

Europe, a unique partner for the Caribbean

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To mark the celebration of Europe Day on 9 May 2019

I have always thought of Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe as two sister regions, united by history and culture. We are a family because so many Europeans in the last century found a new home in Latin America and the Caribbean and vice-versa, contributing to making both our regions richer and greater. Through its outermost regions and territories, Europe is also part of the region.

In recent years our cooperation has reached unprecedented levels. And today our two continents are much closer than in the previous decade. In the coming years, it will be essential to continue on the path laid out, but with a renewed sense of urgency. Caribbean countries face specific vulnerabilities: you are particularly exposed to the impact of climate change, yet the potential of your economies is immense. Europe has much to offer its friends in this delicate phase of our common history, and we Europeans need more than ever a strong partnership with Latin America and the Caribbean.

On this basis rests the new European strategy on the future of relations between the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean. Compared to a decade ago, European investments in Latin America and the Caribbean have more than doubled. We have entered into cooperation agreements with 27 of the 33 countries of the continent, and we are about to conclude a new generation of agreements with Chile, Mexico and Mercosur. We are also working intensively with the Caribbean countries for a successor to the Cotonou agreement, which should be a major step ahead in our relationship.

Europe has been close to you in the most delicate moments in your continent's life. We intervened with our satellites when it was necessary to plan humanitarian aid and reconstruction in the Caribbean after Hurricane Irma and other natural catastrophes. We have resumed a common path with Cuba, strengthening the political dialogue and cooperation on a wide range of issues, including sustainable development and human rights. We have accompanied the negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC in Havana, and we are contributing with our support to the full realisation of the peace agreement. Faced with the tragic situation in Venezuela we are assisting the refugees and the countries that have sheltered them. But not only: together with countries from the region and European countries, we have created the International Contact Group which today is the only international initiative that has established a dialogue with all the Venezuelan parties, with a view to the common goal of a peaceful, political and democratic solution to the crisis through new free and transparent presidential elections.

This type of collaboration will be even more important in the years to come, for both our continents. Your region has an incredible untapped potential, but many social contradictions and

fragilities have not yet been resolved. And Europe is not that different. The fight against inequalities and the creation of a truly inclusive and sustainable development model will be the great challenges of this century. The collaboration between the European Union, and Latin America and the Caribbean can contribute uniquely to the prosperity of our regions. The trade agreements we are negotiating are not simple free trade agreements: they contain mechanisms for the protection of workers' rights, consumers' health and the traditional sectors of our economies. The Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) that we concluded ten years ago with CARIFORUM has led the way. Europe is not only the leading international investor in the region: we are the only world power to systematically invest in the green and blue economy, in digitalisation, and in high-quality jobs.

Our strategy contains a series of concrete proposals for the sustainable development of Latin America and the Caribbean – from investments in climate resilient development, to the sustainable use of maritime resources, to public-private partnerships in the most hi-tech economic sectors. We want to strengthen the cooperation we have already started on some issues of strategic importance, such as the improvement of human and citizen security, the fight against organized crime and the improvement of public services.

Europe has every interest in strengthening not only the economic partnership with Latin America and the Caribbean, but also international political cooperation. The collaboration between our regions has made possible the Paris agreement against Climate Change and the agreement on Sustainable Development Goals at the United Nations. Together, we make for 61 votes in the UN context. This is the weight we can mobilize to strengthen the joint work on the reform of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, on non-proliferation, and on the common security issues that are dearest to us.

To do this, we want to have dialogue with each country in the region, but also to intensify work with regional and sub-regional organisations. This is why we are strengthening relations with different groups of countries – from CARIFORUM to SICA, from Mercosur to the Pacific Alliance. It is not an interaction between bureaucracies, but a political dialogue between organisations that represent the interests and values of millions of people.

The collaboration between regions is the best way to advance the interests and values of our citizens. The potentialities of integration between two regions are infinite. We Europeans have decided to invest in our friendship with Latin America and the Caribbean.