a necessary process to chart the way forward. Similar developments are underway within the office of the Auditor General, supporting the efforts to foster accountability within the public service.

While this workshop is the last stop for the EU on this particular trip with you, we hope that the experience gained will be further taken advantage of and put at work in your reform process.

I would like to thank the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago for the opportunity you gave us to be with you on this journey. We look forward to continuing to travel together.