



Countdown to the EU-CELAC Summit

*by Ramón Jáuregui Atondo**

We are on the eve of the II European Union – Latin America and Caribbean Summit, that Brussels will host on 10th and 11h of June. The timing could not be more interesting: an Europe that laboriously tries to get out of the crisis is the host to a Latin America that faces its own challenges in the economic and political spheres, all this in a turbulent global context whose challenges compromise both regions.

This Summit is the opportunity to go beyond the protocol pictures and declarative commitments, to boost the bi-regional partnership producing concrete and tangible results. Despite the unquestionable difficulty of this goal, I believe that there is a window of opportunity to achieve it.

First of all, the European, Latin American and Caribbean Heads of State and Government will count with a series of valuable inputs from other institutional settings and civil society. On the days before the Summit, between 4th and 9th of June, several meetings of trade unions, businesses, women, members of parliament and academics of both continents will take place. All these fora will express their concerns in documents that will be handed to the political leaders gathered in Brussels. According to each sector, their proposal will focus on boosting competitiveness and growth, fight against inequality and poverty, decent work, human rights, equality between women and men, education as an engine of economic and human development, and narrowing the political dialogue between the two regions. On either side of the Atlantic there is a long way to go on all of those aspects; none of the strategic partners has reached excellency in those. To combine the points of view expressed by such diverse socio-economic and institutional sectors would decrease the risk that the Summit concludes with a purely rhetorical declaration, or with a list of good wishes without practical application.

One of the other factors that induce me to view a window of opportunity for the relations between the two regions is the change in attitude towards Latin America and the Caribbean that has been gaining force in the European Union. For a long time, Europe did look too little to Latin America; the interest for the region was scarce and was frequently marked by lack of knowledge or, what was worse, by clichés more and more further away from the reality in Latin America. Logically, the loss of European interest for Latin America had as response a change in horizon on the part of this region, which had started to direct its priorities towards the Pacific. Nonetheless, precisely now Latin America starts to arouse once more Europe's interest.



A first symbolic evidence of this change in attitude are the three visits to the region, in little over four months, by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogheini: in January she participated in the CELAC Summit in Costa Rica, in March she visited Cuba and had a historical meeting with Raúl Castro; finally, in April, she went to the Summit of the Americas celebrated in Panama. In all cases, the High Representative insisted on the necessity of reinforcing the ties with a region that shares with Europe a large part of its culture and values and that has, in addition, a global strategic importance for its political, social and economic potential.

In the European Parliament there are many of us who share this viewpoint. Europe has to rethink its relation with Latin America from a position of respect between partners in all levels, from trade agreements to development cooperation. To narrow links and overcome old stereotypes, a dialogue based on knowledge and mutual respect is key. Both tasks are being addressed in the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat), through a busy agenda of meeting and events.

With the purpose of improving the knowledge of Latin American reality in Europe, we at the EuroLat have organised a day of analysis and discussions over the main issues in the agenda of the region, on the 28th of May in the headquarters of the European Parliament, in Brussels. In this occasion we have addressed, with the help of various experts, topics that range from the change in the relations with Cuba to the peace process in Colombia, the future of trade agreements, the relations with China or the fight against inequality.

In relation to the intensification of dialogue, and with the EU-CELAC Summit in sight, the European and Latin American members of parliament that are part of EuroLat met in March, in Panama, and again in Riga in May, and finally meet again in Brussels, a few days before the June Summit. These successive meetings have the primary objective of elaborating a joint declaration about the relation of the two regions from the perspective of parliamentary assemblies, whose reflexive ability could help enrich the views of Heads of States and Government.

In summary, I consider that the Brussels Summit has in its favour circumstances that it ought to exploit, in order to avoid being converted into just another summit in a long list of high level political meetings between Europeans and Latin Americans. It is urgent to build together a genuine global governance agenda that includes the many challenges that affect both regions: economic growth, the post-2015 development agenda, climate change, the progress towards fairer and efficient taxation, the threats to world peace. In all of these topics, Europe and Latin



America should be strategic partners for a new world governance. Let us not miss that opportunity.

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