EU-Colombia relations, factsheet

Colombia is a key partner for the European Union in Latin America. The EU's relations with Colombia are based on political dialogue, trade cooperation, joint efforts to achieve sustainable development and support to peace-building.

In particular, the European Union has supported peace negotiations between the Colombian authorities and the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) since the very beginning of those negotiations and is also supporting the peace talks with the ELN (National Liberation Army). In recognition of the importance of Colombia's efforts to build peace, in November 2015 High Representative Mogherini appointed former Irish Deputy Prime Minister Eamon Gilmore as her Special Envoy for the peace process in Colombia. The EU has also reaffirmed its support to peace building through the overall support package of almost €600 million.

Political relations

The European Union and Colombia hold consultations on political issues focussing on bilateral, regional and global themes. Political and policy dialogue is based on the 1996 Rome Declaration and a 2009 Memorandum of Understanding. High-level political and sectorial dialogue meetings are held annually. A fruitful bilateral human rights dialogue complements relations between the European Union and Colombia. The last human rights dialogue took place on the 13 July 2016 and high-level dialogue on 14 May 2018; both took place in Brussels.

The fight against organised crime, respect for human rights, climate change and the protection of biodiversity are common challenges that the European Union and Colombia wish to address. However, the highest priority for both parties now is the pursuit of stable and lasting peace, as reiterated during the visit of the High Representative Federica Mogherini to Colombia in May 2016.

Colombia is an important partner in achieving the objectives of the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as the EU and Colombia share a very like-minded view on the importance
of joint efforts in areas such as sustainable development, climate change, sustainable use of natural resources as well as the responsible conduct of enterprises. Colombia's important role is underlined by the fact that it has significant investments – including also Foreign Direct Investment from the European Union – in sensitive areas such as the mining or forestry sectors. The common aim is to further strengthen that partnership, in order to achieve these goals. One of the overarching goals is to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, as well as the promotion of human rights and the rule of law.

Colombia is also a partner in the fight against illicit drugs and organised crime with constructive cooperation also in regional organisations such as UNASUR, CELAC and the Pacific Alliance.

In August 2014 the European Union and Colombia concluded a Framework Participation Agreement (FPA), which will facilitate Colombia's participation in EU-led crisis management operations in the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy. As a token of its commitment, Colombia deployed a navy vessel in support of the European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) operation Atalanta off the Horn of Africa.

**Trade relations / Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows**

Colombia is Party of the EU-Colombia/Ecuador/Peru Trade Agreement which has been applied with Colombia since August 2013. In 2018, The EU is the first investor in Colombia and its third trading partner, after the US and China. In 2018, bilateral trade amounted to €11 billion. EU exports to Colombia amounted to €6 billion, while Colombia’s exports to the EU accounted for €5 billion. The Trade Agreement brings important benefits for the agricultural sector in Colombia. Since 2012 (year before the application of the Agreement), Colombia’s exports of agricultural products to the EU increased by 45% and now account for 43% of total Colombian exports to the EU, compared to 18% in 2012. This diversification of Colombia’s exports to the EU contributes to rural development, crucial in the post-conflict context. Colombian SMEs are great beneficiaries of the new opportunities provided by the FTA.

**Peace Process - The European approach to peacebuilding**

Peacebuilding has been the backbone of the European Union's cooperation with Colombia since 2002. Over the last 15 years, the European Union and its Member States have supported peace building in Colombia with 1.5 billion, with €550 million from the Commission.

The European Union cooperation has been focusing mainly on activities in the areas of:

1. Local productive development and income generation;
2. Local institutional strengthening and citizen's participation;
3. Human and victim's rights.

An emblematic example was the *Peace Laboratories project* (2002 – 2012) which was followed by *New Peace Territories project* (2012-2017). These local level initiatives aimed to foster economic development and reconciliation by focusing on eradicating the causes of the conflict. In this framework €230 million (€160 million by the EU) has been invested in 1,108 projects in economic and regional development, human rights and democratic governance. These projects have benefitted 280,000 people in 249 municipalities and 19 Colombian Departments (states).
Civil society - Continuous and structured support to civil society also contributes to the sustainability of peace from the ground up, particularly in rural areas. Specific support to civil society projects in the post conflict phase amounted to €10 million in 2017 (separate from the Trust Fund). This focused on creating new opportunities in rural areas, particularly for young people (over 5,000) and grass roots and community organisations, enhancing participation and local democracy. These social innovation projects will focus on training, technical assistance, land adaptation, land reclamation, entrepreneurship, productive projects, marketing and access to means of production.

ICSP - One of the main instruments the EU has used to support peacebuilding initiatives has been the instrument for stability and peace. This has totalled approximately €40 million in the last 4 years. Actions include:

- support for humanitarian demining, including the demining pilot project between the FARC and armed forces in Orejon and St. Helena;
- access to justice at local level;
- reintegration of minors from the FARC and other armed groups;
- peace education for armed forces (particularly in relation to FARC & ELN bilateral ceasefires);
- (see Human Rights Section on page 4)

European Parliament – In 2017 under the European Parliament’s Pilot Projects and Preparatory Actions, the EU Delegation allocated €1.5 million towards economic empowerment for rural women in Cauca. This contribution is expected to develop income generation strategies which will allow rural women to scale-up existing economic autonomy, as well as increase their participation in networks and improve market access in conflict affected areas. Actions are also expected to support rural women in access to land, financial resources and technical assistance.

Bilateral budget support - Since 2012, the European Union has geared its bilateral cooperation through budget support operations, which are direct payments to the National Treasury of Colombia to support sectoral reforms in line with a number of commonly agreed objectives. The total budget support portfolio at the moment exceeds €100 million. This has been primarily in budgetary support to the Ministries of Environment and Trade, to strengthen and co-finance the Government’s own public policies on SME competitiveness and local sustainable development as well as to the Ministry of Agriculture to support of its rural development policy and improve competitiveness in the dairy sector.

EIB - The European Investment Bank has also offered a €400 million package to the Colombian Government in low interest loans and access to credit for rural roads and productive infrastructure.

EU Trust Fund - Finally, the EU Trust Fund (€96 million; funded by the Commission and 19 EUMS) was launched in Brussels on 12 December 2016 in the presence of President Santos. The Fund focuses on 3 areas:
1) comprehensive rural development – to support point 1 of the Peace Agreement and stimulate economic activity in rural areas;

2) reinforcing state presence and restoring the social fabric in areas affected by the conflict;

3) reincorporation of ex-combatants.

The first phase of EUTF projects worth €13.5 million began in the first quarter of 2017 in Norte del Valle de Cauca, Meta, Tierradentro in Cauca, and Chocó. A further 12 projects worth €40 million were approved during the 2nd semester; again directed at comprehensive sustainable rural development in Nariño, Putumayo, Guaviare and Caquetá and further 4 projects worth €12 million are in the pipeline. These programmes will strengthen the Government's work on rural reform and voluntary crop substitution agreements and bring economic benefits to the entire population.

www.eeas.europa.eu

Source URL: