

## **Dialogue between European, Latin-American and Caribbean Research Centres and Decision Makers:**

### **‘Perspectives and proposals for renewing the Strategic Partnership between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean’**

**3-4 April 2023, Madrid**

**– Extended Report –**

The meeting "Perspectives and proposals for renewing the Strategic Partnership between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean", organised by the Carolina Foundation and the EU-LAC Foundation on 3 and 4 April 2023, was held at the premises of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of the Spanish Government. During the day and a half of dialogue, around 60 participants from research centres from Latin America, the Caribbean (LAC) and the European Union (EU) who study central aspects of the bi-regional agenda met and entered into dialogue with high authorities from the two regions and regional organisations.

This activity continued a series of meetings held at the initiative of the EU-LAC Foundation, first in Berlin (Germany) on 28-29 April 2022, with representatives of research centres and study associations based in the EU, in cooperation with the Ibero-American Institute (IAI) and the GIGA Institute of Latin American Studies (GIGA-ILAS). The second one took place in Quito (Ecuador) on 12-13 December 2022, gathering research centres and study associations based in LAC, in cooperation with the Centre of European Studies of San Francisco University in Quito (USFQ). The Fundación Carolina participated in the meeting that took place in Berlin and attended the meeting in Quito as an observer. The purpose of this third meeting held in Madrid was to convene representatives of the centres that had participated in the two previous meetings and to include in the conversation several decision-makers working on EU-LAC bi-regional relations.

## Opening

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The opening session was attended by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP), Josep Borrell, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, pro tempore presidency of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), Keisal Melissa Peters. The Secretary of State for Ibero-America and the Caribbean and Spanish in the World, Juan Fernández Trigo, extended a welcoming speech to the audience. The President of the EU-LAC Foundation, Leire Pajín, and the Director of the Carolina Foundation, José Antonio Sanahuja, offered introductory remarks. The panel dialogue between Josep Borrell and Keisal Melissa Peters was moderated by the former President of the United Nations General Assembly, María Fernanda Espinosa.

In his initial remarks, the Director of the Carolina Foundation underlined the willingness of the EU and CELAC to resume political dialogue at the highest level, with the Summit of Heads of State and Government in Brussels, scheduled for July 2023. After eight years without such meetings, this Summit, which will take place during the Spanish presidency of the Council of the EU, allows to speak of a 'new stage' of cooperation and dialogue between the two regions amidst an adverse and changing global scenario. The issues to be addressed by this renewed agenda include, among other important matters, how to promote greater autonomy and broaden the scope for action of both regions in a context of a crisis of globalisation, while maintaining reliable partners and economic ties that contribute to the prosperity of societies in both regions. At the same time, it is essential to reflect on how to convert the triple transition – digital, green and social – into "just" ones, with a view to forging strong economic, social and territorial cohesion, and all of which without losing sight of the importance of strengthening the effectiveness, the inclusion and greater equity of public policies towards a revitalisation of democracy and the renewal of the social contract which, by virtue of this, should contribute to the recovery of citizen confidence.

According to the director of the Carolina Foundation, bearing in mind the moment of "interregnum" that the international system is experiencing – where the old has not yet died and the new has not yet come to light – academia and study and research centres can and should be relevant. To this end, the Carolina Foundation joined the EU-LAC Foundation's initiative to convene academic centres and personalities from the two regions to jointly review the agendas and results, based on their contributions and research. The relevance of this initiative resides in the possibility of joining in a broader collective conversation in the public sphere – as already done in 2010 with a similar experience – giving value to the contributions and continuity to the results produced in Berlin and Quito in 2022, with the aim of promoting a frank dialogue with those responsible for responding to the collective challenges of the present and the future, through international and local policies. In short, Sanahuja stated: "we strive for more reflective, rational and deliberative politics and public life in which knowledge and action sustain a more regular and better dialogue; this meeting aims to serve this purpose".



***We want more reflective, rational and deliberative politics and public life in which knowledge and action sustain a more regular and better dialogue; this meeting aims to serve this purpose.***

**José Antonio Sanahuja**

Following, Leire Pajín pointed out that one of the lessons learned from the pandemic was the necessity of a connection between science, knowledge and decision-making, which applies not only to health, but also to diplomacy, foreign policy, and politics in general. The EU-LAC Foundation has worked and contributed to the generation of spaces for reflection and analysis of research centres and academia, offering channels for them to contribute to policy decision-making, especially in the current context of diverse crises. Both regions share values and historic ties and require several issues: the first is political leadership, where the upcoming EU-CELAC summit plays an important role. The second is to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the current context to weave alliances. The third is the need for rigorous analysis, which is where research centres and academia come into play, as they help to interpret the key issues and identify priorities. Lastly, citizen support, given that progress cannot be achieved if decision-making is not backed by civil society and all stakeholders.



***The bi-regional relationship requires rigorous analysis, and this is where research centres and academia are particularly valuable as they help to interpret the key issues and identify priorities.***

**Leire Pajín**

Next, the Spanish Secretary of State for Ibero-America, the Caribbean and Spanish in the World, Juan Fernández Trigo, stressed that both Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean share the same values and have high levels of economic complementarity – the LAC region being the EU's fifth largest trading partner –, and that the EU is destined to be a key partner in the triple transition. He highlighted the Ibero-American Summit held in Santo Domingo in March, the forthcoming EU-CELAC Summit, and the future Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, which, in his words, will have a "marked Latin American and Caribbean focus". All of these are opportunities to strengthen ties and address priority issues, but not without acknowledging that relations with Latin America and the Caribbean have been neglected in recent years.

To steer the renewal of the strategic partnership between the EU and LAC, Juan Fernández Trigo identified the following three lines of action: (i) strengthening institutionality, with

emphasis on the defence of democratic systems and fundamental rights and freedoms, as priority lines of Spanish foreign policy and European external action towards the region; ii) undertaking reforms aimed at economic and social welfare, which are necessary for the construction of inclusive democracies and for overcoming the costs that the pandemic has imposed on LAC – in terms of inequality, labour informality, access of its societies to basic services, and of the region’s countries to international financing mechanisms, which require adaptation to their needs due to their status as middle-income countries; iii) the seriousness of the historically unprecedented migratory crisis that LAC is facing. In this regard, he noted that around two million Latin Americans reside in Spain and almost three million of Spain's inhabitants were born in Latin America. For these reasons, according to him, the EU should consider the migration issue, bearing in mind the importance of reactivating the economies of both blocs, and thus contributing to inclusive and sustainable growth, so that citizens can decide on their future and emigration is not the only way out. Finally, he stressed the need for Europe and LAC to "get to know each other better", a task to which the different research centres involved in this dialogue are contributing.

The moderator, María Fernanda Espinosa, then opened the dialogue with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and pro tempore presidency of CELAC, Keisal Melissa Peters and the HR/VP, Josep Borrell. The Minister presented CELAC's priorities for action, including post-pandemic recovery, climate change, sustainable development, security, poverty eradication, gender equality, as well as the strengthening of scientific research and innovation through better quality education. She placed special emphasis on the climate issue, calling some LAC countries "*unwilling participants*" in the global climate action efforts, since they face climatic phenomena and other natural catastrophes on an annual basis. In this context, she stressed the efforts to increase and improve climate finance made by the most recent pro tempore presidencies of CELAC (Mexico and Argentina). She also underlined the need to develop a Latin American and Caribbean health strategy as well as to mitigate the effects of the pandemic in the region, which highlighted the extreme vulnerability in terms of access to vaccines. Finally, she emphasised the role of regional and bi-regional alliances in providing the necessary tools to combat the current global crises.



***The priorities of CELAC are post-pandemic recovery, climate change, poverty eradication, gender equality and scientific innovation.***

**Keisal Melissa Peters**

In turn, Josep Borrell highlighted the importance of "Europeanising" the relations with Latin America and the Caribbean, given that they were currently marked by an "Iberian" accent, alluding to the role that Spain and Portugal have traditionally played, and that Europe tends to look at Latin America mainly through these two countries. In this sense, he stressed that the bi-regional relationship should not be conceived of as a "Spanish problem", but as a "European problem", and urged EU states to pay more attention to LAC, to take on a more

active role and to contribute with ideas in this phase of revitalising bi-regional cooperation. For the HR/VP, it is not so much the revitalisation of the bi-regional association in July 2023 that is important, but rather how that relationship will develop once the Spanish presidency of the Council of the EU concludes. Additionally, it is crucial to go beyond conciliatory discourses on shared values, for the main interest lies in whether or not the regions share the same priorities. Moreover, he put forward one of the central ideas that served as the backbone of many of the subsequent dialogues: the Caribbean's own identity as a sub-region that – whilst being part of the LAC region – has distinctive economic, geographic, linguistic and cultural features and pursues its own interests, aspirations and needs. Therefore, when talking about LAC, one should not forget to make reference to the Caribbean, to give it attention and to place it in the spotlight.

Borrell underlined that LAC is one of the regions with the highest rates of violence, although there are no wars in the region, not to mention its inequality, weak governance and scarce public resources, as well as a low fiscal pressure in relation to its GDP. In addition, it is a region with low responsibility for climate change – with around 2% of accumulated emissions – although it will suffer a large part of its consequences. For these reasons, it is essential to consolidate effective institutions and governments.



***It is important to “europeanise” the relationship with Latin America and the Caribbean, such that not everything revolves around the Iberian Peninsula, but that all of Europe commits itself to this bi-regional association.***

### **Josep Borrell**

Both Josep Borrell and Keisal Melissa Peters, who expressed their willingness to listen, asked the moderator to open the dialogue in order to attend the interventions and reflections of the representatives of the research centres. The following is a systematisation of the main lines and themes addressed:

- i) The first topic focused on the potential contribution that LAC can make in terms of three issues: climate change, its potential as a supplier of all energy sources and the possibility for the region to double its production in order to secure its food sovereignty. Particularly with Europe, the updating and revision of existing agreements, as well as renewable energies, are two aspects that need to be worked on. For all of this, a fertile political dialogue is essential.
- ii) Secondly, reflections were made on the three simultaneous global crises that have a considerable impact on LAC's structural difficulties: the consequences of the 2008 crisis, the impact of the pandemic and the effects of the war in Ukraine following Russia's large-scale invasion. On top of this, there is the crisis of the model that has prevailed in the region, and the crisis derived from the massive emigration of Venezuelans in the continent. In this context of simultaneous crises, both regions can play a role as an alternative space between the great powers.

- iii) A third aspect that enriched the debate and that needs to be considered within the bi-regional relationship is the concern over violence in the region and its interdependencies. Although this is a multi-causal phenomenon, one of the underlying factors is to be seen in the global drug problem, since several countries in the region are both consumers and producers. In addition, institutional vulnerability in LAC contributes to the generation of scenarios of extreme violence. Within this framework, the construction of illegal networks that negatively affect human mobility processes in the region should not be underestimated.
- iv) The fourth element of the debate was related to another of the issues already pointed out by Keisal Melissa Peters and Josep Borrell: the Caribbean's vulnerability to climate change, as well as the heterogeneity of this sub-region. In addition to this, there is the recognition that the Caribbean has an even greater distance than Latin America on the stage of dialogue with the EU, often being relegated to the 'background'. For this reason, intra-regional and extra-regional dialogue becomes important, referring precisely to the member states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which, given their graduation as middle- and high-income economies, meaning developed countries according to OECD criteria, are affected when it comes to requiring inputs from other partners and actors to mitigate the effects of climate change. Considering that there are also non-independent territories in the Caribbean, the dialogue with Europe beyond Spain and Portugal is increasingly necessary. With regard to the heterogeneous nature of the Caribbean and the need for Europe to recognise this diversity, it was stressed that within the EU-CELAC dialogue, it is essential to open up more specific sub-regional spaces and to give "careful attention" to the Caribbean.
- v) Following the same tone of the importance of the CELAC in this bi-regional dialogue, "summit diplomacy" was another aspect mentioned. It was pointed out that its rhetorical dimension is excessive in relation to the real needs of the region. It is therefore considered necessary to have parameters for evaluating the results of the summits. The summit agenda should be delimited, and concrete expectations should be guided by synthetic and concrete objectives, thereby preventing the summit from ending up as an 'empty shell'.
- vi) Another important issue raised by some European centres concerned the "languishing" of research and research centres. Specifically, it was pointed out that the focus has shifted to global studies, and thus the 'neglect' of the bi-regional relationship in the political dimension has also been present in academia.
- vii) The interest of Eastern European countries became evident by referring to the 'interest gap', and the question of how to incorporate countries such as Poland into this new bi-regional approach. It was suggested to make clearer references to the consequences generated by the war in Ukraine, the role that Brazil wishes to assume in its peace initiative, and the idea of 'Europeanisation' proposed by Borrell.
- viii) One of the reflections revolved around intra- and extra-regional asymmetries, particularly in terms of the "geopolitics of knowledge". To this end, institutions that already cooperate with each other should be built upon and others strengthened, with the common objective of recovering research projects between the two regions

on a long-term basis and linked to practice. Existing bilateral cooperation between institutions should be "regionalised".

- ix) Finally, the need for cooperation in infrastructure linked to the capacities of LAC countries was mentioned, with reference to China's initiatives in this area – such as the One Belt One Road Initiative (OBOR). In this regard, the following question was asked: What is Europe's strategy for achieving greater influence in the region to counterbalance China? And also, in the field of transnational investments, what investments could Europe negotiate with Latin America from a green and sustainable perspective, which would not perpetuate the reprimarisation of the region's economies? Likewise, it was considered whether, given the rapprochement towards the region for its lithium and green hydrogen needs, Europe is willing for LAC to develop these raw materials in its territory and abandon its role as an exporter.

**Keisal Melissa Peters and Josep Borrell**



After the interventions corresponding to the research centres, the moderator, María Fernanda Espinosa, gave the floor to Keisal Peters and Josep Borrell to close the inauguration with some conclusions and to delineate a minimum agenda. Minister Peters insisted on the importance of taking decisions that lead to concrete actions – avoiding a relapse into passive rhetoric – and to think and discuss the next steps to be taken from a bi-regional perspective. For his part, the HR/VP, Josep Borrell, reiterated the commitment to consider a sub-regional approach, insisting on the idea of "Europeanisation" in order to "move beyond" the "Ibero-American view". From this perspective, he stressed that the relationship with Latin America is below its potential, which implies an opportunity, but also a risk of returning to a new primarisation of mineral resources. He also mentioned the "Lithium Triangle", pointing out that there are no European companies involved, while most of them are Chinese-owned. Finally, he addressed LAC's food production capacity, the need for financial and social resources, public goods and a social fabric built from the collective, through the necessary institutionalisation, as well as the importance of investment in infrastructures without neglecting social architecture.

After the inauguration, four sessions were held, articulated around a series of guiding questions indicated by the moderator, which served to dynamise and to focus the discussion on the central theme to be addressed in each session. The following is a summary of the debates that emerged from the guiding questions raised.



## **Session 1: From Berlin and Quito to Madrid: the contribution of European, Latin American and Caribbean research centres to the reflections on the EU-CELAC Bi-regional Strategic Partnership**

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1. *Taking into account the role of science centres and think tanks, what would be the main conclusion, or key message, that you identify from the reflections held at the Berlin (April 2022) / Quito (December 2022) meeting?*
2. *After the meetings held in Berlin - European centres - and Quito - Latin American and Caribbean centres - have you incorporated into your research processes and/or agendas any lesson or aspect that emerged during the shared reflection that took place during these meetings?*
3. *What relevant collaborative project, thematically linked to EU-CELAC bi-regional relations, can be mentioned from your institution's experience?*
4. *How does the research and expertise generated in European, Latin American and Caribbean centres feed into the EU-CELAC bi-regional strategic partnership?*
5. *What are the issues or agendas of the bi-regional relationship on which it is possible to influence intergovernmental decision-making processes, based on the experience, information and knowledge produced by the Research Centres?*
6. *What would be, from your perspective, viable options for future cooperation and partnership between the research centres, in order to provide evidence, analysis and proposals on issues of relevance for policy design and decision-making in the bi-regional space?*

The answers to these questions prompted a series of debates that led to a number of important reflections. The first element to point out in this session concerned one of the themes raised at the inauguration: the regional and the sub-regional perspectives. That is, considering the specificities of each sub-region and thus providing fair and adequate responses to specific goals, objectives and needs (e.g., the Caribbean or Eastern Europe), as well as identifying their specific potential as partners.

At the request of the moderator, the participants exchanged experiences of the different research centres in the framework of the relationship between EU countries and LAC. The Nordic Institute of Latin American Studies at Stockholm University shared experiences with its Erasmus Mundus project, the meetings and seminars with Swedish parliamentarians working on Latin America, and a training project of diplomatic personnel assigned to Latin America – currently under negotiation with the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Following the same line, the experience of the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) and its relationship with parliamentarians who have an impact on regional debates was highlighted, as well as the incorporation of knowledge and experiences of diverse actors from civil society, such as social movements and trade unions. Especially with the latter, the UBA has developed research projects with their respective studies, analyses, and published reports.

The European Studies Programme of the University of Concepción in Chile, for its part, has been running five "Jean Monnet" projects, and is currently developing the second "Jean Monnet" chair. Two joint projects were highlighted: the first, with the Universidad Externado

de Colombia, which plans to produce publications and three conferences to be held in Chile, Colombia and Salerno; the second – still in its incipient phase – with FLACSO-Ecuador.

The Carolina Foundation underlined its intense work of regular publications, and the good reception – as measured by the number of downloads and citations (according to Google Scholar). Similarly, it was acknowledged that the academic accreditation system in Spain has begun to consider the social value of the work of teaching and research staff (e.g., the *sexenios* of knowledge transfer), which can function as an incentive to reward these activities.

In terms of centres in the Caribbean, the "Caribbean Studies" chair at the University of Havana has been hosting the Caribbean Studies Meetings on an annual basis. On the other hand, the UNESCO Transcultural Programme, financed with EU funds, has been set up as a centre to strengthen the capacities of young Caribbean people in the Caribbean cultural industries. Finally, FLACSO-Ecuador currently liaises with diplomatic staff accredited in Ecuador, and in the same vein, the Institut des Amériques de France functions as an institutionalised network that maintains direct contact with political authorities and policymakers, as well as holding an annual colloquium in the framework of the Latin America and the Caribbean Week in France.

The consensus was that research centres play a fundamental role through: (i) the ability to contribute on issues that diplomatic and political agendas are not considering; (ii) the possibility of identifying the respective interrelationships for addressing these issues; (iii) the ability to generate inputs of a transdisciplinary and cross-border nature; iv) the capacity to strengthen the science-policy-society nexus by incorporating voices that are not taken into account and that need to transcend their role as objects of research into active partners in dialogue; v) the capacity to carry out critical monitoring and function as an "early warning system" that informs policy and decision-makers, i.e., the science-policy nexus.

Although many areas of intersection were identified, the importance of the Euro-Latin American and Caribbean space of knowledge was emphasised, recovering what was already indicated at the Quito meeting: the right to access higher education and the role that the region has played in defending this issue. In this sense, it is necessary to think about how to influence and the way in which the knowledge generated is translated and how it reaches the different sectors and actors in society, from a perspective of "social mobilisation of knowledge". Thus, the following challenges faced by LAC research systems were pointed out: the evaluation not only of projects and publications, but also of the research centres themselves; the search for funding; the importance of stable research and knowledge instruments; the need to promote open science and create incentives for systems for transferring research to society. In this sense, the need to be more emphatic in promoting a non-commercial logic of the research generated and the policies of open access and science, in order to democratise access to publications, especially those with public funding, was raised. In short, it was concluded that the regions should consider what model of research personnel they were encouraging.

Various participants reiterated the difficulties in bi-regional dialogue in a context in which LAC is undergoing a process of disintegration, manifested in the weakening of its integration mechanisms, and in which solitary initiatives have proven to be a mistake. Thus, the importance of the political-strategic dimension of the bi-regional relationship was addressed from the perspective of 'strategic autonomy'. In addition to assessing positively the opportunity represented by Spain's presidency of the EU Council and the EU-CELAC Summit,

it was acknowledged that this should not imply ignoring the sub-regions, particularly the Caribbean, given that there are other spaces – such as Mercosur – that require attention and strengthening. This, in turn, underlines one of the central ideas raised at the inauguration, which is the need to institutionalise the relationship between LAC and the EU.

In the context of bi-regional dialogue, the need to establish "short" and "measurable" agendas in the framework of the next EU-CELAC Summit in July of this year was also raised. In this sense, and based on previous experience, if a multiplicity of unattainable issues are placed on the agenda, the commitments will not have the expected effect in the medium and long term. It is also important to recognise asymmetries, since there are negotiation processes and agreements that, despite having advanced in the technical component, have failed precisely for this reason. In addition, the importance of the transfer, translation, and dissemination of "complex institutional landscapes", which require the circulation of knowledge, was addressed. Thus, the importance of 'literacy' about the EU was identified, and conversely, the importance of fostering better knowledge about LAC in Europe.

On the other hand, the environment and the triple transition – digital, green and social – were among the issues discussed. Some of the arguments exchanged envisaged to "intertwine" the climate agenda with social inequality in the dialogue between Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean, – an idea which was developed in greater depth in the fourth session. In this regard, climate change was identified as one of the potential priority areas for the EU and the Caribbean, given its specific characteristics and needs.

Finally, a reflection was made on the framework in which scientific cooperation is implemented. The graduation of middle-income countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, far from being a benefit, has become an obstacle for bi-regional cooperation because it has had an impact on the continuity of programmes or projects. Likewise, the change in priority themes compromises not only the maintenance, but also the resources and efforts of the different centres. The importance of reviewing the commitment to medium- and long-term projects was highlighted, as well as the need for greater funding that also includes more expeditious procedures in the awarding processes, with the understanding that cooperation is not only built on programmes and projects, and that it is necessary to assume Latin America and the Caribbean's relationship with Europe as partners rather than as beneficiaries.

To close this first session, Minister Keisal Peters, representing the pro tempore presidency of CELAC, insisted that it is vital to recognise the importance of research, based on the understanding that spaces such as the present dialogue provide relevant information and that policy makers should be nourished by these dialogues and create, prioritise and strengthen common agendas among the different actors involved.



## **Session 2: Shared principles and priorities in addressing global challenges and strengthening multilateralism in the current strategic context**

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1. *From the results of the research carried out in your research centres, what are the most significant features and trends of the contemporary international environment and how do they affect European, Latin American and Caribbean relations?*
2. *In turn, what political, socio-economic and environmental priorities for the bi-regional relationship can be derived for Latin American, Caribbean and European societies?*
3. *Bearing in mind the research results of your centres, what are the most appropriate approaches to contemplate the particularities of the sub-regions and the gaps (socio-economic, gender, ethnic-cultural, territorial, generational, among others) in the EU-CELAC partnership?*
4. *What are, from the perspective and reflection of think tanks, the most important European needs and strategic interests in the contemporary international scenario, and what are those of Latin American and Caribbean countries?*
5. *In which areas do the two regions share their current priorities? In which areas are the current priorities different?*
6. *Do there exist, currently, useful multilateral spaces for processing the coincidences and divergences between the European Union and the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean? Are they necessary? Are they possible?*

The second roundtable addressed issues related to the priorities of the EU-LAC bi-regional cooperation agenda, without losing sight of the tools to strengthen multilateralism in the geostrategic context of 2023. In this sense, a series of points can be identified around which the different interventions revolved.

Firstly, the importance of understanding the current political cycle as a window of opportunity which is more favourable in international terms, was pointed out. The most obvious aspect of this window for greater dialogue and cooperation between the actors of the Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean is the Spanish presidency of the Council of the EU, but one should not lose sight of the upcoming presidency of the G20, which will be held by Brazil from September 2024. Furthermore, experts insisted that the starting point should not be regional or national entities, but rather the interlinkages and networks that have been built up in recent decades, working on different scales according to different needs. In this way, the debate on the convenience or otherwise of operating bilaterally or in smaller bodies was revived, even going so far as to consider to what extent EU-LAC relations should revolve around mechanisms such as CELAC. In this regard, the importance of political will, of creating meaning and naturalising political conflict, was recalled. This would generate debates that advance the institutionalisation and consolidation of regional bodies, suggesting that the past "failures" of regional institutions could be corrected to a large extent if there were a firm will and commitment to them.

Accordingly, the necessity of signing the EU-Mercosur agreement in the present year was highlighted as one of the tangible objectives of bi-regional cooperation. Any failure to materialise the agreement, which has been under negotiation for almost twenty years, would

be a serious blow to the credibility of the narrative around the need to take advantage of the favourable political context. In this sense, there was widespread concern about being able to give continuity to the different projects, arguing that a significant part of them last as long as the funding lasts. Therefore, they remain subject to ups and downs, making it difficult for the various initiatives to last. In the same vein, the question of what will happen after 1 January 2024 was raised, pointing out that care must be taken to ensure that relations with LAC do not fall into oblivion once Spain completes its presidential term.

Moreover, there was a discussion from different perspectives on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of prioritising certain agendas. On one hand, the need to place trade or economic issues at the centre of cooperation objectives was raised. Without ignoring the relevance of elements related to minority rights or environmental and gender issues, it was proposed to articulate an agenda that would be capable of competing with China for economic presence and of financing development projects. From this perspective, it was argued that China has been able to connect with the material needs of the Latin American region and thus has opted for a diplomatic strategy towards Latin America that has financing-related issues at its core.

On the other hand, it was pointed out that there is a need to deepen other agendas such as gender, the environment or the defence of minority rights, as hallmarks of the projects in which Europe shows its leadership. Those agendas were compatible with the intention to make progress on trade agendas and economic cooperation projects. However, issues related to human and environmental rights are directly linked to the main concerns of Latin American and Caribbean citizens, such as inequality, security and development. For this reason, Europe's role as a leading agent in the defence of advances in human rights and environmental protection was recalled. In addition, a feminist agenda should be promoted in order to address the delicate situation that millions of women in the region are exposed to.

This debate was linked to another of the issues discussed in the session: the need of building the spirit of integration from the main concerns of Latin American citizens, as captured, for example, by the "Latinobarómetro" survey. In this work of identification and knowledge of the Latin American and Caribbean realities, intellectual capital should play a key role, especially by actors such as the research centres gathered at this event. Thus, the importance of promoting dialogues, working groups and common projects, with open access and a focus on meeting the needs of the citizenry was recalled.

China's rising role and how to adapt the EU-LAC bi-regional relationship to this rise dominated many of the second session's interventions. It was debated whether the narrative of the Chinese 'threat' should be accepted, recalling that it is an inescapable geopolitical reality that must be lived with. Thus, it was pointed out that precisely because both LAC and the EU are vulnerable to the bipolar hegemony, it is necessary to agree on ways to increase the "strategic autonomy" of both regions. This implies rethinking the relationship with both China and the United States. In this sense, Europe's challenge is to see how it can compete in terms of trade and financing with the Asian giant. This obliges the EU to reformulate its strategy. In all this reconfiguration of the geopolitical landscape and international alliances, the evolution of the democracy-authoritarianism cleavage will be the focus of attention, as well as the position of Latin American and Caribbean countries in this respect.

Likewise, it was stressed that China's position as a major player filling certain gaps in Latin America, both in terms of financing and of pioneering technology to combat insecurity, is a

challenge. Accordingly, China has become the main partner for importing surveillance systems, data analysis software and access control devices. The roundtable added that this challenge involves an additional difficulty given the role of the United States as the main arms seller or as a priority destination for the export of illicit substances from Latin America, along with Europe. It seems, based on the exchange held, that the articulation of a normative narrative, in which China is positioned as a 'threat', encounters difficulties at the current juncture.

Another aspect of the discussion was the growing concern over issues of violence, insecurity and drug trafficking, and the need to review the EU's strategy in these areas. The challenge related to this phenomenon implies international policies that address the issue from the perspective of each region's role in the global drug problem. Moreover, a coordinated and cooperative approach among the different actors will contribute to avoiding potential authoritarian responses to solve the issue of insecurity. This phenomenon seems to require a joint and regional approach, as seems to be conceived in the project to re-establish the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), which must inevitably include security issues and the drug problem on its agenda. In this way, the need to jointly address these issues was recalled in order to avoid the progressive militarisation public life in ALC.

Finally, the economic debate played an important role during the second session. From a governance perspective, it was pointed out that development banks are key to attracting partners and investment. In this sense, the key role of the private sector in dynamising the development of Latin American and Caribbean economies was recalled. Furthermore, the speakers warned of the risks that policies such as the *European Green Deal* could bring, as they could hinder LAC countries' access to international markets. Lastly, it was proposed that the competitive vision that operates between the different LAC nations when it comes to their presence in the market should be modified. In this respect, the success of European integration was recalled in conceiving economic interests as common and acting as partners, in contrast to LAC where states conceive of themselves as competitors.



### Session 3: Just Transitions: economy, society and environment

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1. *From the perspective of your institution, what impact have global challenges (climate crisis, COVID-19, war in Ukraine, among others) had on the just transitions required by the societies of Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union?*
2. *In the light of the knowledge accumulated in your research centre, how can the programmes and policies that promote EU-CELAC bi-regional cooperation be strengthened with regard to just - socio-economic, digital and productive, and green - transitions?*
3. *In your opinion, what is the most important priority (and of eventual intergovernmental consensus) of a joint social cohesion agenda between the governments of Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union?*

In this session, the focus was on how the EU has undergone major transformations in recent years, not without tensions, which have called into question its own socio-economic model and its social and market foundations. The energy transition, in particular, has shifted from being an ecological imperative to one of security (e.g., REPowerEU) and, ultimately, of competitiveness (due to rising energy prices and the subsidies of the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act with the consequent risk of relocation). In this sense, it was stressed that the EU has left the ordoliberal model that prevailed after the 2008 crisis behind, and participants highlighted the importance of a horizontal bi-regional exchange about the policies to be deployed to manage multiple transitions.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and later the war in Ukraine depressed LAC economies and showed their vulnerabilities in the international economy. As a result, the countries of the region are seeking to diversify their strategic options and markets. In this context the dialogue with the EU is important, but does not exclude exchanges with other international actors, both in terms of economic needs and from a development and environmental policy perspective.

Regarding some of the transformations undertaken by the EU, participants highlighted the importance to establish a regulatory dialogue with LAC in the ESG (environmental, social and governance) areas, as well as on the recently adapted standards and rules on conflict resolution mechanisms and arbitration at the global level. Likewise, they warned of the negative impact that a "regulatory tsunami" derived from the European Green Pact could have on LAC, hindering its capacity to access EU markets. They also recommended including processes such as urbanisation, changes in land usage and biodiversity (including reforestation) in the essential political dialogue.

As pointed out during the debate, the war in Ukraine exacerbated what COVID-19 had already started. In the effort to compensate for the effects of inflation on the most vulnerable sectors, the fiscal space in LAC has shrunk even further and thereby narrowed the room for manoeuvre available to the region's governments. In this regard, it was pointed out that Europe plays an essential role, not only in mobilising international public financing, but also in private financing.

In addition, views were exchanged on EU's role on patents during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected Latin America and the Caribbean. Not losing sight of this problem, from a



realistic point of view, can help to improve the link. It was recalled that the EU opposed approving a waiver from certain provisions of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights that would have allowed countries to more easily manufacture their versions of products to combat COVID-19. As vaccines did not arrive through COVAX, China was a main country to respond to demand, which had an impact on various countries in the region. In turn, from the LAC perspective, it was highlighted that the regional experience in the Caribbean, through CARICOM, demonstrated better management of the problem of access to vaccines.

In this session, experts were also invited to assess the dimension of the EU cooperation, recalling the issues on the roadmap for the bi-regional high-level summit in Brussels in July. It was stated that the items on the agenda disregard international issues, on the one hand, and omit domestic politics, on the other hand. Thus, it was an arguably limited agenda, even though being the only one of inter-regional character that involves society. Moreover, it was noted that the three transitions addressed in the session – digital, green and social – which will be present at the summit, are intrinsically linked to each other. Emphasis was placed on taking into consideration the dilemmas that affect the link between renewable energies and territory, due to the social impact and the conflicts associated with them. For this reason, talking about climate change is not enough for the next summit, and it is important not to lose sight of aspects such as biodiversity and food security, among other issues.

With regard to the Global Gateway initiative, which targets public investments in key sectors of transition that should be complemented by private resources, a number of critical issues were raised: the risk of overshadowing other EU cooperation instruments; the suspicion of 'rebranding' - giving a new name to existing instruments; whether this initiative is demand- or supply-driven, and to what extent it coincides or not with countries' development plans; the question of who would be willing to invest in projects whose regulatory frameworks and medium- and long-term perspectives are not yet clearly defined.

It was stressed that these transformations take place in a scenario of uncertainty, which responds to a historical phase of 'interregnum' in the international system, in the face of which there is no 'guidebook' in either the EU or LAC. It was recommended to not only place the "what", but also the "how" of the transitions at the centre of the dialogue. In this regard, it was recalled that LAC and the EU face similar challenges in terms of demographic changes and migratory flows, opening an opportunity for joint dialogue on how to invest in education, training and in the existing human talent in their societies, in order to lead to more inclusive transitions. In the face of technological advances in full swing (i.e., artificial intelligence), it was advocated that transition policies or programmes should not be undertaken amid a "vertigo". Similarly, analyses should highlight the size of the amounts invested in policy implementation (e.g., amounts of EU cooperation programmes compared to amounts invested by individual states).

Finally, from the perspective of the academic community, emphasis was placed on the importance of its impact on public policies and on the strengthening of the bi-regional EU-LAC relationship, and – more specifically – on the imperative of assuming the role of protagonists-scriptwriters and not only as spectators-narrators.

## Session 4: Democracy, human rights and social cohesion

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1. *Could a bi-regional policy affirming democracy involving the different forms of existing political regimes be possible, while preserving the continuity of the strategic partnership? What would be its minimum conditions?*
2. *What would be the most important lines of convergence in terms of social cohesion, democracy and human rights, which could serve to guide the design of bi-regional cooperation policies and programmes?*
3. *Without losing sight of the research results developed in your respective centres, how can the programmes and policies that promote EU-CELAC bi-regional cooperation in this area - democracy, human rights and social cohesion - be strengthened?*
4. *How can the role of research centres and associations be strengthened in order to contribute to the improvement of European, Latin American and Caribbean societies in terms of democracy, human rights and social cohesion?*

Firstly, the participants discussed the implications of the EU-CELAC Summit to be held in Brussels in July 2023. Many of the participants considered that the Summit should be seen as an opportunity to make progress on the bi-regional agenda, bearing in mind that eight years have passed since the last one was held. There is thus a double challenge: the construction of the road to the Summit – agenda, mobilisation of resources through diplomacy, mobilisation/activism of other actors seeking influence – and the post-summit scenario, which will also be a post-Spanish presidency of the EU Council. Therefore, it was considered essential to design cooperation programmes and long-term projects which would move beyond this presidency.

The convening of the EU-CELAC summit in itself can be understood as a success. It should be based on a pragmatic logic that leaves behind the 'myths' of one region in relation to another. However, it is necessary to go beyond the summit as such and to try to extract tangible agreements that will make bi-regional relations more dynamic. In this sense, the need to identify "short" and "measurable" central axes or themes was pointed out. However, the importance of this instrument as a policy tool should be assumed, not in terms of friend-enemy, but rather by seeking the lowest common denominators between the two regions and the 'translations' necessary to carry out dialogues on an equal footing.

The second aspect was related to the lack of consensus on the concepts and values associated with democracy, human rights and social cohesion in LAC and the EU. Although this lack of consensus was recognised as a 'problem' – in terms of an 'issue', rather than with a negative connotation – some proposals were aimed at recovering pragmatic visions that transcend the conceptual discussion as well as the need to prevent the debate on the bi-regional relationship from being situated in domestic political dynamics at the service of actors and logics of polarisation both in LAC and in Europe.

In this respect, the case of Venezuela was recalled, along with others such as Cuba and Nicaragua, which have historically generated important tensions between government representatives, with dramatic consequences for the regional integration project, or in recent summits of this type that have been promoted by other extra-regional actors. Trying to overcome these tensions does not imply, however, ignoring the institutional fragility, polarisation and disaffection towards political systems in both regions. In this way, the

regional integration process and the subsequent dialogue with the EU should involve all countries: none should be excluded because of the political situation they are experiencing.

On this point, however, the institutional and normative *acquis* of LAC in terms of democracy and human rights was recognised. The American continent as a whole has historically shown its commitment to democracy and the protection of human rights, which is a value to be defended in the context of the crisis of the liberal and democratic order. In the same way, Latin America and the Caribbean has also incorporated into its political tradition the experience of activism and social mobilisation, as has happened in Europe, with the issues of gender, the environment and the defence of minority rights as central elements of the agenda of social movements. This is where the region shares values with Europe and where common projects can be developed that move in the same direction.

Furthermore, considering the existing differences and asymmetries, participants insisted on the need for a better "translation" of the debates and perspectives of each region in their dialogue with the other. In addition, they recommended, on the one hand, to take more advantage of existing spaces (such as regional parliaments and bi-regional bodies, whose working commissions address these issues/problems), and, on the other hand, to consider local governments as key agents in cooperation policies in specific territories from where agendas and policies can be implemented. In this way, the multilevel dimension and the connivance and constant dialogue between different political-administrative bodies must be taken into consideration.

Besides, the importance of a socio-ecological cohesion within a logic of bi-regional interdependence was highlighted. This notion includes two axes of the triple transition, the ecological and social dimensions, which are mutually dependent in order to guarantee a just transition. In particular, the need to consider the current debates on extractivism, the progress of the 2030 Agenda and the European Green Pact was discussed, insisting on the need to leave behind the North-South logic of development. The need to think about this challenge in a universalist way was raised, recognising that the dominant development models are neither universalisable nor sustainable. Development is a global challenge, and therefore, as the transformations adopted by the European Green Deal reveal, one cannot lose sight of the fact that the EU is also a "developing" region.

The relevance of energy and food security in LAC countries was also debated. In this regard, the key role that the region can play, thanks to the wealth of its food and energy resources, was recalled, assuming a central role in the process of just transition. In the same vein, the round table discussion pointed out the risk for the region of failing to act against the climate crisis, which could eventually lead to a food crisis of dramatic proportions. Furthermore, in climatic terms, regions such as the Caribbean will suffer more intensely from meteorological fluctuations, being a region that emits hardly any polluting gases, but nevertheless suffers intensely from the consequences of the climate crisis.

In line with the above, the ideas of 'Caribbeanisation' and 'Latin Americanisation' were put forward, in addition to the 'Europeanisation' of the bi-regional relationship proposed by HR/VP Josep Borrell in the inauguration session, and reflections were made on how to socialise a common, shared and inclusive vision within the region, considering all the regions and sub-regions under construction, including at the level of identity, – a level that should be taken into account in the construction of the bi-regional dialogue. The concept of 'Europeanisation' is related to the idea that the themes of the bi-regional agenda should be shared, ideally, by all 27 EU member states, and not just some of them. Likewise, the ideas of

'Latin Americanisation' and 'Caribbeanisation' recover the importance of considering the sub-regions and, in this way, undertaking joint actions appropriate to specific realities.

Finally, the need to combine diplomatic work with the democratic participation of civil society was recalled. This implies strengthening meetings such as summits and other dialogue formats, with fluid communications and through the backing of CELAC and the EU, which are key to bi-regional relations. In order to put the concerns of the citizenry to the fore of the dialogue, civil society should be an integral part of the continuous dialogue with decision-makers. To this end, the need to protect pluralism and democracy was recalled, in pursuit of greater autonomy for social organisations in the face of a possible accumulation of power by different governments.

## Closing

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The closing ceremony began with an intervention of the Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, José Manuel Albares, who stressed the importance of giving a "renewed impetus" to the relationship between the EU and LAC, based on the shared values of both regions, which transcend the economic and commercial field, while reinforcing the socio-cultural dimension, the defence of human rights, the strengthening of democracies and reflecting the will to face a triple challenge: environmental, digital and food. This "renewed momentum" must be capable of understanding the challenges and potential of a relationship of friendship and partnership, based on firm, permanent work and a deep and constant dialogue between equals.

With a view to strengthening ties between the two regions, José Manuel Albares identified 2023 as a key year for bi-regional cooperation and the EU-CELAC Summit as fundamental for strengthening it. In this context, he welcomed Brazil's return to regional coordination mechanisms such as CELAC and the Global Gateway initiative as potential elements of joint development, within a framework of a necessary "strategic autonomy" to face the context of the crisis in the international order. Based on the vision of EU and LAC as 'priority partners' in the current global context, he also stressed the need to deepen relations of economic complementarity.



*The “renewed momentum” of the bi-regional relationship should entail the challenges and potential of a relation as friends and partners, based on strong, continuous, and profound dialogue between equals.*

### **José Manuel Albares**

The Minister expressed his gratitude for the convening of spaces that promote the discussion and dissemination of knowledge, and allow the multiple challenges of security, gender, just transitions and the reduction of inequalities to be addressed. He reiterated Spain's commitment to democratic normalisation in Venezuela, stability in Haiti, support for the peace agreements in Colombia and the Spanish development cooperation. In short, bi-regional cooperation should bring together all European countries, while Russia's war in Ukraine opens up new horizons in an energy market in which the Latin American region will play a key role. It is therefore essential that relations between the two continents be strengthened.

After a round of presentations of the reports of the main themes and conclusions of each of the four sessions, the meeting closed with some final reflections by the directors of the two foundations that co-organised the meeting. First, the director of the EU-LAC Foundation, Adrián Bonilla, thanked the intense work of the representatives of the Think Tanks and research centres, while recalling the experiences of the meetings held in Berlin and Quito in 2022. He also pointed out that this meeting was characterised by an open dialogue in which

a multiplicity of issues were addressed and political, economic, ecological and social priorities were jointly identified. The purpose of the meeting had not been to generate joint positions in the form of declarations, but rather to recognise the diversity and the different ways in which the bi-regional relationship can be conceived. Given that the dialogue also aimed at the channeling of issues from civil society to spheres of policy design and decision-making, he thanked the active involvement of the present international and regional organisations as well as political authorities.

For his part, the Director of the Carolina Foundation, José Antonio Sanahuja, expressed his satisfaction with the richness of the debate, which, despite "ontological" differences, showed fluidity in the conversation at different levels and in different spheres. In closing, he systematised three aspects: i) the need to be more reflective about the role of academia and to question from a critical perspective the power relations in which it operates, as well as the norms and institutions that determine, affect and condition the production of knowledge, pointing to the need to strengthen open science and open access; ii) the importance of doubt in the questioning of current ideas, especially in uncertain times, and the possibility of developing a "heuristic of uncertainty"; iii) the need for dialogue and the attitude of listening as adopted by the HR/VP himself, Josep Borrell at the inauguration, in order to continue generating spaces for collective learning and socialisation.

Finally, the directors of the Carolina Foundation and the EU-LAC Foundation expressed their gratitude for the participation and assistance of the study centres and observer institutions and for the work carried out by the technical teams of the entities involved.

Report written by:  
**Fundación Carolina**

Translation into English:  
**EU-LAC Foundation**



### Videos and photos

- Video of the inauguration  
<https://www.fundacioncarolina.es/perspectivas-y-propuestas-para-renovar-la-asociacion-estrategica-entre-la-union-europea-y-america-latina-y-el-caribe/>
- Photo album of the meeting:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/redcarolina/albums/72177720307258844>

## Participants

### LAC region:

- Asociación Latinoamericana de Ciencia Política (ALACIP) – Grupo de Investigación en Relaciones Internacionales;
- Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) – División de Estudios Internacionales, México;
- Consejo Latinoamericano de Estudios Sociales (CLACSO);
- Coordinadora Regional de Investigaciones Económicas y Sociales (CRIES);
- FLACSO-Ecuador;
- Fundação Getúlio Vargas, Centre of Excellence on EU-South America Global Governance, Brasil;
- Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales (IAEN), Ecuador;
- Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú – Departamento de Economía;
- The University of the West Indies – Institute of International Relations;
- Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar - Área de Estudios Sociales y Globales, Ecuador;
- Universidad de Chile – Instituto de Estudios Internacionales;
- Universidad de Concepción – Programa de Estudios Europeos, Chile;
- Universidad de la Habana – Vicerrectoría de Relaciones Internacionales, Cuba;
- Universidad de la República – Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Uruguay;
- Universidad Externado de Colombia – Jean Monnet Chair, Colombia
- Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) - Departamento de Economia e Relações Internacionais, Brasil;
- Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) – Instituto Mora, Mexico;
- Universidad para la Paz, San José, Costa Rica;
- Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ) – Centro de Estudios Europeos, Ecuador.

### EU region:

- Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB), Spain;
- German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Germany;
- GIGA Instituto de Estudios Latinoamericanos (GIGA-ILAS), Germany;
- Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut (IAI), Alemania;
- Institut des Amériques (IdA), France;
- Instituto de Estudios Latinoamericanos (LAI), Freie Universität Berlin, Germany;
- Instituto de Iberoamérica, Universidad de Salamanca, Spain;
- Instituto Para a Promoção da América Latina e Caraíbas (IPDAL), Portugal;
- Latin American Studies, Department of Cultures, University of Helsinki, Finland;
- Nordic Institute of Latin American Studies (NILAS), Stockholm University, Sweden;
- Observatorio Político de América Latina y el Caribe (OPALC), CERI – Sciences Po, France;
- Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), Poland;
- Real Instituto Elcano, Spain;
- Universidad Complutense, Spain.

### Observer institutions:

- CAF Development Bank of Latin America;
- Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC);
- Fundación Academia Europea e Iberoamericana de Yuste, Spain;

- Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB);
- Inter-American Development Bank (IADB).

Political representatives:

- Josep Borrell – High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy;
- Keisal Melissa Peters – Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and President of CELAC;
- José Manuel Albares – Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Spain;
- Juan Fernández Trigo Spanish Secretary of State for Ibero-America, the Caribbean and Spanish in the World;
- Javier López – Co-President of the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly, Member of the European Parliament;
- Teppo Tauriainen – Swedish Ambassador to Spain;
- Volker Pellet – Deputy Director for Latin America at the German Foreign Ministry.