

**Hon. Baldwin Spencer  
Antigua and Barbuda**

**Regional Interactive Discussion  
Member Governments of the OECS**

**OECS Economic Union and the ECCU Eight Point Stabilization Fund  
23 July 2009**

**Opening Remarks**

**Focus: Importance of Air and Sea Transportation to Region:**

Honourable Prime Ministers, Sir Dwight Venner, Chairman, OECS Economic Union Task Force, Dr. the Hon. Ralph Gonsalves Chairman, OECS Coordinating Committee, Colleague Ministers, Director General and Staff OECS Secretariat, ladies and gentlemen, viewers to this special broadcast, good night.

I am extremely pleased to be part of this important and critical encounter this evening as we seek to obtain the views and ideas of you the citizens of the Eastern Caribbean States on the way forward in our efforts to strengthen the integration process.

The economic situation for us in the region and the world in general is calling for the development of cohesive and prudent economic and financial measures designed to create collective responses that will address the structural problems within our individual economies.

**Ladies and gentlemen, citizens of the OECS,** the situation before us is extremely necessary and critical as we seek to gather support and ideas about how best we could foster and shape an Economic Union that will help us to mitigate the difficulties faced by individuals and businesses.

In this regard I think the time is now for us to hasten our efforts towards deeper and more meaningful mechanisms of cooperation and integration.

As you heard from the speakers before me, there are many facets to our proposed Economic Union which is designed to promote trade and policy frameworks for the best possible level of growth and development within the Eastern Caribbean territories.

The New Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Treaty in article 4 speaks to the need *for ‘cooperation...and the maintenance of unity and solidarity among member states in the defense of their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence.’* It also highlights the need for member states to harmonize, coordinate and undertake joint action in a wide range of fields to include, but not limited to

1. International marketing of goods and services including tourism
2. Public administration and management
3. Tax administration and
4. External transportation and communications including civil aviation which will be the focus of my intervention to further strengthen our efforts to ensure that we have a comprehensive Economic Union Mechanism and that we recognize the important successes we have achieved in areas of functional cooperation to date.

The development of efficient and affordable Air and Sea transportation systems in the region is necessary and critical for our continuous development and growth.

My colleagues and I recognize the current deficiencies in our transportation system with respect to the movement of people and goods across the region. However, we are also cognizant of the fact that we have successfully maintained a very important civil aviation regulatory authority that is doing great work in the area of air transportation safety and security.

The Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority (ECCA) which is one of the oldest institutions of cooperation in the OECS was established as early as 1957 as the Directorate of Civil Aviation.

From its inception this institution was seen as a vehicle for facilitating a collective and uniform approach to Civil Aviation matters affecting the then Windward and Leeward Islands, which now comprise the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Group.

I do think that as we dialogue about the merit and demerit of the OECS Economic Union, let us not forget that we have already developed institutions that are recognized internationally as useful models for regional functional cooperation.

Therefore as we move forward with new initiatives and explore new ideas for the establishment of institutions and bodies to coordinate policy and manage Air and Sea transportation, let us be mindful of and learn from the experiences of those institutions like the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank and the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority.

In conclusion I would just like to state that there are number of initiatives already in progress that will further help us in the region to improve and implement an efficient regional Air and Sea transportation system. For example

- a.** A study supported by The World Bank to look at the establishment of a Ferry Service is currently in progress.
- b.** OECS Distribution and Transportation Company (ODTC) which was mandated by the Monetary Council and spear headed by the ECCB held its first boarding meeting recently. It is expected that
- c.** The ODTC will be a private sector company that facilitates transportation and distribution links in the region.

Therefore our efforts to explore ways of improving Air and Sea transportation in the Sub region should seek to ensure that

1. We create mechanisms to develop and manage Air and Sea transportation Policies
2. That we explore we ways to effectively regulate competition and route rights among businesses involved in Air and Sea Transportation and that we
3. Investigate in a very methodical manner, the factors influencing the cost of travel to ensure that Air and Sea transportation is affordable.

**Ladies and gentlemen, citizens of the OECS these are just my brief remarks on the issue of Air and Sea Transportation in the region and look forward to your comments.**

**Thank you very much...**