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**Committee on Regional Trade Agreements
Hundred and Fourth Session**

**FREE TRADE AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL (GCC)
MEMBER STATES AND SINGAPORE
(SERVICES)**

NOTE ON THE MEETING OF 22 SEPTEMBER 2022

Chairman: Ambassador H.E. Mr. Taeho LEE (Republic of Korea)

1.1. The 104th Session of the Committee on Regional Trade Agreements (hereinafter "CRTA" or the "Committee") was convened in Airgram WTO/AIR/RTA/29/Rev.1 dated 12 September 2022.

1.2. Under Agenda Item F.V of the Session, the CRTA considered the Free Trade Agreement between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Member States and Singapore, services (hereinafter "the Agreement"). The Chairman stated that the factual presentation had been prepared by the Secretariat on its own responsibility in full consultation with the Parties, in accordance with paragraph 7(b) of the Transparency Mechanism for Regional Trade Agreements (document WT/L/671).

1.3. The Chairman noted that the consideration by the CRTA of the services aspects of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Member States and Singapore had been subject to some delays. The Committee now had a complete package of documents that would permit it to discharge its mandate. He saw this as proof that the Chair's consultations could be effective.

1.4. The Chairman recalled that the Agreement had entered into force on 1 September 2013. It had been notified to the WTO by the Parties on 30 June 2015 under Article V:7(a) of the GATS as an agreement providing for the liberalisation of trade in services between them (document S/C/N/807/Rev.1). The text of the Agreement, together with its Annexes, was available on the Parties' official websites and in the WTO RTA database. The goods part of the Agreement had been notified under the Enabling Clause and would therefore be considered at a meeting of the Committee on Trade and Development, tentatively scheduled in November. The factual presentation in document WT/REG460/1, and questions and replies in document WT/REG460/2 had been distributed in advance of the meeting.

1.5. The representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the GCC said that the GCC and the Republic of Singapore had enjoyed a long-standing friendship and strong economic and political ties. This relationship had promoted and strengthened the multilateral trading system in a manner conducive to the development of regional and international cooperation, economic and trade relations through the liberalization and expansion of trade in goods and services in their common interest and for their mutual benefit as well as to promote the transfer of technology.

1.6. Accordingly, the Parties had signed an FTA which covered trade in goods and services on 15 December 2008 at Doha, Qatar. The Agreement had entered into force on the 1 September 2013 and was the first FTA signed by the GCC and the second FTA by Singapore with a Party from the Middle East region.

1.7. GCC countries were Singapore's top trading partners in the Middle East with the volume of merchandise trade at over USD 31 billion in 2021. Singapore's largest import from the GCC countries

in 2021 was mineral fuels which accounted for 82% of total GCC imports from Singapore. Mechanical Appliances were Singapore's largest export to GCC countries, comprising 25% of its total exports to GCC countries in 2021. The Agreement consisted of 10 chapters: General Provisions, Trade in Goods, Rules of Origin, Customs Procedures, Trade in Services, Government Procurement, Electronic Commerce, Cooperation, Settlement of Disputes, and Final Provisions.

1.8. In conclusion, he thanked Singapore for its efforts to finalize the Agreement and for their excellent cooperation in the preparations for the consideration of the Agreement by the Committee. He also thanked WTO Members for showing their interest by participation in the meeting and the WTO Secretariat for issuing the factual presentation on the Agreement and for preparing the meeting.

1.9. The representative of Singapore stated that Singapore and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) had been longstanding trade and economic partners. The Agreement, signed in December 2008, was the first FTA which the GCC had signed with a non-Middle East partner. This had been an important milestone in GCC-Singapore relations. At the time of signing, the Agreement was not only symbolic of the strong and growing economic relations between the GCC and Singapore, but also demonstrated a recognition of the importance of each other's economies in their respective regions. Over the years, Singapore's trade with the GCC had remained robust and diversified along with their economies. The Agreement had enabled commercial interests to grow, represented by the steady increase in trade in services and investments between Singapore and GCC members.

1.10. Singapore and the GCC were like-minded partners. Despite differences in the composition of their economies, there was shared impetus to pursue new frontiers in areas such as the digital and green economies. While Singapore's trade with the GCC had been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, it had quickly bounced back to pre-pandemic levels. During the pandemic, there had been an uptick in Singapore's engagements with GCC Members on trade facilitation initiatives in the digital economy. For instance, in November 2021, Singapore and the UAE had successfully piloted the digital transfer of electronic Bills of Lading across both jurisdictions via Singapore's Infocomm and Media Development Authority's (IMDA) Trade Trust framework. Global climate change mitigation efforts had also created opportunities for Singapore and the GCC Members to strengthen their economic exchanges in areas such as renewable energy and low-carbon technologies. In December 2021, Singapore had signed an MoU with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to cooperate in the energy sector, which included collaborations in renewable energy and energy efficiency.

1.11. Overall, the Agreement had provided a strong foundation for their bilateral trade and economic relations, which Singapore and the GCC would continue to leverage and build upon. It had also helped to provide stability for Singapore and its companies in exploring the burgeoning economic opportunities in the GCC market. Singapore was confident that its partnership with the GCC would continue to strengthen in years to come.

1.12. Lastly, she extended her thanks to her colleagues from Saudi Arabia for their close cooperation in preparing to present the Agreement at the Committee and to other WTO Members for their interest in it. She also expressed her heartfelt thanks to the WTO Secretariat for preparing the factual presentation and other work leading up to the presentation.

1.13. The Chair opened the floor to Members for general comments, comments on any section of the factual presentation as well as on the written replies.

1.14. The representative of the European Union indicated that she had taken good note of the information and data that had been shared on the Agreement. She thanked the Parties for their presentations and hoped that the implementation of the Agreement would be very fruitful for the Parties.

1.15. The representative of Canada thanked the Parties for their efforts to bring the transparency process to a fruitful conclusion for their regional trade agreement.

1.16. The representative of Japan thanked the Parties for their comprehensive and informative presentations. He also thanked the Secretariat for its efforts in preparing the factual presentation and wished the Parties success in the implementation of the Agreement. Japan believed that they would further strengthen the multilateral trading system.

1.17. The Chairman noted that the consideration of the Trade Continuity Agreement between the GCC Member States and Singapore had allowed the Committee to clarify a number of questions and conclude oral discussion of the RTA in accordance with paragraph 11 of the Transparency Mechanism. Any delegations wishing to ask follow-up questions were invited to forward submissions in writing to the Secretariat by 29 September 2022 and the Parties were asked to submit replies in writing by no later than 13 October 2022. In accordance with paragraph 13 of the Transparency Mechanism all written submissions, as well as the minutes of the meeting would be circulated promptly, in all WTO official languages, and made available on the WTO website.

1.18. The Committee took note of the comments made.
