

Berlin, 14 December 2020

EU27 - Latin America and Caribbean Informal Ministerial Meeting

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the countries of the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) today met in an informal Ministerial Meeting. This meeting was hosted by the Foreign Minister of Germany, Heiko Maas, for the rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU, and chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission (HR/VP), Josep Borrell Fontelles in Berlin. Due to the restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, all other 48 participating Foreign Ministers joined the meeting online in a virtual format.

Ministers affirmed the intention to step up high-level bi-regional political dialogue and agreed to work towards a bi-regional Summit. They sent a signal of solidarity and reflected the high importance attached by the countries of both regions to their long-standing partnership, based on common interests and shared values such as the respect for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, democracy, sustainable development, human rights and the rule of law. Ministers acknowledged the work done by the EU-LAC Foundation as an intergovernmental organization as well as the role of civil society actors to further the bi-regional partnership. They also recognised the role of parliamentary diplomacy, in particular the work of the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly, welcoming its declaration of 5 November 2020.

Ministers expressed their conviction that there is much to gain from international cooperation in an interconnected and interdependent world and reaffirmed their commitment to working together to achieve more democratic, prosperous, cohesive and inclusive societies.

In line with the Declaration for the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, Ministers stressed that strengthened and effective multilateral cooperation is not an option but a necessity for a more equal, more resilient and more sustainable world. The UN must be at the centre of our efforts and should be made more efficient and transparent (“fit for purpose”), democratic, accountable and representative. Ministers reiterated their commitment to instil new life into the discussions on the reform of the Security Council, the revitalisation of the General Assembly and the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council. The Ministers also referred to ongoing initiatives in support of a rules-based multilateral order, such as the Alliance for Multilateralism.

Ministers reaffirmed their determination to step up joint efforts to overcome the multidimensional challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, which risks exacerbating existing structural gaps, inequalities, social, economic and financial exclusion. Expressing their deep concern at the pandemic’s devastating impact, Ministers stressed that Covid-19 vaccines should be considered as a global public

good that can only be provided through a multilateral approach, because no one is safe until everyone is safe. They highlighted the need for equitable global access to Covid-19 vaccines, and the urgency of fighting the root causes of inequality through a comprehensive, multidimensional and forward-looking response. Ministers underlined the need to ensure a robust and sustainable recovery, and to build more innovative, inclusive and resilient economies and societies, including by better seizing trade and investment opportunities and by strengthening the participation of women in all areas. In this context, Ministers recognised the contribution of the Eurosocial+ programme to social cohesion. The crisis is an opportunity to “build back better” in line with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Ministers agreed that by joining forces, including in robust green and digital partnerships, the two regions can ensure a better common future for their citizens. In particular, they underlined the following:

1. Ministers reaffirmed their efforts to strengthen global health security and the WHO/PAHO, in particular its capacity for preparedness and response in health emergencies, and in line with the “One Health” approach. They welcomed the efforts implemented by governments and regional groups in combatting the health and economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the work of the WHO/PAHO, confirmed the importance of respecting the International Health Regulations, and expressed support for the Access To Covid Tools Accelerator (Act-A) and its COVAX facility, the multilateral initiative to tackle Covid-19 driven by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), the Vaccine Alliance (GAVI), and for other global health initiatives, such as the Global Research Collaboration for Infectious Diseases Prevention (GloPID-R). The meeting emphasised the benefits of increasing collaboration under these initiatives and promoting open access to Covid-19 research results. The Ministers reaffirmed the importance of the review process of experience gained and lessons learned from the WHO’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as called for in resolution WHA.73.1, highlighting ongoing discussions on initiatives proposed in the framework of WHO to strengthen preparedness and response capacities to the multidimensional impacts of future pandemics. Ministers also exchanged views on new initiatives for regional health cooperation such as setting up a transnational institute for infectious diseases (as laid out in a Declaration of Intent) and supported the reinforced EU cooperation with the Caribbean to ensure participation in the COVAX Facility

- 2 Ministers recognised that Covid-19 disproportionately affects low and middle-income and developing countries and groups in situations of vulnerability, including women and girls, the elderly, minorities and indigenous communities, eroding health and development gains, thus hampering the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They reiterated the importance of supporting Primary Health Care systems to advance towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC). Migration and population mobility in LAC are increasingly important health determinants and require greater cooperation. The Ministers acknowledged the solidarity efforts undertaken, aimed at complementing the national responses to the most pressing needs caused by the pandemic. The European Union reiterated its commitment to continue providing immediate relief support to the most vulnerable across the region.

3. Ministers expressed their solidarity with the countries of Central America, South America and the Caribbean recently impacted by the devastating hurricanes Eta and Iota. They noted the particular vulnerability of smaller states, Central America and the Caribbean, to the effects of climate change and exogenous shocks, and recognised the solidarity efforts deployed by the countries in the region as well as the EU and its Member States in terms of rescue operations and immediate emergency relief, and confirmed their commitment to sustainable recovery. They stressed with concern that the severity of this year's hurricane season and other climate-related disasters and emergencies are an acute reminder of the necessity of promoting climate and disaster risk resilience and disaster risk reduction strategies that include access to financing. Ministers emphasized the benefits of increasing collaboration between the EU and the LAC countries as regards wildfire management and supported the efforts for the development of regional wildfire early warning and monitoring systems.

4 Ministers acknowledged that economic recovery from the socio-economic damage wrought by the pandemic cannot be sustainable without addressing the global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss and moving towards the circular economy. They recalled their mutual interest in seeking ambitious outcomes at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP) and at the Convention on Biodiversity COP in 2021. The EU informed of its new binding target of a net domestic reduction of at least 55% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990. It is in the interest of both the EU and LAC to achieve a sustainable and inclusive post-Covid recovery in both regions and to support LAC countries where appropriate, as Parties prepare to raise their ambition under the Paris Agreement. Ministers recognised the importance of adopting measures that allow a climate resilient development with low carbon emissions. The economic transformation should promote sustainable development, aim for carbon-neutrality in the second half of this century and comply with international commitments. Ministers welcomed the ongoing cooperation and EU support in this area through initiatives such as the Global Climate Change Alliance and the Euroclima+ programme.

5. The EU and its Member States reiterated their strong commitment to the Team Europe approach in cooperating with the LAC region and addressing Covid-19 and its consequences in the short and longer term. Team Europe brings together the EU, its Member States and their diplomatic networks, and financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank (EIB)[1]. To date, a total of over 2.4bn€ has been committed to the LAC region for Covid-19 emergency response, strengthening health, water and sanitation systems and addressing the socio-economic consequences. Ministers highlighted the essential role that international and regional financial institutions, including the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Latin American Development Bank (CAF), the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) and the Caribbean Development Bank play in financing the investments needed for the post-pandemic socio-economic recovery.

6. Ministers stressed the strategic importance of strengthening bi-regional cooperation mechanisms to promote sustainable development in the Latin American

and Caribbean countries. In this regard, welcomed the European Commission's continued commitment to the region under the EU's new multi-annual financial framework (MFF 2021-2027) including through the European Fund for Sustainable Development plus (EFSD+) and the EU's commitment to cooperate with all partner countries in the region irrespective of their level of income in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals. They also recognised the efforts being made by LAC countries to enhance the achievements of bi-regional cooperation, and emphasised the importance of close coordination with the development priorities of the Latin American and Caribbean countries. Ministers warmly welcomed the Commission's decision to launch LAGREEN, a Green Bonds fund of 449m€ led by the German Government and implemented by Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), and supported by capital contributions and grants from the EU Investment Facility.

7. Ministers noted that the growing levels of debt that emerging and developing countries are facing due to the economic impact of the pandemic can lead to a serious rise in global poverty and inequality. Ministers welcomed the idea to further work on sustainable and inclusive debt and investment approaches, including the instrument of debt swaps, bringing debt, investment and capacity building into the context of the SDGs and the goals of the Paris Agreement and the Biodiversity Convention. Ministers encouraged coherent approaches to these issues.

8. The Ministers also welcomed the Team Europe Initiatives for sustainable recovery that have been prepared together by the EU and many of its Member States in LAC countries, as well as at regional level. Ministers particularly welcomed the launch by the European Commission of AL-INVEST VERDE, a 33m€ programme for supporting SMEs in LAC in their transition towards a more sustainable, green and circular economy.

9. Ministers welcomed the adoption by the European Commission of a waste management programme under the regional programme for the Caribbean (8.7m€), and expressed support for a strong partnership with the region for climate action and resilience in the framework of the post-Cotonou Agreement, in line with the high-level panel on "Building Bridges with the Caribbean for Resilience" in the margins of this informal Ministerial meeting. Participants recognised the important contribution by the European Investment Bank (EIB) towards a sustainable recovery in LAC.

10. Ministers recognized the importance of combining energy security with the transition of the energy matrix towards renewable energy sources in both regions and welcomed participation in the UN Partnership on Action for a Green Economy (PAGE) by a number of LAC countries. Ministers welcomed a Team Europe Initiative on hydrogen partnerships in support of green hydrogen development in Chile as a pilot initiative in LAC, welcomed bilateral hydrogen projects as currently implemented by Chilean, German and Italian companies, and expressed their interest in looking into its replication in other interested LAC countries. Ministers proposed to the Commission to assess and map the potential of sustainable hydrogen production across Latin America and the Caribbean and ascertain the necessary regulatory convergence to put in place a level playing field, in order to

strengthen the basis for further cooperation and with the aim of developing a global hydrogen market conducive to trade and investment.

11. Ministers noted with great interest the conclusions of the Future Affairs Forum on Geopolitical Aspects of the Digital Revolution, which was part of the overall meeting programme. Underscoring the potential of a bi-regional digital alliance, ministers encouraged further exchanges between the EU and LAC on themes such as digital connectivity and the possibility of a connectivity platform on digital infrastructure, data protection and the benefits of further convergence, in particular for facilitating commercial data flows and law enforcement cooperation, policy and regulatory cooperation and digital skills development. This could further the digital economy as a driver for inclusive and sustainable growth and promote and implement relevant international norms and standards, including high standards of sustainability. Recognizing the challenge that access to these technologies represents for many LAC countries, Ministers stressed the need to seek creative ways to bridge the digital divide.

12. In this regard, Ministers welcomed with satisfaction the ongoing work for a Team Europe digital initiative for the LAC region, as well as bilateral Team Europe digital initiatives in several countries. Ministers expressed their great satisfaction with the expected completion in 2021 of the Trans-Atlantic submarine fibre-optic cable BELLA (Building the Europe Link with Latin America), a new digital highway for knowledge and data exchange that will connect various LAC countries amongst each other as well as with the EU, and in particular large research facilities on both continents. Ministers stressed the importance of equal access to digital services, to avoid social exclusion and maximise the potential for digital growth. Ministers furthermore encouraged partners to seek closer cooperation on issues related to artificial intelligence.

13. Ministers agreed that research and innovation hold the key to unlocking long-term solutions to the shared global challenges and stressed the need to fully use these instruments for the future prosperity of both regions. They welcomed the roadmap prepared at the recent meeting of the EU-CELAC Joint Initiative on Research and Innovation (JIRI) and the relaunch of the bi-regional research and innovation dialogue with its focus on the four pillars of researcher mobility, research infrastructures, global challenges and innovation.

14. The Ministers welcomed on-going cooperation in the framework of the EU Space Programme (Copernicus, Galileo and EGNOS) to tackle environmental challenges and enable the e-economy and greater connectivity. Ministers welcomed the establishment of a Regional Emergency Centre in the Republic of Panama using EU space data which will increase regional planning and decision-making capabilities regarding disaster risk reduction, recovery and resilience. The forthcoming new Galileo Information Centre in Mexico will also cover Central America and the Caribbean, and will complement the services provided by the existing Galileo Information Centres in Brazil and Chile and the Copernicus Relays and Academy networks' members in the region. Ministers welcomed the recent creation of the Latin American and Caribbean Space Agency (ALCE).

15. Ministers highlighted the opportunities offered by the extensive network of association agreements and trade agreements between the EU and LAC partners. Using the full potential of these agreements will contribute to attracting investment and boosting economic recovery on both sides of the Atlantic. Ministers took note of the finalisation of the negotiations of the modernised agreement between the EU and Mexico and the EU-Mercosur agreement, as well as the progress achieved between the EU and Chile to modernise their agreement. Ministers restated the geopolitical and strategic significance of these agreements. EU and Mercosur Ministers expressed their conviction that their cooperation to establish the right conditions for the entry into force of the EU-Mercosur Agreement will enhance its potential to contribute to the shared overarching objective of sustainable development.

16. In this regard, Ministers also welcomed the imminent finalisation of the Post-Cotonou Agreement as a basis for renewed engagement with the Caribbean region.

17. Ministers expressed the view that the EU and LAC region should continue to cooperate to contribute to shaping global rules in fields such as trade, sustainable development and climate change response. Considering the vital importance of open, fair and sustainable trade, Ministers agreed to work together towards a reform of the WTO, including the three pillars of negotiations, dispute settlement and transparency. They stressed the need to conclude a meaningful agreement on, inter alia, fisheries subsidies, e-commerce, domestic regulation in services and investment facilitation, as well as to improve subsidy rules across all industrial sectors in order to reduce distortions such as excess capacity. They stressed that strengthening the WTO, which is at the core of the rules-based multilateral trading system, is crucial for supporting economic recovery from the pandemic.

[1] The “Team Europe” approach draws contributions from all EU institutions and EU Member States, while respecting the EU competences and the decision-making procedures, including the voting rules, established by the EU Treaties.