



DECLARATION OF THE LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN – EUROPE FORUM OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS

We, as leaders of Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) of the Latin America Caribbean region (LAC) and of the European Union (EU), meeting on 13 and 14 July 2023 in Brussels (Belgium) on the side-line of the 2023 Summit of Heads of State and Government of the European Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (EU-CELAC):

Context:

Acknowledging the current global and regional context in which the EU-CELAC Summit is taking place for both regions, where climate change, human pressure on nature resulting in environmental degradation, resources scarcity, extreme poverty, growing inequalities, the multiplication of social tensions and armed conflicts; leading to deterioration of human, and specifically women and youth rights, within and in proximity to their borders, migrations flows, as well as the worrying context of recentralisation trends.

Considering the unequal economic and historical relationship between EU and Latin America and the Caribbean, there is an ever growing need to strengthen the EU-LAC bi-regional partnership on equal footing. This must be enshrined in the principles of policy coherence and effectiveness for development between local and regional bodies, together with their National Associations and must strive to enhance and achieve joint economic and sustainable development, social cohesion, strengthen trade and reinforce shared values of cooperation, collaboration, solidarity, democracy, and peace, in-line with the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Recognising that a tailor-made, territorial approach to development is needed to respond to the diversity of national realities and sub-regions in Latin America and that there are specific challenges being faced in the Caribbean with regards to climate and economic diversifications.

Recognising the existential threat that, climate change poses to all of our societies whilst acknowledging the disproportionate impact that it is having and will continue to have on the LAC region and its citizens, despite Latin America accounting for less than 8% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and the Caribbean less than 1%, while hosting over 50% of the planet's biodiversity.

Recognising that economic, social and human inequalities are increasing in both regions, exacerbated by the impact of the COVID-19 and Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine, which have further deteriorated already critical contexts, and contributed to Latin America and the Caribbean's status as the second most unequal region of the world.

Acknowledging the EU's recognition of the role of LRGs in international cooperation and development policies expressed in the 2013 Communication "Empowering Local Authorities in partner countries for enhanced governance and more effective development outcomes"; the European Consensus on Development in 2017, as part of its response to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (2015) as well as in *ad-hoc* regional programmes for decentralised cooperation such as URB-AL.

Reflecting on the priorities of the EU's Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe, the ACP-EU partnership agreement, the EU's Global Gateway priorities, the EU's New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean and their linkages with the role and responsibilities of LRG in both regions.

Recalling that we are currently in the decade of action for achieving the UN Global Agenda - SDGs, and that estimates show that 65% of the 169 targets underpinning the 17 SDGs cannot be reached without engagement of LRGs.

Appreciative of the UN recommendation that these global agendas must be implemented at the local level to achieve concrete impact on the ground and that LRGs be fully recognised; in that regard, cities and territories are at the heart of catalysing the transition towards a low carbon, energy efficient, inclusive, sustainable and resilient development model.

Acknowledging the importance of the Framework Partnerships Agreements (FPAs) signed between global networks of associations of local authorities and the Directorate General for International Partnerships of the European Commission which supports them to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Declare the following:

We are ready to contribute to deepening the political dialogue at the highest local, regional, national and international levels to build more ambitious political partnerships and ensure that LRGs are fully recognised as the level of government closest to citizens.

We stress that LRGs must be considered as key actors in achieving the full set of objectives within the "New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean". There is a need to recognise the democratic mandate of LRGs, delivering basic services and being the first port of call for addressing citizens' needs, and supporting their aspiration for just, inclusive, sustainable and prosperous communities.

We welcome the focus on strengthening trade, enhancing investment to tackle inequalities, improving access to basic public services and society of care, reinforcing a socially just-green and digital transition, and building a vibrant people-to-people partnership. However, we stress the need to put in place the necessary guarantees and financial arrangements to ensure that LRGs and their associations can play their mandated role in supporting these objectives and access EU resources under the NDICI-Global Europe geographic and thematic instruments. Nevertheless, we do regret that these do not foresee a specific budget-line for LRGs or for decentralised cooperation projects within EU-LAC.

We are determined to support socially just green and digital transition in our territories as part of our work to build back better and strengthen resilience in communities following the Covid-19 pandemic, the impact of which is still deepening inequalities. Reinforcing economic diversification will be key in supporting our citizens to access sustainable livelihoods and contribute fully to build inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable societies in both the EU and the LAC region.

We commit to include a gender-inclusive, intersectional, cross-cultural and intergenerational approach at all levels of our territorial development and cooperation activities, and to increase investments in our constituencies in the field of youth education and vocational training, promoting global citizenship education, as well as the creation of decent jobs, and entrepreneurship.

We call for a shared engagement in supporting young people, especially young women in their active participation in political and civic life at the local and regional level via inter alia global citizenship education, considering their contributions as fundamental to build a long-lasting, inclusive and sustainable development of the international and mutual partnership between the EU and LAC regions.

We call on:

The European Union (EU) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) to recognise the importance of the decentralisation agenda, and the key role played by LRGs in achieving the joint objectives of the “New Agenda for relations between EU and Latin America and the Caribbean”. Recentralisation trends in both regions are curtailing efforts from LRGs to deliver for their communities. Decentralisation does not entail the reduction of national governments competencies, rather it is an opportunity to boost coordination and implement public policy aligned with citizens’ needs.

The EU and CELAC and their representative offices to engage, structurally, financially and politically with LRGs and other key political actors including parliaments, local civil society and the private sector, to ensure the renewed partnership provides for regular, fair, inclusive multi-stakeholder dialogue adopting a ‘whole of society approach’ to achieve joint objectives and put in place a framework to counterbalances existing and emerging division and conflicts.

The EU and CELAC to create multi-stakeholder bi-regional instruments – including LRGs, civil society organisations and other relevant actors – to facilitate cooperation and dialogue spaces between the regions, as well as to monitor the results and achieve the implementation of the Summit’s conclusions and other bi-regional priorities absent at the Summit.

The EU and CELAC to recognise sub-national governments’ direct cooperation (also known as decentralised cooperation) in both the EU and the LAC region as an important modality of cooperation to increase policy coherence for development through involvement of local and regional stakeholders, at the territorial level where citizens live.

The EU to include clear examples and guidance on how the EU’s investments agenda for the LAC region, developed in the framework of the Global Gateway, is going to respect and promote fair trade, due diligence, social inclusion, human rights and the inclusion of LRGs, when possible and relevant, as partners of this investment agenda which should ultimately benefit citizens.

The EU and MERCOSUR States to ensure the on-going monitoring of the EU-MERCOSUR agreement to ensure public service delivery can benefit from strengthened capacities, value chains and access across both markets and that LRGs are enabled to ensure the public interest and to preserves the right to organise public services in the way they consider most appropriate.

The EU and CARICOM/CARIFORUM to ensure that the follow up to the ACP-Cotonou agreement recognises the important role of Caribbean local government in addressing the priority areas of Green Deal; Economic Resilience and Trade; and Governance, Security and Human Development, and includes LRGs in the development and implementation of joint actions.

We are grateful for the support received from the EU for the organisation of the EU-LAC CSO-LA-Youth Forum.



We request that this LRG Forum is recognised and integrated as an official part of future Summits and is consulted in the establishment of a follow mechanism and the implementation of the Partnership. Future Summits must integrate LRGs perspectives into achieving the shared objectives of the renewed partnership between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Adopted in Brussels, 14 July 2023

The Latin America & Caribbean – Europe Forum of Local and Regional Governments