

## **Small and Medium sized Enterprises, Missions for Growth and the New Industrial Revolution**

by Antonio Tajani \*

The European Union and the Latin America and Caribbean region have enjoyed privileged relations since the first bi-regional Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 1999, which established a strategic partnership between the two regions. They are natural partners linked by strong historical, cultural and economic ties. They co- operate closely at the international level and maintain an intensive political dialogue at all levels – regional, subregional and, increasingly, at bilateral level.

Summits of EU, Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) leaders take place every two years, the last one was held in Santiago, Chile, in January 2013, and the next one will take place in Brussels in 2015.

One of the ways in which cooperation between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean can and has been fostered in recent years is through the Missions for Growth initiative which I have led with the support of the European Commission's Directorate General for Enterprise and Industry.

In my role as Vice President of the European Commission responsible for industry and entrepreneurship, I want to ensure that European industry and enterprises come out of the current economic crisis stronger and more competitive than before. With that in mind, helping EU companies and in particular SMEs to develop their activities both within the EU and abroad, while in parallel reinforcing industrial cooperation and strengthening the links of EU enterprise policies with third countries is vital. For this reason, I have been leading Missions for Growth in countries both inside and outside the EU. Through our Missions, Europe can also better promote its policies.

Concretely, our Missions involve political and business meetings and discussions in areas of mutual interest in the fields of enterprise and industrial policy. They allow for high-level contacts between myself, the European External Action Service (EEAS), European entrepreneurs and political authorities. Generally, I travel with groups of around 50 companies. During a mission, business-to-business (B2B) meetings are arranged, political declarations of intent are signed to deepen our bilateral industrial relations with a country. The companies are

also invited to join me in meetings with my political counterparts – Ministers and often Prime Ministers or even Presidents.

This last element – where business and the political level come together – is often the richest part of the Mission, because companies can tell Ministers about their aspirations and their problems in a third country, whereas Ministers can “sell” the business opportunities in their country to the companies.

Missions for Growth are often associated with a specific business event that is organised in the country visited. The local organiser of the event is normally in charge of the organisation of the B2B meetings in cooperation with the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN network).

The EU, both from headquarters and through the delegation in the country, liaises with the local administration and organisers of the event. My colleagues within the Directorate General for Enterprise and Industry in Brussels have to conduct, in parallel, complex negotiations with the country, as well as various Directorates General of the Commission, to get consensus on a number of agreements that can be signed during the event. The Commission office in the country concerned performs an important role in spreading information about the Mission in the destination country. The EEN network also helps in stimulating interest among companies, particularly SME's.

If a small or medium-sized company wishes to participate in one of these Missions, they can express their interest via our dedicated "Missions for Growth" website: [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/initiatives/mission-growth/missions-for-growth/antonio-tajani/america/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/initiatives/mission-growth/missions-for-growth/antonio-tajani/america/index_en.htm)). Participation is open to all interested businesses, but companies have to pay their own costs (travel and accommodation expenses).

The Commission takes into account the overall geographical and industrial balance of the business delegation, the level of representation of the companies and business associations and targets a high presence of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises.

Since December 2011, we have carried out 10 Missions for Growth to 17 different countries. The pioneering phase had a strong focus on the Americas, with visits in particular to the USA, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Colombia, Peru and Chile. I was the first Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry in a decade to visit Latin America. More than 800 participants representing more than 570 companies or business associations from 26 Member States took part in these Missions. A total of 70 bilateral political agreements were signed with third countries. Typical areas covered by these agreements were SME policy, industrial cooperation, industrial innovation and clusters, space policy, raw materials, standardisation, sustainable tourism, sustainable construction and others.

We are now also stepping up the follow-up of Missions, with our Director General and Special Envoy for SME's, Mr. Daniel Calleja, going to countries to monitor implementation of the agreements and push specific SME issues. In 2012, he visited Brazil, Uruguay and Chile. In 2013, he went to Mexico, Colombia and Peru while he will lead a Mission to Israel on 24-26 June 2014.

Myself, I will now be leading a new Mission for Growth visiting Panama on 12 June, Argentina on 13 June and Paraguay on 14 June 2014.

Latin American and Caribbean economies need to up their game in terms of modernisation and productivity. European countries are well placed to help with quality investment and technology. In this context, strengthened cooperation between our regions in the field of small and medium size enterprises is crucial and extremely promising. In Europe, such companies play a decisive role for the competitiveness and the dynamism of our economies. I recently underlined the medium-term objective of the European Commission to establish an innovation dialogue with the EU's partners across the world involving small and medium size companies. Europe needs its real economy now more than ever to underpin the economic recovery creating growth and jobs and it needs to reindustrialise for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is important to highlight the work of the EU-LAC Foundation to encourage civil society participation supporting the process of bi-regional relations. The upcoming EU-LAC meeting scheduled in Brussels in 2015 will no doubt reinforce our cooperation in a win-win perspective.

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