San Jose Dialog between the European Union and Central America

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RELATIONS BETWEEN THE EU AND CENTRAL AMERICA The San Jose dialogue The San Jose dialogue between the Community and its Member States and the six countries of Central America (Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala,Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama) was launched at a ministerial conference in September 1984 held in the Costa Rican capital. It was put on a formal footing at the following conference, in November 1985 in Luxembourg, in the shape of a declaration setting out the dialogue's objectives and the principle of annual high-level meetings. Since then there have been 11 ministerial meetings, the last of which (San Jose XI) was held in Panama in February. This political and economic dialogue is an example of a unique political and cooperation commitment vis-a-vis a developing region of the world with which the Community had fairly loose geographical, historical and economic ties,but whose instability was, at the time, a potential source of increased East-West tensions with implications for the Community. For that reason, the key objective of the dialogue spelled out in the Luxembourg declaration was to find - with the support and encouragement of the Contadora Group - a peaceful, regional, comprehensive and negotiated solution in order to put an end to violence and instability in the region and to foster social justice and economic development and respect for human rights and democratic freedoms. This objective was largely achieved over the first decade: the Community has made a major contribution to the Central American peace process under the Esquipulas agreements at regional level and in domestic conflicts in Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, as well as providing appreciable support for the consolidation of democracy. Cooperation agreement In addition to the strides made on a political level, the first cooperation agreement, also signed by the partners concerned in Luxembourg in 1985, entered into force on 1 March 1987 and has provided a framework for boosting Community assistance for the Central America. The Community recognized from the outset the critical link between the drive for stability in the area and socio-economic development. The increasing volume of Community aid throughout this period - with total commitments far exceeding ECU 1 billion (annual commitments in 1994 were ECU 170 million compared with some ECU 40 million before the dialogue) has made the European Community the main donor in Central America, which is now one of the principal per capita recipients of Community aid in the world. In line with the dialogue's objectives, Community aid over the first ten years has by and large been allocated to operations relating to the peace process (supporting rehabilitation programmes in Nicaragua and El Salvador and reintegration of uprooted populations) or to the most urgent needs of underdeveloped sectors such as large-scale food aid and projects to help peasant farmers. In February 1993, a more ambitious cooperation agreement including a human rights clause, a future developments clause and a wider range of cooperation sectors was signed in San Salvador. It is yet to enter into force, however,pending ratification by all the Central American countries. Panama and Costa Rica are the two main partners in the region, with a trade volume in 1994 of ECU 1 041 and ECU 1 162 million respectively. Around 85 % of EU imports from Central America are agricultural food products. (Source:RAPID)