



## **The Second EU-CELAC Summit – the way forward**

*by Edgars Rinkevičs\**

On January 1, 2015 Latvia for the first time assumed the Presidency to the European Council. The priorities of the Latvian Presidency are Competitive Europe, Digital Europe and Engaged Europe. The first priority aims to enhance the competitiveness and growth of the European Union, second - fully exploit the digital potential in the economy, but third - to reinforce the role of the European Union in the global arena. Taking into account that EU and Latin America are like-minded partners linked by an intensive political dialogue as well as strong historical, cultural and economic ties, third priority is directly linked with enhancing relationship with Latin America and the Caribbean. Therefore I am honored that exactly during Latvian Presidency Brussels on 10 – 11 June, 2015 will host II EU – CELAC summit.

While it is only the second EU- CELAC summit, interregional cooperation between Europe and Latin America began already in 1999 with a bi-regional summit in Rio de Janeiro. More than a decade has passed since then and our partnership has experienced steady progress, while our regions as well as the world itself have changed dramatically.

Sustainable development, citizen security, climate and even fundamental freedoms, like human rights, are facing global challenges that can be tackled only in a close and strategic partnership of like-minded partners. Therefore, the second EU- CELAC Summit is an excellent opportunity to affirm and develop the partnership between the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean. To have all our Latin American partners at a single event is remarkable and we ought to use gathering like this to further our shared aspirations.

A partnership does not simply mean that we discuss issues of mutual concern. It implies a joint, evolving and structured approach to facing the realities of a globalized world with the aim of overcoming any crisis more effectively, taking advantage of opportunities as they present themselves and securing stable and balanced economic growth across our regions. I also believe that a partnership based on common values and a shared vision of an inclusive multilateral system in which sovereignty and equality of all states are enshrined in the UN Charter, and all international actors accept the benefits of a level playing field under international law.



The theme of the Second EU- CELAC Summit is "shaping our common future: working for prosperous, cohesive and sustainable societies for our citizens". The theme not only underlines the commitments of our governments to advance development, social cohesion and positive changes in our societies, but also points to our mutual efforts to face and overcome global challenges, such as, but not limited to, achieving strong, sustainable growth, seeking a successful outcome to the climate change negotiations and working together to arrive at an ambitious, universal and transformative post-2015 development agenda and a new global partnership to implement it.

The Summit must be used not only to address the strategic agenda that focuses on global shifts and challenges that are affecting the societies of our regions, but also to look at the significant potential our strategic partnership has and explore the opportunities the cooperation between our regions might bring in the fields of better governance, economy, fighting crime, education, and energy – to name just a few.

It is important that the Summit also marks the path and sets the guidelines for future bi-regional partnership between the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean.

We must work together to review the EU-CELAC Action Plan and expand it with new chapters. I also very much look forward to the resumption of negotiations on the Association Agreement between the EU and Mercosur during the Summit. A comprehensive and balanced agreement that covers not only agricultural and industrial goods but also services and government procurement, and the improvement of rules on intellectual property, customs and trade facilitation, technical barriers to trade, would increase trade turnover between both regions and revitalize economic development. An Agreement on the Action Plan of the EU Citizen Security Strategy with Central America and the Caribbean will also deepen our cooperation and contribute significantly to peaceful and sustainable development.

In view of the Summit's theme, I am especially delighted that the Summit has been preceded by meetings of representatives from civil society, youth, academia, parliamentarians and businesses. It is the young generation, the leaders of communities, and entrepreneurs that are the driving force behind the changes in our societies and only by working together, listening to one another and being open to each other, we can achieve agreed goals of prosperity and sustainability. These goals are tangible but they are only in reach through the teamwork and long-term vision which our citizens expect from their governments.



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**\*Edgars Rinkēvičs** is Latvia's Minister of Foreign Affairs and currently holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU. This paper is a contribution to the EU-LAC Foundation's Newsletter special edition EU-CELAC Summit 2015.