


# Speech at High-Level seminar at the European Parliament on the Partnership between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean

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*Check against delivery!*

Ladies and gentlemen,

Honourable Members of the European Parliament,

Esteemed representatives of Latin America and the Caribbean,

Distinguished colleagues,

The next decade will shape the rest of the century. In fact right now it feels like the next few days could do this too.

The world is very uncertain. It is shaped by war, economic volatility, competition, a rejection of global norms and rules, and the looming threat of climate change.

In this context, isolation may be tempting for some. To put up barriers as protection and tell yourself that you don't need the rest of the world.

This is not the European way. We know from experience that we are stronger when we do things together.

To face the challenges ahead, be it the security of our societies, the defence of our territorial integrity, the future of AI or climate change, we need to work together.

This starts with partners and allies who share common interests and values. The strength of the EU-LAC relationship comes from a common history of deep ties between our peoples.

We share a commitment to values that are not only European but universal: democracy, human rights, and the rules-based international order.

We also share a belief in pursuing our own interests, while making the very best of our partnerships too.

In Europe we call it strategic autonomy. In Latin America and the Caribbean you call it sovereignty. But we mean the same thing.

We don't want dependencies. We don't believe in spheres of influence. We don't want a world divided into blocs.

In a world increasingly dominated by the idea of short-term deals and transactions, the EU will be firm and pragmatic in defending its interests and values.

But we believe the best way to do this is through long-term partnerships with reliable, trusted partners. In uncertain times, the stability built on trust attracts investment, fosters opportunity, and allows societies to thrive.

This is our proposition—because this is who we are as the EU.

Our history has taught us a painful but crucial lesson: long-term, reciprocal cooperation yields better outcomes than selfish, short-term competition.

A transaction might bring a quick win, and we will not shy away from them, but trust allows both sides to take calculated risks and make investments that create greater value over time.

That is by the way, the logic of our Global Gateway Investment Agenda.

That is also why **Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are part of the solution, not the problem.**

It is not merely a regional partner for the EU. It is a global and geopolitical partner, playing a crucial role in shaping the future of our world.

We are the region's largest investor (36%), third-largest trading partner, and leading donor. The EU is one of the world's most open economies, with over 70% of imports entering tariff-free. We believe in fair and mutually beneficial economic partnerships. Our agreements with 22 LAC countries have driven a 45% increase in trade value since 2013.

And the collaboration between our regions goes beyond trade and economic ties.

First, our collaboration is essential in addressing global challenges. Together, we defend and still we must reform the international rules based order, because in a world of giants, rules are the protection (the nuclear weapon) of small states. Together we also promote peace, security, democracy, and multilateralism.

We represent a third of UN members, the EU and LAC have often been united in defending international law and confronting global threats like Russia's aggression in Ukraine. A war that undermines the core principles of sovereignty and international law that LAC has contributed to create.

Second, LAC is central to Europe's economic security and de-risking strategy—just as Europe plays an important role in LAC's diversification, stability and growth, with EU investments supporting almost 3 million jobs in the region. For Europe, this is not about

countering China but about defending our shared values and interests. We value our partnership with LAC in its own right.

Third, LAC is an indispensable partner in today's world. It remains a cultural and democratic powerhouse, it is home to the planet's richest biodiversity, half of the world's tropical forests, and is a key ally in the fight against climate change. With an impressive renewable energy capacity, accounting for 60% of the power mix (double the world average), and rich in critical raw materials, LAC plays a vital role in our green and digital transition agenda.

President Von der Leyen will attend the CARICOM summit in Barbados this week. In a fast-changing and complex world, this high-level visit matters. The Caribbean's voice in the Global South is strong, and its role in climate advocacy is crucial, given its vulnerability to natural disasters. Climate-related natural disasters have tripled in the region in the last 50 years. We must tackle global challenges and stand up for multilateral solutions together.

As we look to the future, our partnership must focus on key priorities.

The "triple transition"—green, digital, and fair—is at the core of our collaboration. These three pillars are essential for our growth and resilience in both regions.

The triple transition is deeply embedded in our trade and investment agreements and is a cornerstone of the Global Gateway. This strategy is our offer to build sustainable, high-quality infrastructure—together.

To scale it up in the region, we're working with our LAC partners. We need to deliver so that these projects create local value, strengthen bi-regional value chains, and boost economic security for both sides.

But beyond these three key transitions, and as we confront a key year with a Summit in November, there are **three emerging priorities** that must guide our actions: **Security and justice; democratic governance; and global justice and multilateralism.**

**First, on security and justice.** Organised crime, and illicit trafficking including drugs, are a threat to both our regions. They fuel corruption, undermine governance and destabilise communities, fuelling migration. Tackling this challenge requires more structured cooperation and coordinated operations, from law enforcement to judicial collaboration.

**Enforcement alone is not enough.** We must address root causes like poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunities for vulnerable populations, particularly youth. **This is why we propose to work towards an EU-LAC Alliance for Citizens' Security.** Together, we can create safer communities, protect citizens, and uphold the rule of law.

**Secondly, democracy.** This is the cornerstone of our partnership. Democracy, human rights, good governance, are our strength. Yet democracy faces enemies all over the world. Be it in corruption, or disinformation, particularly on social media platforms. And

there is extreme political polarisation. These issues strain institutions, erode trust, and undermine the reputation of well-functioning democracies too. We must confront this problem together.

Our electoral observation missions – requested by LAC countries – contribute to credible elections. In Venezuela, the results of the election were not credible. The authorities missed a key opportunity to respect the people's will and ensure a democratic transition with guarantees for all. That is why we stand by all those upholding democratic values and will continue to work with all Venezuelans, regional and international partners to foster dialogue and a democratic way out of the crisis.

Democracy and the rule of law are not just who we are, they are also good for business. They make innovation and investment possible. Through our **trade agreements** and the Global Gateway, **our job together is to turn values into value.**

**Third, global justice and multilateralism.** The world is now more multipolar and less multilateral. This is not just about the values that define our societies but about rules that govern them too. Whether addressing global public goods like climate change or reforming international financial institutions, from New York to Geneva, I believe we should work more together.

The Pact for the Future, adopted in 2024, is an example. It includes the most progressive commitment to reforming the UN Security Council since the 1960s, and major deliverables from financial architecture reform to digital cooperation for future generations. We should work together implement it.

We must be able to update and improve international institutions to reflect today's realities, or our citizens will lose their faith.

**To briefly conclude,** ladies and gentlemen, long awaited breakthroughs, such as agreements with Mexico and Mercosur, show this is a moment of opportunity and responsibility. They also show our commitment to closer relations.

As we enter 2025, several milestones will shape our partnership:

- The CELAC-EU Summit in Colombia;
- The EU-CELAC meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs that I will host in Brussels;
- Summits with Brazil and Mexico.
- The first Association Council (ministerial) under the EU-Central America Association Agreement
- The upcoming EU-CLASI meeting on Internal Security (in March)
- The Eurolat parliamentary meeting in Peru

The European Parliament has been a steadfast supporter of the EU-LAC relationship, through the good and the bad, and I am sure it will remain a key ally in our common endeavour.

The EU's approach will be pragmatic, transparent, and built on mutual respect. We negotiate in good faith, we cooperate in line with our interests, and we protect our values by engaging and working together.

This is the European way.

Thank you.