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EU-Latin America and Caribbean Inter-regional relations: complexity and change

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses regionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean and interregionalism between this region and the European Union. The complexities and overlapping of Latin American regionalisms are reflected in the several interregional mechanisms that the European Union has with Latin American and Caribbean countries and regional organisations. The paper argues that different political and economic interests in Latin America and the Caribbean have given rise to overlapping regionalist projects, where the overlapping of competences is more problematic than that of membership. Also, Latin American and Caribbean regionalisms have constantly evolved in terms of strategies and organisations. This has generated a number of interregional institutionalized mechanisms between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean, but the current structure seems in need for reform.

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1. Introduction

The idea of Latin America almost intuitively refers to the Central and the Southern parts of the Americas, also in opposition to the North. However the concept of a Latin American cohesive region and the construction of it are quite problematic. Latin America is not as homogeneous a continent as it is often thought of because of language, religion or colonial legacy. Cultural, geographic, historical, political, economic and even linguistic cleavages are significant. Spanish is the dominant language but the most populous and influential country in the region, Brazil, speaks Portuguese. A number of countries have French and English as their official language. The adjective Latin itself is problematic. Does it refer to culture? Language? Historical legacy? French-speaking and largely catholic Quebec in Canada may arguably be more culturally “Latin” than some Caribbean islands where English is spoken and culture is influenced by the past British rule and African traditions, and United States (US) presence today.

Geographically, uncertainty exists too. Is the Caribbean to be included in the concept of Latin America? Or North America? Or is the Caribbean a different region? The European Union (EU) has long considered the Caribbean as part of the least developed African-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) countries in its development policy. Yet, the EU includes the Caribbean in the Latin American region for the sake of political dialogue. And where exactly is the boundary between North and Latin America? Mexico, one of the cradles of Latin American history and culture, is geographically considered as North America, and so are Central America and the Caribbean (University of Oxford, 2015). Furthermore Mexico is closer to the US than to the Latin rest of the continent in terms of economic ties. And yet Mexico is a centre of Latin American resistance to US influence.

In economic and political terms, it is possible to distinguish a number of sub-regions. The Caribbean, Central America, and South America have quite different economic and strategic vocations in the global and hemispheric contexts. These differentiations in sub-regions also tend to coincide historically with the level of influence exercised by the US (Dominguez, 2000). In recent years the situation has grown more and more complex and also sub-regions have been further fragmented in sub-sub-regions with their corresponding economic and political regional organisations, such as the Andean Community (CAN) for the Andean countries, the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) for the countries of the Plata Basin (at least originally), or the Association of Eastern Caribbean States.

Different ideological and strategic options add to sub-regional differentiations. South America, under the aegis of Brazilian geostrategic thinking and recent global and regional assertiveness, is differentiating itself from Latin America, also in institutional terms with the creation of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). At the beginning of the 21st century ideology has provided a further cleavage. The so called “Bolivarian” countries, most strongly rejecting neoliberal policies and US influence in the region, grouped in the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA). Finally, the recent rise in importance of the Asian markets to Latin America has produced another cleavage, the one between the Atlantic and the Pacific shore of the continent, which resulted in the creation of the regional project Pacific Alliance (PA). This Atlantic-Pacific divide may be a significant factor in shaping the future of the Atlantic space from a Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) perspective.

Yet, LAC is an accepted label that identifies a reasonably well-defined region. In spite of diversity, Latin America and Caribbean has significant elements of affinity beyond

language, religion or colonialism: the concentration of land ownership and its impact on societal and economic development; the peculiarity of modernisation processes such as late industrialisation and high urbanisation; and the magnitude of social and economic inequality that remains a crucial issue (Rouquie, 1998). After all, to make sense of a region, this has to be defined by some sort of criteria and boundaries, regardless of how contested or wobbling these may be. In this paper, we acknowledge definitional ambiguities and complexities. We stick to the traditional label of Latin America and the Caribbean to identify the region that stretches from the Rio Bravo river to the Tierra del Fuego, including the islands of the Caribbean Basin. That is all the 33 countries in the Western hemisphere excluding Canada and the US.

Regionalism in LAC perfectly reflects this ambiguity and tension between unity and diversity (Gardini, 2011). A variety of schemes and projects since the early 20th century have purported to pursue Latin American (and Caribbean) unity, while at the same time producing a multiplication of initiatives and the fragmentation of the region. Both regionalism and interregionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean are quite complex. Multi-layered and multi-faceted sets of arrangements, formal and informal norms, regimes, and organisations coexist (Malamud and Gardini, 2012). As we will discuss in the historical section, this is also the result of the coexistence of regional projects from different epochs, thus carrying different political and value-based rationales (Altman, 2015).

The first thread of this paper concerns Latin American and Caribbean regionalism and is the interplay of complexity and change. These changes have been influenced by the diverse conjunctures, ideologies and interest of the various governmental and non-governmental actors involved. In the end, these changes have also impacted the inter-regional relations with the EU. The second thread concerns more specifically EU-LAC interregionalism. In particular, there is a fit between LAC empirical interregionalism and the conceptual framework of interregionalism in the Atlantic Future project (Malamud and Gardini, Atlantic Future paper). First, LAC's interregional relations fit the types designed by Hänggi (2000), comprising traditional or pure interregionalism, that is relations between regional groupings (EU-MERCOSUR), transregionalism (where states participate in an individual capacity, as in APEC or EU-LAC before CELAC), and hybrids (such as relations between regional groupings and single powers, namely the EU political dialogue with Brazil, Chile and Mexico). Second, EU-Latin American interregionalism is largely based on summitry. Third, new forms of interregionalism that hardly fit in existing categories seem to be emerging. Such is the case of the new CELAC-EU format.

The paper unfolds as follows. Section 2 discusses the historical evolution and juxtaposition of Latin American and Caribbean regionalisms. In section 3, the dynamics and logics of Latin American and Caribbean regionalisms are dissected and succinctly compared to the European case. Section 4 put the evolution of EU-Latin America and the Caribbean interregional relations in historical context. Section 5 critically analyses interregional relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean in the light of the overarching paper on interregionalism designed for the Atlantic Future. The conclusion wraps up the key arguments and offers some tentative answers to the question of whether or not inter-regional cooperation between EU and LAC is contributing to the governance of the Atlantic Space and the convergence of values and norms.

2. Historical evolution of regionalisms in Latin America and the Caribbean

The definition of regionalism, its varieties and evolution - in Latin America and the Caribbean and elsewhere - has consistently prompted intense debate (Schmitter, 1991; Hurrell, 1995; Hettne and Soderbaum, 1998; Vayrynen, 2003; Gomez-Mera, 2008) In this paper regionalism is understood as an umbrella concept that encompasses a set of distinct although intertwined phenomena. Following Andrew Hurrell's conceptualization (1995), and for the sake of argument and space, we will focus on two specific dimensions:

1. Regional interstate cooperation: "the negotiation and construction of interstate or intergovernmental agreements or regimes" (ibid, p. 42).
2. State-promoted regional integration: "specific policy decisions by governments designed to reduce or remove barriers to mutual exchange of goods, services, capital, and people" (ibid, p. 43).

The word integration (*integración*) is very much used interchangeably with regionalism and/or cooperation in Latin American political, media, and even academic discourse and accounts. However regional integration is strictly speaking only a specific aspect of the more general phenomenon of regionalism. From a legal perspective regional integration only occurs when there is a transfer of sovereignty from the state governments to international institutions. That is the supranational structure that characterizes the European regional integration, but is not the case of Latin American institutions. Regionalism in LAC evolved in a different and eclectic way along different waves of regionalism.

There are three different periods in LAC regionalism (Altman, 2015): the developmentalist regionalism (1950-1970s); the open regionalism (1980s-1990s) and the 21st century regionalism, which is currently under construction (Ayuso and Villar, 2014). The first wave related to the national industrialisation process through the imports-substitution model (ISI). This kind of regionalism was conceived as a defensive system against extra-regional industrialized markets, through the creation of a larger regional market. This model included the Central American Common Market (CACM), the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA), and the Andean Pact.

Good results were obtained at the beginning and intra-regional trade grew from 6% to 12% in 6 years (Tussie, 2011). However, the huge differences among the national economies, the impossibility for some members to comply with the LAFTA tariff reduction schedule, and the worldwide crisis of the early 1970s led to a *flexibilisation* of the regional projects. In the 1980s, under the debt crisis pressure a less structured and more flexible regionalism, based mainly on bilateral and sub-regional agreements was developed (CEPAL, 2012). The Latin American Integration Association (LAIA) replaced LAFTA and was established as an "*umbrella*" organisation under which member states could sign commercial integration agreements compatible with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and later on World Trade Organisation commitments.

In the 1990s the so-called "open regionalism" appeared as a pro-liberalisation process to make the economies more flexible to place them in the interconnected world economy. This model was linked to the so-called *Washington Consensus*¹ which aimed

¹ The Washington Consensus is the name given to a set of economic-aimed public policies proposed by some financial institutions with headquarters in Washington, and published by John Williamson in his paper "*What Washington Means by Policy Reform*" in November 1989.

at trade openness, de-regulation and privatisation of the LAC economies (Bouzas, 2009). Regional integration was understood as a tool to promote international competitiveness and increase the bargaining power towards industrialised countries (Sanahuja, 2007). MERCOSUR was created in 1991 and the Andean Community (CAN), the Central American Integration System (SICA) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) substitute previous initiatives adopting the open regionalism. Yet, this model collapsed with the end-of-the-century crises² (CEPAL, 2012), leaving behind job losses and increased poverty in the region.

The beginning of the 21st century marked the emergence of a new generation of Latin American regionalism. These developments have been captured in different ways by different scholars: *post-liberal regionalism* (Sanahuja, 2007 and 2010; Da Motta and Ríos, 2007) is used to emphasise a more political and less commercial driven approach; *post-hegemonic regionalism* (Tussie and Riggiozzi, 2012) underlines the greater autonomy of the new LAC regional projects, especially from US traditional hegemony; *strategic regionalism* emphasises the increasing globalization and interdependence challenges; finally Van Klaveren adopted the pragmatic expression *heterodox regionalism* (Van Klaveren, 2012) stressing the lack of a common pattern. Examples of this third wave are: the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA, 2004), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR, 2008), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC, 2011) and the new reforms that took place in SICA and MERCOSUR to strengthening the institutions and incorporate new competences in political issues. A common feature of this regionalism could be the flexibility and the stress on social policies and not merely on trade-related issues. However, the trade-focused integration processes have not been abandoned. A clear example of this is the Pacific Alliance created in 2012 by Chile, Peru, Colombia and Mexico. Today there is a regional multilateral structure composed of several layers, which are inter-related, generating synergies and cooperation links, but also competition and tensions (Nolte, 2013).

3. Dynamics of Regionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union: a comparative analysis

In this section we focus on three aspects: first, how to explain the high number of competing regionalisms in LAC; second, how to explain the variety and sometimes divergence of regional visions and policies; third, how structural constraints as well as different modes of societal interactions make the EU's regional scenario and construction very different from the LAC ones.

First, the high number of regionalisms in Latin America and the Caribbean can be explained with reference to political-ideological and geographic factors. On the political plane, different societal interactions, different senses of belonging and identity as well as different state agreements and projects coexist. In addition, the variety of economic and political interests present in the continent, as well as differences in ideology and regional visions gave rise to a number of alternative regionalisms (Tussie, 2009). For example, economic interests towards the Asia-Pacific and a preference for open economies and free trade gave rise to the Pacific Alliance, while the rejection of US interference and the excesses of capitalism as well as a preference for endogenous development prompted the creation of ALBA. The competing aspirations at regional

² Clear examples could be the Mexican crisis in 1994, the Brazilian crisis in 1998/9 and the Argentine crisis in 2001

leadership of Venezuela and Brazil facilitated ALBA and UNASUR respectively (Burges, 2007).

Geographically, complexity is due to the institutionalised forms of cooperation at three different geographic levels: hemispheric, regional and sub-regional (Portales, 2013). LAC countries are engaged in regionalist projects in the large region of the Americas, together with Canada and the United States at hemispheric level through the Organisation of American States (OAS), the Inter-American Development Bank or the failed attempt to create a Free Trade Area of the Americas. At the LAC regional level, perceived regional commonalities and identities led to the creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). At the sub-regional level, many other examples exist: UNASUR, CAN, MERCOSUR, CARICOM or the Pacific Alliance. This paper will not cover hemispheric arrangements but will focus on regionalist or sub-regionalist initiatives that only comprise LAC countries. But it can't be ignored that the hemispheric model and the inter-regional European one have been competing in LAC and that other extra-regional actors have joined this competition, particularly China.

In comparative terms, the number and variety of regional projects available in Europe and LAC marks a stark contrast between the two regions. In Europe, in spite of different visions of what and how European integration ought to be, the EU is essentially the only real game in town. It has widespread competences, membership and legitimacy. Other trade or political cooperation projects exist but are either subservient to or compatible with the EU. In Latin America a number of competing regional integration initiatives and organisations share the landscape. This results not only in fragmentation but often in quite divergent policies and ideological stances that make even regional coordination problematic. Some of these sub-regional institutions compete for members, representation, resources and allegiance in LAC.

Second, how to explain then this variety and fragmentation of visions and policy choices? Three factors can represent or constitute a minimum common denominator at the regional level: the stance of the region toward (the) major international player(s), the question of regional leadership, and a common economic and development policy or model (Gardini, 2010). LAC and European responses to these three key issues have been very different and this difference largely accounts for the uniqueness of the European case as well as for the fragmentation and divergence of the LAC scenario.

The stance towards the international leading power(s) is crucial as it largely defines the positioning of a region in international affairs and alliances. In LAC there is no unique regional posture toward the world major power, the US, which is so close and so relevant to the region. The relationship with the US varies from mildly competitive in commercial terms with MERCOSUR, to inconsistent or elusive (UNASUR), to ideologically confrontational (ALBA). This is not the case in Europe. When the European Economic Community was established, the regional unit of reference was not Europe but Western Europe because of the Cold War. In that context, the US was unquestionably an ally for all the six founding members. No single member attacked verbally or otherwise the US or questioned the support of the others for Washington. Between the then EEC and the US there was a 'shared blend of institutions', namely liberal democracy and market economy (Toje, 2008). The Atlantic alliance produced a first minimum common denominator that contributed to the stability and identity of the newly formed community. Now NATO remains the foundation of the collective defence of EU members, even if the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) increased the capability to perform independently crisis management operations. By contrast, in today's Latin America, deep divisions separate those states supporting or accepting the US leading role and values, friendship or alliance, and those questioning the US, its leadership, models and philosophy. The creation of the South American Security

Council within UNASUR and the Declaration of South America as a Zone of Peace are part of this contestation strategy³

The role of the regional leader or paymaster supposedly gives cohesion and drive to a truly regional project. In the European case the situation has been and still is relatively simple as no country has played a clearly dominant lead and no huge structural economic and demographic asymmetries exist among the major members. Indeed, the European project has been built on an implicit convergence on the issue of leadership (or absence of it) and relations among members: the assumption of equality and reciprocity (Mc Allister, 2010; Hayward, 2008). If one country could be indicated as the EEC/EU *primus inter pares* this would probably be Germany. However, although Germany has become Europe's economic 'center of gravity', it has never reached a position of hegemony or dominance (Lankowski, 1993:11). Its power has remained 'constrained and contained', especially at the regional level, and Germany's position in Europe can be described as one of 'asymmetric interdependence' (Bulmer, 1993:75;87). Although the German leadership increased in the context of the Eurozone financial crisis since 2008 and the role of the Bundesbank has been key to face structural weaknesses of the European Central Bank, its room for manoeuvre is limited due to the danger of destabilization of the Eurozone (Bibow, 2012).

All this is not applicable to the LAC case because of Brazil's disproportionate political, economic and demographic weight in the region as well as for Mexico's peculiar vicinity to the US. While Brazil is by now considered indispensable to any meaningful regional integration, several Latin American countries look at Brazil with suspicion and often question Brazilian regional initiatives fearing marginalization. Yet no clear counterbalance to Brazil is firmly established or acknowledged. In turn, Brazil has been ambiguous on its own leadership, using it at convenience but being reluctant to accept, and even less to pay for, the associated political and economic costs. The few instruments created, such as the Structural Fund of MERCOSUR (FOCEM) represent a tiny amount when compared with Brazil's trade surplus with the region and Brazil's preference to use funds from its own national development bank (BNDES) for regional cooperation rather than joining the South Bank promoted by Venezuela.

The economic and development model is arguably what unites a regional group of countries and gives it a common purpose and unity of vision and intent. Capitalism and free trade have been the pillars of the European economic development, together with an effort at social cohesion. All members, founding or late comers, accepted these principles and collaborated with one another to pursue it. The economic models proposed by the LAC regional blocs are not only divergent but in some cases incompatible if facts were to follow literally political declarations. Alternatively, and almost as a natural consequence, no real development model can be adopted at the LAC level because of a lack of consensus.

Third, a number of structural constraints and socio-political situations help to understand how LAC regional processes are invariably very different in nature and depth from the EU experience. Issues such as supranationality, asymmetries among members, trade patterns regionally and globally, and the role of civil society mark the mode and forms of institutions and interactions at the regional level.

The tension between intergovernmental and supranational approaches is a first case in point. In all LAC regional projects there are forms of common institutions but they are strictly intergovernmental and not supranational. Decisions are taken mainly by

³ http://sedici.unlp.edu.ar/bitstream/handle/10915/35066/Documento_completo.pdf?sequence=1

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consensus or unanimity and no decisions can be imposed by a majority. The so-called *Summit's Diplomacy* prevails in LAC (Rojas Aravena, 2012) and this is one of the reasons why it is hard to further develop integration only based on intergovernmental decisions without a push from the inside of the institution itself. The absence of bodies ensuring the general interest and compliance with the agreements, the delay in the incorporation of the common law into domestic law and the recourse to unilateral measures are other challenges to integration deepening in LAC. Conversely, in the EU supranational and democratic bodies were created in order to leave behind a basic Free-Trade Area to move forward to a strong Custom Union and later a Common Market (Sanahuja, 2007).

Another difference between EU and LAC regional integration processes is the low commercial complementarities. In the EU intra-regional trade is around 60% and within NAFTA it is near 55%. Whereas in LAC those figures are -in comparison- low, from 26% in MERCOSUR to 7.2% in the Pacific Alliance (CIDOB, 2015). These numbers are partly justified by the particular features of LAC, based mainly on agricultural products and mining, and heavily dependent on extra-regional manufactured products. In the EU case, integration started precisely with the exchange and production of goods. Integration is primarily expected to integrate the economies and trade of a region. However today, LAC economies are surfing through the global crisis because of their exports to non-regional emerging markets, so why trade regionally? LAC has tried to foster intra-regional trade where it did not exist. While the EU or NAFTA were born as a tool to manage existing interdependence, LAIA, the Andean Community, the SICA and MERCOSUR were created to decrease dependence on extra-regional markets and to induce a surge in intra-regional trade. But what if there is little to trade regionally and more to gain extra-regionally?

The breakdown for individual countries is even more telling. According to WTO figures for country profiles 2014, Germany, the largest European economy sent over 55% of its total exports to the EU and received from the region more than 55% of its total imports. Even the UK, the least Euro-enthusiastic country and the one historically most linked with extra-regional markets, traded for almost 50% of the total with EU partners. By contrast, Brazil, the largest exporter of MERCOSUR, has none of the remaining associates, individually or as a group, among its first three trade partners which are the EU, China and the US. While it is true that Brazil is the first commercial partner for Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay this may be misleading for MERCOSUR overall. In fact, Brazil represents 2/3 of MERCOSUR's trade, which makes the level of intra-regional trade pretty low overall. For members of the Andean Community figures are even clearer, with Brazil, the US, the EU and China representing well over 50% of the total trade of the region, where regional associates lag far behind (WTO, 2015).

Another significant obstacle to further integrate the region is the lack of infrastructure. The infrastructure deficit has been repeatedly identified as one of the impediments to higher growth, increased productivity and the formation of productive chains. This is further aggravated by low levels of investment when compared with other developing countries such as China (Barbero, 2013). Many LAC companies produce goods or obtain raw materials at competitive price but the freight cost to regional or extra-regional markets is high. Regional initiatives have been launched, both in South America through the IIRSA program (Regional Infrastructure Initiative of South America) and Central and North America (Mesoamerica Plan) to alleviate the deficit. These programs are funded by national governments and development banks but also regional financial institutions such as the Andean Development Corporation and the Inter-American Development Bank, and extra-regional actors such as China and the EU itself.

Finally, while in Europe the role of civil society and the private sector was crucial at the start of the integration project (Haas, 1958) and plays a central role today, in Latin America integration is essentially a government affair and clearly reflects a top down approach with a limited role for civil society. All regionalist projects were born as a state-led project and remain so today. While it is important to acknowledge the contribution of non-state actors to regional choices, ‘evidence demonstrates that state preferences and institutions crucially mediate the influence of societal pressure on actual state policy’ and that ‘societal pressure against cooperation was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for states to defect from regional commitments’ (Gomez-Mera, 2013:199). Interestingly, this is true also for those projects like ALBA where civil society and social movements supposedly have a central role in the institutional architecture of the organization (Cusack, forthcoming, 2015). Ultimately, states are very central to many regional integration projects in the developing world (Gomez-Mera, 2013:223) and one could argue that after all this is the case in Europe too.

So far, we have discussed the interplay of change and complexity of LAC regionalism, the features that constitute the first thread of this paper. In the next sections we will address how this set of complexities and evolutions has impacted interregional relations with the EU and how these fit the overall interregional conceptual framework of the Atlantic Future. This is the second thread of the paper. In particular, the focus will be on two aspects. First, the match between EU-LAC interregionalism and the types identified by Hånggi (2000), namely traditional or pure interregionalism, transregionalism and hybrid interregionalism. Second, the central role of summitry. In the conclusion, we will resume discussion on whether or not the CELAC-EU format may constitute a new form or type of interregionalism.

4. The Evolution of the bi-regional relations

Relations between Europe and LAC have a long and deep-seated history. Latin America was colonized primarily by Spain and Portugal, and events that took place in Europe, such as the Napoleonic wars, were at the root of Latin American independence in the early nineteenth century. Up until the end of the First World War the wealth of many LAC countries, for example Argentina, was dependent upon commercial ties with European powers, particularly Great Britain (Brown, 2008). Following the Second World War and with the onset of the Cold War, European former colonial powers lost their status as world powers and relations with Latin American were put on the back burner.

The establishment of the European Economic Community in 1957 did little to reverse this trend, and LAC increasingly became a side-line in EU international affairs. However, when Spain and Portugal joined the EU in 1986, interregional relations took on a new verve, with European political and economic presence reaching new heights. LAC did not become a priority area for the EU; quite the contrary in fact. Nonetheless, in its quest for a global player status the EU has adopted a rather active and dynamic position regarding LAC (Gardini, 2012).

The process of democratic transition in the region experienced during the 1980s and 1990s fuelled the re-launch of the LAC integration projects and led to a process of sub-regionalization of the relationship of the European Community institutions with LAC. This started with the creation of the San José dialogue between the European Community (EC) and Central America in 1984 in support to the Regional Peace

Process and was intensified from 1987 with the dialogue between the EC and the Rio Group⁴ that was institutionalized in 1990. In the subsequent decade the first agreements between the EEC and LAC regional organizations were formalized, first with the Andean Group in 1983 and then with the CACM in 1985. These are first examples of traditional interregionalism that is formal regional organization to formal regional organization.

With the second regionalist wave and the "open regionalism" initiatives in LAC the EU support for regional integration processes became one of the pillars of the bi-regional relationship. This included a preference for bargaining collectively with existing bodies and the development of sub-regional cooperation strategies with those blocks. The strategic partnership launched in 1999 by the Heads of State and Government of LAC and the EU aimed at consolidating a space for political cooperation and inter-regional cooperation complemented by the gradual establishment of a Euro-Latin American free trade area⁵. Europe tried to distance from a purely commercial approach and promote a regulatory role incorporating three dimensions: political, through multilevel dialogues; economic, including trade and investment; and development cooperation, incorporating social policies. The political dialogue institutionalised in the EU-LAC Summits and the EU-Rio Group Summits are examples of transregionalism, bringing together a formal regional organization (the EU) and a quite loose group of states from one region (LAC countries acting individually).

The strategic partnership between EU and LAC was developed not only as a top-down process lead by governmental agencies but integrates multiple consultation mechanisms and frameworks that incorporate relations between social partners and parliamentarians⁶ and a large number of actors forming a multilevel relationship. The existence of such dense social network is a specific quality pattern of the EU dialogue with LAC. Another particularity of EU-LAC cooperation is the horizontality through the so-called decentralized cooperation programs that put into direct contact institutions and actors of both regions⁷.

At the political level, the creation of CELAC introduced a new framework for dialogues. Now it should be harmonized with the dialogues at different levels, including bilateral strategic partnerships with Mexico and Brazil and possibly the incorporation of new significant regional groupings in Latin America such as UNASUR and the Pacific Alliance. Starting with the 2013 Santiago de Chile Summit, the biannual EU-LAC Summits were replaced by EU-CELAC Summits. The international and regional scenarios of the 21st century are quite different from those that generated the current EU-LAC model of relation. At the commercial level, the entry into force of the free trade agreements between the EU and CARICOM, Central America, Colombia and Peru, as well as the renegotiation of existing agreements with Mexico and Chile and the new agreement with Ecuador frame a new map of agreements. These achievements contrast with the lack of progress in the negotiations with MERCOSUR. This picture should also be analysed in the context of the negotiations for a Trans-Atlantic Partnership between the EU, Canada and the US (the TTIP) and the lack of

⁴ This was created during the mid-1980s by a small group of Latin American countries to support democratic consolidation in LAC. It later expanded to include almost all of the countries on the continent, and even Cuba joined in 2008.

⁵ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/delegations/noneurope/idel/d12/docs/cumbrederio/prioridadesaccionen.htm> Last view 20.07.2015

⁶ Non-governmental dialogues includes: EU-LAC Inter-parliamentary conferences; Euro-Latin American parliamentary assembly (EUROLAT); EU-LAC Dialogues with members of the Civil Society; EU-LAC Business Forums; EU-LAC Trade Unions Bi-regional meetings; EU-LAC organised civil society meeting; EU-CELAC civil society forums.

⁷ As: Eurosocietal, ERASMUS MUNDUS, EUROCLIMA, EUROSOLAR, URB AL III, AL INVEST, ALFA, ALIS...among others.

momentum in the WTO negotiations. The future of the Atlantic space and its governance also depends on these developments.

In terms of development cooperation, the 21st century accelerated changes that have altered the relationship between the developing world and the traditional powers. The incorporation of heterogeneous actors, new instruments and forms of cooperation, new standards of quality and greater accountability in relation to the results of political action have all brought in significant innovation. Changes have also concerned the agenda after the end of the cycle of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Participatory processes of regional, national and thematic scope of the post-2015 agenda have affected the meaning of mutual responsibility and the role of the traditional Official Development Assistance. New approaches to cooperation seem to distinguish emerging powers and middle-income countries, as well as various forms of South-South and triangular cooperation that have been proliferating in LAC with Brazilian leadership (Ayllon, Ojeda and Surasky, 2014). The EU-CELAC relationship can no longer be conceived as a strictly North-South link as in the past. This is not only because of the emergence of Latin American powers, but also because many of the new EU member states have similar per capita income levels to those of some LAC countries, and cannot be considered traditional donors (Ayuso and Villar, 2014).

5. Interregionalism, transregionalism and hybrid interregionalism in practice.

Interregional EU-LAC relations build on very diverse experiences of and approaches to regional cooperation. Like other approaches to the governance of interdependence, interregionalism encompasses political interactions, formal institutional relations, material transactions and cultural exchanges among the parties (Garzón, 2015). Given the trends towards fragmented or modular regionalism in LAC (Gardini 2015), group-to-group institutional dialogue - in Hänggi words, 'pure interregionalism' (Hänggi, 2000) comprise EU-LAC relations as well as relations between the EU and LAC sub-regional cooperation schemes. This section studies the variety of EU-LAC institutionalised interregional relations focusing on: EU-SICA, EU-CAN, EU-CARICOM, EU-MERCOSUR, and EU-CELAC.

5.1 EU and Central America

The relations between the EU and Central America are probably the more successful of the EU support to LAC regional integration. The 1984 San Jose process pioneered the EU political dialogue with the region. The San José dialogue is now incorporated - as one of three pillars - in the new Partnership Agreement signed in 2010. This Partnership agreement⁸ is evidence of the EU commitment to Central American integration. It includes mechanisms to address asymmetries both between the two regions and within Central America, but its effectiveness should be tested once the agreement enters into force. Cooperation on trade issues to promote liberalization has been added to an increased contribution to regional programs, including new funding for a Support Regional Integration Fund.

The cooperation pillar in the Central America Strategy 2007-2013 continued the traditional institutional support linked to trade issues (creation of the customs union, adoption of international standards, legislative harmonization, investments promotion, intellectual property protection and harmonization of fiscal policies), but also included

⁸ EU-Central America association agreement: <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=689>

democracy, human rights and security, and measures to "mitigate the impact of the free movement of goods, capital and persons." ⁹ In fact, in the new Latin American regional program 2014-2020, Central America is the only integration process maintaining its specific regional program.

The first pillar of the regional programme is primarily intended to deepen economic integration through the harmonization and implementation of regulatory policies, standards and statistics, support for intra and extra regional trade, promotion of SMEs, improving infrastructure and promoting regional productive value chains. However, the most important trading partner for Central America is the United States. The second pillar includes prevention against violence with special attention to vulnerable groups; reintegration and social rehabilitation, strengthening law enforcement and operational regional cooperation and promoting a culture of peace among citizens. The third pillar focuses on adaptation to climate change and regional risk management and disaster reduction in Central America, a region particularly affected by such threats.

5.2 EU and Andean Community

The Andean Pact, created in 1969¹⁰, was the integration process in LAC with most similarities with the EEC. Its institutional and legal structures were developed in parallel (De Lombaerde, 2008) but differed as the CAN institutional structure remained intergovernmental and internal and communitarian laws kept separate. The failure of the import substitution policies, the effects of the debt crisis in LAC in the 1980s and the political instability in the member states contributed to stall the project for a decade. Following the new dynamics of open regionalism in the 1990s, the Trujillo Protocol (1996) was a new starting point for the Andean Community of Nations (CAN) towards the establishment of a free trade zone but also to improve integration in international markets.

Negotiations for an EU-CAN association agreement were launched in 2007, just after the signature of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between Colombia and Peru with the US. These two negotiations of FTA with the EU and the US entailed the withdrawal of Venezuela from the CAN in 2006 and its application for membership to MERCOSUR. The initial scheme for the EU-CAN negotiating process "bloc to bloc" was maintained with the four remaining CAN members¹¹ for the development cooperation and political dialogue pillars. But negotiations failed, as Bolivia left the talks and Ecuador followed suit. Thus, two bilateral trade agreements with Colombia and Peru were signed in 2010. This was an achievement for the extension of the EU map of trade agreements but it also can be seen as a failure in the EU inter-regionalist strategy with the CAN. However, a trade agreement was achieved in 2014 with Ecuador.

Currently the CAN integration process is threatened. After Venezuela, Bolivia signed an adhesion agreement with MERCOSUR as well, but without leaving the CAN. Ecuador is now negotiating its accession to MERCOSUR, whereas Colombia and Peru are part of the Pacific Alliance. The creation of the Pacific Alliance highlighted political differences among the four members of the CAN. The competition between the open model of liberalization of the Pacific Alliance and the protectionist model of MERCOSUR weakened the CAN integration process. Even if EU-CAN trade relations have grown in recent years with a positive balance of payments for the Andean countries, the main trading partner of CAN remains the United States. Except Bolivia, whose main markets are Brazil and Argentina, the EU is gradually being displaced from

⁹ http://eeas.europa.eu/ca/rsp/07_13_es.pdf

¹⁰ Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru were the original members but Chile withdrew in 1976 after the Pinochet coup. Venezuela was incorporated in 1973 and withdrew in 2006.

¹¹ Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Perú

the second place by China. The dynamism of the Pacific Alliance and the interest of the two fastest growing countries of the CAN, Colombia and Peru, in the Asian market have devalued the relationship with the EU, which seems to be doomed to languish. The legal framework for EU-CAN cooperation and political dialogue still depends on the Agreement adopted in 2003 which is pending for the ratification by some European countries. Changes in the EU development policy and the CAN decline resulted in the ineligibility of Colombia, Peru and Ecuador for bilateral cooperation under the 2014-2020 EU Cooperation Program. Only Bolivia remains an eligible country for bilateral cooperation but paradoxically it is the only CAN country that has no FTA with the EU.

This loss of importance in the EU-CAN relations may be partially offset by European involvement in the Peace Process in Colombia and by the growing priority of the security issues related to drug trafficking and transnational crimes for the EU. A specialized Drugs High Level Dialogue CAN-EU exists since 1995 to exchange best practices and enhance further cooperation, co-existing with the Coordination and Cooperation on Drugs Mechanism between the EU and LAC. This will continue to be an axis for stronger co-operation but the security cooperation bodies created in UNASUR will probably acquire a more prominent role at the expense of CAN.

5.3 EU and CARICOM

Overlapping cooperation schemes exist in the Caribbean reflecting the political diversity of this space (Sutton, 2012) composed of 12 island sovereign states and different dependent territories including Overseas Countries or Territories (OCT) linked to European countries (France, United Kingdom and Netherlands) and islands dependent from border countries (Belize, Colombia, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, US and Venezuela). The small size of these territories and the diverse colonial past caused a fractioned regionalism. Currently the main organizations are the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) created in 1981¹² and the CARICOM created in 1973 and reformed in 2001 to create a future single market.

The CARICOM 15 member countries¹³ have a total population of just 16.5 million, representing a very small proportion of the LAC total. The small size makes these countries sensitive to external fluctuations. Trade with the rest of LAC is low and a negative trade balance of payments is a shared trend. The role of the US in the Caribbean economies is crucial and the EU has a much less relevant position. Only in three cases (Belize, Guyana and Suriname) the EU represents over 10% of the total trade and only with the first one is above the US. Furthermore, the EU faces competition of other Latin American countries, such as Mexico and Brazil, for investment opportunities and trade.

Despite weak economic links, historical and cultural relations between the EU members and the Caribbean are strong. Sixteen Caribbean countries are part of the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group. This group was created in 1975¹⁴ by the European Economic Community to establish a strategic partnership through

¹² Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Granada, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The British Virgin Islands joined in 1984 and Anguilla in 1995 bringing the membership to 9 countries in total.

¹³ Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago.

¹⁴ The ACP Group consists of 79 member states, all of them, save Cuba, signatories to the Cotonou Agreement which binds them to the EU: 48 countries from Sub-Saharan Africa, 16 from the Caribbean and 15 from the Pacific.

cooperation programs and priority access to European markets. After the British adhesion to the EEC, this agreement added the Caribbean countries to the “Regime of Association” started previously with the African countries. Currently, b-regional relations are largely framed under the 2000 Cotonou Agreement. Political dialogue is held at different formal and informal levels and geographic and/or sectorial levels (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2004). It includes High-level Summits, Ministerial meetings, Parliamentary meetings and civil society encounters. The EU political dialogue is channelled through CARIFORUM, a political consultation Group established in 1992 that incorporates Cuba, not belonging to the Cotonou Agreement.

The Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the EU and CARIFORUM was signed in 2008. It removes all tariffs and quotas from Caribbean exports to the EU. Caribbean countries offer a gradual opening of markets over a period of twenty-five years, but they are allowed to exclude sensitive products and industries. Improved rules of origin intend to have positive effects on the development of industries to export products to Europe. The implementation of the EPA has been difficult and with important delays in a context of the EU crisis and the economic downturn in most Caribbean states (Byron, 2014). EU-Caribbean cooperation priorities however have to be coordinated now with the most recent overarching EU-CELAC Action Plan. Constituting 42% of CELAC membership, the Caribbean sub-region has a real chance to enhance its role and bargaining power within LAC and in its relations with the EU.

5.4 EU and MERCOSUR

The MERCOSUR area has the strongest and deepest historical and cultural bonds with Europe. It is thus unsurprising that this area also has the strongest political and economic ties with the EU. The EU has always assisted MERCOSUR as part of its support strategy for regional integration schemes elsewhere in the world, and by 1992 the EU had made an agreement to supply the newly formed South American bloc with technical assistance. Although a possible EU–MERCOSUR association agreement is in the pipeline, relations between the two blocs at the moment are amply regulated by the 1995 Framework Agreement for Inter-regional Cooperation, which covers three fields: political dialogue, cooperation and commercial issues.

Political dialogue took shape in 1996 and includes meetings between heads of state and government, ministers and diplomats. These meetings usually take place in tandem with the EU–LAC summits (now CELAC) to save time and economic resources. The key themes on the current agenda are the conclusion of the EU–MERCOSUR association agreement, better coordination of positions in multilateral fora, and intensification of cooperation in innovation and technology. Sub-regional cooperation, which is a complement to EU cooperation with individual member states in MERCOSUR, concentrates on assistance to help complete the common market of MERCOSUR and reinforce regional institutions and civil society. In particular, EU funds were used to support the MERCOSUR secretariat and the conflict resolution instrument, as well as measures for harmonization in the customs, statistical, veterinary and macroeconomic sectors. The EU is MERCOSUR’s main trade partner: it accounts for nearly 20 per cent of the bloc’s commercial relations; the EU is also a major exporter of commercial services to MERCOSUR, as well as the biggest foreign investor in the region (DG Trade, 2015).

Given their political and economic links, it seems logical for the EU and MERCOSUR to strengthen their exchanges by concluding an association agreement and creating a free trade area. Talks that had begun in 1999 ground to a halt in 2004. The EU decided to re-launch the negotiations in 2010. There were multiple and complex reasons for this lack of progress between 2004 and 2010. As well as the changing international

situation, particularly the shifting trends and equilibriums in trade surpluses, it is important to note that the bilateral association agreement was closely linked with multilateral negotiations on similar topics within the World Trade Organization. The multilateral draft under discussion at the WTO was more favourable to MERCOSUR countries than the EU bilateral proposal. For this reason, the parties prioritized multilateral discussions, at least until 2006, when the collapse of the Doha Round provided a possible incentive to re-engage in bilateral dialogue. However, other difficulties existed. The European Commission's own estimates confirm that a potential liberalization, whether partial or complete, would have relatively more positive effects for the EU than for MERCOSUR. This can be explained by the fact that over 60 per cent of products that MERCOSUR countries export to the EU are already free from import duty. This is true for both industrial and agricultural products. On the other hand, the EU's most important export sectors (automotive, transport components, mechanical and electrical products) are subject to relatively high customs duties when entering MERCOSUR. Considering that the EU also has an undeniable comparative advantage in services and investments, the inclusion of these sectors in the free trade agreement linked to the association agreement would be another advantage for Europe. More importantly, the EU Common Agricultural Policy, through which European farmers are subsidised, is perceived as an obstacle to negotiations by MERCOSUR members. Yet, for both economic and social/environmental reasons, both fair and justified it has to be said, the EU does not seem inclined to make significant concessions in this domain.

The re-launch of negotiations in 2010 was due to a number of reasons but a conclusion is not within reach yet. First, the rise of China forces the EU to look for new markets to compete globally and to defend more effectively its market quota abroad. China also offers MERCOSUR countries an alternative trade partner to the US and the EU, thus increasing their leverage with the latter. Secondly, the stalemate of multilateral negotiations at the WTO seems endless, which increases the convenience of the bi-regional option to both parties. Thirdly, the global crisis that shook the EU hard requires strategies to reactivate growth and employment, and fostering trade relations with MERCOSUR may be part of such a strategy. Fourthly, Brazil's rise ought to produce tangible results in terms of commercial expansion. The Lula administration was unable to produce any significant preferential trade agreement but it is in the area of trade that big powers and would-be ones will increasingly compete globally.

5.5 EU and CELAC

Historically there have been two official mechanisms for interregional political dialogue between Europe and Latin America: EU-LAC summits and EU-Rio Group summits. The first are biennial bilateral meetings between heads of state and government which identify the basic drivers and priorities for the bi-regional relationship. The first summit took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1999. The 2010 Madrid Summit may well have marked the end of an era and a cooperation model. With the creation of CELAC in 2011, and the first EU-CELAC Summit, celebrated in Santiago de Chile in January 2013, Latin America and the Caribbean now attempt to speak with one voice in international venues. This is meant to increase the global weight of Latin America and to make it heavier than that of sub-regional groupings (Appelgren, 2013). The second mechanism, the EU-Rio Group summits of ministers, used to take place every two years, alternating with the EU-Latin America summits. Now both mechanisms are incorporated in the new EU-CELAC system.

The first element that has to be kept in mind is that CELAC is a political project (Bonilla, 2013). This means that CELAC is not meant to produce direct economic benefit but to pursue political objectives and coordination. Interestingly, CELAC has been perceived

as a promising step both by Latin Americans and international partners. Europeans have stressed in fact how CELAC provides a framework to work with everyone in Latin America, and therefore to overcome to an extent regional complexities and sub-regional fragmentation (Schafer, 2013). CELAC indeed provides an umbrella framework for all the EU-Latin American and Caribbean regional and sub-regional dialogues, with the latter now taking place at the fringes of the main political event thus saving time, human and financial resources.

The EU-CELAC interregional mechanism also responds to a fast changing international scenario (Sanahuja, 2013). EU-LAC institutionalized biregional relations started in the 1980s, in a context of Cold War, conflict in Central America, and democratic transition. Today, distribution of power and wealth are significantly different. The North Atlantic area is losing importance while the Asia-Pacific is rising. New partners are available both for Europe and Latin America and the EU itself seems to be less important to Latin America. In this sense, the new format of EU-CELAC Summit may offer an opportunity to rethink EU-LAC interregionalism.

Yet CELAC, somehow paradoxically but almost naturally, embodies all the contradictions of Latin American and Caribbean regionalisms and attempts at unity (Ayuso, 2015). CELAC can be seen as a response to a changing context but also as a counter-hegemonic project in opposition to the US and the OAS. While diversity of members is taken as a given, the ability to reach significant consensus on issues with practical impact remains to be seen. Some members favour institutionalization and others prefer a loose and flexible structure. While CELAC boosted an Action Plan to develop economic relations with China, only a few members actively open their economies towards Asia while for instance MERCOSUR countries resist that.

The first two EU-CELAC Summits confirmed the problems that all summitry exercise have, in particular the ability to deliver concrete measures (Maihold, 2010, Whitehead and Barahona de Brito, 2005). In 2013, the Santiago Summit produced a final Declaration in 48 points, while the 2015 Brussels Declaration comprised 77 points. These are hardly lists of priorities. Besides limited practical results, summitry often poses problems to leaders, diplomatic services and domestic constituencies in terms of time, energy, money, opportunity cost and swollen and diluted agenda. Yet, the EU-CELAC mechanism is an effort to address the challenges facing the two regions. It reflects the need for structured dialogue at the highest political level, and it is certainly perfectible. Most of all, the format of the summit seems to reflect a genuine societal demand that goes beyond government agendas.

Both the 2013 and the 2015 EU-CELAC Summits brought together societal actors and state bodies other than the executives. In spite of the costs associated and other criticisms, this is a laudable step to reduce the democratic deficit and involve an ampler sample of the institutional spectrum from the two regions. On the fringes of the main political summit, a business summit and an academic summit fostered dialogue between significant stakeholders from civil society. The Parliamentary summit and the Courts of Justice summit involved in the process the other key branches of the state. Demand for this parallel events stemmed from those involved and their desire for contribution to shaping and directing the bi-regional relation. The tangible effects on the main political event may be limited. In 2015, several leaders, especially from Latin America, objected to start the opening plenary with the recommendations from civil society meetings. While this shows the complex interaction among stakeholders of the bi-regional relation, these difficulties do not diminish the potential value of this pluralistic and inclusive format.

6. Conclusions

The first thread of this paper addressed complexity and change in Latin American regionalisms. Two conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, Latin American regionalisms reflect the variety of interests and visions present in the region as well as a constantly evolving concept of regionalism and regional development. The different regional projects available are not only the result of the currently fragmented and multifaceted political and economic regional scenario but also the product of different epochs, reflecting different values and development strategies. Such a variety can coexist because of the significant gap between rhetorical commitments and practical implementation. The lack of depth in regional integration is also due to a lack of leadership, or in fact to an excess in leadership offer but a deficit in political and economic will to assume the costs of effective leadership.

Secondly, incentives and constraints to Latin American and Caribbean regionalism are of a varied nature. Political factors play a more prominent role than economic factors. Both elite and the population display high levels of support of the idea of integration but the will to have one's hands tight by regional commitments and common rules has been quite low so far. On the economic front, structural constraints limit the depth of Latin American regionalism(s). The region trades more extra-regionally than intra-regionally thus limiting economic incentives to deep cooperation. Often in the past LAC regionalisms have been of a defensive nature against external influences rather than a positive policy to develop regional links and productive chains. Also, the real demand of integration by Latin American civil society is overall quite low and so is the real electoral debate about regional integration.

The second thread of the paper concerns dynamics of EU-LAC interregional relations. Four points can be made. Firstly, Inter-regional dynamics with the European Union reflect the complexities and fragmentation of LAC regionalism. The EU had to establish several sub-regional mechanisms of political dialogue and economic relations due to the variety of sub-regional integration schemes in Latin America and the Caribbean. Historically the inter-regional dynamics have been propelled by the EU and have reflected essentially its priority and vision, including incentives and concrete policy in favour of the deepening of regional integration. Interestingly, and following European priorities and needs, civil society has been more directly involved in EU-LAC inter-regional mechanisms than in LAC regionalism. With the creation of CELAC, Latin America and the Caribbean are bound to play a more proactive role, especially in terms of agenda setting, in inter-regional relations with Europe.

Secondly, in theoretical terms, EU-LAC interregionalism fit Hänggi's model in all its dimensions: pure interregionalism, transregionalism and hybrid interregionalism. Furthermore, this can be observed at the three levels of relations that the EU offers to LAC countries: political dialogue, trade, and cooperation. At the level of political dialogue, EU relations with MERCOSUR, SICA and CARICOM are examples of pure interregionalism; EU-LAC Summits before CELAC and EU-Rio Group Summits are examples of transregionalism, where LAC countries acted individually within a regional loose framework vis-à-vis a regional organization, the EU; the EU strategic partnerships with Mexico and Brazil provide examples of hybrid interregionalism. At the trade level, bi-regional agreements with SICA and CARIFORUM and negotiations with MERCOSUR are examples of regional organization to regional organization relations, which is pure interregionalism; FTA agreements with CAN members Colombia, Peru and Ecuador are examples of transregionalism; bilateral agreements EU-Chile and EU-Mexico are hybrid cases. At the level of development cooperation, the EU-Central America regional plan is a form of pure interregionalism while EU bilateral country

programs with less developed countries are cases of hybrid regionalism; the transregional form is more problematic at this level and paves the way to a broader discussion about CELAC.

Thirdly, the case of CELAC falls between pure interregionalism, transregionalism and possibly new forms of interregionalism. On the one hand, CELAC is an attempt to give Latin America a unitary voice in its relations with global partners, not only the EU but also China and others in the near future. In this sense, the EU-CELAC Summit may be seen as a case of regional organization to regional organization relations, or pure interregionalism. On the other hand however, practice reveals that CELAC has no juridical personality and no real institutional structure, such as a secretariat, and the body speaking on behalf of the members with a single voice, the pro-tempore-presidency, has no power to commit the member states or the organization as such. In this sense, EU-CELAC relations can be understood as a case of transregionalism, where a regional organization, the EU, deals with a group of states acting individually, although with some degree of coordination. Or, alternatively, EU-CELAC summits can be seen as a new form of interregionalism that reflects the evolution and peculiarities of LAC regional processes, removing an EU-centric vision of regionalism and interregionalism, and opening space to new varieties emerging as results of developments and concepts in regions other than Europe.

Fourthly, the summity dimension is an inescapable element of EU-LAC interregionalism. Theoretically, the processes of regionalization and globalization, limiting the control of nation states on their own policy choices encourage states to engage in interregional cooperation. Also, rhetorical commitments produce actual effects. So, political support for interregionalism, as expressed in final declarations and political statements, reinforces and propels the interregional mechanisms. Perhaps more convincingly, the multi-bilateralism approach (Hill and Smith 2011: 401; Le Gloannec 2004) suggests that interregional summits actually provide convenient venues to take forward bilateral affairs and agendas. In addition to theoretical explanations, there are very practical and pragmatic reasons for the resilience and flourishing of interregional summits. Firstly, they provide a forum for discussion and political direction in interregional relations. Secondly, with the increase and diversification of regional organizations and aggregations, interregionalism is a logical step to connect new regional actors, powers and agendas. Thirdly, in spite of constant complains at exclusion, civil society demand for and participation in interregional summits legitimizes their existence and continuation.

Overall, the rhetoric of shared values and principles underpinning EU-LAC interregional relations, and more broadly cross-Atlantic relations, collides with a reality full of nuances, in which both regions seek to enhance their place in the world. The relative decline of the EU and rise of LAC, and the periphery overall, in the international system, may have a significant impact to shape the future of the Atlantic. On the one hand, they will determine a new balance of power, including agenda setting power and the ability to spread values, across the four shores of the Atlantic. On the other hand, these shifts will affect mechanisms of interregional relations too across the Atlantic. With specific reference to EU-LAC interregionalism, “over the years, the two sides have progressively built up a broad-based relationship of equals”. (EEAS, 2014). This statement suggests that the goal of an equal partnership has been an incremental process. The goal now seems to be within reach.

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