



EU-CELAC Summit: a youth perspective

*by Timothy Ferdinand**

For any young person to truly appreciate the context of an EU-CELAC framework, he or she must have some understanding of the history and ongoing experiences of the two regions. More importantly, one must have the capacity to peer into future shapes of our development – both through the visionary lens of our current CELAC leaders and through the eyes of the ordinary citizen- additionally, one must also understand the role and interests of the European Union (EU).

The Latin American and Caribbean community (CELAC) was formed in December of 2011, with the purpose of deepening Latin American integration. Therefore, any contribution by the EU to the enhancement of that mission will serve the interest of our leaders. This, according to calls made at the inaugural CELAC meeting will obviously translate into encouragement and facilitation of increased regional trade, economic development, and further economic cooperation among members in defending their growing economies.

There are however, three things that can be considered barriers to improving multinational cooperation from a youth perspective. First is the issue of language, second is the dilution of heritage and cultural identity and third is the apparent inequalities existing at the root of our global societal construct. These inequalities make it difficult to envision a fighting chance for the average youth to excel; hence the responsibility of member governments to ensure that an environment of hope, excellence, equality and creativity is developed, managed and maintained as a product of such multinational relations. Furthermore, if cultural heritage and history are not secured and effectively taught, and if hybrid cultures are not consciously developed, the youth will most certainly discard significant portions of the past. The sustainability of all things established today depends therefore on the degree of significance placed upon it by the youth and the deliberate attention that current leaders place on their inclusion in these establishments.

This implies the role of youth as active and conscious participants in development and not merely as recipients.

A young person, if not self taught, would never learn the intricacies of the political environments in which we live, and if not for personal interest in history, international relations or national development strategies, would not find appreciation for the internal systems of societal order, but would easier become cynical of politics. The EU-CELAC relationship is therefore seen as one of promise due simply to the obvious certainty of synergy that comes with



any such collaboration and the importance of mature, mutual relations between countries in guaranteeing peace and security.

The integration of peoples and nations of the world is necessary not only to overcome armed conflicts but, to maintain sanity and the survival of the human race itself. This can only be guaranteed through unity of the people- hence the need to strengthen cooperation not only at the leadership levels but at community levels where impact can be seen, felt and heard.

This can be achieved by prioritizing public policies, action plans and development projects with, from and for the youth of our regions and establishing systems that guarantee respect for human rights. There is need to continue promoting and strengthening participatory democracy with respect for the heterogeneity that characterizes our people.

Greater focus and investment in technology and innovation will certainly unleash new employment perspectives and areas of productivity; however the ICT market still appears locked and untapped especially within the CELAC states. Our mobile industries lack effective competition and in 2015 our average internet penetration levels are only at 52.3% for Latin America & Caribbean.

Commitments from heads of state should include stand alone statements that particularly articulate their commitment to “young people” as well as to existing initiatives and networks that are proven to filter into communities and lives of vulnerable citizens.

In keeping with Articles 28 and 29, of the Santiago declaration, recognition and support must be given to student-based organizations and youth-led platforms that promote active civic engagement alongside curriculum studies as well as non-formal learning sectors. Establishment of consistent dialogue between government and civil society, especially youth-led platforms such as the European Youth Forum (EYF) and the Latin American and Caribbean Youth Forum (FLACJ) should be pursued. Furthermore, there should be greater support and commitment toward building the capacity of these very organizations, especially National Youth Councils across the CELAC-EU regions.

Reimagining and redesigning education, work and economic systems to suit the future are essential components of “relevant governance”- thereby offering flexibility and adaptability to the changing socio- cultural dynamics.

The ability to obtain such relevance has been demonstrated through the undeniable progress achieved over the past fourteen (14) years of institutionalized relations and over six (6) summits.

The 2015 Summit:



Our governments have already accurately declared their intentions to work together. The Havana and the Santiago declarations clearly outline the areas of cooperation that can propel our regions forward (see articles 27, 34 & 41), and admittedly, this must be through gradual processes.

However, the pace at which unemployment, poverty, hunger, violence and crime is rising, negatively affects economic growth and outruns the pace of our developmental response mechanisms. There is a call by youth for time bound "action", rigorous implementation and elaborate systems of "proactive governance" that simultaneously deals with anticipated challenges of the future while addressing current issues.

What could make the links between the two regions more visible?

The visibility of EU-CELAC can be improved through the broadening of technical programs and human resource sharing across the regions, particularly among youth, through educational platforms and volunteerism in community development. Clear movement towards breaking the barriers of language must come from purified motives such as the pursuit of equity, education for all, zero-hunger and peace.

Also, the proliferation of objective news and other development-based media broadcasting across the regions (balanced with respect for the sovereignty of states) are effective tools of sensitization and sharing.

EU-CELAC is a platform for the integration of our people, therefore, strengthening the bonds of cooperation and creating mechanisms that facilitate dialogue, strengthen economic integration and serve as a place for conflict resolution is important. It is also necessary to build relationships that respect the sovereignty of nations.

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