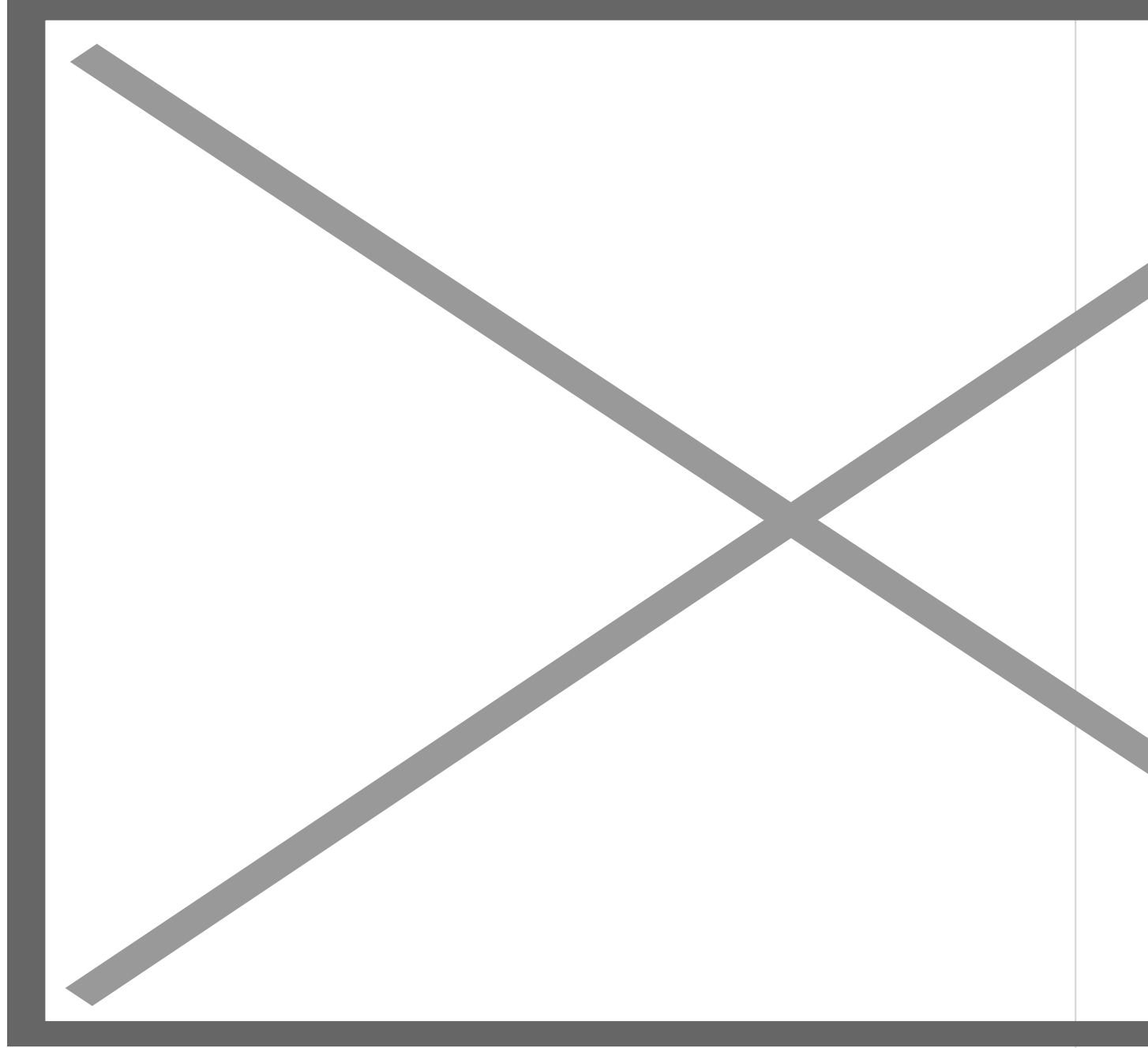


CARICOM marks 50 years of Caribbean integration and shared challenges

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The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) commemorated this week in Trinidad and Tobago its half-century of existence with the 45th meeting of heads of state and government of the bloc, who agreed on the need

and importance of deepening the integration achieved to jointly overcome complex common challenges.

During the high-level meeting, which began on July 3 and concluded on Wednesday in the Trinidadian capital, the CARICOM leaders highlighted the significant advances made by the group in its first 50 years, among them the consolidation of a system of functional institutions for regional integration and economic cooperation in the Caribbean.

They also pondered how much more the community can do to enrich what has been achieved and enhance the development of its member countries.

CARICOM was created on July 4, 1973 with the signing of the Treaty of Chaguaramas by Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago. Since then, 11 other countries have joined the mechanism as member states and five as associate members.

The group aims to promote economic cooperation and sustainable development in the Caribbean, as well as political and social integration, through institutions and agreements that favor the free movement of goods, services and people.

The Prime Minister of Dominica, Roosevelt Skerit, president of CARICOM, advocated at all times during the recent meeting of leaders to resume the free transit of citizens through the region, for the benefit of the growth and expansion of the regional economy.

In this regard, one of the main agreements of the meeting was to approve the free movement of people between most of the member countries of the regional group.

"We have taken the decision to have free movement of all categories of people to live and work. We believe this is a fundamental part of the integration architecture," Skerit said at a press conference after the closing of the meeting.

The CARICOM president also stressed the importance of overcoming the challenges that prevent air and maritime transport in the Caribbean from becoming more efficient and affordable, to facilitate the movement of people and goods, "the backbone of a successful integration agreement."

Advances in the free flow of goods, services and people, as well as the adoption of standardized rules governing economic transactions in the region, are some of the main achievements of the longest-running integration mechanism in the developing world.

According to economist Antonio Romero, president of the "Norman Girvan" Chair of Caribbean Studies at the University of Havana, these achievements show that Caricom has advanced more than other integration processes in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Romero stressed in an interview with Xinhua that functional cooperation among Caricom member countries has been essential to face the asymmetries and vulnerabilities of the small Caribbean island states.

International analyst Adalberto Santana, a researcher at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), considers that the "admirable search" for regional integration by the members of the Caribbean community, despite the cultural, social, political and economic differences present in the region, is worthy of note.

In declarations to Telesur television station, Santana highlighted the strategic value of the insular Caribbean due to its geographic location, cultural diversity and its relevance as a financial center, and explained that taking full advantage of this value can contribute greatly to the integration proposed by Caricom.

But, he added, the pressures exerted by the great Western powers have hindered the territorial integration of the Caribbean, and to address this, one of the bloc's successes has been the diversification of its foreign relations.

Despite its achievements, CARICOM faces challenges on its path towards more effective integration and the development of its member countries, such as food security, climate change and the multidimensional crisis that Haiti is going through.

In this regard, the meeting of Heads of State and Government affirmed the regional commitment to the deployment of joint efforts in Haiti to achieve tangible results that contribute to the resolution of the situation of insecurity and violence in the country.

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