



The EU and LAC: United by a commitment to sustainable development

*By Anna Ayuso**

Adapting the bi-regional agenda to the major challenges of sustainable development and climate change and turning it into a powerful engine for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is a challenge that both the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are facing together. In the Joint Declaration of the II Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) of July 2018, the leaders reiterated their commitment to the global challenges of the 2030 Agenda with shared but differentiated responsibilities depending on the needs, capacities and resources of each country. To this end, it will be necessary to design new cooperation instruments with a multilateral approach and a perspective of shared values, problems and solutions, linking them to mutually agreed mechanisms. Along these lines, the new joint Statement of the European Commission to the Parliament and the Council of April 16, 2019 entitled "Uniting forces for a common future" emphasises the need to modernise the partnership by renewing the cooperation instruments for a more effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In order to put it into practice, it is vital to create broad alliances in favour of sustainable development in a multi-level and multi-sectoral dimension and to establish transparent accountability mechanisms. The exercise of incorporating the 2030 Agenda into the set of relations represents a challenge in terms of innovation and institutionalisation and requires political will. To this end, the mechanisms for identifying priorities in different spheres and at different levels must be reviewed in order to incorporate pluralistic visions and to analyse in which themes and areas similar positions are shared and in which effort can be done to adopt common positions with respect to the global agenda.

The EU and CELAC maintain a series of structured dialogues (social cohesion, migration, drugs, climate change, technology and innovation) in which they must define their respective responsibilities for the achievement of the SDGs, identifying interregional priorities that contribute to the different SDGs and building partnerships (with governments, civil society organisations and the private sector) for the formulation, implementation and evaluation of interregional cooperation. One of the major challenges emanating from the 2030 Agenda is the need to incorporate policy coherence for development (PCD) analysis. This approach has become a consubstantial element of development strategies that must be included at all levels of governance and obliges the different objectives to be tackled jointly and to analyse the effects and interactions of policies both internally and in their outward projection and contribution to global public goods. In order to define the strategies and political priorities of the bi-regional Development Agenda, it is possible to identify some of the strategic themes for aligning interregional cooperation with the SDGs:

The first objective of the 2030 Agenda is to put an end to poverty. However, the upturn in poverty and inequality caused by the crisis that shook both regions points to the need to promote a paradigm shift in the fight against poverty that, in addition to the traditional redistributive logic, proposes a multidimensional development incorporating social participation with a parity-based approach. This requires Development models that are more stable and less vulnerable to changes in the economic cycle and that address phenomena



such as the fourth industrial revolution and its effects on labour relations, the necessary transfer of knowledge and experience through public and private interaction or the need for sustainable social safety nets that can cope with demographic changes, all that with the full involvement of social agents. Based on the lessons learned from the past two decades in the fight against poverty and the factors that have led to an increase in extreme poverty in recent years, the EU and LAC, in collaboration with ECLAC, should re-elaborate a strategy leading to a bi-regional pact against poverty that will enable the goals of the 2030 Agenda to be achieved.

The 2030 Agenda puts inequality at the heart of the SDGs: Goal 10 to reduce inequality within and between countries and Goal 5 to reduce gender inequality are two mandates that must give rise to a precise set of measures. The EU-CELAC cooperation agenda should incorporate the fight against multidimensional inequality as one of the elements for analysing policy coherence in bi-regional relations. In addition to sharing experiences, lessons learned and good practices, procedures should be reinforced that privilege the fight against gender and race inequalities in a transversal manner. Against inequality, it is also crucial to support civil society organisations by establishing an inter-regional support and exchange network that contributes to raising awareness with empirical evidence on the causes and effects of inequality. The growing inequality also demands progressive tax reforms, the fight against fraud and money laundering with national and international measures. The EU and LAC can lead an anti-corruption pact and control tax havens to curb capital and tax evasion that erodes the taxation needed to sustain public policies. This should act in two ways: On the one hand, encouraging international persecution and the establishment of measures against havens that encourage evasion and, on the other, the improvement of transparency and tax control policies within countries through technical cooperation and exchange, as has already been initiated in some EUROsocial programmes.

The EU and CELAC strongly supported the 2015 Climate Change Agreement and in its strategic priorities for EU cooperation with LAC, the environment and energy occupy a prominent place, but it is necessary to agree on measures and instruments in line with their various responsibilities that translate into resources, technology transfer and contribution to multilateral initiatives such as the Green Climate Fund. SDG 7 (affordable and sustainable energy), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 12 (responsible production and consumption), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 14 (life below water), SDG 15 (life on land) are the international framework for cooperation between the EU and LAC and make them compatible with the Paris Agreement. Both the EU and LAC will have to maintain the intensity of the efforts they are making at the international negotiation level, aimed at concretising the commitments to implement the Paris Agreement and at elaborating the necessary institutional architecture and allocating the relevant resources. For an effective implementation of the environmental agenda, it is necessary to fully involve civil society. The EU and LAC can contribute through environmental education programmes, both in schools and for the general public, to promote the use of alternative energies and responsible consumption. A crucial aspect is protecting environmental defenders, supporting citizens' movements and raising awareness about the need for a change in the energy matrix and the negative consequences of inaction.

The EU and CELAC should cooperate to strengthen socio-environmental protection systems and reinforce international self-regulatory mechanisms such as the Equator Principles, which



have been adopted by 96 financial institutions in 37 countries to establish minimum standards for environmental protection applied to investments, or the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. On this basis, progress should also be made towards a common normative framework that establishes minimum standards for investments in decent work in accordance with the recommendations of the ILO and for responsible and sustainable production. Unilateral conditionality and protectionism that has prevailed in previous times must be transformed into a common agreed reference framework and establish a bi-regional Action Plan with monitoring instruments that allow for accountability to citizens. Another sector with great possibilities for cooperation is the protection of biological biodiversity. Although some cooperation programmes already exist, progress should be made towards a bi-regional strategy aligned with SDG 14 and 15 and with the United Nations Conventions.

Both the EU and LAC have incorporated the urban dimension into their regional agendas with the European Urban Agenda and the New Urban Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean. Cooperation between cities was incorporated into the EU's Agenda with LAC since the 1990s and contributed to establishing international networks of cities with the aim of giving voice to local actors and tackling transnational problems. Establishing an inter-regional urban agenda should be a contribution to the global sustainable development agenda and make cities actors promoting peace and global justice in a multi-level governance scheme with shared responsibilities. The construction of a new inter-regional urban agenda should be aligned with the respective regional agendas and expressed as a contribution to the global urban agenda adopted at the Habitat III Conference in 2016, as well as with the SDGs and the localisation process of these, very specifically the SDG 11 dedicated to the construction of Sustainable Cities. The LAC and EU commitments to the Global Urban Agenda should be strengthened by giving more prominence to the participation of cities in the 2030 Agenda through an interregional pact for sustainable urban development and resilient communities that includes local authorities in the design of cooperation policies and social participation mechanisms in a multi-level governance scheme.

One of the greatest challenges for the implementation of these and other dimensions of the 2030 Agenda is the ability to mobilise the resources needed to carry out the policies needed to achieve them. This is why compliance with the Addis Ababa Agenda adopted at the third Conference on Financing for Development in 2015 is an essential part of achieving the SDGs adopted that same year. The UN's Financing for Sustainable Development Report 2019 warns that there is a need to seek new sources of funding and mobilise public and private resources, and a long-term vision including the public and private sector is required. However, attention is drawn to the fact that by failing to curb growing inequality the credibility in the multilateral system is undermined and that it will be necessary to promote changes in the global financial architecture. The conclusions and recommendations adopted at the ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development held from 15 to 18 April 2019 call for concerted action to align the different sources of financing with the SDGs. The EU and LAC must commit themselves to these structural changes by incorporating them into inter-regional relations as an intermediate instrument to contribute to global governance capable of bringing the 2030 Agenda to a successful conclusion.



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This article is a contribution Newsletter of the EU-LAC Foundation on the theme "Why should the European Union be of relevance to Latin America and the Caribbean?" And why should Latin America and the Caribbean be of relevance to the European Union?" The opinions expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the author and may not be those of the EU-LAC Foundation.