

REMARKS
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**Remarks by the President of the European Council,
Herman Van Rompuy,
following his meeting
with the President of the Dominican Republic,
Danilo Medina
on the occasion of the signing ceremony
of the National Indicative Programme 2014-2020**

Buenos días! Let me start by thanking you, Mr. President, for your invitation to visit your country and for your generous and friendly welcome.

The Dominican Republic is well known in Europe. More than a million of our citizens visit your beautiful country every year, many have fixed their residence here. But I have not come as a tourist, nor to enjoy your beautiful scenery, your historical sites, nor the well known Dominican hospitality.

I have come to mark the importance the European Union attaches to its relations with the Dominican Republic and through it to its relations with the Caribbean and with Central America. The Dominican Republic enjoys indeed a double affiliation.

It is an active member of SICA and as such contributes to its integration process. It is equally an important actor within the Caribbean, notably through CARIFORUM.

As a key regional integration process, the European Union is convinced of the virtues of systematic regional cooperation, based on the acknowledgement of common interests, as a means to overcome rivalries, defeat challenges and generate prosperity. And there is no doubt that the Dominican Republic plays a main bridge-building role between Central America, the Caribbean and Europe.

The 25th anniversary of the Dominican accession to the Cotonou agreement, offers therefore an unparalleled occasion to highlight these facts and give renewed impetus to our relations.

These are the questions I have reviewed with President Medina this morning. We have noted that our bilateral relationship is based on a joint commitment to democracy and human rights. We have agreed to continue nourishing it through regular political dialogue. We have agreed that the Economic Partnership Agreement, signed between the EU and CARIFORUM should be used to the hilt in order to promote further trade and investments which are so important for the future of the country. The National Indicative Programme for cooperation we have just signed adds further substance to these efforts, notably by supporting education and vocational training (as a contribution to social integration).

We have also noted important challenges that require improved regional and inter-regional cooperation. I am referring concretely to the fight against organised crime and strengthening resilience to face natural disasters, including in particular those produced by climate change. With this very purpose the European Union has just finalised a "Strategy on citizen security in Central America and the Caribbean". Once again, the Dominican Republic can play an important role in facilitating cooperation on these matters between both sides of the Atlantic.

The terrible tragedy experienced by Haiti in 2010, put our regional and international solidarity to the test. And no doubt, the Dominican Republic responded swiftly and was among the first to offer support, showing the good will and sympathy of the Dominican people. The European Union and its Member States were also quick to follow and billions of euros worth of international assistance have been invested during the last four years in humanitarian support and reconstruction efforts in Haiti.

But no country can be more concerned about the future of Haiti, nor can benefit more from its stability and a re-launch of its economic growth, than its closest neighbour, the Dominican Republic. I wish therefore to welcome and express support for the important High Level Dialogue that the Dominican Republic and Haiti have launched together.

As an important partner of both countries, the European Union remains ready to assist in the further strengthening of Haitian-Dominican relations as much as it will be considered useful. In this context, I look forward to the trilateral meeting I will have with Presidents Medina and Martelly in Punta Cana tomorrow.

While we are celebrating a quarter of a century of relations, I realise that our bonds extend for over five centuries. The streets of "la zone colonial" will bring this clearly to mind when I walk through it this afternoon. It is from the depth of this fraternity that I salute you today.

Muchas gracias.
