

**THIRD MEETING
OF EUROPEAN UNION-LATIN AMERICAN-CARIBBEAN CIVIL SOCIETY
ORGANISATIONS
MEXICO, 13, 14 AND 15 APRIL 2004**

FINAL DECLARATION

The Third Meeting of European Union, Latin American and Caribbean civil society organisations was organised by the European Economic and Social Committee, representing the economic and social components of organised civil society of the European Union, with the support of the European Commission and the cooperation of the State Secretariat for External Relations of Mexico. The meeting brought together the representatives of civil society from all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and representatives of the Mercosur Economic and Social Consultative Forum, the Central American Integration System Consultative Committee and the Andean Community's Labor and Business Advisory Councils.

At their Third Meeting, the representatives of European Union, Latin American and Caribbean civil society organisations adopted the following Declaration, addressed to the Summit of Heads of State and Government to be held on 28 and 29 May in Guadalajara (Mexico):

MEXICO DECLARATION

Summary

I. Deepening the European Union – Latin America and Caribbean partnership:

Reinforcing European Union-Latin American and Caribbean relations will serve as a strategic factor for the development of both regions and towards the achievement of a more balanced international order. For this purpose, the following should be ensured:

- a. a partnership initially based on a network of agreements between the EU and the various LAC regional associations and nations, with the ambition to evolve into an overall association agreement between the two regions;
- b. a significant economic, social, occupational, political and cultural dimension, together with the promotion, strengthening and involvement of organised civil society in EU-LAC agreements;
- c. a new world governance based on agreement between nations and compliance with international law and commitments to global ecological and social balances.

II. Drawing up an Agenda for social cohesion:

Inequality and poverty pose a potential threat to democracy, peace and economic development. We urge governments and the international community to mobilise urgently to adopt an Agenda for social cohesion, with organised civil society playing a prominent role in its preparation and implementation.

We, the representatives of LAC civil society, in turn undertake to carry forward our own Action Programme for social cohesion, and to this end call for the necessary material and logistical resources to be made available.

In order to achieve greater social cohesion, the following should be promoted:

- a. sustainable economic growth and development in a framework of regional integration, with the priority aim of reducing poverty and inequality;**
- b. the credibility of public institutions, so that they can create a consistent framework facilitating economic development and social cohesion;**
- c. priority actions in favour of the most vulnerable sectors of society;**
- d. initiatives to reduce external debt, linked in the first instance to social cohesion and poverty reduction;**
- e. policies to reduce inequality by improving education, health, social protection, access to essential services, gender equalities and anti-discrimination measures;**
- f. substantial, balanced and reciprocal opening up of markets;**
- g. a structured labour market offering decent employment and official mechanisms to facilitate negotiation between the social partners;**
- h. identification with, and commitment to, the Agenda for social cohesion on the part of society at large;**
- i. reinforcement for institutions in combating corruption;**
- j. the support of the European Union and the international community, and economic and trade relations which are consistent with this aim.**

III. Strengthening the role of organised civil society:

Civil society must be better structured; the following are essential if this is to be achieved:

- a. recognition by the public authorities of the important role played by civil society in the governance of integration processes and in securing greater social cohesion;**
- b. the establishment and reinforcement of structured bodies for dialogue at national and regional level;**

- c. stepping up, within cooperation programmes, of measures specifically designed to strengthen civil society organisations, with a view to their development;**
- d. the creation and promotion of networks between EU and LAC organisations belonging to the same socio-occupational sectors.**

The participants:

1. consider that a reinforcement of European Union-Latin American and Caribbean relations will serve as a strategic factor for the development of both regions and for the creation of a more balanced international order, and advocate the establishment of a partnership initially based on a network of agreements between the European Union (EU) and the various regional associations and nations of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC);
2. urge that the negotiations for an Association Agreement between the EU and Mercosur be successfully concluded in the coming months, and that in addition to a balanced approach to the trade aspects, the Agreement should include a political, social, occupational and cultural dimension; and call for similar negotiations to be promoted between the EU and the Andean Community and the EU and Central America. They also ask for the rapid commencement of negotiations within the Cotonou Agreement framework on economic partnership agreements between the European Union and the nations of the Caribbean;
3. call for agreements with the EU to encompass a significant social dimension, the promotion and strengthening of social organisations and of participatory and consultative bodies representing organised civil society;
4. attach great importance to an EU-LAC partnership in the presence of varying points of view regarding globalisation. The strategic alliance between the EU and LAC could contribute significantly to encouraging a multilateral approach, particularly in the political sphere, and sustainable development resting on economic, social and environmental pillars;
5. believe it is essential that civil society be given an important role in EU-LAC relations. They therefore welcome the official presence, for the first time, of all the consultative councils of the different regions at this Third Meeting, following the Rio and Madrid meetings. They also call for effective involvement of civil society to be enshrined in the agreements currently under negotiation or to be negotiated. They restate their determination to carry forward relations between existing regional LAC consultative bodies and between the EESC and the these bodies;

Towards an Agenda for social cohesion

6. voice their deep concern at the poverty, inequality and severe lack of social cohesion from which LAC societies suffer, and which affect first and foremost the everyday life of Latin American and Caribbean people;
7. are concerned that the existing inequality and poverty pose a potential threat to democracy, peace and economic development;
8. urge their respective governments and the international community to give immediate priority to mobilising efforts for social cohesion in Latin America and the Caribbean, and in consequence call for an agenda for social cohesion to be drawn up in which civil society must be actively involved;
9. trust that the EU will fulfil a leadership role in this international drive for social cohesion in LAC;
10. welcome the undertaking by the representatives of LAC civil society, with the support of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in its capacity as the official representative of European organised civil society, to carry forward their own action programme for social cohesion in LAC. To this end, they ask that the material and logistical resources necessary to implement this programme be made available;

Facilitating economic growth and development in a framework of regional integration

11. believe that sustainable economic growth and development, aimed at removing social inequalities, are necessary if social cohesion is to be increased significantly in LAC;
12. call for the regional economic integration process in Latin America and the Caribbean to be stepped up and deepened in order to facilitate integrated and structured economic development - taking account of national and regional asymmetries - especially by means of efficient and effective economic policies and measures which attract foreign investment. The content of these LAC integration processes should not be purely economic; they must also promote convergence both between and within countries. The participants also support negotiations between different regional integration processes.
13. draw attention to the fact that, in spite of wealth creation, Latin American and Caribbean economies remain vulnerable to external factors, on account of both their dependence on external flows of capital and their low level of diversification. They underline the crushing burden of debt servicing which stands in the way of any real economic development policy;
14. call for the trade integration agreements to lead to a substantial, balanced and reciprocal opening up of markets;

15. suggest that the groundwork be prepared for an international poverty reduction programme, with national-level strategies, along the lines of those already set up in a number of countries in the region. These plans should be supported by a broad consensus encompassing the general public and be drawn up, monitored and evaluated in close cooperation with the representatives of civil society. They should also meet with the active support of the international community, especially the European Union, in both financial and technical terms.
16. note that the low level of investment, the absence of favourable conditions for saving and, more generally, of financial resources, are a significant obstacle to the growth of economic activity. Against this backdrop, they call in particular for promotion of saving, a range of investment-friendly conditions, and micro-credit arrangements to support small businesses, the self-employed, and social economy enterprises;

Public institutions at the service of economic growth and development and social cohesion

17. believe that in order to reconcile economic growth and development with more cohesive societies, it is essential to deepen and enhance the creation of institutions in the countries of the region. The quality of the institutional framework, together with efficiency and transparency in public administration, the system of justice and government machinery, are key factors in this strategy. The institutional element is therefore a prerequisite for the success of macro and microeconomic policy measures in ensuring that growth and development reach the most disadvantaged sectors of the population;
18. agree that, in order to achieve overall economic growth and development, a better balance must be struck between the economic and social dimensions. To this end, policies should be adopted to encourage social justice and high-quality employment, together with official mechanisms to facilitate negotiation between the social partners;
19. note that in some of their countries, tax systems fail to serve the aims of either economic development or social justice. They point out that corruption and institutionalised unlawfulness break the basic ethical, legal and community-related bonds that hold society together, and that to mend these bonds, action must be taken in terms of education, of the full rule of law and of effective legislation;

Priority action for the most vulnerable

20. call for priority actions to be implemented for the most vulnerable, including women, children, young people, the elderly, the disabled, indigenous populations and, in certain countries, other similar populations. They urge the European Union to support such activities, some of which are innovative and have a considerable social impact, by promoting, for

example, business skills. Similarly, action on human rights must be a priority for the public authorities and organised civil society;

Reducing inequalities through policies to promote education and access to essential services and health care and to combat discrimination

21. strongly support the introduction of policies guaranteeing fair access to essential services, especially in the fields of education, health, protection from violence and access to justice;
22. also call for social protection systems to be set up as a priority, features of which would be their sustainability, their provision of decent retirement conditions for pensioners, and universal cover;

Structuring the labour market

23. note with concern the strong trend towards informal and casual work in LAC due, in some cases, to non-compliance with existing laws and a lack of monitoring by governments;
24. emphasise that labour relations are marked, in some countries, by patchy recognition and application of the fundamental rights of workers. They call for decent employment to be promoted, based on the fundamental labour principles and rights set out in the 1998 Declaration of the International Labour Organization (ILO), and for the relevant regulatory instruments in the various LAC countries to be applied;
25. draw attention to the need to boost the promotion of social dialogue. In this connection, they welcome the project on the socio-occupational dimension of Mercosur launched by the European Economic and Social Committee and the Mercosur Economic and Social Consultative Forum. They ask for similar actions to be prepared with regard to the Andean Community, Central America, the Caribbean, Mexico and Chile;
26. recognise, in keeping with ILO Recommendation 193 and the Communication from the European Commission on the promotion of cooperative societies, the role of cooperatives and other social economy enterprises in the overall development of their countries. They consequently call for an exchange of experiences between the relevant organisations of the European Union and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and for cooperation programmes to be set up;
27. are convinced that multinational corporations, and European ones in particular, should play an important part, above and beyond established standards in the LAC countries, in promoting respect for labour and environmental rights by means of voluntary corporate responsibility initiatives;

28. propose that employers of every kind, the trade unions and governments of Latin America and the Caribbean spare no effort in driving forward practical actions in favour of social and labour cohesion. They should in consequence adopt United Nations and ILO guidelines on decent employment, encourage occupational training to impart skills to those who do not have them, implement gender policies, eradicate child labour, ensure compliance with labour legislation and promote a culture of workplace safety, together with other initiatives aimed at enhancing individual quality of life;

Involving civil society in social cohesion

29. are of the view that if social cohesion programmes are to be substantive and sustainable over the long term, society at large must identify with them. To this end, civil society organisations (**employers, trade unions, social economy organisations and others generating social cohesion**) and the public authorities shall foster information, debate and public involvement in such policies and their implementation;
30. welcome the initiatives to reduce the debt of the most indebted countries, such as debt conversion investment schemes, and call for initiatives to be launched for the majority of countries not falling into this category;

Receiving support from the European Union and the international community

31. recommend that the international financial institutions and other providers of funding and technical assistance always make use of social indicators, as well as financial audits, in monitoring and evaluating the actions they undertake;
32. acknowledge that initiatives for cooperation and for sharing experience and skills between the EU and LAC in the framing and implementation of social policies contribute to social cohesion. They welcome the support of the EU in the institutional underpinning of the integration process, and ask for this action to be continued, extended, and made even more effective, particularly in light of the fact that although the EU is the leading donor of international aid to LAC, the volume of such aid has been decreasing over recent years. They also urge that such action take the form of enhanced coordination of initiatives undertaken by the European Union and the Member States. The participants also voice their support for the European Parliament's proposal to create a bi-regional solidarity fund.

Strengthening civil society institutions

33. point out that civil society must be better structured, and that for this purpose it is essential that the public authorities recognise and foster the important role played by civil society in achieving social cohesion;

34. agree that strengthening representative economic and social organisations is a prerequisite for the establishment of a fruitful civil dialogue. In this connection, they call for cooperation programmes to be stepped up so that their organisations can be developed, and networks between EU and LAC organisations belonging to the same socio-occupational category be created;
 35. propose the creation of structured bodies for dialogue at national and regional level, and declare their willingness to commit themselves fully to the process of strengthening such institutions. They therefore request the support of the European Economic and Social Committee in transferring expertise and fostering dialogue, and the financial support of the European Union in institutional capacity-building. In turn, the LAC organised civil society participatory bodies undertake to submit a regular report on the initiatives they launch in the region and in their countries in order to promote dialogue within civil society.
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