



European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)

03/05/2010

EU-Latin America and Caribbean Trade Union Summit

Speech at the EU-Latin America and Caribbean Trade Union Summit on 04-05 May 2010

Dear Colleagues,

This is the fifth time we meet for a European and Latin American and Caribbean trade union Summit.

The ETUC places great store in this relationship, which we want to deepen further.

Over the next 2 days we will take stock of the outcomes since the Lima meeting two years ago, and prepare for the next phase.

We will condense our thoughts in a declaration for presentation to the current rotating President of the EU, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, at the Summit meeting in a couple of weeks.

This is not an easy time to be a trade unionist, on either side of the Atlantic. And it's not an easy time to look outwards, as the economic and financial crisis is leading governments, and people, to turn inwards, to erect barriers, to blame others - the foreigners. We see this within the EU itself, this grouping that is meant to show the world the benefits of ever closer union.

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But the ETUC rejects this dangerous introspection that can only spell disaster for us all.

We want solidarity in our European home. To start with, solidarity with the workers and people of Greece - the country from which stems all our democracies which is now under ferocious attack from the speculators, who also have Portugal and this country, Spain, in their sights.

And we want solidarity abroad, and in particular with the workers and peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean with whom we share so much.

Our common strategy, launched at the Rio Summit in 1999 and reiterated subsequently, most recently in Lima, has been to support the development of political associations that strengthen integration and social cohesion processes in Latin America. It has been to promote regional unity and bi-regional agreements between the EU and those regions: with Mercosur, the Andean Community, Central America, and the Caribbean.

We have insisted that those agreements should be fair and should enhance development. We have worked for the construction of democratic institutions and the involvement of trade unions. We have called for the integration process to ensure that human rights, including workers' rights, are respected everywhere and that the impunity that remains rife in some countries is stamped out.

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For us, agreements between the EU and Latin America should make up for the asymmetries that exist by means of transition periods and special, differentiated treatment. Investment mechanisms should be set up aimed at reducing structural differences and promoting social cohesion.

Together with the ITUC we have drawn up a statement on key social elements for inclusion in the Sustainable Development Chapters that must be included in each and every bilateral agreement negotiated by the European Union. These aim at guaranteeing human, social, labour and environmental rights, as well as the creation of consultative mechanisms including trade union organisations.

The agreement currently at an advanced state of negotiation with Central America should include these conditions. We also anticipate the negotiations with MERCOSUR being relaunched, our requirements must be essential elements. The same should exceptionally apply to relations with individual countries such as Chile and Mexico where bilateral deals have already been reached. We are right now being consulted on the EU side about trade union representation in the CARIFORUM Consultative Committee that is being set up under the recent Agreement. We hope to turn this body into an effective tool to supervise this relationship and look forward to working closely with our colleagues from the Caribbean in doing so.

Colleagues,

We have raised our conditions with the European authorities on many occasions during the last period. We have defended our joint strategy. We have denounced its failings.

We have expressed our deep concern that the relationship with the Andean Community, which was meant to lead to an association agreement with four countries including political dialogue and cooperation, has now withered into a bilateral free trade agreement with Colombia and Peru. We have made clear our opposition to those ongoing negotiations.

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trade agreement with Colombia and Peru. We have made clear our opposition to those ongoing negotiations.

This is particularly the case in relation with Colombia where trade unionists are routinely assassinated with practically total impunity. This is outrageous. We have said so, and I say it again.

I also, again, want to denounce the violations of human and trade union rights in countries such as Costa Rica, Guatemala and El Salvador. We also condemned the coup d'état in Honduras against its constitutional president, and find it quite distasteful that this country will be represented by a putshist at the summit.

Colleagues,

Decent work should be at the centre of the debate between the Heads of State at their Summit. This is crucial for sustainable development. And yet, from what we have seen, the issue is hardly mentioned in their draft conclusions. The Action Plan that the Heads of State are to adopt should reflect the need to act on decent work, concretely. We raised this with the EU High Representative last week.

The dialogue on employment and social affairs should be deepened and involve the trade unions. Proper standards should be maintained. There are concerns about European multinational companies not acting in Latin America as they should do in Europe. We must not let them get away with this. They should respect the principles of decent work laid down by the ILO, as well as the OECD guidelines.

I fear that our governments' approaches to the economic and financial crisis will rely to a large extent on G20 conclusions. But those are not enough.

While we hear about governments' concerns about jobs and social protection, we also see their leaning towards "exit strategies" that for us are premature. We oppose the cutting back of recovery programmes and reductions in public expenditures that could tip the global economy back into a recession with catastrophic results.

Instead, in Europe, to remedy the deteriorating employment situation, we believe that the EU must develop investment policies through an EU recovery plan equivalent to 1% of Europe's GDP. This should deliver new, innovative and job-creating industrial policies. In respect of our relations with Latin America, we support the launch of a large investment programme – through the Latin American Investment Facility – to promote development and social cohesion in Latin America.

Working people and their families shouldn't pay the price for the excesses of greedy financial operators. They are the ones who should pay, starting with a transaction tax on short-term capital movements.

I must also warn that protectionist beggar-thy-neighbour policies are not the answer. We must show that we have learnt from the 1930's. The financial centres then were only in the US and Europe. But the world is more interdependent now. The centre of gravity for global growth has shifted, including towards your continent.

As countries emerge, so will responsibilities increasingly come onto their shoulders. We can expect that world governance will shift also, be it in the UN, in the International Financial Institutions, in relation to climate change. We must all be ready for this.

Colleagues,

In addition to the economic and financial meltdown, some countries have had to face natural disasters. Our thoughts turn in particular to our friends on the two edges of your continent -in Haiti and Chile- hit by devastating earthquakes.

It is incumbent on Europe to demonstrate solidarity, especially with those among the poorest in the world, in Haiti. We, together with the ITUC, have pressed the European Commission to support the Haiti trade union roadmap that places decent work at the heart of the recovery and reconstruction process of Haiti.

Colleagues,

You have a wide agenda before you: from human and trade union rights, to trade and investment. There are strongly felt positions on migration policy to be discussed.

We welcome the good cooperation we have established with the Trade Union Organisation for the Americas, with whom we have drawn up a joint work plan.

I hope that your work here will help cement and deepen that relationship.

*Last Modification :**May 3 2010.***