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Social agenda and Common Environment

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for asking me to address you; a meeting on the subject of a 'Social agenda and common environment' between parliamentarians from two continents as dissimilar as ours poses an interesting challenge. I am quite sure that this will be a mutually enriching exchange.

In México, like other developing countries, no programmed efforts on the part of the government are adequate to deal with the challenges left over from the past and those which will come in the future. Our efforts are focussed on a simultaneous agenda, in which all the issues are running in parallel, and where our efforts seem to be devoured by the immediacy of everything.

I am telling you this in all honesty, fully recognising that even when social, economic and political problems appear to be hopelessly eating up our time, we *are* making efforts to respond to them; at the same time we acknowledge that our immediate (and future) challenge is to better integrate them into policies and programmes.

Here, I am going to provide a faithful and detailed 'x-ray' of what is happening in México, with regard to the subject which I have been asked to present. Nonetheless, I would point out that the picture is not very different from what is happening in other Latin American countries, only excepting the national legislation aspect. There will be an opportunity for all of the Latin American MPs attending this Conference to comment on the issues I touch on, and tell us what is happening in their respective countries. This will provide our European colleagues with a wealth of information on Latin America as a whole, and we will be very happy to hear their positions and questions.

Mexico has made a national and international commitment to fighting poverty, which is still one of the front-line programmes on the social agenda. Indeed, the central plank of our social policy is the 'Opportunities' programme, which is designed to change the circumstances in which poor families live and which keep them in poverty.

Basically, the programme consists of providing those suffering from poverty with a minimum level of decent living standards, by providing access to basic goods and services in terms of food, health, education, housing and part-time work, above all in the so-called

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micro-regions, which is where communities suffering from extreme poverty are concentrated. The programme currently benefits five million families in rural and semi-urban areas.

One of its outstanding features is that it has been subject to constant assessment. This has allowed progress to be demonstrated, e.g. in the case of beneficiaries amongst the under-fives, where there has been nutritional improvement. Likewise, there has been a demonstrable increase in the number of young people matriculating, on grants, and of young people in full-time schooling, while demand for doctors' appointments with preventive ends in view has risen.

These impact assessments have also enabled us to distinguish between the steps that need to be taken in the short- and medium-term in order to consolidate the progress made. For example, food supplements provided by the programme have unquestionably helped the children who eat them; but what is absolutely necessary is to guarantee a constant supply to the most dispersed and outlying communities. The rising demand for school and university education means that it is essential that the quality of our educational services and their coverage be improved, and the same goes for the health services, where although there have been legal reforms which will allow the system to be financially strengthened in the long-term, the demand placed on these services means that we need to ensure that they are viable right now.

This means that the changes that we have successfully brought about have very quickly turned into an agenda of 'things that need to be done', and if this agenda is not dealt with quickly, it runs the risk of becoming a fresh socio-economic problem, since we are going to have families escaping from the poverty trap who will be suffering from real dissatisfaction at the fact that they have not been able to make the decisive leap to better expectations. In Latin America we have various examples, some more recent than others, of what can happen when social discontent finds no adequate institutional channels to allow it to be reduced and resolved.

Mexico has also made significant legislative progress in the social sphere, and it is worth briefly giving some details. Firstly, the Reforms of the General Health Law: these created the People's Insurance Programme, with the goal of providing access to the social security services for 57.8% of the population who, whether due to their employment status, as casual workers, working in the informal sector, and rural workers - or because their income meant that they could not pay for family health insurance - have no access to the services provided by the national health institutes.

This programme is basically aimed at people who are in the six first income - distribution deciles, and who on average spend 40% of their income purely on food.

This is a public programme, and it is voluntary. The protection provided by the Mexican State takes the form of a federal subsidy, which is complemented by the contribution each

family makes in terms of its own income, and a contribution from the federative bodies, a contribution which those bodies receive from the Federation under two headings (12 and 33). The idea behind the contribution made by the families themselves is that it makes people co-responsible, and encourages a 'culture of protection and foresight'. Currently, this programme operates in some regions out of 21 federative bodies, but we hope to extend it gradually to 2010, in terms of the availability of the programme's resources.

Mexico drafted and adopted its General Law on Social Development in response to the need to create a legal framework which will allow for the continuity of social development policies from one six year government mandate to the next.

Since 2001, The National Action Party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party and the Party of the Democratic Revolution - both in the Lower and Upper Houses - have put forward General Social Development Law in initiatives. After long debates on the minimum contents of this Law, the following relevant points have been agreed:

1. The social rights established in the Constitution, under the principles of liberty, distributive justice, solidarity, integrality, social participation, sustainability, respect for diversity, the self-determination of peoples and indigenous communities and transparency, are guaranteed.
2. A National Development Policy is to be drawn up, which will include poverty-abolition programmes, social security and assistance programmes, regional development: basic social infrastructure and the fostering of the social sector of the economy
3. Conditions are laid down for funding social development. Spending must not decrease from one fiscal year to the next, and indeed, must, as a minimum, rise in due proportion to GDP.
4. Priority Attention Zones are established, so that the most defenceless population groups will receive priority attention.
5. All three levels of government are compulsorily obliged to foster productive activity, so as to achieve the goal of full social development, and ensure that social development policies have no merely 'assistential' functions.
6. An autonomous National Social Policy Assessment Council is to be set up, to measure the real effects to be achieved by the programmes, establish minimum criteria for making assessments and avoiding optional approaches, and to standardise data on social development and poverty in Mexico.
7. A National Social Development System is to be set up, to provide a permanent mechanism ensuring the synergy, collaboration, coordination and concertation of the work of the federal, state and municipal authorities, and of the public and private sectors.
8. The powers of each level of government are clearly laid down, and a National Social Development Commission is to be established to coordinate their efforts.
9. Furthermore, an Intersecretarial Commission is set up to ensure horizontal cooperation and coordination of social policy.

10. Finally, the right of all citizens to complain about anomalies and failures to apply this law is established.

The Law's significance lies in the fact that it lays down general criteria for designing social policy, and very clear obligations to ensure that it is not subject to specific interests on the part of political groups or parties. Nonetheless, it could do with further filling out, particularly with regard to participative planning, to ensure that the social development policies are designed horizontally, with the involvement of the State Secretariats concerned, and at the same time reflect a 'bottom up' approach taking account of the needs of the population and their actual living experience on a day to day basis when finding solutions to their problems.

Mexico has also adopted a Social Assistance Law which makes the family as such a legal subject capable of receiving assistance support, since the family is the institution which needs the greatest level of social protection in the face of the changes that have been taking place with regard to economic criteria and public policy at a global level.

Additionally, it lays down the implementation of action aimed particularly at children and adolescents suffering from malnutrition, physical and mental disabilities, and adverse family circumstances, subject to ill-treatment or abuse, abandoned, exploited, living on the street and in poverty. Furthermore, it grants the status of legal subjects to migrants, victims of armed conflict, or victims of ethnic or religious persecution.

This Law lays down the setting up of a National Public and Private Social Assistance System, coordinated by the Secretariat for Health, with the object of promoting and supporting the involvement of all sectors; coordinating action; establishing priorities and strategies; promoting the extending of healthcare cover; and guaranteeing the quality of the services and inter-institutional cooperation coordination.

A further contribution is the establishment of hitherto inexistent Mexican Official Rules on Health and Social Assistance with the objective of regulating and establishing minimum conditions for the services provided by all assistance bodies.

The final major contribution made by this Law is to set up a National Directorate for Assistance Institutions to provide a reliable Register of such institutions, and prevent the proliferation of civil associations set up purely to attract funding, which then vanish; and to ensure that those using the services provided by these institutions have guarantees as to the quality of the services.

Both the General Social Development Law and the Social Assistance Law have made it necessary to regulate the involvement of civil society organisations working on social development. Mexico has therefore adopted the Federal Law on Fostering the Activities carried out by Civil Society Organisations.

This last-named Law has a long history; there were attempts to put forward a bill in the lower house from as long ago as 1997, and the Law itself was finally promulgated only last year, representing a triumph for the social organisations in their struggle to achieve recognition as public interest bodies.

Basically, the Law lays down the legal bases endowing civil society organisations with both rights and obligations, so that they can assist the Federal Government in its efforts in the field of social development, while being obliged to give account of their activities and ensure transparency in the way in which they are funded;

The Law establishes a Federal Register so that like the private assistance institutions, the activities of civil society organisations are fully in the public domain, and the organisations can be penalised should they fail to comply with the official conditions governing their establishment and modus operandi.

Such, in broad brushstrokes, are the legislative contributions made over the last few years to creating rules on the promotion, implementation and assessment of social development and anti-poverty policies in Mexico and to foster society's coordinated involvement in these areas.

The Senate has adopted other laws on social issues, which concern guaranteed protection and special rights for specific population groups, e.g. the Law on the Rights of Older Adults, and the Law on People with Disabilities.

In parallel with this work, we have been tackling the environmental agenda, fully aware as we are that deforestation, and the deterioration of woods and forests, is one of Mexico's major problems, as it is of the Latin American countries in general.

The deterioration of our 'Green Gold', i.e. our woods and forests, is affecting the hydrological cycle, causing soil erosion and the loss of biodiversity and environmental functions performed by these eco-systems, and is also changing the chemical composition of the atmosphere itself, thanks to the loss of the tree cover that processes carbon, and the use of the soil for purposes which release carbon.

All of this represents major economic, social and environmental costs, which increase the vulnerability of all basic production processes, and of rural and urban communities alike, to extreme hydro-meteorological incidents.

Our basic approach in formulating the Federal Government's environmental policy is that forests and water are matters of national security. Furthermore, the focus used for implementing programmes is rooted in local action like the Mexican Forest Resources Conservation and Sustainable Management Project (Procymaf), which basically consists of providing economic aid and training in developing community forest undertakings to over 600 common land units and communities in the three major forest states of Michoacán,

Guerrero and Oaxaca. Over 60% of the communities taking part are indigenous. Over the last four years, over 271 000 hectares have been brought under sustainable forest management.

Work is also being done on fostering the social and economic rehabilitation of natural resources. Mexico has become a pioneer in paying for environmental services to maintain eco-systems.

- Since the Payments Service for Environmental Services came on-stream in 2003, 600 million pesos have been paid out for the good maintenance of woods and forests to those who own them: the benefits include recharged aquifers, greater availability of water in periods of drought, conservation of biodiversity, recycling of carbon, protection of hydrological basins, erosion controls, conservation and rehabilitation of soil, plant pollination and biological control of pests, the preservation of natural beauty, and eco-tourism.
- The programme covers 2.9 million hectares.
- At the end of 2004, the programme was extended to take on board payment for environmental services in terms of recycling carbon and conserving bio-diversity.

The shortage and pollution of water are Mexico's and the world's major environmental challenges. In order to achieve sustainability with regard to water over the next 20 years we need to double current investment levels, which needs to be done by sharing responsibilities between the three levels of government, society and the private sector.

Next year, Mexico will house the Fourth World Water Forum. This will provide a unique opportunity to share experiences, concerns and projects with the international community.

Sustainable development is unthinkable without a solid framework of environmental legislation. In Mexico, we have been both developing environmental law, and consolidating the institutions, programmes, policies and instruments required to ensure that it is correctly applied.

The fight against environmental crime has been anything but easy. The Federal Environmental Protection Attorney's Office has created legal structures and focused its strategic inspection and monitoring programmes on critical areas of logging and trafficking of forest fauna, bringing proceedings against environmental criminals. However, the poor remain very vulnerable to the large logging groups, which belong to networks as complex as those of organised crime in other areas and are difficult to dismantle; the poor, who 'consume' the forests in order to survive, end up being those who pay for environmental crimes of this kind.

We are working on endowing individuals with legal certainty, forestalling and preventing damage stemming from environmental deterioration, decentralising decisions on and management of natural resources, and strengthening voluntary compliance arrangements.

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Legislative progress has been made under the present government, to wit:

- control, concertation and conciliation mechanisms in order to seek optimum solutions to environmental conflicts and abolish environmental impunity;
- voluntary and preventive mechanisms;
- application of heavier penalties to perpetrators of illegal logging, trafficking in wildlife and inappropriate handling of dangerous waste (up to 15 years imprisonment);
- the classification of environmental damage in protected natural areas as a serious crime.

We already have legislation on forest management (the General Sustainable Forest Development Law and its accompanying Regulation), making its own contribution to Mexico's social, economic and environmental development.

With regard to waste management, we have the General Integrated Waste Prevention and Management Law, which assigns specific responsibilities to the authorities at both State and municipal level with regard to sustainable management of waste. In order to meet our commitment to the reforms adopted by the Mexican Congress and our international commitments, the Regulation on Registering Emissions and Transfer of Pollutants (RETC) was published in 2004; this marks a major step towards public access to environmental information.

We have adopted reforms to the National Water Law, incorporating environmental provisions on sustainable water management, such as integrated water resources management, decentralisation in the shape of catchment area bodies, and the involvement of the PROFEPA in inspection and monitoring.

This year has seen the adoption of the Law on the Bio-safety of GMOs, and we are currently working on a Law on Access to Genetic Resources, which will ensure that the benefits and profits from the use of these resources will be fairly and equitably distributed.

The GMO law is designed to regulate restricted utilisation, experimental liberation, pilot programme release, commercial release, marketing, imports and exports of GMOs, with a view to pre-empting, preventing or reducing the possible risks of such activities to human health or to the environment, and to biological diversity and to animal, vegetable and marine health. It also lays down the principles governing the design of programmes in this area, and establishes the powers and synergies of the three levels of government.

The Genetic Resources Access Law is designed to regulate access, use, exploitation, in situ and ex situ conservation and protection of genetic resources, and the fair and equitable distribution of the profits arising from the exploitation and marketing of such resources; it constitutes a response to the obligations contracted by Mexico as a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity, in that it incorporates, as a piece of national legislation, issues concerning the preservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of

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its components and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits and profits arising from the use of genetic resources, by means of adequate access to them and appropriate technology transfer.

We should not forget that Mexico, like several Latin American countries, is home to some of the world's greatest biological diversity. Our continent's biological wealth, in conjunction with its cultural and ethnic riches, constitute an extraordinary heritage which we all need to protect, and we need to make the requisite effort to ensure that Latin America sets an example on the world stage in achieving the global standards which have been established for sustainable development.

Climate change, as the result of greenhouse gas emissions and their accumulation in the atmosphere, is seen by many experts as the greatest environmental challenge facing our century. Mexico signed the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992, and ratified it in 1993. Ever since, Mexico has been prominent in complying with its international commitments with regard to drawing up and regularly updating National Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventories, and likewise the drafting and submission of two National Communications.

Mexico was the first developing country to submit its Second Communication in 2001, and it will submit its Third Communication during the lifetime of the present administration; this will include an update on greenhouse gas emissions to 2002 in all sectors, as the Convention requires.

Other relevant action in this area includes:

- the setting up of an Intersecretarial Climate Change Commission; the updating of a National Climate Action Strategy; and, as I have already said, the updating of the National Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory to 2002, and the drawing up of the Third National Communication;
- encouraging research projects on climate change within the Semarnat-Conacyt Sectoral Research Fund. 18 such projects are currently in hand.
- Collaboration in Methane Market Multinational Initiatives; the Programme for Mexican Companies Emission Measurement and Voluntary Reports, using the Greenhouse Gas Protocol of the World Resources Institute and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. This voluntary programme benefits both the companies taking part and the country by means of capacity-building and by identifying greenhouse gas emission reduction opportunities; developing and promoting projects within the Clean Development Mechanism, through the Mexican Committee for Projects to Reduce Emissions of and Capture Greenhouse Gases, under the aegis of the Intersecretarial Commission.

Various federal, state and municipal departments are implementing action to make better use of our natural resources in order to reduce climate change. I would cite the Payment Programme for Carbon Capture Environmental Services, run by the State Secretariat for the Environment and Natural Resources, via the National Forest Commission; the Secretariat for Energy, supported by the National Energy-saving Commission (CONAE) and the Energy Saving Trust (FIDE); encouraging the Secretariat for Social Development's promotion of the use of biogas generated in rubbish tips; and I could cite many other examples.

We have also sought to foster action in other priority sectors, e.g. more efficient vehicles or ecotechnology in the housing sector; in both, successful pilot projects have been carried out, and it is clear that there are various additional benefits which all provide a better quality of life for our citizens.

In this transition to Mexico's sustainable development, the private sector is essential for the implementation of projects, under the Kyoto Protocol Clean Development Mechanism. In the first Kyoto compliance period (2008-2012) there are real opportunities for Mexican and foreign businesses to implement carbon reduction projects and take part in the market in certified carbon reductions or carbon certificates. 44 projects are currently listed, representing 12 million tonnes of carbon reduction.

So, as all this shows, there has been progress, and steps have been taken; but we have to push ahead with the legislative procedures to improve current legislation and go on fighting obstacles like the costs of regulation and their respective impact on interest groups, as well as differences in development at regional and state levels. That is not all. We need to have the courage to dare to change the dynamic in which developing countries habitually find themselves trapped, that is, where the shortage of resources, both human, material and economic, pushes us into dealing only with what is immediately urgent, and makes it look as though we have no hope of ever looking to the future. In the case of Mexico, in particular, the need is to fully integrate all public policies, instead of letting them pursue parallel tracks.

It seems to me that we have lost the ability to put human beings at the centre of all our action and all our decisions, not from an individualist stance - which *inter alia* has led us into exceedingly over-focused public policies and a belief that government is entirely and solely responsible for supplying welfare - but from the viewpoint that human beings are subjects with rights and obligations which allow them to fulfil their individual and social destinies.

We have relegated solidarity to a purely adjectival function, instead of making it a substantive principle of our actions, so as to place them at the service of a common destiny and achieve the synergy of greater private, public, national and international resources, linking up the management of affairs by national governments and international bodies, so as to integrate environmental, economic and social criteria, and, in the legislative sphere,

implement effective, efficient and transparent legal mechanisms which will foster economic, financial, cultural, technological and institutional change.

We need to establish strategic guidelines which put the conservation of the environment and its resources at the very centre of our policies and efforts, so as to allow us both to think about renewable energy sources and to design production schemes which will provide for an area of human activity which will resolve the issues of income and trade essential to life, but which also will be forms of production that simultaneously get beyond the mere acquisition of perishable goods. We need to be able to envisage the state as something imbued with solidarity, where social cohabitation is something that involves the efforts of all to achieve the higher goals of the whole, without ignoring the legitimate interests of the intermediate layers of individuals and communities.

There is no question that the strategy of investing in today's generation, in terms of health, education and nutrition, has borne fruit, but we have yet to take the step of exploiting the wealth that Mexico possesses in terms of its communities, linked to integrated development and carried out in the communities' own surroundings, with those communities being responsible for their natural resources.

The challenges are therefore:

- to develop communities whose own authorities devise and implement medium-term policies which provide the community with sustainable production projects which will allow them to get out of the poverty trap, look after their natural environment and, simultaneously, link up with other economies outwith the individual community;
- create incentives for the authorities in the various spheres of government to submit to sustainable urban development plans, so as to escape from the cycle of immediate, short-term spending on perishable goods and services;
- supporting crop and stock farming which is compatible with husbanding and caring for natural resources; the consequences for the environment of badly designed programmes are frequently negative, e.g. in terms of logging and/or soil erosion;
- place the responsibilities of our citizens on an equal footing - both rich and poor must be equally responsible in order to benefit from a programme. Programmes for the poor, in order to avoid 'assistance-dependency', are designed so as to make support conditional and tend to make a single individual responsible, instead of the family group or the community as a whole;
- develop more energetic policies to prevent unsustainable urban development.

Furthermore, as legislators, we need to make sure that we tackle the environmental issue horizontally, i.e. in terms of criminal law, taxation, and spatial planning legislation

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assigning environmental duties and powers to local authorities; this applies equally to planning laws, budgets, the powers of the various environmental authorities, citizen involvement in the environmental issue, monitoring bodies and political monitoring powers, and with regard to the adaptation of international treaties, in keeping with the Parlantino's own *Cartilla de lineamientos parlamentarios ambientalistas* [Primer of Parliamentary Environmentalist Rudiments].

We must not lose sight of the fact that at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002) it was made perfectly clear that the eradication of poverty and securing of environmental sustainability were goals which have not been met.

The Parlantino has stated that the challenge continues to be:

- to cut current greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% so as to stabilise CO₂ concentrations;
- change the current template of development and consumption based on intensive fossil fuel use, deforestation and agriculture heavily reliant on chemical fertilisers;
- comply with the undertakings given in international agreements¹.

It would be extremely useful, within the Parlantino's Committee on the Environment and Tourism, to draw up an analytical review of the state of environmental legislation in Latin America with regard to climate change, laying particular stress on what legal adjustments are required in each country in order to comply with the commitments made in terms of treaties which have been signed, and to assess the possibility of standardising public policies on the environment in Latin America, particularly in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The fact is that the inequality, poverty and environmental deterioration which obtain in the countries of Latin America are things that need to be changed throughout the continent not only by means of domestic but also international policies. We live in a profoundly unequal world: 20% of the richest countries have 62% of world income, i.e. 16 times more than the 20% of the poorest countries. Worse still, the levels of inequality between the countries of our own continent are greater than those which exist in the Asian and East European countries, which are emergent economies.

It has been shown that greater growth and greater equality have led to reduced poverty levels in south-east Asia, whereas in Africa and Latin America, little growth and severe inequality has increased poverty levels. This means that domestic policies are indeed called for, and it would appear that Latin America policies involving focused attention have

¹ The three issues are set out in: Parlamento Latinoamericano (2005). Cartilla de Lineamientos Parlamentarios Ambientalistas. Proyecto Ciudadanía Ambiental Global. Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Medio Ambiente (PNUMA)/Parlamento Latinoamericano. México D.F. en http://www.rolac.unep.mx/ciudadania/manuales/recientes/cartilla_parlatino.pdf

worked well: for example, Brazil has a similar social policy approach to Mexico's, or is moving towards one.

Furthermore, we need to promote domestic policies which will attract direct foreign investment and design more efficient and less costly institutions, including trade and investment regulatory agencies, with rules which provide incentives to environmental conservation.

However, the vulnerability of the emergent countries could be reduced by means of international policies: international agreements, on which the continent would negotiate *en bloc*, which would make possible much greater exports, for example, which would in its turn generate accumulation of foreign reserves.

The obstacles to growth in Latin America include factors which have nothing to do with the continent as such, such as the behaviour of the international financial system, against which we are completely defenceless thanks to internal indebtedness, exchange rates and the liabilities of our own banks. International financial institutions have laid down parameters which we have to meet in order to get resources to flow, and these resources are the ones that act as catalysts for investment.

Given that Latin America is a region with massive inequalities, it is an absolute priority that we have substantive collaboration in improving the social situation, above all social cohesion, an issue which has been a serious obstacle to the continent's sustainable development. Inequality impedes any development strategy, while simultaneously destabilising both democracies and development processes.

The European Community and the Interamerican Development Bank are at one in promoting joint objectives in the region so as to achieve synergies and regional social cohesion, using three fundamental approaches:

- fiscal policies,
- promotion of social equality and access to social services and,
- social inclusion as an essential element in development.

At the same time, this involves rehabilitating party politics, and making political parties relevant players when it comes to defining the economic and social transformation strategies essential to guaranteeing sustainable development.

Over and above various international commitments, the Cusco Consensus of 24 May 2003 decided on the course of action to be followed in two main areas:

1. Strengthening political parties and
2. The need to establish innovative financial mechanisms to meet social demands and consolidate democratic governability, given that globalisation demands more

inclusive societies, by giving priority to fighting poverty and social exclusion and guaranteeing better distribution of wealth.

This commitment is of major significance, since we look at the CEPAL assessment, we see it claimed that only seven of Latin America's 18 countries could possibly achieve the reduction of poverty and the other Millennium Goals by 2015: Colombia, Chile, Honduras, Panama, Dominican Republic and Uruguay and - before the crisis - Argentina.

Tackling the issue of social cohesion necessarily requires a new vision of macroeconomics. It is not a question of rejecting the so-called Washington Consensus; but the Washington Consensus needs to be revised in the light of experience and the glaring shortfalls on the social front. It is clear that political aspects need to be taken into account, e.g. reclaiming the role of the State and of political parties in the social sphere. This therefore means incorporating an inclusive approach to growth, with improved distribution by means of macroeconomic stability, expansion of trade, improved efficiency and transparency of government spending, fine-tuning of the taxation system, more efficient and better distributed social spending, investment in marginalised human capital, increased labour and finance market opportunities, the promotion of social inclusion, the implementation of innovative programmes on poverty, the promotion of health education and access to healthcare for the poor.

Globalisation means that regional integration is more than ever a necessity; and in fact, in commercial terms, integration has been taking place, although in the 1940s the goal was more a political one. Here, we need to apply ourselves to reviewing various aspects of our integration, so as to put ourselves in a competitive position to tackle this global age of ours efficiently: we need structural, institutional, socioagricultural, political, fiscal, macroeconomic, financial and infrastructural reviews characterised by transparency and widespread involvement. Integration does not involve undrawing borders, so much as a minimum of common policies with fairness mechanisms, i.e. solidarity - policies which can be implemented on a collegiate basis, and ideally on the basis of regulation by supranational bodies which, I might observe in passing, themselves need to be overhauled, strengthened and updated to tackle this new task.

As parliamentarians, we are all responsible for working for the good of our continent, of those whom we represent, and of future generations. Today's meeting is a good place to achieve that.

Thank you.