# Stronger partnership between the European Union and Latin America

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report on enhanced cooperation between the EU and Latin America drawn up by José Ignacio SALAFRANCA SÁNCHEZ-NEYRA (EPP-ED, ES) in response to the Commission policy paper submitted ahead of the EU-LAC (Latin America and the Caribbean) Summit scheduled for May 2006 in Vienna.

The report stressed that Latin America was a highly important market for the Union because of its growing ties with Asia (especially China) and its abundant human resources and raw material stocks. The Summit would afford an excellent opportunity to "revitalise" relations and, as far as the EU was concerned, to draw up a "self-contained, coherent and comprehensive strategic framework". MEPs pledged that Parliament would do its utmost to help make the Summit "a real success" for all the partners.

The committee spoke of the need for an an overall strategic vision which should "pursue the ultimate goal of establishing a genuine political, social, cultural, environmental and security partnership, bringing a Euro-Latin American free trade area into being by 2010, and launching a real partnership in the social field and in the spheres of knowledge and joint action to bring about sustainable development". While supporting the Commission's proposals for stepping up political dialogue, MEPs said that a stronger partnership must also be built on a Euro-Latin American charter for peace and security, on the work of a bi-regional conflict prevention centre, and on new institutional machinery including a Euro-Latin American Transatlantic Assembly and a Euro-Latin American Permanent Secretariat. They also called for a "regular bi-regional dialogue between local and regional governments under the auspices of the Committee of the Regions", and wanted to see "systematic attempts to seek a Euro-Latin American consensus in the various international organisations and negotiations", especially in the UN and the WTO. The report added that it was essential, if the partnership was to run smoothly, that a Euro-Latin American entrepreneurial forum, with representatives of employers' organisations and large and small businesses, should work to promote trade and encourage investment of every kind in the two regions.

In other points raised in the report, the committee endorsed the Commission's aim of continuing to help Latin America fight drugs and demanded "a resolute strategy" to tackle the pernicious effects of the drugs trade. It also supported the Commission's proposals on strengthening regional integration processes in Latin America and its specific commitments regarding social cohesion. Lastly, MEPs called for the EU to launch a "resolute, generous development cooperation policy" and to allocate budget resources "commensurate with stated ambitions". In this connection the Commission was urged to put forward "ambitious options" in its future budget proposals so that Parliament would not have to battle with the Council in order to increase funding.