

Opportunity and investment

INTERVIEW WITH HE MARIA ANGELA HOLGUIN CUELLAR

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, COLOMBIA



MARIA ANGELA HOLGUIN CUELLAR is a graduate of the Universidad de los Andes, with further studies at the CEDS and Sorbonne in Paris, and at Harvard. She has previously been Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, and served as Colombia's Ambassador to Venezuela and to the United Nations. She served as Head of Cabinet to the Vice President of the Republic, and was the Representative of the Andean Development Corporation in Argentina, before taking up her current Ministerial appointment.

What are the key aims, objectives and guiding principles of Colombia's foreign policy, given the growing importance of Latin America to the global economy?

Under President Juan Manuel Santos, Colombia's foreign policy has been guided by four key objectives: Normalising and strengthening our relationships with the region with a view to a greater integration of Latin America and the Caribbean; developing a new dynamic relationship with Asia and the Pacific through a strengthened diplomatic presence and the opening of new markets; seeking greater engagement in formal and informal international arenas to generate new political, economic and investment opportunities; and diversifying the thematic agenda with traditional partners. These policy objectives are framed by the Democratic Prosperity agenda, which aims to increase foreign and domestic investment, generate growth, create jobs and reduce poverty.

Security is a key issue for government and inward investors. What is the current situation in Colombia in this regard?

Today, Colombia is one of the most attractive destinations for investment in Latin America. Significant improvements in security over the last decade have contributed greatly to this perception, but are not the only factor. Colombia's political, economic and institutional stability have created an environment that offers all the necessary protections for investors to feel confident about coming to Colombia. This positive climate for investment has been validated by the improvement of Colombia's credit rating and by the number of foreign companies that are interested in doing business in Colombia, among other factors.

How are Colombia's relations with Europe developing? How important is Europe to Colombia as a diplomatic and trading partner? How is progress moving on the multi-party trade agreement?

Europe is a very important partner for Colombia at the bilateral, sub-regional, regional and multilateral level. The EU has been a close ally in issues like the global drug problem, human rights and good governance and we are working hard at diversifying the agenda

to include matters such as science and technology, innovation, education, energy, biodiversity and agriculture, among others. We want to elevate the relationship to the status of a strategic partnership and having a trade agreement with the European Union will go a long way towards that goal. We are hopeful that the agreement will become a reality next year after being approved by the European Commission and having been submitted for the consideration of the European Parliament.

What role will Colombia play in ensuring the region's continuing prosperity and stability? How are relations with your neighbours developing?

One of President Santos' top priorities when he came into office was rebuilding and strengthening the relationships with the region. As a result we have entered into a new regional paradigm based on mutual respect and cooperation and now have a good political dialogue at the highest level with our neighbours. We believe that Colombia can play a positive and constructive role in Latin America and the Caribbean and that we can have a part in driving regional integration forward. Through the ongoing strengthening of regional and sub-regional groupings, like UNASUR, the Andean Community (CAN), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Pacific Alliance, we hope we can address the region's most pressing issues and work together to generate the conditions for sustained prosperity and stability.

How would you define Colombia's global role in the coming decade?

Colombia is a country with tremendous potential and opportunities. And we are not the only ones to see that. Colombia is part of the so-called CIVETS, a group of emerging economies with sustained growth and great potential for investment that are expected to drive the world economy in the next decade. Colombia is a country with the capacity to be a bridge between north and south and a gateway to Latin America. We want to be an engine for integration and development. We want Colombia to be recognized for its human capital and its social equity, as well as for its economic, entrepreneurial and technological capacity.