

# The European Commission and the European-Latin American-Caribbean Summit

Francisco da Câmara Santa Clara Gomes

The Latin American and Caribbean sub-continent has recently appeared in the news as a victim more than as an active player, despite the consolidation of democratic institutions and the reinforcement of the rule of law, continuous economic growth experienced globally and the positive impact of courageous structural reforms. A natural disaster of unprecedented dimensions just sent some of the poorer economies backwards a few decades, while the contagion of a financial crisis originated in Asia depleted the reserves of some of the richer countries. In Europe, the year of the euro is nigh, amid questions about the financing of convergence measures and cautionary tales about monetary policy. The spontaneous forces supposed to regulate life to the benefit of everyone living in the global village do not appear to be enough at least to preserve what has been achieved thus far. Globalisation is a fact of life for many of us, but such a commonplace can never become a valid substitute for an articulate political agenda. A reflection about the shared values and the common goals of solidarity between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean is more necessary than ever.

The EU/LAC Summit is therefore a timely initiative, widely discussed in many fora. All the fascinating talk about the Summit is generating great expectations. Hence the need to concentrate preparatory work on a manageable number of meaningful issues, along the three axes identified for discussion: political dialogue; economic and trade relations; and cultural, educational and human matters. The Summit will offer a unique opportunity to give renewed dynamism to relations between the EU and the Latin American and Caribbean countries, providing political guidelines for future action in the targeted areas.

A mere three years ago, the Commission submitted to the Council and to the European Parliament a programme of action covering the period 1996-2000. The objectives delineated in that document have been almost fulfilled, both in terms of institutionalization and the achievements of co-operation. The Summit will certainly permit the drawing up of a new agenda for the first years of the coming century.