



Panama Takes a Decisive Step Toward MERCOSUR: Accession Bill Approved in Third Debate



Panama's National Assembly has unanimously approved in third debate Bill No. 201, which ratifies Economic Complementation Agreement No. 76 between Panama and the MERCOSUR countries: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. MERCOSUR is one of the world's largest economic blocs, representing over 295 million consumers and a combined economy ranked among the top five globally.

During the legislative debates, Minister of Commerce and Industries Julio Moltó emphasized that the agreement is not a Free Trade Agreement, nor does it imply automatic market liberalization. It also does not compromise Panama's sensitive sectors. On the contrary, it represents a strategic opportunity to strengthen Panama's role as a regional logistics hub, attract foreign investment, and promote regional value chains.

Key Opportunities for the Private Sector:

- Preferential and gradual access to an expanded market, ideal for boosting exports of Panamanian goods and services.

- Growing interest from foreign companies, especially from Brazil and Argentina, in establishing regional operations in Panama.
- Support for free zones, facilitating the setup of manufacturing industries that leverage local talent and raw materials.
- Harmonization of sanitary and phytosanitary standards, reducing technical barriers and facilitating agro-industrial trade.
- Creation of a binational Administrative Commission, responsible for ensuring effective implementation of the agreement.

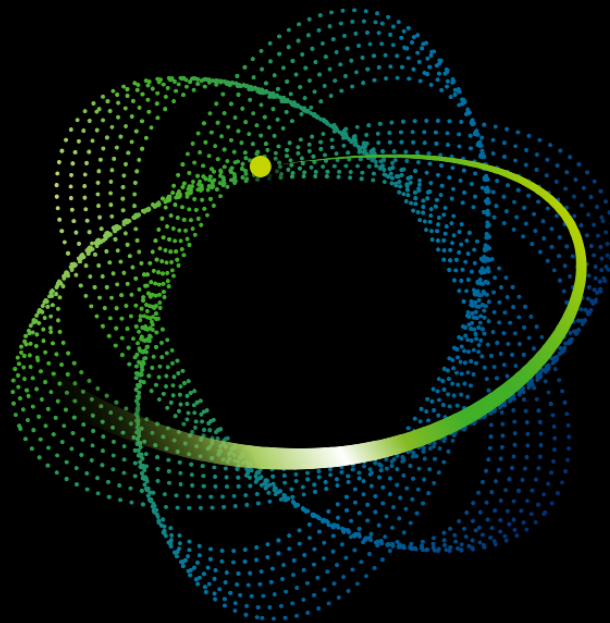
With this third debate approval, the bill is now ready to be signed into law by the Executive and subsequently published in the Official Gazette, the final step for it to take full legal effect.

Panama's accession as an Associated State of MERCOSUR is a strategic move that expands its reach in hemispheric trade. It also complements established investment regimes such as Panama Pacifico, SEM, Free Zones, Colón Free Zone, and EMMA, opening new avenues for investment and value creation.

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