

THE EU AND LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN RELATIONS: BUILDING A STRONG MULTILATERAL DIALOGUE

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The European Union (EU) and Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) share deep historical, cultural, and diplomatic bonds. However, the interregional relationship often suffers from asymmetries, limited cooperation, and Eurocentric approaches. Strengthening political collaboration and moving beyond economic interests is crucial to fostering mutual trust and long-term, balanced partnerships.

Addressing the EU-LAC interregional relations with a threefold perspective

This policy brief aims to map the EU-LAC interregional relations from a threefold perspective: (1) interinstitutional dialogue; (2) main areas of cooperation; (3) political cooperation in the field of security. The ultimate goal is to recommend that the EU take more consistent and continuous actions to cooperate with Latin America and the Caribbean. Strengthening the EU-LAC interregional bond has always been crucial for both regions: their relationship underpins multilateral dialogue, in a world with increasing polarisation. Nowadays, Western democracies - especially the EU and the United States (US) - are experiencing a backlash of democratic values, an erosion of international rules and a decrease in multilateral dialogue. Global powers such as the US, Russia, and China often sideline

multilateralism in favour of self-interest: they act alone, ruling the others, not willing (or trying to circumvent) to interact as peers with other countries. In this scenario, the EU should recognise the opportunity to (finally) build a meaningful partnership with LAC countries. It is already late, but it is not too late.

Interregional institutional dialogue between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean

The EU-LAC interregional relation is complex and multifaceted, and primarily relates to the different governance methods adopted by the two regions. The EU is an integrated regional organisation with a structured sovereignty, whilst the LAC region hosts a variety of regional organisations with diverse purposes and diverse membership compositions.[1]

In the last [Regional Multiannual Indicative Programme \(2021-2027\)](#) (MIP), the Commission proposed improved engagement with sub-regional groups like Mercosur, the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Andean Community, and the Pacific Alliance. This process starts by establishing regular Summits and other tools allowing permanent coordination: the EU-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (EU-CELAC) summit of 2023, after a long break of eight years, assessed the reciprocal need for an EU-LAC consistent dialogue, with a meeting every two years, according to the [new agenda](#) (the next one is scheduled for November 2025). There are Parliamentary Assemblies between the European Parliament and the LAC region organising meetings to

[1] These include the [Community of Latin American and Caribbean States](#) (CELAC), the [Caribbean Community](#) (CARICOM), and the [Southern Common Market](#) (Mercosur), etc.

update and possibly coordinate together.[2] Two key issues arise regarding the inter-institutional dialogue. Firstly, the EU is utilising several instruments without meaningful continuity; there are political meetings, but these only began to regularly occur in 2023, and it is uncertain whether they will persist (the timeframe of two years is not enough to have a definitive picture of a continuous yearly-based dialogue). Additionally, these meetings should consist of experts providing critical analyses on how to establish a more reliable and coherent EU-LAC relationship, rather than merely praising existing links. Secondly, the EU too often adopts a 'sectioning' approach with the region. The EU's tendency to prioritise specific relationships with bigger countries generates regional inequalities and fosters distrust among smaller partners towards the EU. There is a differentiation between Latin America and the Caribbean that cannot be treated superficially.

Main priorities: Supporting trade agreements, financing digital, and green transition

The EU-LAC investments and projects are part of the package of the [EU Global Gateway Initiative](#), which aims to commit the two regions to economic cooperation through fair, green and digital investment opportunities in LAC. The [New Agenda for Relations between the EU and LAC of 2023](#) can be divided into (a) trade agreements, (b) digital transition, and (c) green transition. Trade agreements such as the one with Mercosur, implying duty-free trade with the EU, promise significant economic advantage.

Moreover, LAC countries have expressed their commitment to advancing their expertise in the

critical areas of digitalisation and the green transition, and there is clear potential for further growth through collaboration with other regions.

Trade agreements

According to the [Commission's Answers on the Agenda 2023-2025](#), in 2022, total trade in goods between the 27 EU Member States and Latin America and the Caribbean accounted for EUR 293.09 billion, corresponding to 4.8% of total extra-EU imports, and 5.8% of total extra-EU exports. The EU has recently negotiated trade agreements, such as those with Mercosur, Mexico, and Chile. On this, the most recent and revolutionary development was the conclusion of the [EU-Mercosur Trade Agreement in December 2024](#). While it was welcomed by some, critics point out the Agreement's potential environmental impacts and concerns about the respect for fundamental and social rights.

Economic relations between the EU and Latin America present significant challenges, particularly the risk that the EU could act primarily in its own interest, prioritising resource extraction over equitable development. [Latin America is rich in natural resources](#) such as lithium and copper, whose demand is constantly increasing. Lithium is an essential mineral to produce batteries used in laptops, smartphones, hybrid and electric vehicles. Copper is crucial for renewable energy technologies of which Chile and Peru are the largest producers, with, respectively, 27% and 11% of global supply. When investing in these resources, the EU should be guided by principles of fair trade, environmental sustainability, and respect for social rights, rather than mere profit-seeking. Overemphasis on resource extraction threatens rural communities and exacerbates existing inequalities: for example, the environmental

[2] These include the [Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly](#), [Delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly](#) and the [Delegation to the Caribbean-EU Parliamentary Assembly](#).

impact of the extraction is creating depopulation of rural communities, endangering agriculture and thus [people of that areas who are already communities](#), endangering agriculture and thus people of that areas who are already poorer compared to the urban areas. In addition, many LAC countries still struggle with stark social disparities embedded in unequal access to resources and services. If EU investments disproportionately benefit already-powerful enterprises, they risk deepening these divisions rather than supporting inclusive growth.

Digital transition

The MIP focused on the need for action in the digital transition; this was mentioned during the [January 2025](#) meeting of the Delegation to the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (DLAT). Since 2023, the EU-LAC Digital Alliance serves as a collaborative framework promoting an inclusive, secure, and human-centric digital transformation. It encompasses cooperation in areas such as digital policy dialogue, internet governance, data protection, artificial intelligence, digital trade, and the digitisation of public services. It also supports knowledge exchange on digital citizenship and interoperability of electronic services. Among others, the MIP supports the Building Europe Link to Latin America Programme (born in 2016 for Latin America, from 2023 extended to the Caribbean), which provides support for long-term inter-connectivity. Supporting the digital transition is crucial to build EU and LAC competitiveness in the global market, however, there is a need to guarantee strong and well-structured coordination in the programmes proposed, through high-level expertise and continuous sharing of information and tools. LAC enterprises often do not have the resources for an efficient implementation of digital transition, and the EU should function by combining economic assistance financing with continuous aid in providing expertise.

Green transition

Concerning the environment, the LAC region has committed to a collaborative green transition through the Global Gateway Investment Agenda and the [Euroclima+](#) programme. To ensure tangible progress, these programmes must be implemented with consistency and transparency, involving not only institutional actors but also civil society. Engaging local communities and stakeholders will help build trust and ensure that the transition is inclusive and equitable. Environmental protection must be a central point of the EU-LAC relationship. The environment will be impacted and affected by trade relations, and this is already under high attention and criticism. An encouraging move is the inclusion of the Paris Agreement signature in the Trade Agreement with Mercosur and with Chile.

However, if the programming related to the green transition is not done with continuity and with a flow of information, the possibility of achieving it is low. Furthermore, if the EU claims to be entering into programmes to assist a green transition, these must be concrete and visible, through action at the institutional level and with civil society. This cooperation offers a path toward building a shared understanding of the global climate crisis. For years, industrial economies of the Global North have fallen short in adopting ecological and sustainable economic practices. Therefore, it is neither fair nor realistic to expect countries in the Global South to bear the full burden of being green. The narrative must shift toward a more inclusive and cooperative approach that acknowledges historical responsibility and focuses on working together to find new collective ways of protecting the environment.

Interregional cooperation against transnational crimes and human rights protection

The EU-LAC partnership extends beyond economic cooperation, and it includes a common fight against transnational crimes such as drug trafficking, human trafficking, and environmental crimes. These forms of organised crime have become key drivers of violence and inequality, undermining trust in public institutions and hindering economic growth in both regions. Recognising these shared challenges, the EU has initiated several cooperation programs to strengthen interregional efforts, such as Europe Latin America Programme of Assistance against Transnational Organised Crime ([EI PAcCTO 2.0](#)), the Cooperation Program between Latin America, the Caribbean and the EU on drug policy ([COPOLAD III](#)) and [EUROFRONT](#) (protection of borders). The EU-LAC relation formed part of the EU's Security Strategy 2020-2025 and the EU Drugs Strategy 2021-2025. According to the MIP, there is a need for more coordinated action between EU Member States and Commission Directorates-General and specialised agencies. This is only partly done through the above-mentioned programmes, and the agencies are negotiating agreements with third countries. In [March 2024](#), experts from the Commission, from EI PAcCTO 2.0, from Europol and Eurojust intervened in the DLAT meeting: they agreed on the need for more cooperation, which is a significant step ahead, especially on the will of more security.

There are two main criticisms to address regarding this policy issue. First, while combating transnational crime contributes to upholding the rule of law, there is a pressing need to strengthen the protection

of criminal law guarantees. This includes safeguarding the rights and conditions of suspects and detainees, an area that is insufficiently addressed at the moment. The actions of EU agencies in fostering cooperation with LAC should take fundamental rights into account, yet this consideration seems absent from current agendas. Second, whereas trade-related issues receive significant attention and public discourse, cooperation on criminal matters is often relegated to technical experts, thus lacking broader and more integrated discussion. This should be supported not only by institutional commitment but also by engagement with nongovernmental organisations working in this specialised field. Given that organised crime often follows financial flows, it is essential to align crime prevention strategies with trade and economic policies for a coherent and effective approach.

Policy recommendations

EU-LAC relations present a mixed picture. Despite the wide discourse on interregional 'sisterhood', the attention of the two regions focuses on economic interests. This can create a hiccup relationship, because the moment the economy of one of the two regions becomes less stable, there is less motivation to cooperate. Economic interests alone are a weak bond, so there should be a will to build up an interregional dialogue based on equal pillars; these obviously will contribute to the economy, yet, at the same time, they will establish stronger trust between partners.

- **Employing more consistency and more inclusiveness in the institutional dialogue with LAC:** The Euro-Latin Parliamentary Assembly should meet once a year, and the representatives of the two regions should have a key role in communicating with the EU-CELAC Summits. Additionally, there should be more clarity and publicity

regarding informing researchers and stakeholders, also on the content and the discussion of these meetings and the Delegations.

- **Bridging from institutional dialogue to connecting civil societies:** The lack of sustained cooperation stems in part from limited mutual understanding between institutions and the private sector. Inter-institutional dialogue should be a platform for broader networking and relationship-building, especially among innovation ecosystems and entrepreneurs, whose goals often remain unclear.
- **Interregional cooperation through subregional dialogues:** Between the EU-CELAC meetings, there should be specific dialogues with smaller regions to understand this complex puzzle. Employing meetings with specific countries will lead to targeted investments, taking the entire landscape into account and thus being prepared for any potential issues.
- **Promoting equitable economic cooperation:** Beyond increasing trade, investments should aim to reduce inequality, for instance, by promoting microcredit for small enterprises. Encouraging microcredit aligns with the EU's responsibility to help address economic disparities both within and among countries in the LAC region. While the extraction of raw materials plays a role, it must support the development of LAC economies. In this, there should be more transparency in the processes of investments the EU has started or will start.
- **Better coordinating funding instruments:** The EU needs to be aligned in financing LAC entrepreneurship, trying

to avoid gaps in their lifecycle. More engagement with civil society, as recommended above, can help in building more continuous and coherent funding instruments.

- **Upholding environment as first pillar for investing:** Environmental policy should be the central issue of EU-LAC relations; every negotiation should consider the preservation and protection of the environment. There should be continuous monitoring of the sustainability of projects in which the EU has invested.
- **Enhancing interregional programs to fight crime:** The EU should expand interregional programs that foster institutional dialogue on key technical issues, including crime prevention and social rights protection. Eurojust should open more negotiations in LAC. Regular meetings of legal practitioners, from judges to defence lawyers, would boost cooperation.
- **Boosting fundamental rights guarantees in interregional programmes:** There should be more engagement in sharing expertise related to prison conditions and alternative measures, more generally, in the duty to observe criminal law guarantees. This should be one of the pillars of the interregional programmes concerning criminal justice and law enforcement.

A final recommendation relates to the need of the EU to connect with citizens by means of academic cooperation and outreach. The EU should actively support academic programs, research collaborations, and exchange initiatives with the LAC region. Existing efforts, such as the Jean Monnet Centres of Excellence, are a good start, but the effort should go further: promoting knowledge flows in both directions, therefore strengthening the EU's understanding of LAC just as much as LAC's understanding of Europe.

All the opinions expressed in this publication are the sole view of the authors, and do not represent the position of the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) or of its Members.

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