



European Economic and Social Committee

DECLARATION

of the European Economic and Social Committee for the attention of the EU-Latin America Joint Parliamentary Assembly

Cuenca, Ecuador, 3, 4 and 5 November 2010

The European Union-Latin America Joint Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat) held a hearing with Andean civil society in conjunction with the meeting of its parliamentary committees that took place in Cuenca, Ecuador, on 3-5 November 2010. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the institution representing organised civil society in Europe, contributed to the hearing in its capacity as permanent observer involved in the Assembly's work.

In the wake of the discussions that took place at the hearing, the EESC has drawn up the following declaration as organised civil society's contribution to the work of the EuroLat Assembly:

Introduction

The EESC thanks the EuroLat Assembly, particularly Mr Cortés Lastra and Mr Pampero, vice-presidents in charge of relations with civil society, for the recognition and joint work achieved at this fifth assembly, and pledges to maintain and further this cooperation.

The EESC calls on the EuroLat Assembly to make every effort to promote and encourage the involvement in its work, as permanent observers, of Latin-American regional and national consultative civil society bodies, particularly the Consultative Committee of the Central American Integration System (CC-SICA), the Andean Advisory Councils representing the business, trade union, indigenous and consumer sectors, and Mercosur's Economic and Social Consultative Forum.

1. **With regard to the social, labour and environmental dimension, and the participation of civil society in monitoring trade or association agreements between the EU and Latin America**
 - 1.1 The trade agreements in force or under negotiation between the EU and the various Latin American countries and regions are all the more important in the light of an international financial and economic crisis that requires policies for closer cooperation and fair trade and to combat social inequalities.
 - 1.2 The conclusion of these agreements will decisively strengthen the EU-Latin American Bi-regional Strategic Partnership and deliver greater influence to both regions in effective multilateral governance.

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- 1.3 These agreements should promote comprehensive development and greater social cohesion in the signatory countries, and help to ensure greater regional integration in the partner regions.
- 1.4 The EESC believes that the agreements, whether solely trade-oriented or broader in scope, should guarantee a democratic institutional structure, the rule of law and respect for the dignity of all citizens.
- 1.5 Moreover, it is also necessary to include social, employment and environmental provisions that guarantee sustainable development.
- 1.6 The EESC reiterates that the trade chapters of these agreements should take existing disparities between the parties into account by applying exceptions and transitional measures, the principle of special and differential treatment, and support for convergence funds.
- 1.7 All agreements between the EU and Latin America should consider the fact that organised civil society involvement is key to ensuring the fair application and adoption of the agreements by the populations affected.
- 1.8 In this context, and in line with provisions of the EU-Central America Association Agreement signed in May 2010, the EESC again stresses that the institutional provisions of the agreements should include civil society joint consultative committees that enable the bodies and institutions representing civil society on both sides to be fully involved in implementing the agreements. These civil society representative committees would have an advisory role and comprise equal numbers of members from each side.
- 1.9 As stated in the Final Declaration of the Sixth Meeting of EU-Latin American Civil Society Organisations (May 2010), the EESC recommends that the agreements include provisions on the participation and consultation of the social partners for those aspects of the agreements affecting the labour issues relevant to them.
2. **With regard to strategies for maintaining and creating jobs, particularly for women and young people**
 - 2.1 The Committee believes that the Action Plan resulting from the EU-Latin America and Caribbean Summit 2010 should include measures geared towards a bi-regional strategy for employment, in line with the Global Jobs Pact agreed at the 98th Session of the ILO International Labour Conference and based on the four priorities of the pact: to accelerate job creation, strengthen social protection systems, boost compliance with international labour legislation and reinforce social dialogue and collective bargaining.
 - 2.2 The job creation strategies must make it possible to improve regulation of the financial system, give priority to productive investment, and improve education levels, vocational training and decent work. Education and training should be geared towards

the needs of the labour market and measures should be adopted to ease the transition between school and employment.

- 2.3 Job creation essentially depends on productive investment. It is therefore vital to maintain the flow of credit to businesses, especially SMES, to steer public investment towards sectors linked to services of general interest and to develop green jobs, in line with changes to the production model.
- 2.4 Similarly, for jobs to be created, greater attention should be paid to policies to boost productive enterprise and the development of human capital. The commitment to boosting job creation also means giving strong support to the social economy which accounts for a significant percentage of all jobs across the EU.
- 2.5 Social inclusion and cohesion policies should not lose sight of the importance of young people for national growth and development, or the need to promote the integration of women into the labour market and ensure that their working conditions are equal to those enjoyed by men. Young people and women, particularly in rural areas, along with indigenous populations and migrants, are vulnerable groups that should benefit from policies designed especially to help them join the labour market.
- 2.6 Currently, the crisis is having the greatest effect on jobs for young people. It is therefore essential to act in order to prevent long-term unemployment from becoming endemic among them. Decisive action must be taken to combat school failure and drop-outs, strengthen active employment policies and draw up plans to offer 16 to 25 year-olds job or training opportunities.
- 2.7 To boost employment amongst women (another of the groups most affected by unemployment), measures are necessary to help them retain their jobs: care services for dependent elderly persons, childcare and infant schools, fair division of tasks between men and women and policies to encourage women to remain in work throughout their active lives. This would also be beneficial for social protection systems.
- 2.8 The high levels of informal employment in Latin America should be combated through measures designed to promote formal, decent work. This could be done by promoting social dialogue and social protection and strengthening the role of the social partners, and by providing self-employed workers with social rights.
- 2.9 Flexicurity (the balance between job flexibility and security in professional relations and working life, achieved through a high level of unemployment services during periods of transition between jobs, access to vocational re-training and personalised assistance in finding work) can help to create and, above all, maintain jobs. However, all depends on what the "balance" between flexibility and security is understood to be.
- 2.10 The social partners and, where relevant, other civil society organisations should be systematically involved in designing these policies and measures, and the population groups affected by such measures should be included in the decision-making process.

2.11 The EU can and should make sure that trade carried out with Latin America in the context of free trade agreements and any ensuing investments involve production methods and human resource policies that comply with the labour rights of workers and the promotion of adequate frameworks for social dialogue.

3. **With regard to the role of civil society in preventing disasters**

3.1 It is the right of any population that may be affected to receive information about potential disasters. National governments, municipal authorities, the scientific community, the media and civil society organisations must all play a part in ensuring that this is achieved.

3.2 Development policies between the EU and Latin America must systematically include the issue of risk prevention in vulnerable areas, as some sustainable development policies can improve capacities for responding to natural disasters.

3.3 The vulnerability of population groups to natural disasters is affected by various factors, such as the development of public policies, growing urban populations, corruption levels, the existence of official prevention and relief mechanisms, the general health of the population, levels of violence and conflict, the size of displaced populations, land-use and urban planning and the management of environmental heritage, along with certain economic indicators such as per capita income and the diversification of income sources. Political action is key to reducing these risk factors.

3.4 Similarly, disaster risk management cannot exclude those affected from participating. In this context, information, awareness-raising and involvement of citizens, local communities and civil society organisations can help to improve the way that disasters are dealt with.

3.5 In this connection, the decision-making process with regard to disaster prevention should always involve seeking the most appropriate solutions within a broad, participatory social process, identifying the local players who should be involved, raising their awareness and building their capacity.

3.6 Any successful disaster risk management strategy should avoid limiting itself to providing assistance alone, and should be combined with capacity-building among communities and populations, including the establishment of local risk management committees.

Cuenca, 4 November 2010
