Stronger partnership between the European Union and Latin America

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PURPOSE : to strengthen the partnership between the European Union and Latin America.

CONTENT : this communication sets out a series of recommendations aiming to further consolidate the links between the EU and Latin America. Bearing in mind the next EU-Latin America/Caribbean Summit to be held in Vienna in May 2006, the Commission analyses the current challenges and makes practical recommendations to revitalise the partnership. In particular, its proposals include stepping up political dialogue between the two regions, stimulating economic and commercial exchanges, encouraging regional integration, tackling inequality and tailoring its development and aid policy more closely to real conditions in Latin America.

The Commission proposes to give a fresh impetus to the EU-Latin America partnership which currently faces a number of challenges. Its main objectives for the coming years aim to:

- establish a strategic partnership through a network of association agreements (including free trade agreements) involving all the countries of the region and liable to contribute to the integration of the region as a whole;

- have genuine political dialogues which increase the influence of both regions on the international scene;

- develop effective sectoral dialogues (e.g. on social cohesion or the environment) with a view to the sustainable reduction of inequalities and promoting sustainable development: the Commission proposes holding a social cohesion forum and a meeting of environment ministers every two years to prepare for the EU-Latin America/Caribbean Summits;

- contribute to the development of a stable and predictable framework to help the Latin American countries attract more European investment, which will eventually contribute to economic development: the Commission encourages the European Investment Bank to set up a Latin American Facility to provide loans in support of interconnectivity of infrastructure networks;

- tailor aid and cooperation more to the needs of the countries concerned;

- increase mutual understanding through education and culture: the Commission will prioritise the creation of a common higher education area and undertakes to ensure that Latin American teachers and students are invited to visit European universities;

- sustaining the Commission’s commitment to supporting the countries of Latin America in the fight against drugs and corruption.

The Commission recommends:

- conducting a needs-based political dialogue with the appropriate Latin American partners at biregional, bilateral or subregional level, on carefully chosen topics (such as UN reform, peace-keeping, conflict prevention and crisis situations in certain countries of the region);

- selecting a restricted number of topics;

- preparing political dialogue at meetings of senior officials (using the troika format);

- regularly organising meetings at senior official level with a few countries, as and when necessary, for the purposes of political dialogue.

Strengthening the strategic partnership should contribute to establishing a favourable climate for economic exchanges between the two regions: in Latin America this could mean technology transfers, improvements in productivity, the development of its infrastructure and diversification of its markets. It is in the EU's interest on the other hand to develop and consolidate its market positions and to pursue a dynamic investment policy.

With a view to modernising the government, the Commission aims to step up cooperation operations which will strengthen governance and encourage inclusiveness, of poorer citizens in particular; involve civil society in its operations and promoting the involvement of citizens (particularly women) in political projects, notably through political parties and support the EP's desire to set up an EU-Latin America Transatlantic assembly.

Lastly, the Commission intends to strengthen the transfer of know-how and good practice regarding cultural cooperation, both between Latin American countries and between the region and the EU. Therefore, it recommends organising a Europe week every year around 9 May in all Latin American countries in which it is represented, in close collaboration with the embassies of the Member States.