

Speech by Commissioner Phil Hogan at "Tastes of Europe" Seminar

8th February 2016, Bogota, Colombia

- Check Against Delivery –

- Minister Irigorri Valencia, esteemed delegates,

- Thank you for your warm welcome, muchas gracias! In recent weeks, friends and colleagues told me that Colombia is a beautiful country, and I must say that so far the reality far exceeds the expectation.

- I am absolutely delighted to be here today. And I am equally delighted that so many of you are here with me. For my part, I am **very proud to be the first Commissioner visiting Colombia from the European Commission team of President Jean-Claude Juncker.**

- We have a great opportunity in front of us, and today is an important step on that journey. The work we do today, and the conversations we begin, can make a real difference to our farmers, our agri-businesses, and our economies.
- History has taught us that there are two pillars which support strong and sustainable economic growth.
- The first of these pillars is **peace**. We have built a lasting peace on the continent of Europe. And here in Colombia you are at a vital point in your history. Peace talks are very advanced, and the EU is very supportive of this process.
- I was very pleased to meet your President this morning to discuss these important matters. The EU Envoy for the Peace Process in Colombia is Mr Eamon Gilmore, my former colleague in the government of Ireland. I met with Eamon last month and he presented a very hopeful and positive picture.
- The second pillar required for meaningful economic growth is **trade**. Buying and selling, innovating and competing – this is the beating heart of a healthy economy.

- Trade means developing and improving your country's products.
- It means inventing and innovating to bring both new and improved products to the market.
- And it means developing the networks at home and abroad to sell these products, generating income and jobs for your citizens.
- In Europe and Colombia, we have a variety of excellent products with strong export potential.
- I have the pleasure to be accompanied during this visit by more than 30 representatives of EU agricultural and food businesses active in sectors with large export-import potential in Colombia. We will travel later this week to Mexico.
- Some of them represent large European companies, others come from small enterprises. They come from 13 Member States in every corner of the EU. We have oats from Finland, cured meat from Italy, cheese from Poland and whisky from Scotland – to name but a few.

- They represent the richness and diversity of the European agricultural model. We have producers of fine spirits and wine, and excellent dairy and meat products.
- No matter the size of the company, we are all working together to boost trade, promote our high-quality products and introduce to importers and authorities the stories and values behind our agricultural traditions.
- Some of these companies are entering the Colombian market for the first time and others are already present here but wish to expand their potential.
- This visit to Colombia and Mexico is the first of a series that I plan to make to third countries where important opportunities exist for EU agriculture. After Colombia and Mexico I will continue this campaign in China and Japan in April 2016 and in Indonesia and Vietnam in the autumn.
- The main aim of our campaign is to support our exporters in fostering the EU's position as the world's top exporter and importer of food and drink. At the same time we wish to introduce to you, Colombia's agri-food professionals, the unique quality of our products.

- The EU considers Colombia as one of the key trading partners in Latin America and I would like to reaffirm our full commitment to further deepen and develop our bilateral links. As you know, we recently concluded a Trade Agreement, and we have already seen some encouraging initial trade figures.
- Among **alcoholic beverages**, EU whisky exports to Colombia increased by 3.9%, beer made from malt by 10.25%, wine from fresh grapes +8.35%, and sparkling wine from fresh grapes by 26.43%.
- Meanwhile, EU exports of **dairy products** to Colombia grew 115.98% last year, mainly composed of whey, cheese and curd.
- The Agreement is already proving effective, granting legal certainty to operators and also removing trade barriers. Of course there remain a number of challenges, notably relating to sanitary and phytosanitary issues, as well as spirit drinks. But I am confident that these can be resolved soon.
- I have had the pleasure of discussing this with Minister Iragorri Valencia, and I would like to thank you, Minister, for the commitment and positivity you have shown.

- Full peace will bring a new era of openness and opportunity to Colombia. Allow me to restate, in the name of the European Union, our full support for the peace process talks. You can count on the European Union to help with our experience and commitment.
- Your job, and my job, is to make the most of the opportunities peace will bring.
- Agriculture and rural development will play a key role in the post-conflict scenario. **Enhancing agriculture is one of the avenues that the Colombian Government is correctly exploring in order to create growth and jobs.** As you can imagine, I am fully supportive of this political initiative. I want to translate these good intentions into concrete actions during my visit.
- First, we will start negotiations of **an agreement of equivalence of organic products** between the EU and Colombia. The development of organic farming has great potential in Colombia.
- There is a lot of land which could not be used in the past because of the conflict.

- Also, many of those involved in the conflict were previously farmers. And the country is famous for its amazing biodiversity.
- All these factors point towards a great opportunity for Colombian organic products. If these are successfully promoted, they could enjoy great success meeting the growing global organic demand.
- We have also co-organised with the Colombian authorities a high level event on Monday afternoon where the development of organics will be one of the main elements.
- I have brought with me to Colombia three of the best European companies in the field of organics (HIPP from Germany, EOSTA from the Netherlands and COATO from Spain). They will be pleased to share their experience with the participants.
- Second, I want to explore cooperation in the area of **rural development**. We have a huge amount of European experience in this field. During tomorrow's visit to Cali, I will inspect a number of local projects co-financed by the EU.

- The broad objectives of our EU Rural Development Policy are designed to positively influence the full spectrum of rural life. Over the years, we have developed a highly integrated approach to making these objectives real and meaningful in the lives of rural citizens.
- From an economic point of view, our mission is to provide rewarding and sustainable livelihoods for people living in rural areas. We believe high-quality localised agricultural products can contribute to this goal in a major way. And we believe this will also be the case in Colombia.
- **I want to assure you that I will listen closely to any ideas and suggestions you have for improving and deepening our cooperation.**
- If I turn now to the more economic part of the visit, it is clear that **the removal of obstacles to trade and therefore unlocking potential in important agricultural sectors** will be at the centre of the visit.

- Good opportunities exist for EU agriculture and I want to help open doors for new exports. There are some obstacles, notably to our wines and spirits and fruits and vegetables in Colombia, and I want to make progress in removing them.
- We will also discuss **geographical indications**. Colombia has one of the most famous in the world: "Café de Colombia".
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- This brings me to my next point. In my second day of visit **we will go to Cali**. Why? Because we want to explore more business opportunities. Experience shows that there are often excellent opportunities outside the capital city.
- Diversification for me means not only exploring new markets in third countries: it is also means looking beyond the capital city when looking for business opportunities. In Cali I am going to meet the Governor and three other Governors from different regions.
- They are going to Cali to participate in a business event with some of the European companies accompanying me. I intend to visit the International Centre for tropical agriculture to view their internationally renowned seed bank, and a laboratory.

- And I will be delivering the same message everywhere I go: rural areas, including but not limited to the agri-food sector, can be leaders of economic growth and job creation.
- In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, I want to repeat the message that European farmers and food producers know that the high standards of their products must be maintained if they want to stay on top in an increasingly competitive global market.
- All over the world consumers are increasingly interested in the quality of food and drink and how they were produced. Colombia can also choose this path; it has quality products, a great climate and land. There are sectors of great potential, such as the organic sector.
- And I am confident that peace time will bring a new energy and dynamism to farming and rural communities.
- Thank you for your attention.