



The relationship between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean is strong, deep and inalienable

by Federica Mogherini

Strong, deep, inalienable: there are no better words to describe the relationship between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean. We saw this clearly once again this Monday and Tuesday, when the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the 28 countries of the European Union and the 33 of the Community of Latin American and the Caribbean met in Brussels, to further promote the partnership between our two continents. Although separated by geography, Europe and Latin America are closer than any other continents.

We are on the same side. We believe that international disputes should only be tackled by diplomacy and international cooperation. We believe in the United Nations as the centre of gravity of the international system. We believe that a globalized world can only be governed in a joint manner – with alliances to deal with our common interests, from sustainable development to action on climate issues.

The cooperative world order in which we believe is now being called into question: the UN system is being attacked, there is a threat of new trade wars and the most basic rules of our international system are being breached.

Our democracies are also facing similar challenges in our two continents, more similar than many of us believe. Latin America and the Caribbean is the only part of the world where inequalities have been continuously decreasing from the beginning of this century, yet it continues to be the most unequal region in the world. There is a growing demand for better jobs, better education and good governance to meet the increasing expectations of our people. Many of these preoccupations are the same as those Europeans are also expressing to their governments. Our democracies have a duty to listen to these demands.

Cooperation between our continents has enormous potential for tackling these difficulties: for example, we are launching a European Facility for Development in Transition in Latin America and the Caribbean - going beyond the old mentality of donor-recipient towards a partnership of equals, in cooperation with the OECD and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. A stronger partnership can help protect the interests of our citizens, create new opportunities for economic and human growth, and promote a more cooperative world order.

At our meeting in Brussels, we first discussed our common global agenda: how to continue turning the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris climate Agreement into reality. These had been drawn up by us working together over years of coordinated effort.

We have also explored new opportunities related to our economic cooperation. Millions of people on our continents live and work on the other side of the Atlantic. The European Union is the principal foreign investor in



Latin America and the Caribbean, and represents one third of the total investment in the region. The commitment of the European Investment Bank to your continent has increased by 400 million euros.

Our trade agreements have not only brought economic benefits to our companies; they have also provided security for our traditional products, raised standards for workers and protected our environment. We want our trade to be both free and fair. We are now modernising our political and trade agreements with Mexico, Chile and Mercosur: we want to extend their benefits to a greater number of people, especially small and medium enterprises, but also to achieve a higher level of cooperation in energy and infrastructure projects, in culture and the creative sectors, and in research and education, including our Erasmus programme.

We have begun a totally new phase in our relations with Cuba, based on frank dialogue and effective cooperation for the benefit of all our populations.

Our partnership also aims to promote peace and security. In recent years, the European Union has mobilized unprecedented support for the peace process in Colombia, helping with rural development, and the reconciliation and reintegration of former combatants. We will continue to support dialogue with the aim of finding negotiated political solutions for the crisis in Nicaragua and Venezuela. And we are now mobilizing a new set of measures to support Venezuelan refugees throughout the region. When hurricane Irma struck the Caribbean, we sent support immediately, from humanitarian aid to satellite images to help the rescue teams.

We know from our European experience that regional integration is a powerful driving force for growth, peace and security. Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean is proving to be particularly important and we are observing it with interest and hope. It is natural to build new bridges between the European Union and projects of regional cooperation such as Mercosur and the Pacific Alliance.

In a world where multilateralism and international cooperation are under pressure, we are demonstrating the value of partnership, within and between our continents. It is a partnership for employment and social justice, for inclusive democracies and human rights, for peace and security. It is an antidote to the current confusion in the world, towards a fairer and more cooperative world order.