



III Conferenza Nazionale Italia - America Latina e Caraibi
Roma, 16 – 17 ottobre 2007
Ministero degli Affari Esteri - Sala delle Conferenze Internazionali

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Mr. Chairman

On behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), I wish to thank the Government of Italy for the invitation extended to CARICOM to attend this third biannual event devoted to relations between Italy and Latin America and the Caribbean. The Secretary-General has requested me to convey his sincere regrets in not being able to be here with you. He is at this moment participating in a critical meeting of the CARIFORUM Group preparing for the forthcoming round of the Economic Partnership Agreement negotiations with the European Union.

The European Union – Latin America and Caribbean Summit process has become a valuable forum for strengthening our dialogue and mutual relationships by discussing social, economic and cultural issues between the two regions and by determining priority areas for joint action.

The overall theme of the Conference, “Together Towards the Future”, underlines the increasingly important role being played by the European Union in general, and by Italy, in our wider region as a result of the strategic partnership which has developed over the years. As a leading donor, investor, trading partner and political

interlocutor, the EU has become an important economic and political partner for the region.

Mr. Chairman,

In view of the limited amount of time allotted to speakers, I shall proceed directly to the subject matter of this session. I will focus on the European Union's relations with the sub-regional grouping of small states comprising the Caribbean Community.

The partnership with the European Union has been a long-standing and valuable one. The dominant aspect of the relationship at present is comprised by the negotiations for an Economic Partnership Agreement. This Agreement will replace the non-reciprocal preferential arrangements previously in place and which the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ruled to be non-compliant with global free trade rules.

The negotiations between CARIFORUM (the Caribbean Community along with the Dominican Republic) and the European Community are fairly well advanced. The commitment to have them completed by the end of this year remains firm and was recently reiterated by our Heads of Government and State. However, a number of hurdles remain to be overcome. The negotiations have arrived at a critical stage where decisions with serious and long-term implications for our economies have to be taken.

The transition to a reciprocal trading relationship will exacerbate the already severe social, economic, fiscal and other dislocations created to our small and vulnerable economies by the ongoing phasing out of preferences. Consequently, the Caribbean Community holds the view that priority will have to be accorded to the development dimension of the EPA if the sustainable development objective of the Agreement is to be attained. The EPA must be a development tool and not limited to trade. CARIFORUM Heads of State and Government articulated these concerns and development cooperation expectations recently to the European Commissioners for Trade and for Development.

CARICOM has not awaited the advice or the assistance of its development partners to address the structural and other adjustments required to participate more effectively in the process of globalization and trade liberalization. To this end, the Community has been deepening its regional economic integration process. The

Single Market was launched last year and work is progressing to put in place the Single Economy.

CARICOM practices the Special and Differential treatment it advocates to the wider world with regard to international trade in its internal trading arrangements. Conscious of the disparities in capacity and the varying levels of economic development within the Community; conscious also of the dislocation that will be caused by the operation of the Single Market and Economy, a Regional Development Fund is in the process of being established to offset the negative impact on disadvantaged sectors, regions and Member States. CARICOM believes that its partners in the European Union such as Italy, because of their own developmental experience in the early days of the European integration process, are in a position to empathize with and lend support to the Community's self-help efforts in restructuring the regional economies including retooling of our industries and retraining and building our human capital. In this way the qualities on which sustainable, competitive and self-reliant development is built would be strengthened..

CARICOM places great value on its growing relationship with Italy. In the context of its strategic approach to Latin America and the Caribbean, Italy has shown itself to be supportive of priority concerns of the Caribbean Community such as small states issues, regional integration as a development tool, and keeping development at the top of the international agenda. Prime Minister Prodi reiterated this latter commitment in his statement to the ongoing United Nations General Assembly. The Prime Minister also indicated that development would be the centerpiece of Italy's G8 presidency next year. Italy has been a technical cooperation partner of the Caribbean Community for quite some time and these relations have deepened recently with priority being placed on food security, climate change and disaster preparedness, and capacity building in the area of tourism, the mainstay of most of our economies.

Mr. Chairman

The Caribbean Community, a grouping of small island states and low-lying coastal territories, has been drawing attention for quite some time to the threats and challenges that climate change poses to their viability and well being. It is therefore heartening for the Community to observe the present acute awareness being accorded to the urgency of the phenomenon by the wider international community, including the European Union, and to the need for ambitious and costly solutions.

Mr. Chairman

In conclusion, the Caribbean Community views its relationship with Italy and the European Union as a critical one in the Community's foreign policy and developmental outreach. The Community looks forward to the deepening of these relationships and to the increasing understanding of the special needs of small states in a globalizing world.

Thank you.