The European Union and Latin America: the present situation and prospects for closer partnership, 1996-2000

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In adopting the report by Mr Jan-Willem BERTENS, Parliament welcomed the Commission communication on strengthening the partnership between the European Union and Latin America but considered that the Commission's proposals were 'vague and little innovative'. The communication lacked a global approach and was not based on an effective CFSP. With regard to the CFSP and the political dialogue, Parliament called for a new wide-ranging 'transatlantic dialogue' and called on the Commission and Council to establish a well defined and precise global action programme with sufficient budgetary resources. Calling for Latin America to be considered as a geographic area of great importance for the Union it proposed that this new dialogue should be based on a high-level ministerial framework similar to that for the San José dialogue. Peace, democracy and respect for human rights in Latin America remained essential to all Union action in this region. It was necessary, however, to go further and to involve 'civil society' by having it participate in this cooperation through the establishment of fora for consultation. These were all aspects which would contribute to combat the poverty and social inequalities which threatened to cause serious social unrest. With regard to trade and integration, it stressed that the Commission should include in its action programme a global vision for contractual relations between the EU and this region. It supported in particular the progress made in the sectors of free trade and integration and requested that future economic cooperation agreements should be accompanied by financial protocols incorporating a substantial increase in resources and including a negotiated and reciprocal opening up of markets with no exclusions. It called on the Commission, therefore, before the adoption of the new financial perspective to enter into force by the year 2000, to submit a report assessing the budgetary appropriations and loans which would be necessary to ensure adequate support for EU-Latin America partnership. It also asked for a yearly report on the progress made in removing the obstacles to trade between the two parties. With regard specifically to cooperation, the EP considered that the budget funds for 1996-2000 were insufficient and called on the Commission to use the funds available to give priority to the least developed countries. While supporting the priorities and themes chosen by the Commission in its communication, it stressed the importance of action against drugs, a real scourge in these countries, and called for greater efforts to be made by the Community in this field. It also stressed the extent to which the economic growth of these countries was closely linked to the debt burden. It therefore requested the Council to look into the possibility of applying innovative formulae to reduce the debt (conversion into environment and vocational training projects, tax relief etc.). Lastly, with regard to security and defence cooperation it called on the Commission, the Council and the Member States to increase their cooperation and dialogue with a view to establishing a climate of mutual confidence (in particular with regard to arms control). It encouraged in particular the conclusion of cooperation agreements between the different organizations of which the countries of the EU and Latin America are members.