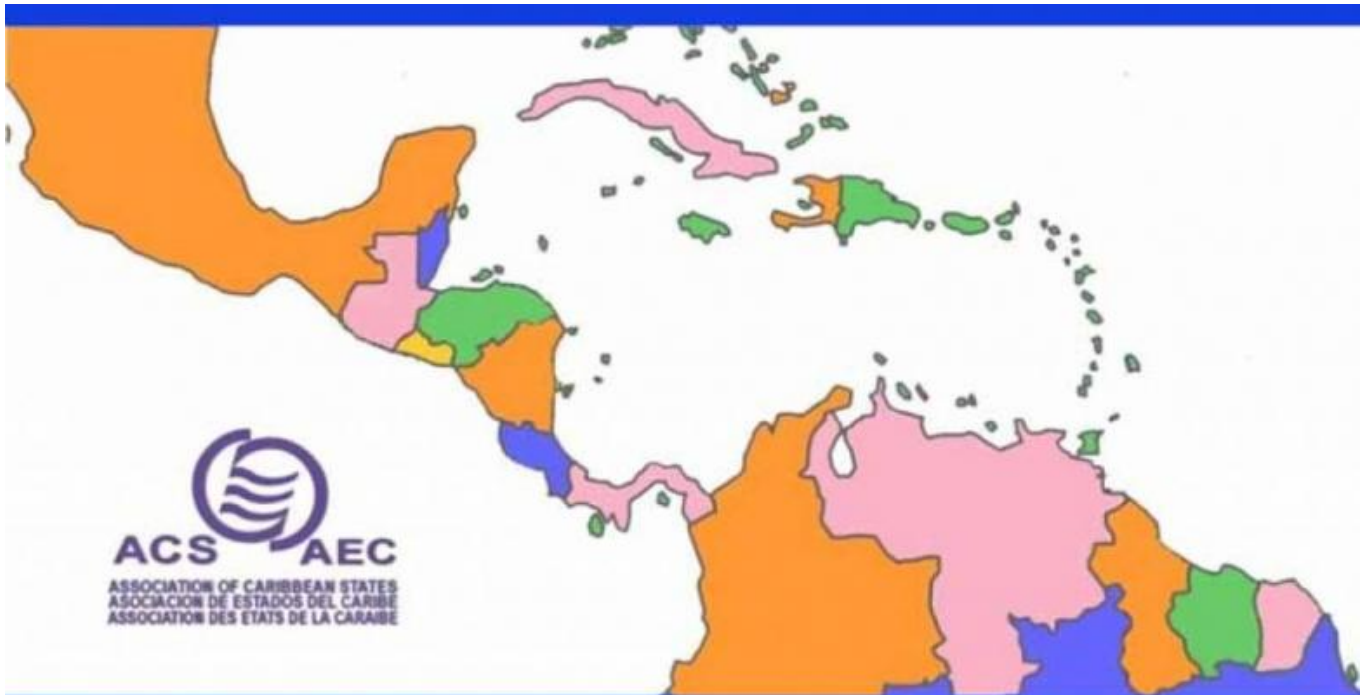

Association of Caribbean States Seeks Common Paths

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Havana, Mar 2 (Prensa Latina) The Association of Caribbean States (ACS) is seeking common paths for the region, so it will focus on fighting climate change and on the need for interconnection at its upcoming ministerial and cooperation meetings.

According to the agenda, on March 8, representatives from about 60 countries that cooperate with the Caribbean region will participate in the 1st Conference on Cooperation of that mechanism in Havana.

On March 9 and 10, the 22nd Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Association will take place in the Cuban capital.

On March 11, the 5th Caricom-Cuba Ministerial Meeting will be held to review the achievements in integral relations between Cuba and the sister nations associated to the Caribbean Community.

The ACS was founded in July 1994 with the main objective of being a consultation and cooperation body for the insular countries and territories or the nations with shores in the Caribbean Sea.

This regional mechanism is being revitalized and it was boosted at the 7th Summit in June 2016, when agreements were reached on common issues by the 25 member countries and the associated States.

The head of the Norman Girvan Chair of Caribbean Studies at the University of Havana, Antonio Romero, noted that since its foundation, the group has defined four areas of priorities, in terms of the search for consensus and cooperation, trade, tourism, transportation and the reduction of disasters.

He pointed out that at the same time, there is a dynamic and dialectic interrelation among those four working areas of the ACS, because tourism is a key element in the economic infrastructure of many of those countries and it is highly vulnerable to climate change, and some development strategies in that sector are not environmentally friendly.

At the same time, maritime and air transportation is still a big problem in the region, as it is essential to foster trade among the Caribbean countries, it is one of the big historic limitations, he added.

The expert said that in general terms, there is a low level of trade among Caribbean countries, even though there are considerable dynamics of bilateral trade, and that situation is caused, among other factors, by the region's weak transportation.

Big states like Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia coexist in the Caribbean with microstates like Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, so differences are clear in terms of international insertion.

Romero added that different modalities of trade and commercial partners exist in the region as well, there are differences from the perspective of development models as a result of ideological diversity.

The 7th Summit also approved the ACS Action Plan for the next three years (2016-2018) with the objective of boosting sustainable development in the region.

In the first of its seven key items, the document expresses the ACS member countries' commitment to establish and consolidate the so-called Caribbean Sustainable Tourism Zone.

In order to achieve that goal, the signatories agreed to boost concerted the potentialities of that economic sector, which is vital for most countries in the region, which they defined as a tourist multideestination par excellence.

In addition, they agreed to build capacities in transportation to enhance the development of trade and economic investment through initiatives like the program to 'Unite the Caribbean by Air and Sea'.

Another issue directly addresses the problem of climate change and the mitigation of its effects by dealing with the reduction of the risk of disasters in countries that are threatened by that phenomenon.

The plan aims to channel cooperation in terms of culture and education with the funding of projects to favor academic exchanges among universities and other regional institutions.
