



## Address

**by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr Dimitrij Rupel, at the meeting of EU-LAC foreign ministers (Lima, 15 May 2008)**

Dear Co-President, Minister José Antonio García Belaunde,

Dear Commissioners Ferrero-Waldner and Michel,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

*Let me use this opportunity to greet you here in Lima as the Foreign Minister of the country holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU.*

The meeting of foreign ministers from EU Member States and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, which serves as an introduction to the 5<sup>th</sup> EU-LAC Summit in Lima, should contribute to enhanced relations between our two regions, which are built on a relationship founded on more than five hundred years of political, cultural and trading links. We are convinced that a strategic partnership can be established and strengthened only on the basis of an in-depth understanding of one another's interests, needs and positions. However, it should also be taken into account that the process of forging a strategic partnership between our two regions is taking place in an

environment of all-round globalisation, bringing new challenges, as well as opportunities.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important challenges brought by modern globalisation to the relationship between the EU and the countries in the LAC region is mass migration. It is well-known that Latin America and the Caribbean is one of the regions most affected by migration flows, both positively and negatively. According to the World Bank, at least 20 per cent of the population of most Caribbean countries lives abroad. We firmly believe that, above all, migrants act as a bridge between their country of origin and their host country. It should also be noted that migrants' incomes are an important factor in the development of their countries of origin. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> EU-LAC Summit in Guadalajara in 2004 our countries, therefore, committed themselves to facilitating the transfer of migrants' incomes as much as possible.

We must all strive for consistent respect for migrants' human rights, and their right to seek asylum. At the same time, cooperation between the European Union and LAC countries in combating illegal migration and human trafficking should be enhanced. In a spirit of partnership and shared responsibility, we should do our utmost to manage migration flows and achieve the earliest possible integration of legal migrants into the societies of the host countries.

In this respect, intercultural dialogue is crucial, as migrants represent a living link between their original culture and that of the host country. Intercultural dialogue is one of the priorities of the Slovenian EU Council Presidency. It is our wish that intercultural dialogue between our two regions be further strengthened in the future, and we particularly hope for an in-depth and

sincere dialogue with representatives of the pre-Columbian cultures of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The EU has for a long time systematically supported regional integration processes in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in other parts of the world. We all know that economic and political integration has guaranteed Europe almost six decades of peace, relatively fast socioeconomic development and above-average political stability. We therefore believe that the same formula could to some extent be applied in other parts of the world, particularly those where elements of unity are already present, which is certainly the case in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Our resolve to support integration processes, both at the regional and sub-regional levels, is also reflected in the Regional Strategy Paper 2007–2013. This document stresses among other things the promotion of regional integration in transport, energy and information infrastructure. In this regard, our experience with trans-European networks would undoubtedly be interesting for Latin America and the Caribbean.

I would like to touch on another pressing issue – drugs. These life-threatening narcotic substances claim the lives of tens of thousands of predominantly young people in Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, and around the world. At the same time, the illegal production and sale of drugs bring vast amounts of money to ruthless criminal groups and individuals. Drugs have been causing huge economic and social damage, not to mention the immense suffering of victims and their families and friends.

EU Member States and LAC countries have long been working together in the fight against drugs within the framework of the Coordination and Cooperation Mechanism on Drugs and the Panama Action Plan. The results of our endeavours to date are positive and encouraging; however, much more will have to be done, particularly in line with the recommendations of the 10<sup>th</sup> high-level meeting on the framework of the mechanism, which was held on 4 and 5 March in Vienna. Furthermore, our cooperation in combating drugs will have to be further intensified and coordinated within the UN and its specialized agencies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our two regions offer immense potential for our people. It is up to all of us – governments as well as business and civil society - to work together in responding to the challenges and making the most of the wealth of opportunity our strategic cooperation has to offer.

Thank you for your attention.