Stronger partnership between the European Union and Latin America

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by José Ignacio **Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra**(EPP-ED, Spain) in anticipation of the Fourth EU-LAC Summit, which will take place in Vienna on 12 and 13 May 2006 . Parliament congratulated the Commission because it had submitted a new strategy communication that serves to identify the challenges and extraordinary opportunities likely to arise as a genuine bi-regional strategic partnership is translated into reality. (Please see the summary of 08/12/2005.) Parliament endorses the Austrian Presidency's commitment to strengthening EU-LAC relations, and reaffirmed its intention of playing a constructive role in support of the Commission and the current Presidency.

A comprehensive approach to the bi-regional strategic partnership: Parliament emphasised that it was absolutely essential to have an overall strategic vision of the partnership, which ranged beyond isolated proposals and pursued the ultimate goal of establishing a genuine political, social, cultural, environmental and security partnership. Such a partnership must be built on a Euro-Latin American Charter for Peace and Security, to enable practical expression to be given to policy, strategy, and security proposals of interest to the two regions, on the work of a bi-regional conflict prevention centre and on new institutional machinery. Parliament supported the Commission's recommendation that the political dialogue be adjusted in line with the needs of the different partners. The dialogue should also encompass European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) matters as a whole and be organised around the Euro-Latin American Charter for Peace and Security and the work of a bi-regional conflict prevention centre. The purpose of the bi-regional conflict prevention centre should be the early detection of causes of potential violence and armed conflicts, with a view to preventing such conflicts or their possible escalation at an early stage.

Parliament applauded the Commission for coming out in favour of setting up the Euro-Latin American Transatlantic Assembly at the Vienna Summit and proposed the Euro-Latin American Transatlantic Assembly (EUROLAT) be made the parliamentary body of the strategic partnership and be provided with certain advisory and review powers. Parliament also called for a Euro-Latin American entrepreneurial forum, consisting of representatives of employers' organisations and of European and Latin American small, medium-sized and large enterprises, to promote trade and encourage investment of every kind in the two regions. Parliament went on to state that a Euro-Latin American area of global interregional partnership should be set up in the medium term. There must also be a genuine partnership in the social field and in the spheres of knowledge and joint action to bring about sustainable development, employing various measures and resources, including a generous development cooperation policy and opening up EU markets step by step, in keeping with the aims laid down in the association agreements. It was essential, too, to give a generous new boost to the Union's development cooperation policy towards Latin America, in which poverty eradication and measures to combat social inequality should become a key element.

Parliament went on to applaud the Commission's proposal that an 'EU-LAC common area of higher education' be established as a matter of priority, but regarded as insufficiently ambitious the aim of welcoming no more than about 4 000 Latin American students and teachers to European universities in the period from 2007 to 2013. To produce a real impact on the cultural and political mores of such a vast region, the above figure should be at least trebled. Special attention must also be paid to basic education, in order to meet the needs of the poorest sectors of Latin American society.

Parliament pointed out that the growing rise in the production, trafficking and use of drugs – and especially cocaine – all over the world and in Europe itself, with its familiar consequence (namely the spread of organised crime, illegal arms trafficking,corruption and money-laundering) was severely damaging all the Euro-Latin American partners. It demanded a resolute strategy to tackle its pernicious effects through encouragement for alternative crops, although without penalising small-scale farmers manipulated by drug traffickers. It called on the Commission to include the European Code of Conduct on Arms Exports in the 'political dialogue' chapter of the bi-regional agenda.

The Vienna Summit: revitalising the bi-regional strategic partnership: Parliament recommendedthat the Vienna Summit make a limited number of verifiable clear-cut commitments serving to lend new impetus to the strategic partnership in four main areas:

- joint action to bring about effective multilateralism;

- a decisive boost to regional integration processes in Latin America; and

- specific commitments regarding social cohesion and migration and human interaction.

A) **Joint action to bring about effective multilateralism**: Parliament pointed to the excellent opportunities for joint action afforded in multilateral fora. At present the role of the two regions on the international stage was not commensurate with their political and economic weigh. Parliament looked, therefore, to all the partners to make a much more purposeful effort to harmonise their positions among themselves and in relation to the outside world. The association agreements in force or about to be concluded offer exceptional opportunities for intensifying relations of every kind between the Union as such and its Latin American partners.

B) **A decisive boost to regional integration processes in Latin America**: Parliament welcomedthe fact that the Commission was continuing to view regional integration as a priority area for development assistance to Latin America, and supported its proposals aimed at strengthening regional integration processes. It noted that the prospect of an association agreement with the Union had already been instrumental in inducing the Andean and Central American countries to press ahead with the various aspects of economic integration. It called on the Commission to draw up a broader strategy to promote integration above and beyond trade commitments, laying emphasis also on non-trading aspects such as regional security and democratic governance, movements of persons and workers, joint management of ecosystems and river basins, and physical integration and infrastructure. Parliament also called on the Commission to launch a multi-annual programme for cooperation with the SEGIB, funded by the necessary budget, in order to tap the full potential to be gained from mutual cooperation by pursuing institutional cooperation, technical assistance, exchange and training programmes relating to regional integration, and policies concerning development cooperation.

C) Specific commitments regarding social cohesion: Parliament unreservedly endorsed the Commission proposal to encompass the aim of social cohesion in an ongoing, coherent and practical fashion within all the initiatives undertaken in partnership with Latin America. It called on the partners to pursue joint initiatives and to hold more frequent social forums ringing together the business world, workers, consumers and civil society, on the one hand at the level of the EU and Latin America as such and on the other within the different countries. Parliament repeated that a bi-regional solidarity fund should be set up for the purpose of financing sector-based programmes relating to the eradication of social exclusion and extreme poverty and to health, education and infrastructures in the countries and regions where per capita income is lower and social inequalities are greater, and subsequently covering the Latin American countries as a whole. A modest injection of funds for Latin America, to be contributed from, or reallocated from within, the Union budget and not constituting an additional allocation, could act as a catalyst which, if combined with the budgetary resources earmarked by other bodies (the EIB, the Inter-American

Development Bank, the Andean Development Corporation, the Central American Bank for Economic Integration, the World Bank, etc.) and the countries concerned, could provide the budgetary support needed to create sufficient critical mass to help alleviate the problems.

D) Verifiable clear-cut commitments regarding migration and human interaction: migration and human interaction were a key area of the Union's relations with its Latin American partners. The approach must encompass policies to combat illegal migration and at the same time, in collaboration with the countries concerned, emphasising the advantages of legal migration. Parliament deplored the Commission's failure to produce specific proposals for the Summit. It proposed that the Council should, as soon as possible, adopt specific priority measures for Latin America along the lines of the conclusions reached at the Brussels European Council as regards Africa and the Mediterranean. These measures should cover a range of matters, including regulation of migration, by strengthening bilateral agreements and including the fight against illegal migration and the mafias that exploit it and against people-trafficking, especially where vulnerable groups are concerned.