

## **International Cooperation (of) between the European Union (with) and Latin America and the Caribbean**

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As Regional Director for Cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean, I have always had mixed feelings.

On the one hand, I attend meetings with my fellow colleagues, directors from other regions or thematic lines, with large portfolios, which can make my regional direction feel like the little sister within the Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development.

On the other hand, **when I can explain** our programmes and projects, **when I can explain** the level of complicity reached with our partners in the region, **when I can explain** the ambition and complexity of our initiatives, **when I can explain** the depth of an agenda like the one that will be discussed in Montevideo in the framework of the 'IX EU-LAC Reflection Forum' on 3 and 4 October, I realise that on the cooperation framework between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean we are exploring the limits and potential of a new international cooperation.

At that moment we are no longer the little sister, we are the bigger sister who paves the way, we are the ones who explore the limits, the ones destined to live outside our comfort zone. And at that moment, I feel proud and supported by a positive, constructive, complicit relationship upon which both regions have been able to build international agendas that will mark our common future.

On the basis of any discussion, aimed at setting out the objectives and logic of our bi-regional cooperation, it is necessary to **reflect on the role that international cooperation should play within the framework of the 2030 Agenda and especially under the perspective of development in transition.**

*THE 2030 AGENDA AND THE EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON DEVELOPMENT REPRESENT A PARADIGM SHIFT IN OUR APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES.*

**2030 Agenda** is the agenda of us all. **It is an agenda that commits us all, that implies reflecting on one of its fundamental principles, it is a universal agenda that concerns us all and from which no country can be excluded.** It is an inclusive, multidimensional agenda that appeals to innovation and commitment of all in order to offer answers to every development reality and to global challenges.

In *the new Consensus on Development the European Union* and its member states commit themselves to 2030 Agenda. Emphasising its support for countries with a lower level of development, the Consensus sets out the need to build **flexible, ambitious and innovative partnership frameworks with all our partners**. And this has opened a very attractive window of opportunities in our cooperation with Latin America.

This framework of opportunity is reflected in the recently approved **Communication of the European Union on our relationship with Latin America and the Caribbean** where we recognise the potential of partnerships for prosperity, the consolidation of our democracies, the strengthening of residence and social cohesion and, a commitment to multilateralism.

### WHAT DOES PARTNERSHIP MEAN?

Partnership: "set of partners for a common purpose" (Real Academia de la Lengua Española). Definition abstract enough to allow us to play with its translation in the context of International Cooperation:

**Partnership means** a horizontal, bi-regional and bi-directional relationship based on political agendas, built jointly upon the value that both parties can bring. **We are talking about shared agendas, triangular cooperation structures and multilateralism.**

**Partnership means** flexible collaborative frameworks, where political dialogue covers the full range of instruments. What is presented by the development agenda in transition is moving away from instrument-based logic, putting policies and common interests in their rightful place and leaving instruments to serve them, taking their rightful place. **We are talking about breaking silos between instruments, coordinating multiple sources on the common objective of the fulfilment of development objectives.**

**Partnership means** establishing innovative, flexible and adaptable cooperation structures and instruments capable of offering specific responses to the multiple realities of development and building on the strengthened capacities of our partners. **We are talking about dialogue, exchange, networks, sub-regional approaches or blending.**

**Partnership means** Mexico and the European Union cooperating in the design of a Gender Violence Alert Mechanism that has become a world reference. **Partnership means** that Dora Quesada Montenegro, an entrepreneurial Costa Rican woman, supported through a network of 22,600 European and Latin American SMEs, exports her dulce de café (coffee jam) and she has been

included within her country brand 'Costa Rica Esencial'. **Partnership means** that the citizens of Ibagué in Colombia are the first to enjoy a public bicycle system with assisted pedalling, based on the consolidated experience of European cities.

**Partnership means** that the title of this article should change '*International Cooperation (of) between the European Union (with) and Latin America and the Caribbean*'. **Partnership means** that 'of' evolves to 'between' (the cooperation no longer belongs to one party) and 'with' to 'and' (always highlighting the bi-directional character, where both parties contribute to achieving common objectives).

This is the basis of the **Development in Transition Agenda** and the role of international cooperation in its capacity to articulate the interests of many, the capacities of many around common initiatives and objectives, within the framework of 2030 Agenda.

#### THE FUTURE OF COOPERATION BETWEEN THE EU AND LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

No two regions are better prepared to develop a more ambitious cooperation. It is now necessary to recognise the role that cooperation between the two regions has played in the consolidation of the most ambitious multilateral agendas in the last decade, with 2030 Agenda or the Paris Agreement itself being two of the most visible examples.

It is time to systematise and look ahead decades of joint work and to position cooperation between the EU and Latin America as the basis for exploring new innovative partnership structures. **We must be the spearhead**, capable of exploring more ambitious frameworks, enhance our capacity to create synergies and leverage efforts and create wealth within the framework of 2030 Agenda.

We do not start from scratch, with Latin America, the European Union has been able to establish cooperation frameworks that have exchange and dialogue as their *raison d'être* and that have been able to generate common responses to specific realities and global challenges. Just as examples: **Eurosocial** has laid the foundations for the design of public policies aimed at strengthening social cohesion, **Euroclima** articulates local and regional initiatives to respond to climate change, **el Pacto** to common security challenges or **AI Invest** on the strengthening of agents of inclusive economic growth.

Today we face the challenge of strengthening **triangular cooperation** structures in the region with which we are able to consolidate horizontal cooperation networks and support the external projection of our partners in the region. At the same time, based on the success of our regional easiness of blending "LAIF", other opportunities can be opened with the geographical extension of the **European Investment Fund** and a closer work with the European Investment Bank.

The European Union has made a strong commitment to this new work paradigm in its financial proposal for the period 2021-2027. **Presenting a radical innovation of cooperation management process** in the financial proposal. We intend to eliminate as much interference as possible, based on a single working instrument, maximising our potential for response and joint and coherent work with all regions of the planet.

**The new role of International Cooperation is not a theoretical discussion, it has to be a discussion in terms of implementation and how to materialise all this potential.** We have all the answers, probably not. But we are counting on our partners in Latin America and the Caribbean to help us explore the potential of the facilitating role that international cooperation can play.

We are **co-creating** a new agenda, a new reality, generating new paths. All change and exploration requires courage and conviction, as well as being prepared for criticism. But we are doing the right thing at the right time. This must be our shared commitment, ‘to open dialogue and create new paths’.