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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

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Subject: Council Conclusions on the Joint HR/Commission Communication on EU relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, "Joining forces for a common future"

Delegations will find in Annex the Council Conclusions on the Joint HR/Commission Communication on EU relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, "Joining forces for a common future", as adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council at its meeting on 13 May 2019.

Council Conclusions on the Joint Communication on EU relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, "Joining forces for a common future"

1. Relations between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have strengthened significantly over the last decade. They represent an important pillar of the EU's global action. The LAC and the EU are key partners with common values and interests, which should work even more closely in the multilateral framework, most notably at the UN and at the WTO, to promote growth and a sustainable development, strengthen respect for democratic principles, the rule of law and human rights, build more resilient societies, preserve and promote peace and security, multilateralism and a rules-based international order.
2. The Council is committed to continue to build on the major achievements of the EU's multi-layered relationship with LAC, which includes a bi-regional strategic partnership, underpinned by a comprehensive Plan of Action; close relationships with several sub-regions with which Political, Cooperation and Trade Agreements are in place; and solid bilateral frameworks with countries which were frontrunners in establishing Association Agreements with the EU.

3. Taken together, the EU and LAC account for 25% of the world's GDP, a third of UN members and almost half the members of G20. Joint action by the two regions has been instrumental in the achievement of landmark multilateral agreements such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Paris Agreement. Maintaining and strengthening our strategic alliances will be crucial in ensuring the effective implementation of, and global compliance with, such international commitments.
4. In a world characterised by interdependence and interconnection, the EU and LAC have much to gain by joining forces to seize the opportunities and manage the challenges of a fast changing international environment. A values-based approach, sustained by a cooperative model and mutually beneficial outcomes differentiates the EU-LAC partnership from alternative models that are less concerned with good governance, transparency and accountability.
5. In this context, the Council welcomes the Joint Communication "Joining forces for a common future" adopted by the High Representative and the European Commission. Together with the present Council Conclusions, the Joint Communication provides a robust policy framework for EU strategic engagement with LAC over the coming years. The Council endorses the Joint Communication and the priority actions it sets out for the development of four partnerships for prosperity, democracy, resilience and a rules-based order.

6. The promotion of democracy, the rule of law, the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression, the protection of human rights defenders and peaceful solutions of crisis situations must remain at the core of EU-LAC relations. The breakdown of democratic principles and civil liberties is at the root of crises that currently affect some countries in the LAC region. Their resolution will require a return to constitutional democracy, the separation of powers, strengthened accountability, and systems of governance that respond to citizens' needs. The Council reaffirms its call for political, democratic and peaceful solutions that reinstate people's freedom, opportunities, and its rightful voice.
7. The full potential of our societies can only be achieved through enabling all people - regardless of their sex, race, ethnic or social origin, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, disability or sexual orientation and gender identity - to live free from discrimination and violence. Specifically, the EU and LAC should continue to promote and act towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in all spheres of their cooperation.
8. The EU and LAC should work to consolidate economic, environmental and societal resilience so that all countries, including Small Island Developing States, can better withstand natural or man-made crises. Both long-standing and new challenges require enhanced cooperation between the two regions. Efforts to tackle climate change and environmental degradation, to preserve biodiversity and water resources, to strengthen institutional resilience, to eradicate social inequalities, to promote citizens' security, to address and counter the world drug problem and to combat organised crime and corruption can only succeed through expanded dialogue, strengthened cooperation, and effective bi-regional cooperation programmes that bring together key stakeholders and influencers from the EU and LAC.

9. The economies of the EU and LAC have become more integrated over the last decade, but there is a huge untapped potential that should be exploited. The EU remains the biggest investor in LAC countries and LAC investment in Europe has grown substantially. Investments have increased in quality as well as in quantity and EU investors continue to add value by promoting social and environmental responsibility, by creating decent jobs and by enhancing human development. EU-LAC prosperity is increasingly shared and should be further enhanced through a greater volume of private investment and effective use of existing trade agreements. Promoting the transformation towards green economies and a sustainable use of natural resources, developing sustainable blue economy, investing in knowledge, innovation and human capital, advancing the digital economy and promoting connectivity are important objectives of the economic partnership between the EU and LAC in the coming years.
10. Joint EU-LAC action is essential to ensure that trade and investment policies are rules-based and progressive, that they foster a better environment for business and help companies from both regions to compete on global markets, and that they result in benefits for citizens and consumers. The two regions should also make sure that trade agreements effectively advance the value-based nature of the bi-regional partnership and strengthen good governance, public health and safety, gender equality, and social, labour and environmental standards, including the Paris Agreement implementation.
11. The Council is committed to resolutely advance on the completion of negotiations for ambitious and balanced free trade agreements with Mercosur and Chile and welcomes the near completion achieved in negotiations with Mexico. Under a new EU-ACP agreement currently under negotiation, the regional partnership with the Caribbean will be brought up to date and political dialogue reinforced. These steps will further expand the Association, Free Trade and Cooperation Agreements that presently bind the EU to 27 of the 33 LAC countries.

12. Many LAC countries have attained high levels of development, and people's needs and expectations are changing. However, progress achieved in the last decade remains fragile and can be overturned if it is not sustained by structural reforms, the reduction of socio-economic inequalities, the encouragement of innovation and the adaptation of economic models to technological changes. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda brings opportunities to act together to consolidate these gains.

13. The Council considers that future cooperation must be able to respond to new and more complex needs and expectations. While providing support for people and countries most in need, and to help countries to consolidate hard-won development achievements by promoting needed reforms, the next Multiannual Financial Framework will also equip the EU with the appropriate tools, means and innovative instruments to prioritise cooperation in mutually relevant areas such as research, digitalisation, clean energy, connectivity, smart cities, and the creative industries, where the two regions stand to gain from sharing experiences, knowledge and working on collaborative frameworks.

14. The Council considers that EU and LAC should be effective partners in shaping global rules in fields such as sustainable development, trade and investment, climate change response, biodiversity protection, and labour or technological developments. The potential for such cooperation needs to be further explored and exploited. More systematic and structured coordination between the two regions should be pursued in multilateral fora, from the United Nations Human Rights Council to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change for the implementation of Paris Agreement and the Katowice Rulebook. The Council also encourages the Commission to pursue cooperation with LAC to preserve a strong multilateral trading system and to reform the World Trade Organization.

15. Support to cooperative regional orders remains a strategic objective for the EU. While it is for LAC countries to decide on the best structures and mechanisms to promote dialogue and cooperation in the region, the Council underlines the importance of the bi-regional partnership as a driver of relations with sub-regions and bilateral relations. The Council looks forward to further enhanced dialogue and cooperation with cross-regional mechanisms, such as CELAC as well as sub-regionally driven efforts, such as the Pacific Alliance, Central American Integration System (SICA), and Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM) /Caribbean Community (CARICOM). It reiterates its willingness to resume Summit meetings with LAC countries in order to give a strategic steer to the partnership.
16. The Council emphasises that the EU-LAC partnership extends beyond governments. The EU should continue its close collaboration with regional and bi-regional organisations, such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Organisation of American States, the Ibero-American General Secretariat, the Italo-Latin American Institute, the Inter-American Development Bank Group, or the Development Bank of Latin America. Future relations need to build on contributions from various stakeholders such as sub-national entities, parliamentarians, civil society, the private sector, the EU-LAC foundation, think tanks and academia. The Council stresses the importance of a full involvement of civil societies in all the dimensions of the partnership with LAC.
17. The Council invites the High Representative and the European Commission to take forward work on the implementation of the concrete priorities identified in the Joint Communication in close cooperation with Member States, including a review by 2020.
