

CREATING CERTAINTY: THE CHALLENGES FACED BY EU-CELAC RELATIONS

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Certainty is essential for creating stability and in an uncertain world, constantly battered by global challenges that disregard borders –a fractured world, as Fernando Vallespín defines it– we need certainty more than ever to move forward and build a hopeful future. The European Union (EU) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), encompassing 60 countries that represent over 1.1 billion people (14% of the world’s population), 21% of global GDP, and a third of United Nations members, face a unique opportunity to confront the major global challenges threatening us. As strategic allies, they must join forces, as no single country or region in the world can address these issues alone.

On 21st-22nd November 2024, at the Royal Monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe in Extremadura, Spain, and subsequently on 3rd December 2024, in Brussels, Belgium, a distinguished group of experts, diplomats, academics, and representatives from European institutions, civil society, and other international organisations gathered. The purpose of these meetings was, on the one hand, to analyse the outcomes of the EU-CELAC heads of State and Government Summit held in July 2023 in Brussels under the Spanish presidency of the European Union, as well as the outcomes of the Ibero-American Summit held in Cuenca, Ecuador, in November 2024. On the other hand, the aim was to reflect on the current state of EU-CELAC relations and explore how both regions can strengthen their collaboration to address today’s increasingly significant global challenges, minimise their impact, and propose concrete actions. These actions would help create environments of security and certainty to ensure progress, stability, democracy, and the rule of law, in preparation for the upcoming CELAC-EU Summit

scheduled to take place in Bogotá in 2025. Both meetings were jointly organised by the European and Ibero-American Academy of Yuste Foundation and the State Secretariat for the European Union of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union, and Cooperation of the Government of Spain.

Below is a brief summary of the main conclusions, recommendations, and key points of the discussions and ideas presented. This aims to contribute, from civil society, to strengthening these relationships and, above all, to the development of a roadmap that will enable the implementation of concrete actions. These actions are not only intended to mitigate and address the global challenges we face but also to provide tangible solutions to citizens, creating a local impact that leads to collective benefits for all.

1. Continuous, Multilevel, and Multisectoral Dialogue

A key message emphasised by all participants was the necessity of maintaining continuous dialogue beyond international summits. This dialogue should occur at multiple levels and involve a range of stakeholders –not just political figures or public administration. Forums such as those promoted by civil society in Guadalupe and Brussels exemplify collaborative, inclusive, and sustainable efforts to confront global challenges together.

2. Strengthening International Institutions and Multilateralism

In a global context marked by geopolitical tensions, the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have both the opportunity and the responsibility to strengthen multilateralism as a cornerstone of their relations. A recurring theme was the need to reform and enhance international institutions to make them more inclusive and

representative of the world’s diverse regions. This is particularly relevant for LAC, a strategic region for the European Union, with which it shares strong historical, cultural, and emotional ties, as well as universal values that must be continuously nurtured and strengthened. These shared values –democracy, human rights, and the rule of law– serve as a foundation for ensuring institutional resilience against global challenges. Achieving this requires the involvement of various sectors, including researchers, academia, government experts, civil society, and the private sector. Furthermore, associated observers must be recognised as strategic pillars to advance cooperation.

Programmes such as Bella 2 and the Digital for Development Hub demonstrate how digital connectivity can enhance collaboration and better prepare our regions for global challenges.

3. Investment, Commerce, Sustainability, and Digital Transition

Economic relations, particularly the signing of agreements such as the EU-Mercosur pact, are positioned as a key driver for strengthening ties and a fundamental step in demonstrating mutual commitment to economic development and social inclusion.

Initiatives like the Global Gateway and programmes such as Aeroclima and Amazonia Plus aim to promote digital connectivity, ecological transition, and sustainability –essential pillars for regional development– and are crucial for building more resilient economies.

Additionally, enhancing productivity through technical collaboration and private sector involvement is vital. It is also necessary to develop strategies to raise awareness of these instruments and mechanisms and to facilitate their use, as there is widespread lack of knowledge among the private sector and society at large.

The competition posed by Chinese companies in the region, supported by much greater and more flexible financial backing, must also be addressed. This underscores the need for profound reform of the international financial system.

4. Climate Change, Social Justice, and Climate Justice

The climate emergency waits for no one and demands immediate and decisive action. Joint efforts, ranging from promoting biodiversity to advancing the circular economy and combating plastic pollution, are essential for achieving an inclusive green transition. Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean are well-positioned to lead meaningful change in this area.

It is also crucial to emphasise equity, recognising that the wealthiest countries are responsible for the majority of global emissions. This necessitates strong collaboration on energy transition and climate resilience projects. It also calls for a model shift, adopting a bottom-up approach where technicians and experts from both regions –and even other parts of the world– can work together to propose solutions. These solutions must be taken into account by policymakers and be informed by scientific evidence, especially in a world where misinformation is another critical challenge to address.

In this regard, Latin America should focus on partnerships in critical raw materials essential for the green transition.

Furthermore, mobilising international financial resources to support the energy transition in Latin America and the Caribbean is crucial, particularly for projects that combine environmental sustainability with social inclusion.

5. Security, Governance, Justice, and Peace

Citizen insecurity, organised crime, and the fight against corruption are shared challenges, particularly in LAC but also in Europe. A collaborative approach to strategies that facilitate the exchange of best practices and governance models between regions is essential. One example is El PacCTO 2.0, which integrates technological tools in the fight against organised crime and could serve as a model for other areas.

The proposal also includes the creation of a public policy laboratory to tackle common challenges in justice and security, ensuring judicial independence and effective cooperation. Strengthening judicial cooperation is vital for upholding the rule of law, with specialised training proposed for handling complex cases, particularly in areas such as organised crime, transnational offences, and environmental crimes.

In the field of security and peace, addressing threats to global stability –such as armed conflicts– is crucial. Particular attention must be paid to the current threats posed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and conflicts in the Middle East. Achieving PEACE must remain a priority.

6. Innovation and Education

The future of our regions depends on investment in emerging technologies and education. Key areas identified include artificial intelligence, green nitrogen, and digital transformation. These fields offer opportunities to develop essential skills and transform economies in both regions. Education must prepare societies for future challenges by prioritising technical training and the protection of digital rights. To address medium- and long-term challenges, greater investment in education and

training is required in both regions. Bridging digital divides, which increasingly exacerbate inequalities and uncertainty, is also critical.

7. Regional Cooperation and Integration

Decentralised cooperation and active participation from local communities are crucial to addressing the specific needs of each territory. In the Caribbean, for instance, the impacts of climate change demand joint responses that include sustainable development in tourism and fisheries.

From food security to gender equity and human mobility, the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains a central focus of the biregional agenda.

8. Culture, Knowledge, and Social Cohesion

Universities, cultural exchanges, and informal dialogue spaces are powerful tools for strengthening ties. Initiatives led by civil society organisations that foster and strengthen relationships between the two regions –through analysis, reflection, dialogue, and exchange– enhance collaboration on human, social, cultural, political, economic, and academic levels.

9. Expanding the Vision Towards Strategic Convergence

The relationship between the EU and LAC must transcend bilateral frameworks to include integration in global forums, where both regions can act as strategic blocs. Recent collaborations on topics like the reform of the international financial system and negotiations for a treaty on plastic pollution highlight the potential of joint action.

10. The Need for Measurable Results


It is essential that initiatives go beyond rhetoric. Clear metrics must be established to assess the real social and economic impact of cooperation. These measurements should be public and accessible to ensure transparency and accountability.

A key recommendation was to conduct a study on the COST OF THE NON-STRATEGIC ALLIANCE between CELAC and the EU. This would highlight the potential losses from inaction and serve to convince sceptics and those who have yet to recognise the importance of advancing the relationship between the two regions.

11. Conclusion

In summary, EU-LAC relations face significant challenges but also present a unique opportunity to strengthen a strategic alliance founded on shared values and the potential to become a global model of cooperation. Translating political declarations into concrete actions is imperative, focusing on tangible outcomes that improve the lives of citizens in both regions—ranging from the green transition to social justice and sustainable economic development.

With these commitments, we can move forward together, as we all must be responsible and contribute our part within our means and capabilities, towards a more inclusive, resilient, and just future for our regions and for the world.



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