



EU-LAC Foundation  
Fundación EU-LAC



Nordic Institute of  
Latin American Studies



Stockholm  
University

## II EU-LAC Forum of Journalists

### Common Spaces for Enhancing a Bi-regional Narrative in a Changing Global Order

#### Report



#### 1. **Background**

On March 23-24, 2023, the EU-LAC Foundation, with the support of the Nordic Institute of Latin American Studies of the University of Stockholm and the Instituto Prensa y Sociedad, organised the II EU-LAC Forum of Journalists with media workers from the European Union (EU), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The forum was held in Stockholm, Sweden, during the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Following up on the I EU-LAC Forum of Journalists, celebrated in Costa Rica in January 2020, this second Forum strived to enhance the achieved synergies and alliances with new perspectives and manifold approaches. Participants were invited to exchange on the status of the EU-CELAC strategic partnership in times of multiple, global crises and with a view to the EU-CELAC summit in July 2023, to generate inputs towards a new narrative on the bi-regional partnership from a societal perspective, and to participate in a session on collaborative journalism and evidence-based reporting.

This encounter between journalists, therefore,

- allowed all participants to learn from beneficial techniques aimed at bridging gaps between journalists and the general society in turbulent times.
- sought to offer a space to explore the state of the art of journalism projects in Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union and to learn about successful initiatives by allowing a truthful and confidential exchange among participants.

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- promoted and fostered qualitative journalistic work on bi-regional issues and relations by looking at potential collaborations in view of the EU-CELAC 2023 Summit.

## 2. Participation and Format

The Forum was attended by 28 journalists from LAC and the EU with varied backgrounds, working for specialised magazines, journals, television, newspapers and traditional digital media.

Together with the partner organisations and external guests, a total of 58 participants joined the event, on-site or virtually via Zoom. These included 14 assistants from Stockholm University and 16 representatives from the membership of the EU-LAC Foundation – from the Diplomatic Corps in Stockholm and the Foundation’s co-chairs, the PPT CELAC and the European External Action Service.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> EU-LAC Forum of Journalists was carried out in a hybrid format in two days, divided into four different thematic sessions, namely a plenary panel open to external visitors, an exchange session on the journalistic manoeuvre of complex scenarios in LAC and the EU, as well as thematic working groups and a final plenary discussion to develop joint proposals for journalistic collaboration.

## 3. Panel session: State of the art on Journalism and Journalists’ take on EU-LAC relations

Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean share common challenges concerning media development and the state of freedom of expression. According to the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders, press freedom is in decline globally, with **five principal areas of concern** that are visible to various degrees in all countries.

Political actors and governments are increasingly intrigued to use journalism for the benefit of their **political interests**, as could be observed during the pandemic and the geopolitical conflict between Russia and Ukraine. In this sense, it becomes indispensable to look at the financial and ideological (in)dependency of the press and the requirements for quality journalism. There is a high need for questioning common discourses and critically assessing information sources in both regions.

Moreover, the **global decline of democracy** has a profound impact on the press with spaces and possibilities to report freely diminishing in Latin America, the Caribbean and the EU. Especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, a region that has turned into the most lethal area in the world for media workers, who face precarious working conditions and are object to violence in many cases. Further organisations, such as Instituto de Prensa y Sociedad (IPYS) and Voces del Sur (VdS) have been monitoring the situation in LAC and report that the conditions under which journalists work have worsened drastically in many countries of the region, e.g., in Peru, Honduras or Nicaragua. On the other hand, there are many challenges in Europe too, where countries such as the Netherlands, Greece, Poland and Bulgaria have dropped to lower positions in the World Press Freedom Index.

Participants emphasised that external factors cannot be blamed for this development, instead, public systems and actors must be held accountable. Those latter often aim at belittling and silencing critical voices in journalism, thus, fuelling the third challenge of **growing mistrust** in societies towards journalists. There is a problem of polarisation: people see and hear only what they want, between infodemic and fake news, it is necessary to foster quality journalism and credible news reporting. There is also great demand for incrementing efforts to improve the validation and recognition of the worth and difficulties of the journalistic profession and its value for democracy.

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Furthermore, there exist **economic and technological challenges**, related to the costs of publishing and advertisement, the work with data and the emergence of new digital platforms, which have transformed traditional ways of producing and consuming information.

Journalistic collaborations can contribute to tackling those challenges by achieving improved information access for actors from different regions. **Especially sharing experiences and good practices around transnational topics such as corruption, organised crime, climate change, environment and migration affect societies in both LAC and the EU and could serve as a starting point for further bi-regional cooperation in the journalistic sector.** In this line, after the first EU-LAC Forum of Journalists in 2020, IPYS initiated alliances with European investigative journalists, which led to the important establishment of communication channels between Latin American and Balkan journalists.

The EU-CELAC Summit in 2023 aims to advance the common agenda between the two regions, including societal links. In a desire to communicate the relevance of this partnership of structurally similar societies, **education is key to avoid falling into stereotypes.** Hereby, it is important to acknowledge the distinctions between the Caribbean, Latin American and European realities, too. Therefore, in countries with extreme journalistic precariousness, **it is recommended to empower local stakeholders to create their own monitoring processes on the state of press freedom.**

In addition, it was recommended **to align international cooperation more regionally and reinforce the bi-regional exchange of good practices of countries with a good rating in the Reporters without Borders index**, e.g., Portugal, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Denmark, in order to address the question of “What have you done to improve quality press in your country?”

Looking ahead to the Summit, participants agreed that there is **more governmental commitment needed to defend democracy, freedom of expression and the physical integrity of journalists.** In LAC and in Europe, journalists face security challenges and information populism, which is important to recognise, specifically in the European Union. Participants of the Forum noted a decrease in solidarity among EU countries in these areas. LAC countries have extensive experience working with security mechanisms and solidarity support systems, e.g., in Colombia, and may be able to teach lessons, techniques and databases to their European counterparts to **construct effective bi-regional security mechanisms for journalists.**

#### **4. Emblematic experiences – constructing and verifying information in turbulent times**

During the second part of the forum, attendees focused their discussion on journalistic practices in times of multiple crises. Following a 2021 survey from Sweden, only 21 % of interviewed people trusted journalists' work during the COVID-19 pandemic. This indicator raises the question of how to regain trust in media.

The pandemic has revealed structural weaknesses of the journalistic work. Especially in unsettling times, journalists rather aim at publishing stories very quickly and are usually focused on clickbait headlines for achieving more views. Undoubtedly, the pandemic has pressured journalists to reflect on their work, and on **how to get better at filtering and distributing information.** In this line, Vetenskap & Allmänhet presented guidelines and advice on crisis communication, namely: Be the first; Be correct; Be trustworthy; Be empathic; Encourage action; Show respect. To make people listen to information, journalists should focus on relevant information and use role models in their storytelling, while being aware of confirmation bias and always staying critical. Nevertheless, communication needs to be adapted to the cultural context of the audiences, and the media should meet social demands of communicating diverse perspectives and opinions.

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Participants agreed that **lowering the speed of journalism** offers potential for reinventing the profession. It is time to **rethink the value, which journalists can add to conversations**, taking into account the abundance of knowledge and information available through technology and journalists' own privilege when reporting about certain contexts, especially in inequitable societies.

In doing so, it is also important to consider the state of news coverage which may lead to disinformation, particularly in communities suffering from the **expansive phenomenon of local news deserts**. COAR has identified such **disinformation trends** in the LAC region, mainly in communities without local news coverage: **child abduction, internet fraud and false content about vaccines, science denialism, rumours circulating about elections and the economy of countries, encouraging attacks against institutions and authorities**, and false information on **gender and religion**. It is in those contexts that journalists' work can contribute meaningfully to a change of narratives in favour of democratisation.

### **5. Informal space for networking between European and Latin American and Caribbean journalists**

During the second day of the Forum, participants were divided according to their thematic focus on three working groups: international politics, human rights, and storytelling. By enabling this informal space for networking, participants were encouraged to talk about their individual experiences and to engage in mutually beneficial dialogue.

#### ***International politics***

Increasing attacks on media freedom, the safety of reporters, limited access to information and the spread of fake news were identified as key issues for journalists in both regions. Participants also discussed how to report news from one region when based in the other one and the significance of having "boots on the ground". They also noted that **constructing stories with a bi-regional perspective, for example in relation to the war in Ukraine, would enrich and deepen the coverage**.

In that sense, they highlighted the importance of collaboration for increasing the quality of the storytelling and overcoming the challenges to reflect multiple narratives and not just a unique, hegemonic line. Nevertheless, they referred that collaboration initiatives are often just a side project for journalists, as they usually have too many work commitments and limited availability for collaborative projects. In this context, participants proposed to explore the possibility of **creating a platform for bi-regional journalistic projects and contacts; promoting agreements between media from both regions to publish joint stories; and holding regular thematic meetings with Latin American, Caribbean and European Journalists**.

#### ***Human rights***

How to protect journalists defending human rights? This question centred the debate in this group. Participants shared examples of journalists being detained, threatened, and killed because of their work. They called on the European Union to take a stronger stance on human rights violations, democratic backsliding, and violence against journalists in LAC. They also underlined the **need for funds (emergency and long-term) aimed at supporting independent media and investigative journalism projects on issues that affect both regions such as drug traffic**.

Equally, the attendees encouraged the **creation of larger programmes to assist journalists in exile and policies to facilitate entry and work in the EU of LAC Journalists**. Additionally, participants mentioned the value of **capacity-building and knowledge exchange programmes between European**

and Latin American and Caribbean media professionals. The shared expertise, for example, could contribute to the consolidation of journalists' organisations in LAC.

### **Storytelling**

Participants in this group reflected on the use of new narratives and formats to make visible the political situation in some countries, to underpin freedom of press and expression and to strengthen media credibility. **New formats can also help to re-articulate the role of the press as a link between the citizens and the governments.** Nevertheless, the media professionals attending the event alerted on how social networks influence the growing polarisation of societies and the media.

On the other hand, **slow journalism was proposed as a form of collaborative work.** This emerging field in journalism allows reporters to take time to check facts, collect and process data and focus on the “deep”. It serves the community thanks to its commitment to a smaller audience, and transforms readers into partners, encouraging them to comment on the content and to contribute to the production of the news.

### **6. Discussion session on bi-regional cooperation proposals in the face of a renewed bi-regional narrative**

LAC and EU journalists share similar concerns regarding their profession, such as the lack of credibility in journalistic work in a context of massive disinformation; the lack of security for journalists; shrinking spaces for press freedom and freedom of expression; the lack of regulation of global platforms; the urgency of finding new business models for independent journalism; the need to find new formats/strategies to reach audiences (particularly young audiences); and the lack of access to information.

Considering the aforementioned challenges and the topics that were discussed during the last meeting of UE-CELAC Foreign Ministers in October 2022, participants of the II EU-LAC Forum of Journalists have thus identified the following **priority areas for common bi-regional action in the journalistic realm: Drug traffic and organised crime; Money laundering and corruption; Climate change and environment; Democracy; Geopolitics: positions, alliances, etc.**

**Transnational journalistic projects covering stories of interest for both regions can contribute significantly to advancing bi-regional knowledge in those areas and media collaborations between the EU and LAC are an important way of creating more visibility for the strategic partnership,** as each media represents a bridge to the public in its respective country. It was also noted that the withdrawal of quality journalism in LAC due to the deteriorating security situation could generate empty spaces that other international actors such as Russia and China might occupy.

Participants expressed great interest in putting their perspectives together in additional networking spaces beyond the EU-LAC Forum of Journalists. **Collaboration on investigative projects or co-publication forms can furthermore contribute to the security of journalists,** e.g. if an article cannot be published in one country for security reasons, the media of other countries can do so. Moreover, **new journalistic formats should be explored (for instance slow journalism)** without falling into egocentrism and subjectivity. The bi-regional narratives created should include the intersectionality between human rights, transparency, and accountability.

In addition, those present exchanged expectations towards the EU-CELAC summit in July 2023. They articulated their **wish for an increased focus of the bi-regional action plan on the connection between press freedom and democracy and a firmer decision by Governments to protect journalists.**

Moreover, the bi-regional partnership should share its commitment to public transparency and to promoting citizens' right to information. General declarations about the importance of press freedom and journalists' security must be accompanied by concrete activities. In several countries in the EU and LAC, repeated attacks against the freedom of expression and assembly are taking place.

It was also discussed that **journalists need to investigate the work and efficiency of the bi-regional agenda by monitoring the implementation and results of summits and action plans.** In this sense, in the field of environmental action and climate change, collaborative journalistic projects may focus on the transition from signed agreements to what is happening on the ground, especially in the context of increased concessions to mining companies.

Concluding the forum, the following collaboration forms, which may be implemented in partnership with international organisations, such as the EU-LAC Foundation, were discussed:

- Creation of a specific fund for EU-LAC collaboration in investigative journalism;
- Establishment of discussion forums between EU and LAC media on successful business models;
- Design of a platform and a data bank for journalists who desire to do collaborative work on a bi-regional level (communication channels for exchanging information);
- Construction of bi-regional support programmes for exiled or threatened journalists;
- Actions to enhance the visibility of already existing EU support for media in LAC countries.