

Vilamoura Declaration

IXth Institutionalised Ministerial Meeting between the EU and the Rio Group

Vilamoura, 24 February 2000

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1. The IXth Institutionalised Ministerial Meeting between the European Union and the Rio Group was held in Vilamoura, Portugal, on 24 February 2000, as provided for in the Rome Declaration of 20 December 1990 and the Final Declaration of the VIIIth Ministerial Meeting held in Panama in February 1998.

2. The EU delegation was led by Mr Jaime Gama, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Portugal and President-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, accompanied by Mr Javier Solana Madariaga, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union and High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The Commission was represented by Mr Chris Patten, Member.

The Rio Group delegation was led by Mr Guillermo Fernández de Soto, Minister for External Relations of Colombia and Pro Tempore Secretary of the Rio Group.

3. Ministers underlined the importance of the first Summit of the Heads of State and of Government of the European Union and Latin American and Caribbean countries, held in Rio de Janeiro on 28 and 29 June 1999. They pointed out that that Summit had initiated a new stage in relations between the two regions, which were called upon to sign up to a strategic partnership in the political, economic, social, environmental, educational, cultural, human relations, technical and scientific spheres.

In this context they reaffirmed their attachment to the principles of the Rio Declaration and their commitment to continuing to work jointly to follow up effectively the priorities for action laid down by the Heads of State and of Government, welcoming in particular the work of the Bi-regional Follow-up Group. Here they referred to the first meeting of that group which had taken place in Tuusula, Finland, at which eleven priority working areas had been identified, and to the holding of its second meeting on 25 February in Vilamoura.

4. Ministers underlined the importance they attached to political dialogue and cooperation between the European Union and the Rio Group and reaffirmed their political will to continue to strengthen relations between the two regions. For that reason, they welcomed the recent accession of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic to the Rio Group, which enriches and reinforces the representative nature of this permanent mechanism for political consultation and concertation.

5. They emphasised that respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic institutions were indispensable for political stability and development in both regions and are mutually reinforcing. They confirmed their Governments' commitment to representative democracy, political pluralism and full participation by civil society in the process of political decision-making.

In particular, Ministers recognised that, in application of these values and the rejection of all forms of intolerance, it was of paramount importance to educate citizens in democratic principles and to encourage a culture based on these same principles, which were at the root of political systems and relations between the parties and also represented an essential factor in ensuring sustainable development.

6. Ministers highlighted the essential role of the international and regional systems for promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms and the importance of cooperation by all countries in this framework. They also stressed the need to give particular importance to promoting equality between men and women and promoting and protecting the rights of the most vulnerable groups in society, in

particular children, young people, the disabled, displaced persons, migrant workers and their families and indigenous populations and minorities.

Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to promoting policies aimed at eliminating poverty, marginalisation and social exclusion, and reducing socio-economic inequality. Similarly, they stressed that it was important, particularly in view of globalisation, that the developed countries and other relevant actors in the international system should show their solidarity.

Ministers emphasised respect for the principles and provisions of international humanitarian law and recommended early adoption of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the recruitment of minors to fight in armed conflicts, with the aim of safeguarding children's welfare, rights and personal development. They therefore launched an appeal to all parties engaged in armed conflicts of any kind to refrain from involving the civilian population, and children in particular.

7. Ministers rejected any extra-territorial application of national laws that infringe international law, and reaffirmed their desire to continue to work jointly to gradually develop national and international provisions concerning the criminal responsibility of persons who have committed crimes against humanity.

Likewise, Ministers reiterated their categorical rejection of all unilateral trade measures with extra-territorial effect as being contrary to international law and the rules of the WTO. They agreed that practices of this type posed a grave threat to multilateralism.

8. Ministers welcomed the progress recently achieved in the process of rapprochement between the two parties, namely completion of negotiations with Mexico for the setting up of a free trade area and launching of the negotiation process for association agreements with Mercosur and Chile.

In this connection, Ministers reiterated the political commitment to strengthen the processes of bi-regional and bilateral rapprochement and encourage progress in implementing the instruments and mechanisms provided for in the existing agreements.

Ministers noted with satisfaction the request to the European Commission and the General Secretariat of the Andean Community to draw up a study which will provide a diagnosis of the current situation and the prospects for economic and commercial relations between the two regions, in the framework of the Andean initiative, with a view to analysing the possibility of negotiating an association agreement.

Ministers applauded the holding of the second European Union-Central America Trade Forum in the context of the San José Dialogue. They acknowledged the importance of laying the foundations for establishing a new model of future economic relations, that will give rise to mutual commercial benefits.

Ministers also underlined the completion of negotiations between the European Union and the ACP States for an agreement to replace the Fourth Lomé Convention.

9. Ministers underlined the convergence of views achieved by both parties on a significant number of subjects of general interest and agreed to step up cooperation on all subjects of common interest within international fora.

In this context, they emphasised the particular importance of reinforcing the dialogue set up within the United Nations, including the debate on the progress of the reform of the United Nations system, the search for a new equilibrium between its main bodies, with the aim of improving its efficiency, and agreed to meet in New York on the occasion of the 55th United Nations General Assembly.

10. The Ministers welcomed and emphasised the historic significance of the return of the Panama Canal to Panamanian hands and stressed the importance of ensuring the smooth functioning of that inter-oceanic thoroughfare for the benefit of world trade.

11. Ministers recognised the importance of maintaining high-level political dialogue and active coordination with regard to combating the world drugs problem, organised crime and terrorism.

12. Ministers stressed the importance of the principles of joint and shared responsibility in combating the international problem of illicit drugs and drug-related crime, such as money laundering, trafficking in and diversion of chemical precursors, contraband and trafficking in arms. They also underlined the need to define in a coordinated way an integrated and balanced approach taking into account sustainable development and aimed at reducing supply and trafficking on the one hand and demand for drugs on the other, by means of international cooperation, in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.

In this context, Ministers reiterated their commitment to work jointly to implement the Comprehensive Action Plan on Drugs between the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean, adopted in Panama in April 1999. Ministers welcomed the accelerated implementation of this plan which seeks in particular better and faster results in areas such as the control of chemical precursors, judicial, police and customs cooperation, prevention, institutional strengthening and alternative development as the central axis of interregional cooperation and the development of the cooperation and coordination mechanism agreed at the Rio Summit. They expressed their conviction that the high-level meeting in Lisbon on 22 and 23 May would make it possible to advance this cooperation and define priorities and practical measures.

13. Ministers agreed in assigning the highest priority to combating the movement of and trafficking in small-calibre weapons and to measures designed to control the accumulation and proliferation of these weapons and the collection and destruction of stocks in civilian hands.

Ministers welcomed the entry into force, on 1st March 1999 of the Ottawa Convention on the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and on their destruction and emphasised the importance of the full and speedy implementation of the Convention. They called on all states to join efforts to achieve the total elimination of Anti-personnel Landmines worldwide and agree to attach high priority to efforts dealing with the suffering and destruction caused by their use.

14. Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to cooperate very closely to reduce vulnerability in the region, to prevent natural disasters of the type which recently caused so much suffering and damage in Venezuela, Central America and the Caribbean and also to react to and lessen the effects of such disasters. The aim would be to make full use of international cooperation at all stages, ranging from prevention to possible humanitarian support and, if need be, help with rehabilitation and reconstruction, with due regard for the environment and in accordance with the principles of Agenda 21 and international law, so as to reduce the region's vulnerability. To that end, they suggest, where appropriate, implementing projects to promote conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources.

Ministers highlighted the concept of disaster prevention from the development viewpoint and took note of the recommendations made by the first meeting of the ad hoc working party on natural disasters set up by the Rio Group, held in September 1999. In the light of these recommendations, they reaffirmed their willingness to cooperate in this area and agreed that the results obtained by this working party would provide a basis for the joint discussions which the Rio Group and the European Union were to begin shortly.

15. Ministers agreed to cooperate and exchange views on sustainable development, including the question of world conservation of forests and the rational use of forest resources.

16. Ministers also expressed their political will to achieve early application of the Kyoto Protocol. In this context they welcomed the Sixth Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which will meet in the Netherlands in November 2000.

17. The Ministers stressed the importance of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) as the main forum for encouraging gradual and mutually advantageous trade liberalisation and establishing basic rules and principles for the international trading system.

The Ministers stressed the importance of keeping up momentum in favour of launching a new comprehensive round based on a balanced agenda taking adequate account of the interests of all the members of the Multilateral Trading System. This round must be directed at strengthening access to markets without excluding any sector, in order to develop and strengthen the rules and disciplines of the

WTO. The Ministers emphasised that, to launch successful negotiations, careful preparation was necessary, including the adoption, as a matter of urgency, of a number of measures aimed at promoting better integration of developing countries into the Multilateral Trading System and, in turn, improving the operation of the WTO. In this context, the Ministers stressed the need to make progress in the WTO's cooperation schemes designed to strengthen the technical and institutional capacity of the developing countries and, particularly of the least developed countries. They also noted the importance of the agreement by all the Members on the initiation of constructive negotiations under the built-in agenda, including agriculture and services.

18. The Ministers stressed the importance of new civil society, players, partners and resources in consolidating economic and social development and encouraged civil society interchange and cooperation between Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union.

19. Ministers urged that fresh efforts be undertaken on regional integration in Latin America and the Caribbean because it represents a significant factor both for the region's economic and social development and for the assertion of Latin America and the Caribbean on the international scene. In order to contribute towards this objective, they confirmed that they intended to set up a programme of postgraduate studies and a network for research on regional integration.

20. Ministers confirmed the need for a stable and dynamic international economic and financial system, restating their intention of developing bi-regional cooperation to bolster national systems and putting into place prevention and early-warning mechanisms to cope with international financial crises, or of arranging, in the event of such crises, for measures capable of providing swift, effective solutions. To this end, Ministers emphasised the need to strengthen the international financial system.

Ministers pleaded for a fair and lasting solution to the external debt problem. Here, they expressed their support for those countries having pursued adjustment and structural reform policies. More particularly, they expressed the wish that highly indebted poor countries be able to benefit more quickly from the measures agreed on their behalf and that bilateral negotiations on debt relief for them be speeded up.

21. Ministers saw a need to promote in appropriate fora a bi-regional dialogue on questions relating to the design of a new international financial architecture, so that the two regions might be able to take full advantage of the integration of capital markets, thereby reducing the risks and destabilising effects associated with their volatile nature.

22. Ministers acknowledged that the introduction of the euro was helping to tighten economic and financial links between the two regions, to consolidate the international financial and monetary system, and to promote its stability and dynamism.

23. Ministers reiterated their conviction that investment promotion was a core objective in the relations between the two regions. They encouraged the development of initiatives to promote the growth of investment flows between the parties, in particular through the creation of joint ventures and the conclusion of bilateral agreements for the promotion and reciprocal protection of investment. Ministers agreed to analyse the potential benefits of concluding agreements designed to avoid double taxation.

24. Ministers welcomed the announcement of the 1st EU-LAC Forum of undertakings to be held in Madrid in November 2000.

25. Ministers restated the need to continue promoting the development of small and medium-sized undertakings as a factor of growth and employment generation capable of dovetailing the knowledge-based society with specific local cultural features, whilst taking account of the special situation of certain regions and priority sectors.

26. Ministers drew up a positive balance sheet in respect of cooperation between the parties, emphasising their wish to step up that cooperation in the areas listed in the priority actions defined at the Rio de Janeiro Summit.

27. Ministers highlighted the advances made on integration in the field of energy in both Latin America and the Caribbean; they undertook to redouble efforts to intensify cooperation on energy, including the use of alternative sources of energy, between the European Union and the Rio Group countries with a view to encouraging free trade and inter-regional investment, in accordance with the legal framework obtaining in each country.

28. Ministers agreed that activities linked to the enhancement of cultural heritage are a major aspect of cooperation between the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition to the preservation of cultural heritage, that aspect covers tourism, support for the development of that sector, including audiovisual matters and trade in cultural goods, as well as promotion of co-productions between the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean.

29. Ministers agreed to hold the Xth ministerial meeting between the European Union and the Rio Group in Chile in 2001.

30. Ministers expressed their gratitude to the government and the people of Portugal for their hospitality and the excellent organisation which had helped to make the IXth institutionalised ministerial meeting between the European Union and the Rio Group a success.