

XVIIIth Ministerial Conference of the San Jose Dialogue

Joint communique

Madrid, 18 May 2002

The Eighteenth Ministerial Conference on Political Dialogue and Economic Cooperation between the European Union and the Member States of the Central American Integration System (CAIS) was held in the city of Madrid, Spain, on 18 May 2002, with the aim of continuing to develop partnership ties on the basis of fundamental principles and shared values.

At this Eighteenth Ministerial Conference, Ministers confirmed their commitment to the consolidation of democratic systems, the establishment of closer economic and trade relations, the promotion of human development and the eradication of poverty. They also reaffirmed their commitment to the principle of a peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law.

Ministers, convinced of the need to update relations and adapt them to meet the new requirements and challenges arising from the internal realities of each region, and from the current international circumstances, also agreed to progress towards a new stage of more dynamic, advanced and substantial relations, confirming the continuity and full validity of the San José Dialogue.

A RENEWED AGENDA

On this occasion, Ministers also stressed the following significant issues which will serve as a reference framework for a common renewed agenda:

- Democracy, human rights, rule of law, good governance and civil society
- Regional integration
- Economic relations between the two regions
- Security
- Environment and natural disasters
- Political consultation on international matters of common interest

A NEW FORMAT FOR THE SAN JOSÉ PROCESS

The San José Ministerial Conferences will take place between the EU Troika and the Central American Foreign Ministers during the first half of each year at alternating venues. Plenary Conferences will continue to be convened by one of the parties, alternating as far as possible.

Joint Committee and Subcommittee meetings will be held consecutively, either on the same day or on successive days, at yearly intervals during the second half of each year at alternating venues.

PRIORITY LINES OF ACTION

Taking into account the agenda guidelines, Ministers agreed on the following points:

- Democracy, human rights, rule of law, good governance and civil society

They decided to increase their countries' efforts to bolster the progress made in the political, economic and social development of Central America and ensure that democratic processes are made irreversible, through the promotion and protection of human rights, transparency and the fight against corruption, the strengthening of the rule of law, good governance, access to justice and the role of civil society, which

are factors that the two regions share and regard as crucial for their political and economic stability.

They agreed to foster cooperation aimed at promoting greater transparency of public administration and the fight against all forms of corruption.

- Regional integration

They agreed to join forces to deepen the process of regional integration, taking into account the progress made and the new impetus acquired by the Central American integration process as the priority means to achieve sustainable development in Central America and its successful integration into the world economy, through the strengthening of political support and cooperation in integration-oriented projects promoting initiatives to reinforce Central American Integration Agenda.

- Economic relations between the two regions

They welcomed the new initiative to negotiate a political and co-operation Agreement, as well as the decision to strengthen the co-operation on trade, investment and economic relations. They stressed that the achievement of the objectives of such an agreement together with the strengthening of their co-operation should establish conditions under which, building upon the outcome of the Doha Work Programme, which we have committed to complete by the end of 2004, a feasible and mutually beneficial Association Agreement, including a FTA, could be negotiated between both regions.

In this spirit, the Central American side invited those EU Member States which so desired to become extra-regional members of the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI).

The European Union side invited the EIB to examine the possibilities and opportunities for the development of its operations in the region, in accordance with its own procedures and financing criteria, respecting available resources and its current objectives and priorities.

- Security

They agreed to increase national and regional efforts to guarantee democratic security and stability in countries, tackling in particular the issue of public security and the problem of small arms and light weapons held by civilians, illicit trafficking in drugs and persons and related crimes, organised crime and terrorism, among other important areas.

They will intensify the fight against the movement, proliferation and illegal trafficking in small arms and light weapons in Central America and develop inter alia legislative, judicial and police coordination and co-operation measures as well as measures for the collection and destruction of light weapons in civilian hands.

They will likewise intensify the fight against all forms of terrorism by including exchanging information and other aspects they consider expedient, to make the fight against this scourge more effective in accordance with international law, and implementing the Central American Plan against terrorism and related activities.

- Environment and natural disasters

Ministers repeated their commitment to protecting the environment and to confronting natural disasters. In this respect they repeated their desire to co-operate in order to overcome Central America's vulnerability, adopting a comprehensive approach to the problem from the point of view of preventing, mitigating and responding to natural disasters as well as reconstruction. They also agreed to strengthen the national and regional bodies competent in both areas.

- Education, culture and information society

They decided to enhance cooperation in the fields of education, technical and commercial training, as well as culture, by developing integration training programmes inter alia within the context of the ALFA programme, and by promoting the production and movement of cultural and artistic assets.

They also agreed to promote cooperation with regard to access to new technologies and to the information society, inter alia under the ALIS programme. At the same time they agreed to encourage and intensify meetings between the scientific and technological communities on both sides.

- Political consultation on international issues of common interest

They agreed to continue developing political consultations on issues of common interest in different international fora and conferences, especially in those priority areas on the agendas of their respective regions.

Finally, Ministers agreed to hold the next meeting of San José XIX in the city of Panama in the Republic of Panama during the first half of 2003, in compliance with the agreed rules on rotation.

Ministers thanked the Spanish people and the Government of the Kingdom of Spain for their hospitality and the excellent organisation of the Conference, extending thanks also to the Presidencies of both regions for the cordial and constructive dialogue which characterised this new ministerial meeting.