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Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Catherine Ashton at the opening session of the 6th EUROLAT Parliamentary Assembly

Santiago, 24 January 2013

Thank you. Mr President, Presidents, Speaker, Ministers, Excellencies, colleagues and friends. I want to say what a privilege it is to be here on my first visit – certainly not my last – to Santiago and to be able to participate in the opening ceremony of this very important occasion. It's wonderful, if I may say, to see so many Members of the European Parliament here, a recognition of the importance that we attach to our relationship with Latin America.

I want to recognise the enormous achievements of this region in terms of economic growth and social reform. Truly, the countries of the region are global players – through the G20, the United Nations – and a partner of choice for the European Union.

I think that we have begun to work very effectively together, as equal partners, going well beyond development cooperation as we focus on the much broader set of issues that we face, especially in the global arena.

We have got very successful trade cooperation for a number of years with the region, which is, in a way, the backbone of our relationship. Since 2004 our trade figures have more than doubled, to over 180 billion euro.

The European Union is proud to be a major investor in this region. With over 300 billion euro in Foreign Direct Investment, our FDI stock here is greater than that of Russia, China and India combined. It is where, I argue, our politics meets our economics, to support prosperity and growth for all our peoples, in Latin America and in the European Union.

P R E S S

FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

Michael Mann +32 498 999 780 - +32 2 299 97 80 - Michael.Mann@eeas.europa.eu

Maja Kocijancic +32 498 984 425 - +32 2 298 65 70 - Maja.Kocijancic@ec.europa.eu

Eamonn Prendergast +32 460 75 32 93 +32 2 299 88 51 - Eamonn.Prendergast@ec.europa.eu

COMM-SPP-HRVP-ASHTON@ec.europa.eu

www.eeas.europa.eu

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We work closely also at the multilateral level. Our cooperation on human rights issues at the UN has been extremely important. We have worked together to press for the abolition of the death penalty and to promote the rights of the child. Our collaboration has been exemplary.

We have also bridged our different positions and jointly promoted a common vision on climate change at Rio+20.

For us in the European Union and for you making human rights the silver thread of our policies is important – supporting countries in our neighbourhood who are going through transitions and helping to put down roots everywhere for deep democracy, enabling people to prosper, to have their rights and to participate in the democratic process. And to give civil society a helping hand as it develops and grows.

I believe that we can transform our values – above all a commitment to democracy and fundamental freedoms – into a shared objective to empower individuals, not just our own peoples, but people everywhere who aspire to the civil rights and freedoms that we have.

We have shared objectives, and we need to nourish these and work better towards them, but we also confronted by shares challenges. In order to mover forward and advance our growth and stability we need to leverage those shared interests and values beyond our bilateral cooperation.

In today's world, no one can do it alone. We have to build on our joint successes to work even more closely on security, non-proliferation, on fighting organised crime and terrorism, to become even stronger partners

Cooperation in EUROLAT parliamentary assembly plays such an important role. You represent the parliamentary voice of a billion people in the European Union and Latin America. I know that the contribution of this gathering is of enormous importance. I believe that your contribution to this EU-CELAC summit is vital because you bring something special to this relationship.

I hope that you will help all of us to strengthen and deepen our bilateral cooperation and to take it to new levels. I wish you every possible success for your assembly and consider it a great honour to have been invited here to speak today. Thank you.
