



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**

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**Speech by Herman Van Rompuy,
President of the European Council,
at the opening ceremony of the EU-LAC Summit
Madrid, 18 May 2010**

On behalf of the European Union, I welcome all our partners from throughout Latin America and the Caribbean to this Summit. I thank heartily Prime Minister Zapatero for his organization of this major event. Between Spain and Latin America, history is still in the minds.

The European Union, and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are partners and natural allies. Our countries are linked by strong historical, cultural and economic ties. We share ever more convergent basic values and principles: a commitment to human rights, to democracy and to social justice. We are ready to cooperate in multilateral forums to achieve these objectives. This makes us well-matched partners to address today's global challenges together.

Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean account for a quarter of all the states that make up the international system, with more than 1 billion people.

The EU is the largest investor in Latin America and its second biggest trading partner, with trade between the two more than doubling since 1990.

These impressive facts constitute the background to our discussions. There is a growing sense that Latin America and the Caribbean has turned an economic corner. There is renewed growth and economic optimism, despite the financial crisis one sees urban renewal projects, and significant new investments. All these underline a new confidence and energy although poverty and inequality have to remain high on the policy agenda. The region is giving birth to its own multinational companies as well as improving the balance of power in its relationships with external multinationals. These are developments all of us in the European Union welcome heartily.

In the world of international relations, Latin American countries now sit at the same round tables with the world economic super-powers. They are being spoken of in the same breath as the emerging giants China and India.

I am sure that the changes under way will be profound, as the new wave of globalisation, led by the information revolution, sweeps into Latin America. You are facing these changes with a sense of belief in your future.

P R E S S

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These latest economic and political developments reinforce what we had already started together. Over the past three decades, the relationship between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean has evolved substantially. Step by step, a wide-ranging network of agreements has been negotiated and concluded. This network, although largely invisible to our citizens, has brought countries from both regions even closer economically and legally. The EU-LAC strategic partnership reflects this increasing convergence of interests and values; our gathering today shows the desire of both parties to further consolidate and strengthen this relationship in the future. You are going your own way, Latin American way. Continued economic growth, political stability and social justice can pave the way to your own model. But challenges remain, as I said.

Social responsibility is a key issue for Latin America and the Caribbean. The need to lift the poor and disadvantaged out of poverty and into a world of opportunity has been a consistent theme for Latin America.

Millions continue to live in poor social circumstances today, and this will continue to be a challenge for all countries in the region. We are fully aware of this and willing to continue to support your efforts to fight against it. There can be no sustainable economic growth without social cohesion. This human dimension is essential for our view on man and society.

I hope that Latin America builds on the inter-country partnerships that we can see emerging across the region.

Just as the European Union has helped to create a framework for peace and economic prosperity in Europe, there are great opportunities if Latin America can create the same type of framework for strong economic relationships and mutual political respect.

Ultimately, in today's global economy it is people who make the difference.

The scientists, doctors, entrepreneurs, professionals, civil society and the hundreds of million common people of Latin America deserve the democratic platform in order to reach their full potential. Your societies are changing, this is a historic period for your continent.

At the beginning of our meeting it is appropriate that we remember the thousands of deaths, wounded and homeless people in Haiti and Chile. Nature is sometimes stronger than we, but together we will work for a quick and strong recovery. With joint efforts we will achieve even a better future. We owe this to those who died.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you all a successful summit.
