

MINUTES
FIFTEENTH CENTRAL AMERICA - EU JOINT COMMITTEE¹
Guatemala, 23 April 2007

1. The fifteenth Joint Committee meeting was held on 23 April 2007 in Guatemala to carry out the tasks set out in the Cooperation Agreement signed in Luxembourg in 1985 and confirmed in the 1993 Framework Agreement of San Salvador.
2. The meeting was chaired by Ms Anamaría Diéguez, Deputy Foreign Minister of Guatemala, for Central America, and by Mr Tomás Duplá del Moral, Deputy Director-General of External Relations, for the European Commission
3. Ms Dieguez welcomed the participants and affirmed the importance of relations between the European Union and Central America in the framework of the San José Dialogue and the other mechanisms and instruments established by both parties. On behalf of Central America, she expressed her satisfaction at the success of the recent San José Dialogue, which was held in the Dominican Republic on 19 April 2007. Mr Duplá del Moral emphasised once again the close ties of friendship and cooperation which bound the European Union and Central America, and the benefits of supporting this region's integration process and development.
4. The parties discussed the progress made on regional integration in Central America, with particular reference to attaining the strategic objectives set at the Madrid, Guadalajara and Vienna EU-LAC summits, including those on negotiating and concluding an Association Agreement between the European Union and Central America. In this regard, both parties recognised that the processes of regional integration and the negotiation and conclusion of a comprehensive Association Agreement were interlinked and interdependent in that they form part of the joint strategic objective of regional integration as a way of reaching higher levels of social cohesion.
5. With reference to the points raised by ministers at the recent San José Dialogue Ministerial meeting, the two parties affirmed the following:

NB: This is a non official translation by the European Commission. The original signed document by both sides is the Spanish version.;

The European Commission confirmed with satisfaction that the negotiating directives for the Association Agreement had been officially adopted by the Council of the European Union that very day (23 April).

Central America reiterated its desire to continue consolidating the process of economic integration in Central America, in line with its belief in and objectives for the region, and to bring to fruition the firm undertaking made by the Presidents to forge ahead with a customs union, on which encouraging progress had been made.

6. The Central American authorities announced that at the beginning of June 2007, they shall proceed and sign a Framework Agreement on the Customs Union, which shall contain the essential elements needed for it to operate effectively, and a process by which the above agreement would enter into force before the end of the Association Agreement's negotiations.

As regards customs harmonisation, Central America shall present at the start of the negotiating process an initial common proposal for all tariff headings .

Central America shall also spare no effort to ratify the Central American Treaty on Investments and Services as quickly as possible.

On these bases, the two parties expressed their decision to proceed to open negotiations in Brussels at the end of June.

In light of the Santo Domingo joint communiqué, Central America submitted a proposal for a methodology, format and timetable to get the negotiating process for the Association Agreement under way.

7. Keeping in mind the declarations of the Vienna summit (May 2006), the Panama summit (July 2006), the San José Dialogue Ministerial meeting held in Santo Domingo (April 2007), Central America and the European Commission reiterated their satisfaction and interest for the gradual approximation of Panama to the Permanent Secretariat of the General Treaty on Central American Economic Integration (SIECA).
8. The parties pointed to the progress made in the implementation of projects being carried out under the multiannual cooperation programme set out in the 2002-2006 Regional Strategy Paper for Central America. They discussed the following projects: the support programme for regional integration in Central America, expressing satisfaction at the progress made to date; the creation of the Central American customs union, the first phase of which had already ended with very positive results, boosting the continuing efforts in this area, with the second phase due to start very soon. The parties also referred to the following projects: the support project for the design and implementation of Central

American common policies (ADAPCCA), and the regional programme for the reduction in vulnerability and environmental vulnerability (PREVDA), which were currently under way.

9. The progress made in other European cooperation programmes of importance to the region, such as the regional food security and nutrition programme (PRESANCA) was also mentioned. The parties agreed that these projects had contributed and were still contributing significantly to the efforts under way to consolidate the Central American integration process and sustainable development in the region.
10. The two parties expressed their satisfaction at the recent adoption by the European Commission of the regional and bilateral Strategy Papers for Central America for the period 2007-2013, the priorities for which had been established in consultation with the various actors, including representatives of civil society from both regions.

The Central American delegation expressed its thanks for the increase in funds allotted to the region in 2007-2013, seeing it as a tangible expression of the European Union's solidarity with Central America, particularly as regards the future Association Agreement.

The European Commission repeated that the regional strategy was centred on reinforcing the integration process in Central America in the framework of the future Association Agreement, and focused on the three priority fields in the Memorandum of Understanding signed in Guatemala on 18 April 2007. As provided for in the regional and bilateral Strategy Papers (2007-2013), the aims and priorities of the cooperation programme would be reviewed and updated in the light of the progress made, the actual pace of development in Central America and the requirements emerging from the undertakings and practical implementation of the future Association Agreement.

Among other things, the review process would take into account the objective of taking maximum advantage of the opportunities provided by the trade provisions of the Association Agreement, with attention being given to the needs of each country to promote equitable development.

11. The Central American delegation announced to its European counterpart that it would set up a technical working group to study the proposal from Nicaragua on establishing an investment credit fund between Central America and the European Union to aid social cohesion and balanced development between Central American countries and the European Union, with a view to incorporating it in the Association Agreement.
12. The Central American authorities commented on the efforts which had been made to give momentum to the process of harmonising and aligning regional cooperation, with particular reference to the Special

Forum held in Vienna on 10 May 2006. This forum was attended by representatives of Central American governments, regional institutions and civil society, and delegates from the international community. One of the results of this Forum was the "Vienna initiative" a document in which it was agreed that a higher level meeting with cooperating governments should be held in 2007.

13. The European Commission and the Central American authorities stressed the importance of statistics in national development policies and the process of regional integration. Both regions recognised the benefit of cooperating to improve the availability of comparable statistical information on selected areas, as high-level statistics are a prerequisite for evaluating progress and impact in areas of interest to the two regions, and agreed that this would be covered in the Association Agreement.
14. The European Commission stressed the importance of the European digital television standard DVB (Digital Video Broadcasting) as a means of improving e-inclusion and reinforcing biregional cultural and economic relations. It drew the attention of the Central American delegation to the importance of participating in the high-level seminar on this subject to be held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia on 4-5 May 2007.
15. Both parties emphasised the importance of involving civil society and mentioned in particular the second EU-Central America Civil Society Forum, held in Tegucigalpa last March. They restated their resolve to explore ways of involving it in the process of strengthening biregional relations.
16. The parties expressed their satisfaction at the success of the Central America - European Union Business Forum, which took place in Panama on 10 March 2006. This event facilitated the exchange of information on the markets and the process of regional integration and helped to bring together representatives of both regions, particularly those in the business sector.
17. Both sides agreed to hold the XVI Joint Committee in Brussels in the first half of 2008.
18. The participants thanked the government of Guatemala for the hospitality and support that had helped make this important meeting a success.

For Central America

For the European Commission

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