

**EU-CELAC Summit June 10-11
Business Forum**

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I have the honour, on behalf of the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, to welcome you in Brussels, for the EU-CELAC Business Summit!

Engaged Europe is one of Latvia's priorities during the EU Presidency. I am delighted that the summit takes place exactly during Latvia's presidency in the EU. And during Ecuador's presidency in CELAC.

This is a special week in the EU and CELAC relations.

Our political leaders, representatives from the business and academic sectors, and civil society are meeting together in one city. And the aim is to further enhance cooperation between our two regions.

The EU and Latin America are strong partners. We are linked by intensive political dialogue. And we are linked by strong historical, cultural and economic ties.

For the next two days, the EU-CELAC Summit will provide a great opportunity to further expand our fruitful cooperation. We will coordinate policies on international issues. We will set the framework for our future cooperation. Brussels declaration and updated action plan will set the way forward.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me speak about current state of our economic cooperation. And touch upon future challenges and opportunities.

We can be pleased with the steady progress in our economic cooperation over the past decade. EU trade with the region has doubled, reaching almost 210 billion euros in 2014. We can proudly

say that trade agreements have been signed with 26 countries. And they are delivering concrete results.

That makes Latin America and the Caribbean into a community of nations most closely integrated with Europe.

We are pleased with the implementation of the Association Agreements between the EU and Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Central America.

The implementation of the Framework Trade and Economic Co-operation Agreement with Argentina is successful.

These agreements promote further partnership between our two regions. They give opportunities for our businesses to expand and become more competitive.

In addition we anticipate that the summit will contribute to the negotiations on the MERCOSUR Association Agreement.

Ladies and gentlemen,

34% of EU's direct investment goes to your region. That is more than the EU invests in Russia, India and China combined. This fact demonstrates a shared trust and shared interests. We should build upon it.

This level of cooperation can be advanced. That requires consistent work, flexibility and a long-term approach. That requires economic and structural reforms aimed at further improving business climate. That requires openness to innovative businesses.

It is time to advance our cooperation in knowledge based economy, including information technology and smart energy. That has immense potential.

For that we need to create favourable conditions to promote research and development. We need to create an environment for our businesses and citizens to apply new knowledge and technologies. Only by innovation we can build knowledge-based economy and society. Therefore we should put all efforts to further advance EU-CELAC knowledge area.

We must move towards economic model that enables companies, countries and whole regions to become competitive in the global

marketplace. And by creating more jobs the living standards will increase.

That is why innovation has become a policy priority and a critical challenge for many governments worldwide, including Latvia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In Latvia we are focussing on the intensification of scientific research. We are enhancing the general infrastructure that supports research and development. We are improving the environment for innovation. We are creating conditions to ensure stronger ties between the research sector and industry.

However, smart growth can only be achieved if regions and countries manage to avoid fragmentation. If they identify their unique features, assets, and competitive advantages.

That will help to concentrate efforts and resources to develop excellence. That will increase the return from investments into innovation and research and development.

In order to achieve this, Latvia, like other EU countries, has introduced the so-called smart specialization approach. We have chosen five areas:

- 1) Knowledge-intensive bio-economy;
- 2) Biomedicine;
- 3) Smart technologies;
- 4) Smart energy;
- 5) Information and communication technologies.

I am convinced that there is an opportunity for innovative companies to promote business links between our regions. They can exchange experiences and build contacts; and identify innovation-oriented projects of common interest.

Latin America and the Caribbean can become an attractive market for innovative companies from Europe. Our future cooperation should facilitate the distribution of innovative products, technologies

and experiences between our regions. We should look into ways, how it can be supported.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The priorities of Latvia's EU presidency have been to advance more competitive, digital and engaged Europe. We have moved forward in all these areas.

Let me mention that European Strategic Investment Fund will be operational in autumn. We have launched the EU Energy Union. We have advanced digital legislation aimed at improving business environment. All these steps will make EU more competitive and business friendly. They also create basis to further advance EU-CELAC economic relations.

Energy Union has been top priority of our presidency. Our goal is that consumers and businesses have access to reliable, sustainable, competitive and affordable energy. We are convinced that EU cooperation with countries of Latin America and Caribbean in the field of sustainable energy can be advanced. We should support projects in the area of renewable energy and energy efficiency. In addition such international organizations as IRENA can be utilized more.

We are convinced that EU cooperation with Latin America and Caribbean countries in the field of sustainable energy will continue to bring mutual benefits.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Advancing digital agenda is crucial for our economies and well being of our people. During Latvia's EU presidency we have progressed on several digital files. European Commission has launched EU digital strategy. It will set our actions for the years to come.

Information and communication technologies and development of the information society are essential to economic growth. And they are crucial for the delivery of social services.

EU and CELAC cooperation in this area is bringing concrete results already. We fully support the broadband transatlantic connectivity between Latin America and the EU. It will further integrate both regions, it will reduce digital divide, it will enhance cooperation in all areas.

Ladies and gentlemen,

EU-CELAC cooperation is described as “a partnership for the next generation”. Together we should continue to promote trade and investment. Together we should adjust our cooperation to new challenges and use new opportunities. That will create more jobs and growth; and that will make life better for our people and our countries.

In conclusion, I would like to express my sincere appreciation for the energy and good will of all participants. I wish us successful and fruitful discussions!