

Vilamoura, 24 February 2000

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MINISTERIAL MEETING EUROPEAN UNION – ANDEAN COMMUNITY

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JOINT PRESS RELEASE

1. The Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Andean Community and the European Union met in Vilamoura on 24 February 2000, for the IXth Institutionalised Ministerial Meeting between the European Union and the Rio Group.
2. At that meeting, held in the framework of the political dialogue mechanisms between the Andean Community and the European Union established in the 1996 Rome Declaration, an exchange of views was held on the political and economic situation in both regions, and on the state of relations between the two regions and their prospects.
3. The Ministers also welcomed the positive development of institutionalised political dialogue and the specialised dialogue with the Andean countries on the fight against drugs and cooperation on that matter, based on the principle of co-responsibility. They stressed the importance of development cooperation as an essential mechanism for fighting poverty, and emphasised the smooth economic relations between the two regions, the fundamental feature of which is the existence of the System of Generalised Preferences, with positive social effects.
4. The Ministers highlighted the achievements of the recent meetings of the Joint Sub-Committees for Trade and Industry and for Science and Technology. They also welcomed the forthcoming third meeting on chemical precursors and the fourth high-level meeting on drugs, to be held in Lima.

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5. The Ministers stated that strengthening the political, economic, social and cultural links between the two regions, and adapting these links to the 21st century, was a priority for them. In this respect, the Ministers exchanged views on how to strengthen these links and on the Andean initiative of carrying out consultations on the negotiation of an Association Agreement which would take account of the development level of the countries of both regions and preserve the current system granting them preferential access to the European market within the framework of the fight against drugs.
6. In this context, the parties agreed to ask the European Commission and the Secretariat-General of the Andean Community to draw up a study making it possible to assess the current state of and prospects for economic and commercial relations between the two regions within the framework of the Andean initiative. They also decided to evaluate the progress and results of that study within the existing bi-regional fora.
7. Ministers reaffirmed their wish to promote the strengthening of the multilateral trading system and to see a global round of negotiations starting as soon as possible.
8. Ministers reviewed the recent developments in the Andean region. In this context, the Ministers stressed their firm commitment to safeguard and promote participatory democracy and the full unrestricted functioning of democratic institutions, pluralism and the Rule of Law.
9. Ministers expressed their support for the consolidation of the democratic system in Ecuador, calling on the international community to cooperate, with the urgency that the situation requires, with the Ecuadorian Government in finding a solution to the serious economic problems with which the country is confronted.
10. Ministers expressed their satisfaction with the initiative by the Colombian Government, in the context of peace negotiations, of sending a mission to Europe made up of spokesmen for the Government and for the insurgents. They acknowledge that this mission has strengthened the credibility of the peace process and they encourage the parties to continue the process which has been started, achieving tangible results as soon as possible.
11. With regard to the initiatives already under way, the Ministers reiterated their support for a balanced and rapid implementation of the conclusions of the de Rio de Janeiro Summit and made a firm commitment to persevere in their efforts.