Inaugural Meeting of Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly

"Our relations are not just based on free trade, we aspire to an association for a common future, based on shared values," said EP President Josep Borrell at the opening session of the new Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EUROLAT) on Wednesday evening. Members of the Assembly chose the two co- Presidents and twelve Vice-Presidents of the body, and approved the provisional rules of procedure that will govern its work.

Mr Borrell warmly welcomed the event, calling it "a crowning result of many years of efforts". Ney Lopes, the President of the Latin-American Parliament reminded Members that the interparliamentary dialogue that EUROLAT is replacing was "the oldest uninterrupted interparliamentary forum, with 17 biannual meetings, dating back to 1974." Luis Fernando Duque praised Mr Borrell's work, saying that "he has been one of the driving forces behind the idea of formalising the political dialogue and agreements between Latin-America and the EU. It's thanks to his enthusiastic engagement that we can bring into being this important political dialogue through the Euro-Latin American Assembly today."

Enrique Iglesias, Head of the Ibero-American General Secretariat, also underlined the solemnity of the occasion, by noting that "Europe is an area with which we share not only economic interests, but also have historical, cultural and linguistic ties, which give the relationship a special significance." The Vice-President of Peru, Lourdes Mendoza, delivered an address from President Alan García, explaining that Latin-America expected some tangible steps from Europe to lend this relationship concrete form, by reaching a mandate for Association Agreement negotiations within three months, and showing generosity in granting resources to the region through the European Investment Bank and the external aid budget.

Nevertheless, there was also some debate at this inaugural session, relating to the overall number of seats in the Assembly. Julio Guillermo Gamarra, Vice-President of the Central American Parliament, said, "We absolutely need an increase in the number of participants to allow MERCOSUR, Chile and Mexico to be fairly represented." This was echoed by several Members, who wished to increase the size of the Assembly to 150.

At the end of the meeting, the two co-Presidents and twelve Vice-Presidents of EUROLAT were elected, by acclamation, and to great applause. The co-Presidents are José Ignacio Salafranca (EPP-ED, ES) and Ney Lopes (President of the Latin-American Parliament, Brazil). The six Vice-Presidents from the EP are: Manuel dos Santos (PES, PT), Alain Lipietz (Greens/EFA, FR), Willy Meyer Pleite (GUE/NGL, ES), Frédérique Ries (ALDE, BE), Struan Stevenson (EPP-ED, UK) and Inese Vaidere (UEN, LV). The six Vice-Presidents from Latin-America are: Eduardo Barbosa (Latin-American Parliament, Brazil), Luis Fernando Duque (President of the Andean Parliament, Peru), Ros-
ario Green (Co-President of the Mexican Congress), Jaime Naranjo (Latin-American Parliament, Chile), Julio Palacios (Central American Parliament, Panama) with the addition of one as yet unnamed representative from MERCOSUR.

After taking his seat as co-President, Mr Salafranca expressed his hope that the EUROLAT Assembly could become a "real political arm of the bi-regional relationship," and that it would remain "a lively affair". "Our aim is to bolster relations between the EU and Latin-America to such an extent that we can play in the 'premier league' of the EP's regional relations," he said.

The Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EUROLAT) brings together 120 Parliamentarians from the European Parliament, the Andean Parliament, the Central American Parliament and the Latin American Parliament, as well as national representatives from the Mexican and Chilean legislatures, and members of the joint parliamentary committee of MERCOSUR. It has three standing committees: Political, Security and Human Rights Affairs; Economic, Financial and Trade Affairs; and Social, Environmental, Educational and Cultural Affairs. These committees will hold their constituent meetings on Thursday afternoon.

N.B. :
A further press release will be published in due course on the remainder of the meeting.

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