

## **The 13th EuroLat plenary session debates the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences**

The Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat) held its 13th plenary session on 4 and 5 November 2020 to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean, its economic and social consequences and the road to recovery. The pandemic has led to unprecedented economic losses and had a profound negative impact on employment, poverty, education, public health and living conditions in both regions.

Due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, the 150 EuroLat members met for the first time in the history of EuroLat remotely. The Co-Presidents of the EuroLat Assembly, Javi López MEP, President of the European Parliament's Delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly, and Jorge Pizarro, President of the Latin American Parliament, co-chaired the plenary meeting, which was held over two days with two hours of plenary debate per day. The successful development of the Plenary, held 11 months after the 12th Plenary Session in Panama in December 2019, has ensured the normal functioning of the Assembly despite the pandemic.

The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Josep Borrell addressed participants through a video message, in which he reaffirmed the EU's commitment to Latin America. He pledged to work to strengthen and revitalise the EU-LAC strategic partnership and suggested holding a bi-regional summit in 2021.

### **Taking stock: The human and health impact of the COVID-19**

The first session, on 4 November, focussed on the human and health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in EU, Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Maximiliano Reyes Zúñiga, Mexican Deputy Minister for Latin America and the Caribbean, representing the Mexican pro tempore presidency of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), highlighted the importance of common efforts towards a regionally coordinated response to the pandemic. He argued that cooperation in the field of science and technology is crucial for Latin America's post-COVID-19 recovery, welcoming the virtual EU-CELAC research and innovation workshop.

Co-Chair Javi López underlined that the pandemic makes it necessary to strengthen co-operation between Europe and Latin America in the field of public health to ensure that there is universal and fair access to a future vaccine.

### **Looking forward: Post-COVID-19 recovery plans**

The second session, held on 5 November, focused on the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and on how to overcome them. Mario Cimoli, Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), offered a comprehensive overview of the economic and social dimensions of the COVID-19 crisis and of the policies needed to overcome it. He underlined that a sustainable recovery would require structural changes and an integrated strategy, through fiscal, social, environmental and industrial policies and a stronger regional integration and multilateral action.

Mr Alejandro Izquierdo, Principal Economist of the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), outlined that the region will have to grow more and reduce social inequalities in the future, and that this would require a 'new social contract' with more equity and more opportunities for productive activities and job creation.

Niels Annen, Minister of State at the German Federal Foreign Office, representing the German presidency of the Council of the EU, pointed out how the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the need for international solidarity and multilateral coordination and cooperation. He announced that the German presidency plans to hold an informal meeting of the foreign ministers of the EU and the CELAC countries in December 2020. He confirmed that he would look into the possibility of the EuroLat Co-Presidents participating in this meeting.

### **Getting the response right: Multilateralism is the answer**

In the debate, EuroLat members underlined the importance of the 'digital transition' and 'green' recovery plans. They pointed out the need to address the gender aspects of the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on vulnerable groups. Many parliamentarians also expressed their concerns over an increased risk of social fragmentation and a drift towards authoritarian politics in many countries. The speakers were unanimous about the need to ensure equal access to a free vaccine.

In order to address these issues, both EU and Latin America representatives emphasised the importance of multilateralism to tackle the economic, social and political consequences of the pandemic, in particular of a stronger EU-LAC partnership, and called for a common joint bi-regional agenda.

To round up the meeting, the two Co-Presidents issued a Joint Statement entitled 'A comprehensive and bi-regional EU-LAC strategy to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic'. In line with the debate at the plenary, the declaration emphasises that to respond to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, a strategy and close multilateral coordination and cooperation are needed on the part of the entire international community, which includes strengthening the United Nations system and the World Health Organisation (WHO) in particular.

Furthermore, the two Co-Presidents call on the governments of both regions, on the EU institutions and on Latin American integration bodies to step up bi-regional cooperation and strengthen bilateral cooperation instruments in areas such as development cooperation, humanitarian aid, health, science, research and technology, and social programmes.