

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S RELATIONS WITH LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES IN THE CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT



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List of abbreviations

ALBA – Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America

BELLA – Building the Europe Link to Latin America – A digital infrastructure project linking Europe and Latin America

BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

CARICOM – Caribbean Community

CARIFORUM – Caribbean Forum

CELAC – Community of Latin American and Caribbean States

COPOLAD – Cooperation Programme on Drugs Policies between Latin America and the European Union

ECLAC – Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

EL PAcCTO – Europe-Latin America Assistance Programme against Transnational Organised Crime

EU – European Union

EUROCLIMA+ – EU programme to promote climate action in Latin America

EUROFRONT – EU – Latin America Border Cooperation Management Programme for supporting the fight against human trafficking and migrant smuggling

FDI – Foreign Direct Investment

LAC – Latin America and the Caribbean

MERCOSUR – Southern Common Market (*Mercado Común del Sur*)

OACPS – Organisation of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States

SICA – Central American Integration System (*Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana*)

SMEs – Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

UN – United Nations

UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

The European Union's relations with Latin America and the Caribbean countries in the current geopolitical context

„Ella sigue llorando. Lloro y llora y no hace más que llorar. Lejos, siguen llegando la gente pasa lentamente con sus muertos en los hombros como hicimos nosotros, buscando algún sitio donde dejarlos descansar para siempre. (...) En esto cementerio no cabe otra alma. No entiendo por qué nos matan. No sé qué hicimos para que dios nos abandonara, nos diera la espalda y nos dejara aquí sueltos, en este cerro, para que los pobres nos las arreglemos como podamos. No sé qué hicimos para que dios nos hiciera esto. Eso es que yo me pregunto mientras mi mamá llora sobre las flores. ¿Qué hicimos?”¹

Abstract: *A study conducted by the European Parliamentary Research Service (2023) notes that the European Union's (EU) relations with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) countries are being affected by changes in global power, economic uncertainty, and security threats. The current working paper explores the nature of this relationship, particularly in the period following the start of Russian aggression against Ukraine (2022), as this event has transformed socio-economic and political partnerships around the world. With this in mind, this paper argues that, even under these tense conditions, the strategic partnership between the EU and LAC is constantly evolving at all levels and can be deepened through increasing political dialogue, a rethinking of trade agreements (for example, the last adaptation of the EU-MERCOSUR trade agreement in December 2024), and new EU post-conflict initiatives like “The New Agenda for Relations between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean”.*

Keywords: *Latin America and the Caribbean, European Union, global consequences of the conflict in Ukraine, EU-LAC trade, EU-LAC strategic partnership, Mercosur.*

JEL classification: *Y8 related disciplines.*

¹ “She keeps crying. She cries and cries, and she does nothing but cry. In the distance, people continue to come, slowly carrying their dead on their shoulders as we did, searching for some place to let them rest forever. (...) In this cemetery, there is no room for another soul. I do not understand why they kill us. I do not know what we did as for God to abandon us, turn His back on us, and leave us strand here, on this hill, so that we, the poor, must figure things out on our own. I do not know what we did for God to do this to us. That is what I ask myself while my mother cries over the flowers. What did we do?” (Trans. Eng.), Jan Queretz, *Nuestra tierra tan pobre*, Venezuela, Caracas, 2020, published in Letralia, “Extracto de Nuestra tierra tan pobre, novela de Jan Queretz”, <https://letralia.com/letras/narrativaletralia/2020/06/16/nuestra-tierra-tan-pobre-novela-de-jan-queretz-extracto/>. Although the author published his novel on his own website to be freely read by those interested, the website and the novel can no longer be accessed at this time.

Biography:

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Disclaimer: *The period analysed in the working paper does not extend beyond December 2024.*

1. Introduction

This working paper begins with a powerful quote from the writer Jan Queretz, whose book “Our Poor Land” (“Nuestra tierra tan pobre”, Spanish) highlights the hardships faced by people in Venezuela’s impoverished contemporary society. This narrative illustrates a little of life under dictatorship, especially after the recent presidential elections in this Latin American country. On 28 July 2024, Nicolás Maduro, the current leader of Venezuela, claimed victory over his liberal opponent Edmundo González Urrutia – despite polls to the contrary². Those who spoke out risked arrest and intimidation. The European Union’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell Fontelles, underlined the seriousness of Venezuela’s political crisis:

“My first concern must be the deepening political crisis in Venezuela.... The people of Venezuela must decide their own future. Their will must prevail. The EU will continue working closely with its regional partners to ensure this occurs at the ballot box. It will also continue helping Venezuela’s leaders engage in talks led by Venezuelans themselves, to solve their problems and restore democracy, addressing humanitarian issues. The Venezuelan authorities must respect the right of all Venezuelans to peacefully protest and express political opinions freely, without fear. They should cease using excessive force, lift restrictions on the opposition and grassroots, end all persecutions against them, and free all political prisoners. Serious human rights abuses must be properly investigated and those responsible held accountable.”³

Just a week after Russia’s illegal aggression, the same Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, reached out to Vladimir Putin, expressing his support for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and condemning what he called the “destabilizing actions of the US and NATO”. What might be seen as a consistent point in his speech was the *threat* to Venezuela from what he described as “the campaign of lies and misinformation” propagated by Western nations⁴, as his increasingly repressive regime pushes Venezuela further into poverty.⁵

²Deutsche Welle, “Venezuela election: Opposition says it has proof it won”, 30.07.2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/venezuela-election-opposition-says-it-has-proof-it-won/a-69802482>.

³The European Union External Action, “Venezuela: Statement by High Representative Josep Borrell on the presidential election”, 29.07.2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/venezuela-statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-presidential-election_en.

⁴Prezident Rossii, *Telefonni razgovor s Prezidentom Venesueli Nicolasom Maduro, 1 marta 2022 goda (President of Russia, Phone call with President of Venezuela, March 1, 2022)*, available at <http://kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/354/events/67885>.

⁵Over one in four Venezuelans have left the country, see The Institute for Economic and Social Investigations, *ENCOVI 2023. The radiography of social vulnerability in Venezuela and public policy proposals*, Catholic University, 2024, [https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5d14c6a5c4ad42a4e794d0f7/65f8aa0a4054c8b7a93fe274_Presentacio%CC%81n%20ENCOVI%2023%20integrada%20prensa%20v1303%20\(1\).pdf](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/5d14c6a5c4ad42a4e794d0f7/65f8aa0a4054c8b7a93fe274_Presentacio%CC%81n%20ENCOVI%2023%20integrada%20prensa%20v1303%20(1).pdf).

When we think of Latin America, some of us may conjure up images of *los pobres de la tierra* (“the poor of the earth”) in *favelas* or recall *romantic ideals* of Che Guevara’s image on T-shirts worn by expressive young men. Also, the Europeans could easily find information, in the media or in the cinematography, about the drug cartels - first Cuban, then Colombian, and now mainly Mexican - and the violence that accompanies authoritarian governments in this region, which is also a hub for organised crime (kidnappings, disappearances, murders, human trafficking)⁶. Unfortunately, in recent years, literary works and films have portrayed an exaggerated image of a highly dangerous South America, and, of course, this represents only a little part of the whole story, which, in more many areas, is a successful one.⁷

But what is it all about? All thirty-three countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) are struggling to express their identity and improve their standard of living. If one examines the historical context of the LAC countries and their actions in relation to the European Union (EU), it becomes clear that a partnership has gradually emerged, which undoubtedly reflects a mutual aspiration that has evolved significantly due to changing dynamics (economic crisis, migration crisis, health crisis, military conflicts, political power struggles, etc.). The foundations of this relationship were laid by colonial history and economic and cultural interdependence⁸.

Recent global crises (COVID-19, economic crisis, the war of aggression in Ukraine) have changed the nature of the EU - LAC partnership⁹. Therefore, we will look at the “micro” historical background of the cooperation and later explore how the international repercussions of the conflict in Ukraine¹⁰ have affected the above-mentioned partnership.

⁶The Latin America and the Caribbean have the highest regional homicide rate in the world, and high rates of homicidal violence related to organized crime. See more: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Homicide And Organized Crime In Latin America And The Caribbean*, 2023, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/2023/GSH_2023_LAC_web.pdf.

⁷Paola Ibarra, *(Dis)locations of Violence in Latin American Film Displacement and Visual Representations*, 2017, <https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/dislocations-of-violence-in-latin-american-film/>.

⁸Felipe Valencia Caicedo, *Roots of Underdevelopment: A New Economic and Political History of Latin America and the Caribbean*, Springer, 2023.

⁹European Commission, “Americas and the Caribbean”, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/countries/americas-and-caribbean_en.

¹⁰European Council, “Speech by President Charles Michel at the Summit on Peace in Ukraine”, 15.06.2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/15/speech-by-president-charles-michel-at-the-summit-on-peace-in-ukraine/>.

2. The foundations of the EU-LAC partnership and the status of cooperation nowadays

The long and sometimes complicated relationship between Europe and Latin America has led to the creation of a shared identity and a desire on both sides to reclaim the past by creating a modern alliance with added value for both regions¹¹. We could assume that European trade and migration after the colonial period only deepened these foundations. Massive European investment in Latin American infrastructure in the 19th and 20th centuries played a huge role in modernising the region, while also creating long-term economic ties between Europe and LAC countries¹².

Not so long after the creation of the European Communities, the formal cooperation between Europe and Latin America began to be formalized, through a series of treaties and agreements in the interest of both parties. These efforts lead to today's platform for joint dialogue¹³.

Step by step a structured political rapprochement began to take shape, with a clear vision of common values, such as the development of democracy, respect for human rights and freedoms and, not least, measures to protect the environment. All this paved the way for debates on local regional integration at ministerial conferences and summits with the ideal of bringing the nations of the EU and LAC closer together. Therefore, the first Summit between the two parties was held in Rio de Janeiro in 1999, which was a moment of great success. This new proximity facilitated agreements on cooperation in trade, security, and not only¹⁴.

2.1. EU-CELAC

In 2011, the *Community of Latin American and Caribbean States* (CELAC) was established, marking a breakthrough on the road to regional unity and cooperation among the

¹¹Scott Eastman, Natalia Sobrevilla Perea, *Independence and Nation-Building in Latin America: Race and Identity in the Crucible of War*, Routledge, 2022. The thesis of the book is that during the fall of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires, despite a rather minority, but active, class that did not recognize the European identity, fighting for the independence of the colonies, a large part of the population understood the shared identity with Europe and, moreover, remained loyal to the former empires.

¹² Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence*, Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 2-14.

¹³ Official Journal of the European Commission, *Framework Agreement for Cooperation between the European Community and the Federative Republic of Brazil*, No. L 262, 1995, p. 54, https://www.eas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/framework_agreement_for_cooperation_eu-brazil_en_3.pdf, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/75285.pdf.

¹⁴*Rio de Janeiro Declaration, 29 June 1999*, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/eurolat/en/eu-latin-america/celac-eu-summits>.

nations of Latin America and the Caribbean¹⁵. This initiative was not so much important for regional integration from an internal point of view, but, in relation to the EU, as it introduced another institutional mechanism with the role of creating a better dialogue with the Europeans. We can, therefore, see that, since its creation, CELAC has become an important channel for growing cooperation between the European Union and the countries of Latin American and Caribbean (EU-LAC). In particular, we can observe that the EU-CELAC Summits have always played a central role in drawing up the Action Plan for political dialogue, economic partnership, and socio-cultural reciprocity.

The most important step forward in creating a more strategic and formalised partnership was the first EU-CELAC Summit which took place in Santiago, Chile, in 2013. During this event, the leaders and representatives of the participating countries adopted the “Santiago Action Plan 2013-2015”. This document focused bilateral cooperation, economic development, social inclusion policies and effective progress¹⁶.

In particular, we saw the creation of a Department of Science, Research and Innovation, which sought to create an “EU-LAC Knowledge Area” through enhanced research cooperation. An intuitive and visionary objective within this framework was the plan to reduce the “digital divide”. This effort included providing targeted support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are crucial to fostering innovation and job creation throughout the region.¹⁷

The priorities of the *Santiago Action Plan* also covered a wide range of pressing issues. One of them was the use of renewable energy, which is now essential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat climate change. Another critical point from the document was the gender equality. It was noted that promoting women’s leadership and preventing gender-based violence was a focus of the partnership. In addition, the plan advocated responsible investment and entrepreneurship, which were critical to promoting corporate social responsibility and transparency in business practices.¹⁸

In this context, we have certainly become aware that it is only through sustained dialogue such as these summits, that the nations involved have had the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions about mutual provocations and have consistently reaffirmed their

¹⁵European Council, *EU-CELAC summit, 17-18 July 2023*, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2023/07/17-18/>.

¹⁶The Council of the European Union, *Santiago Declaration*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/266598/EU-CELAC_Santiago%20Declaration_2013_EN.pdf.

¹⁷The Council of the European Union, *Santiago Declaration*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/266598/EU-CELAC_Santiago%20Declaration_2013_EN.pdf.

¹⁸The Council of the European Union, *EU-CELAC Action Plan, 2013-2015*, 27 January 2013, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/124263/2013_santiago_summit_eu-celac_action_plan_en.pdf.

commitment to cooperation. It is important to note, however, that despite the occasional breakthroughs achieved during these meetings, the different political positions of the CELAC countries - especially with regard to the ongoing crisis in Venezuela - have sometimes interrupted progress and slowed down the development of cooperation¹⁹.

Maybe in the cancellation of the 2017 EU-CELAC summit we can understand that the internal complexities and divisions of Latin American countries can complicate combined support. Additionally, Brazil chose to leave for a period the CELAC, but rejoined it in 2023.²⁰ But from incidents like that the leaders on the both sides should take as a rule the need for dialogue and negotiation.

2.2. CARIFORUM

The Caribbean part of LAC, has also made great progress in its relations with the EU. This has been mainly through CARIFORUM (the Caribbean Forum), established in the early 1990s, which has provided a structure for cooperation between Caribbean states and the EU²¹. The EU-CARIFORUM Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA, 2008) recognises the need for deep integration, the purpose of which is not only to strengthen economic development within the Caribbean region and its relations with the European Union. This far-reaching agreement is designed to ensure that the CARIFORUM states gain preferential access to EU markets, while, progressively opening their own, and to initiate regional cooperation in cultural industries. It also includes provisions on competitiveness (e.g., reduction of tariffs) in various sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, tourism, or the creative arts, with a view to promoting regional integration and attracting investment so that Caribbean society is better equipped economically and politically to assert its own place in the world²².

¹⁹ The Council of the European Union, *EU-CELAC Action Plan, 2013-2015*, 27 January 2013, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/124263/2013_santiago_summit_eu-celac_action_plan_en.pdf.

²⁰ Brazil Agency, "Brazil rejoins Community of Latin American and Caribbean States", 2023, <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/en/politica/noticia/2023-01/brazil-once-again-part-celac-understand-what-regional-block>; See also, Nolte, D., "From the summits to the plains: The crisis of Latin American Regionalism", *Latin American Policy*, vol. 12, pp. 181-192, 2021, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/lamp.12215>.

²¹ European Commission, *Caribbean-EU trade relations with Caribbean countries. Facts, figures and latest developments*, https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/caribbean_en.

²² European Commission, *The EU-CARIFORUM Economic Partnership Agreement*, <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/eu-cariforum-economic-partnership-agreement>.

2.3. EU-Mercosur

The most important form of cooperation in Latin America, in our view, is MERCOSUR, or the Southern Common Market. It is a gradual integration formula initiated by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Although Venezuela joined in 2012, because of its transformation into a dictatorship, its membership was stopped. Bolivia, on the other hand, is in the process of becoming a full member. The format was created in 1991, with the main objective of creating a common space for trade and investment through the gradual integration of its member states into the global market.²³

In addition to its internal objectives, it actively seeks to form agreements with various actors, such as Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, and Suriname. Beyond its regional focus, MERCOSUR has signed numerous commercial, political, and cooperation agreements with countries and organisations across the world, which can be described as a very active form of economic cooperation²⁴.

An important development in this context is the EU-Mercosur Trade Agreement, a major pact between the European Union and the MERCOSUR bloc²⁵. It was adopted in October 2019, with the aim of developing economic relations by eliminating tariffs, simplifying regulatory procedures, and promoting open trade. The long-awaited EU-LAC agreement creates a market of nearly 100 million people in the MERCOSUR space, creating job opportunities and expanding markets for businesses in both regions. Importantly, the agreement includes provisions for sustainable development, such as environmental standards, rules to protect workers' rights, and measures to prevent exploitation in both directions — striking a balance between economic progress and social responsibility. Although the agreement has yet to be ratified, ongoing discussions on environmental commitments and agricultural competition remain contentious. Once finalised, it has the potential to significantly deepen trade relations and economic cooperation between the EU and MERCOSUR.²⁶

²³Council on Foreign Relations, *Mercosur: South America's Fractious Trade Bloc*, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/mercosur-south-americas-fractious-trade-bloc>; Le Figaro, "By the way, what is Mercosur?", 2024, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/conjoncture/au-fait-c-est-quoi-le-mercosur-20241118>.

²⁴United Nations Treaty Collections, *Treaty Establishing a Common Market between the Argentine Republic, the Federal Republic of Brazil, the Republic of Paraguay and the Eastern Republic of Uruguay (Treaty of Asunción)*, <https://treaties.un.org/pages/showDetails.aspx?objid=08000002800a84a2>.

²⁵European Commission, *EU-Mercosur agreement*, last updated 2024, https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/mercosur/eu-mercosur-agreement_en.

²⁶Centre for Strategic and International Studies, "What Are the Implications of the EU–Mercosur Free Trade Agreement?", 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-are-implications-eu-mercosur-free-trade-agreement>.

2.4. EU-Andean Countries

The *Cartagena Agreement (1969)* transformed the Andean Pact into the Andean Community of Nations in 1996²⁷. Today, this dynamic partnership has four member countries: Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru.²⁸

The Framework Cooperation Agreement between the EU and the Andean Community was adopted in 1993. It has been in force since 1998. Although a *Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement* was signed in 2003, it is still awaiting ratification more than twenty years later. These interregional association talks were suspended for two short periods in 2008, when political changes in Bolivia and Ecuador, brought in new leaders such as Evo Morales (Bolivia) and Rafael Correa (Ecuador)²⁹, who turned their attention to regional integration under the *Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America*³⁰ (ALBA), founded by Cuba and Venezuela.³¹

A comprehensive trade agreement between the EU and Colombia/Peru was concluded in June 2012³². The stroke of genius in this agreement was the emphasis on gradual reciprocal liberalisation. For the EU, this strategic agreement was of enormous importance: it sought to secure market access similar to that negotiated between Colombia and Peru in 2006, in connection with free trade agreements for both countries. The European Parliament ratified this multi-party trade agreement in December 2012, having secured from both Colombia and Peru an unbound route, not only for human rights, but also for labour and environmental standards. Subsequent agreements were individually converted into temporary compliance for these nations by August of 2013 and March 2014, respectively. Final acceptance was ultimately finalised on behalf of all parties involved 2024³³. This agreement commits to the substantial liberalisation of all industrial goods and fisheries within ten years. The elimination of most

²⁷ *Andean Subregional Integration Agreement*

(*Cartagena Agreement*), <https://www.comunidadandina.org/quienes-somos>.

²⁸ The Andean Community, official website, <https://www.comunidadandina.org/quienes-somos/>.

²⁹ Ecuador joined ALBA in 2009 under the socialist President Rafael Correa and withdrew in 2018, after a change in power, to avoid being associated with the Venezuelan dictatorship; Associated Press, “Ecuador leaves Venezuelan-run regional alliance”, <https://apnews.com/general-news-6a7d8ed8738a475d8b6c276ffa0b761e>.

³⁰ ALBA – TCP, <https://www.albatcp.org/en/>.

³¹ Steve Ellner, “The Distinguishing Features of Latin America’s New Left in Power: The Chávez, Morales, and Correa Governments”, *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2012, pp. 96, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23238970>.

³² *Trade Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Colombia and Peru, of the other part*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=OJ%3AL%3A2012%3A354%3ATOC>.

³³ Council of the European Union, “EU-Andean Countries: Council greenlights the conclusion of the trade agreement with Colombia, Peru and Ecuador”, 14.10.2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/10/14/eu-andean-countries-council-greenlights-the-conclusion-of-the-trade-agreement-with-colombia-peru-and-ecuador/pdf/>.

tariffs at the outset is a milestone promised to be reached in less than two years; an ambitious target has been set for agricultural market access, with a target line of 85% freedom to be reached within seventeen years to come. It also includes articles on services, investment, public procurement practices, protection of intellectual property rights with respect to trade names and trademarks or brands; human rights clauses are included in the text; labour regulations and environmental protection standards have also been something that members will have to comply with flexibility, depending on each country's circumstances³⁴.

Ecuador took the critical decision to reopen negotiations with the EU in 2013 in order to become part of the existing EU-Colombia-Peru trade framework - to strengthen its market access to Europe, as changes brought by revisions to the GSP (Generalized Scheme of Preferences) were becoming visible. Faced with the possibility of losing its GSP eligibility - and thus being subject to *Most Favoured Nation* tariffs - Ecuador moved decisively to avert this threat; agreements on Ecuador's Protocol of Accession, linked to this trade arrangement, were essentially completed by July 2014, with a formal signature at the end of November; Ecuador officially joined the whole set-up from January 2017³⁵.

In nowadays, EU–Andean agricultural trade is balanced in favour of the Andean countries, who supply the EU with bananas (primarily Colombia and Ecuador), vegetables, coffee, cocoa beans and flowers (primarily Ecuador and Colombia).³⁶

2.5. Global Gateway

Through its Global Gateway initiative, the European Union (EU) aims to forge new partnerships in order to catalyse smart, clean, and secure investments in the digital and climate sectors, particularly in energy and transport. This initiative prioritises the creation of an enabling environment characterised by a robust regulatory framework and investment in human capital through education, research, and health. Central to this strategy is the EU-OACPS Partnership Agreement, which sets out specific objectives for the Caribbean region, recognising its unique economic vulnerability to external shocks³⁷.

³⁴EU trade agreement with Colombia, Peru and Ecuador, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/eu-trade-agreement-with-colombia-peru-and-ecuador.html>.

³⁵European Commission, Andean Community, *EU trade relations with the Andean Community. Facts, figures and latest developments*, https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/andean-community_en.

³⁶European Commission, Agriculture and rural development, “Americas, The Andean Countries”, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/international/agricultural-trade/bilateral-agreements/americas_en#andeancountries.

³⁷European Commission, Organisation of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (OACPS) - “EU Partnership”, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/european-development-policy/oacps-eu-partnership_en.

Key concerns include improving environmental sustainability, strengthening climate resilience, diversifying into equitable and sustainable economies that generate quality jobs and growth, and establishing good governance structures that promote inclusive societies. In addition, the initiative addresses the need to prepare for natural disasters. It is worth noting that the Caribbean Sea is rising at a rate of 2.5 cm per year³⁸.

In response to similar international initiatives, Global Gateway is strategically aligned with other regional development projects. The EU seeks to cultivate partnerships based on sustainability, democratic principles, and mutual cooperation, rather than simply extending its economic influence eastwards. This strategic vision not only strengthens the EU's influence, but also promotes development on an international scale.

The Global Gateway is a programme with a strong focus on closer cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean. Through its funding initiatives such as BELLA, it aims to build a digital infrastructure linking Europe and South America through a 35 000 km submarine fibre-optic cable network. This initiative, supported by grants worth €53 million (of which €26.5 million from the EU) over the next 25 years, will facilitate enhanced research and education cooperation by improving connectivity and knowledge exchange between the continents³⁹.

Most importantly for our topic, the EU-LAC initiative aims to extend BELLA to other Latin American regions through the Global Gateway. The EU has committed an additional €15 million to support regulatory convergence and international cooperation in key areas such as data protection and digital security⁴⁰. Through these efforts, the EU not only promotes technological progress, but also ensures that its values are promoted in this field.

³⁸ European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Brussels, 1.12.2021, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the European Investment Bank. The Global Gateway*, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en.

³⁹ The BELLA Programme, a Europe-Latin America initiative, strives to strengthen connectivity between continents through ambitious digital integration. Comprising submarine cable Ella Link and terrestrial network BELLA-T, the project facilitates interactive learning across boundaries. Laying 6,000 kilometres of fibre optic beneath the Atlantic, Ella Link launched in mid-2021, exponentially boosting data transfer speeds between Portugal and Brazil. This breakthrough cuts latency for academic and research collaborations, allowing trans-oceanic partnerships to thrive.

Meanwhile, BELLA-T expands inclusive internet access throughout Southern South America, linking major population centres with knowledge hubs in remote regions. By promoting digital equality for universities and institutes wherever they reside, technological progress profits all.

More information at BELLA - *Building the Europe Link to Latin America*, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/programming/programmes/bella-building-europe-link-latin-america_en.

⁴⁰BELLA - *Building the Europe Link to Latin America*, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/programming/programmes/bella-building-europe-link-latin-america_en; European Commission, *Europe's Digital Decade: digital targets for 2030*, <https://commission.europa.eu/strategy->

In addition, the development of green energy initiatives is an integral part of Global Gateway's strategy for LAC. The EU supports the growth of renewable energy sources and the integration of regional electricity markets. Particular emphasis is placed on the promotion of renewable hydrogen and the advancement of infrastructure projects that optimise the value chain for primary materials. This energy strategy dovetails with the EU's broader Green Deal agenda, while providing sustainable energy solutions to partner regions⁴¹.

Education and research are another important part of Global Gateway's commitment to the region. Through programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe, the EU promotes mobility opportunities for students and researchers. This strategy could serve as a conduit to connect future leaders from the Americas with European academia.

However, it is important to note that the Global Gateway focuses on five critical sectors: digital, climate and energy, transportation, health, and education and research. This comprehensive approach integrates material infrastructure with supportive regulatory environments, cultural norms, and governance standards, including legal frameworks, which are essential for sustainable development. In the Caribbean sub-region, particular attention is being paid to three strategic priorities: the Green Deal, economic resilience and trade; and governance, security, and human development. These priorities not only respond to the region's diverse needs and potential, but are also in line with the EU's long-term strategic objectives. By investing in critical infrastructure, promoting renewable energy, and strongly supporting education, we can see that the EU is determined to strengthen its relations across the region, and foster a basis for mutual cooperation, despite its global provocations, such as Russia's aggressive foreign policy⁴².

On this point, it is important to pause for a moment to explain the best results of the European initiative, such as the EU-LAC Digital Alliance⁴³, which promotes digital rapprochement between the two regions, while the BELLA Programme promotes close cooperation between European and Latin American researchers and educators. There are also programmes such as the Amazon Basin – targeting deforestation and promoting sustainable

[and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_en#international-partnerships-for-the-digital-decade.](#)

⁴¹Global Gateway, 1 December 2021, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en.

⁴²European Commission, *EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda*, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/eu-lac-global-gateway-investment-agenda_en.

⁴³ Delegation of the European Union to Chile, *EU-LAC: Joint Declaration on a Digital Alliance*, 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/chile/eu-lac-joint-declaration-digital-alliance_en?s=192.

value chains⁴⁴, while EUROCLIMA+ addresses issues of environmental sustainability and climate change⁴⁵. In addition, we now have regional programmes such as EL PAcCTO II, created to develop security and justice by fighting transnational organised crime⁴⁶, while the Latin America and Caribbean Investment Facility⁴⁷ supports a wide range of development projects. In addition, Copolad III⁴⁸ and Eurofront focus on drug policy and migrant smuggling respectively⁴⁹. In Central America, the Digital Trade Platform⁵⁰ focuses on trade and economic integration.

The EU's commitment to a strong and inclusive partnership with Latin America and the Caribbean is also reflected in its comprehensive programmes such as Erasmus+⁵¹, Horizon

⁴⁴ European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean, Team Europe Initiative and Joint Programming Tracker, https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/resources/team-europe-tracker/partner-countries/latin-america-and-caribbean/amazon-basin_en#:~:text=It%20covers%20the%20Amazon%20Basin%20countries%3A%20Bolivia%2C,Brazil%2C%20Colombia%2C%20Ecuador%2C%20Guyana%2C%20Peru%2C%20Suriname%20and%20Venezuela.

⁴⁵ Euroclima contributes to the new Joint Communication 2023 that presents a revitalized agenda for the relationship between the EU and LAC, aligning with the EU Green Deal and the objectives outlined in the Paris Agreement. This refreshed agenda details the EU's commitment to this partnership under the EU Global Gateway Investment Agenda (GGIA), which aims to catalyse investments that will expedite a just and green transition, Euroclima, <https://www.euroclima.org/en/home-en/background>.

⁴⁶ EU Commission, "EU and Latin American and Caribbean Partners team up in the fight against transnational organised crime with the launch of EL PAcCTO 2.0", https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/eu-and-latin-american-and-caribbean-partners-team-fight-against-transnational-organised-crime-launch-2023-11-21_en.

⁴⁷ *The Caribbean Regional Resilience Building Facility* is a partnership between the European Union, GFDRR, and the World Bank, aimed at enhancing disaster resilience and climate adaptation in high-risk Caribbean islands. This is achieved through a comprehensive initiative that offers advisory, financial, and analytical solutions to improve capacity for disaster mitigation and economic protection.

The Facility serves nations including Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago, empowering them to withstand and thrive against natural disaster; *The Caribbean Regional Resilience Building Facility*, <https://www.gfdr.org/en/caribbean-rrb>.

⁴⁸ COPOLAD, <https://copolad.eu/en/what-is-copolad/>

⁴⁹ EUROFRONT is a delegated cooperation programme between the European Union and Latin America that contributes to security, the improvement of respect for and protection of human rights and social and economic development at a national and regional level by strengthening the effectiveness in the management of four pilot borders involving seven countries and supporting the fight against human trafficking and migrant smuggling; EUROFRONT, <https://www.programaeurofront.eu/en/page/que-es-eurofront>.

⁵⁰ The European Union (EU) and Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries have been actively collaborating to enhance digital trade between the regions. A significant initiative in this regard is the creation of the Digital Trade Platform (PDCC), which aims to facilitate trade by promoting the interoperability of national systems. This platform is part of the broader EU-LAC Digital Alliance, launched in March 2023, to foster an inclusive and human-centric digital transformation across both region; European Commission, *EU-Latin America and Caribbean Digital Alliance*, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/eu-latin-america-and-caribbean-digital-alliance_en.

⁵¹ European Commission, "Erasmus Plus", <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/>, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-07/factsheet-erasmusplus-celac-2023_en.pdf.

Europe⁵², Copernicus⁵³, and Galileo⁵⁴. These wide-ranging actions underline the EU's commitment to this partnership.

2.6. The New Agenda for the Relations between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

Given that the European Union has officially demonstrated its ambitions and commitment towards Latin America and the Caribbean, that the twenty-seven current members of the European Union and the member states of CARICOM are historically and culturally linked, that the European Union is the second largest trade partner of LAC, it is only natural that the EU and the inhabitants of the other side of the ocean engage in dialogue, address existing market access issues, and strengthen their overall engagement. This engagement, however, cannot simply be neglected because of developments and processes in other regions of the world, but must be carefully monitored and, if necessary, reformed and enhanced in order to have a positive impact on LAC.

It is, therefore, very important to note that the adoption of the *New Agenda for Relations* between the EU and LAC, after the outbreak of the war, **marked a significant commitment to strengthen and safeguard the partnership between the two regions**, to counter the harmful influence of Russian leadership policies and to mitigate the effects of the conflict in Ukraine. This document, published in 2023, one year after the war of aggression in Ukraine started, **sets out an updated strategy for cooperation based on shared values such as peace, multilateralism and development**. The EU and LAC are described as natural partners, connected by historical and cultural ties, and united in the face of common problems and tensions at international level. In order to effectively address emerging geopolitical issues and crises, such as climate change and social inequality, their relationship needs to be renewed and revitalised on a temporary base⁵⁵.

⁵²EU-LAC Interest Group, "Horizon Europe - List of third country participation", <https://www.eucelac-platform.eu/news-and-events/news/horizon-europe-list-third-country-participation>.

⁵³ BELLA II Programme, "Copernicus Regional Center in Chile: real-time data management to overcome global challenges", 2024, <https://www.bella-programme.eu/en/news-2024/366-centro-regional-copernicus-en-chile-gestion-de-datos-en-tiempo-real-para-superar-desafios-globales>.

⁵⁴ European Union Agency for the Space Programme, "Galileo", <https://www.euspa.europa.eu/eu-space-programme/galileo>.

⁵⁵European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Brussels, 7.6.2023, *Joint Communication To The European Parliament And The Council, A New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52023JC0017&qid=1686302597845>.

The EU agenda also calls for the strengthening political dialogue at all levels and the establishment of a permanent coordination mechanism between the EU and the LAC Community. This will support regional integration, facilitate joint action and promote cohesion and unity. Economic relations also play a crucial role in this partnership, with a focus on strengthening the joint EU-LAC trade agenda. The document also advocates for the conclusion of the EU-Mercosur agreement and the modernisation of existing trade agreements⁵⁶.

The agenda doesn't stop at the economy, but it also emphasises partnerships for the double (green and digital) transition. For the green transition, the EU and LAC will work together to protect biodiversity and reduce carbon emissions by investing in renewable energy and green initiatives. For the digital transition, the launch of the EU-LAC Digital Alliance will promote digital infrastructure and reduce the digital divide through joint investment projects. In addition, the parties will focus on poverty reduction, and social inclusion, which are essential for improving the quality of life⁵⁷.

Cooperation on justice, citizen security, and the fight against transnational organised crime is another key aspect of the partnership. The EU and LAC intend to step up their joint efforts to combat organised crime, including human trafficking, arms trafficking, and drug trafficking, through specific cooperation programmes and the strengthening of institutional capacities.

Overall, the proposal seeks a closer and modernised strategic partnership that puts people at the heart of the relationship and aims to secure peace and prosperity for both regions.

2.7. Nowadays urgent questions to address in the EU-LAC relationship

The MERCOSUR... dilemma?

The EU-Mercosur Trade Agreement is an important formula for cooperation between the EU and the Mercosur bloc (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay). The partnership aims to develop economic relations by eliminating tariffs and regulations, with the idea of creating a more open environment for trade. By bringing together a market of more than 780

⁵⁶European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Brussels, 7.6.2023, *Joint Communication To The European Parliament And The Council, A New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52023JC0017&qid=1686302597845>.

⁵⁷European Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Brussels, 7.6.2023, *Joint Communication To The European Parliament And The Council, A New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52023JC0017&qid=1686302597845>.

million people, the agreement aims to increase GDP and boost exports and direct investment. It also has provisions to create jobs and market access for companies on both sides.

The document includes articles on respect for environmental standards and labour rights, as well as environmental protection practices, demonstrating a balanced view of economic development and social responsibility. Despite its many benefits, the pact is still awaiting final ratification, with ongoing discussions focusing on concerns about meeting environmental standards, agricultural competition and regulatory harmonisation. Once this is done, the EU-Mercosur agreement will significantly deepen trade relations and economic cooperation between the two regions.

The performance of European enterprises in Latin America has contributed significantly to the EU's role as a major investor in the region. To give just one example, the value of European foreign direct investment (FDI) in LAC reached some \$184.304 billion in 2023, making it one of the largest sources of foreign capital in the region⁵⁸. These investments are helping to boost economic growth and job creation in LAC member countries, in sectors such as energy, telecommunications, and manufacturing.

On 6 December 2024, the group of the four Mercosur countries - Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay - and the European Union celebrated a momentous event: they finally signed their historic partnership agreement⁵⁹.

The broad objectives of the EU-Mercosur trade agreement are as follows:

- “Increase bilateral trade and investment, and lower tariff and non-tariff trade barriers, notably for small and medium sized enterprises,
- Create more stable and predictable rules for trade and investment through better and stronger rules, e.g. in the area of intellectual property rights (including geographical indications), food safety standards, competition and good regulatory practices,
- Promote joint values such as sustainable development, by strengthening worker's rights, fight climate change, increase environmental protection, encourage companies to act responsibly, and uphold high food safety standards “⁶⁰

⁵⁸ United Nations, “ECLAC: Foreign Direct Investment in Latin America and the Caribbean Fell by 9.9% in 2023, but Amount Received is Above the Average in the Last Decade”, <https://www.cepal.org/en/pressreleases/eclac-foreign-direct-investment-latin-america-and-caribbean-fell-99-2023-amount>.

⁵⁹2024 EU-Mercosur summary, <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/09242a36-a438-40fd-a7af-fe32e36cbd0e/library/86fb1930-16ed-4ac6-af25-5e0ad0d0c816/details>.

⁶⁰European Commission, Trade and Economic Security, *EU-Mercosur Agreement*, https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/mercotur/eu-mercotur-agreement_en.

At the time of writing, however, the deal has provoked fierce opposition from European farmers, particularly in France. Farmers are worried about competition from South American imports, which they say are not bound by the EU's strict environmental and health standards. Protests have been widespread. Farmers have blocked roads and dumped manure outside government buildings to express their discontent.⁶¹

In response to these concerns, the French supermarket chain Carrefour announced that it would stop buying beef from Mercosur countries in order to support local farmers. This decision led to a backlash from Brazilian meat suppliers, with major companies such as JBS and Marfrig stopping supplies to Carrefour's Brazilian stores. The Brazilian government criticised Carrefour's move as protectionist and lacking a technical basis⁶².

The French government, including President Emmanuel Macron, has expressed its opposition to the agreement, citing potential negative impacts on agriculture and environmental concerns⁶³. Also, in Romania the reaction of the associations of farmers was quite one of concern, as they stated that "the agreement, although it promotes large-scale tariff liberalization, fails to balance the significant differences between European production standards and those of the MERCOSUR bloc. Subsidies, environmental and social norms create unfair competition for European farmers". At the same time, it was highlighted by the representatives of the Romanian Farmers and Professional Processors Forum (RFPPF) that the risks of losing markets for European cereals, caused by massive imports of corn, sorghum and rice at reduced or zero customs duties, which would weaken the financial security of farmers as well as the impact on the processing sectors (starch, bioethanol or corn semolina industry), in the face of products imported at much lower costs.⁶⁴

However, the European Commission, backed by member states such as Germany and Spain, is pushing for the deal to go ahead, emphasising its economic prospects.⁶⁵

⁶¹Theodoros Benakis, "Poland and France against signing EU and Mercosur trade agreement, say Ministers of Agriculture", 22 November 2024, <https://www.europeaninterest.eu/poland-and-france-against-signing-eu-and-mercosur-trade-agreement-say-ministers-of-agriculture/>.

⁶²The Associated Press, "Carrefour's cold shoulder for South American beef sparks a backlash from Brazil", 2024, 25 November 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/france-brazil-beef-trade-environment-deforestation-jbs-marfrig-29a487c6b3e3724f4f89fcadf8bbe839>.

⁶³Reuters, "French farmers back on the streets as Mercosur trade talks stir fury", 18.11.2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-farmers-back-streets-mercosur-trade-talks-stir-fury-2024-11-18/?utm>.

⁶⁴Digi 24, "Impactul acordului UE-Mercosur asupra agricultorilor din România: Riscă să submineze obiectivele de autonomie alimentară" ["The impact of the EU-Mercosur agreement on Romanian farmers: It risks undermining food autonomy objectives"], 18.12.2024, <https://www.digi24.ro/digieconomic/macro/impactul-acordului-ue-mercosur-asupra-agricultorilor-din-romania-risca-sa-submineze-obiectivele-de-autonomie-alimentara-40427>.

⁶⁵Deutsche Welle, Lucia Schulten, "European Commission hails trade deal with Mercosur bloc", 07.12.2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/european-commission-hails-trade-deal-with-mercosur-bloc/a-70992551>.

As the negotiations progress, the EU will have to balance these economic interests against those of its farming sector and against the environment commitments it has made.

The Brazilian policy of non-alignment

In this context, in addition to the ratification of the Mercosur agreement, it is important to recognise another possible problem for the coming years in the LAC region, whose actions could destabilise the partnership with the EU. We are talking about Brazil's significant actions in the region and its actions to foster closer ties with Russia. For example, Brazil has adopted a more non-aligned stance on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and is increasingly leaning towards Russia, especially after the recent BRICS summit. In 2024, Brazil-Russia relations remained robust within the BRICS framework, focusing on economic cooperation and shared geopolitical interests⁶⁶. The Sixteenth BRICS Summit was held in Kazan, Russia, from 22 to 24 October 2024, marking a pivotal moment as it was the first meeting to include new members: Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Ethiopia. Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva participated via videoconference, reaffirming his country's commitment to the BRICS partnership⁶⁷.

Leaders at the Summit discussed strategies for financial cooperation, including the establishment of a BRICS grain exchange to allow member countries to trade their products within the bloc - an initiative welcomed by President Lula and others. Brazil will hold the presidency of BRICS from 1 January to 31 December 2025, under the theme "Strengthening Global South Cooperation for More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance"⁶⁸. This will underline Brazil's commitment to the BRICS format⁶⁹. All in one, one could say that the BRICS Summit in Kazan served as a platform for Brazil and Russia to reaffirm their partnership and to cooperate on initiatives aimed at promoting economic growth and stability within the bloc. The foundation of this cooperation is rooted in the strategic importance of the EU-LAC partnership, which requires a thorough examination of the historical context of their relations and a response appropriate to the unique circumstances of each country in the LAC region.

⁶⁶World Economic Forum, "BRICS: Here's what to know about the international bloc", 2024, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/11/brics-summit-geopolitics-bloc-international/>

⁶⁷President of the Republic of Brazil, *BRICS – Russia 2024*, <https://www.gov.br/planalto/pt-br/agenda-internacional/missoes-internacionais/brics-2024?utm>

⁶⁸Government of Brasil, "Brazil takes over the BRICS presidency in 2025", 1st of January 2025, <https://www.gov.br/planalto/en/latest-news/2025/01/brazil-assumes-the-presidency-of-brics-in-2025>.

⁶⁹Geopolitical Economy Report, "BRICS grows, inviting 13 new *partner countries* at historic summit in Kazan, Russia", 26.10.2024, <https://geopoliticaleconomy.com/2024/10/26/brics-13-partner-countries-summit-kazan-russia/>.

3. Overview of the current status of the Latin American and Caribbean Countries

There are 33 states in LAC, with political regimes at different stages of democratic consolidation. At present, only Costa Rica, Barbados, Chile, Uruguay, and Trinidad and Tobago could be considered democracies from a Western perspective. However, more than half of the states in the region consists of hybrid and flawed democracies with a weak post-materialist spirit in society, populist left-wing and right-wing autocratic regimes⁷⁰. The negative influence of political leaders is exerted by criminal or proto-military structures. Only 6% of the LAC countries are electoral autocracies or one-party states. In these countries, there is a selective mechanism for changing the political actors. They have a strong state or semi-state that has been transformed into a pseudo-society run by so-called *communist* parties or militarised political clans⁷¹.

Across LAC, forms of government range from robust democracies, such as Uruguay and Costa Rica, where elections are fair and civil liberties are respected, to struggling democracies such as Colombia, which faces instability due to polarisation, corruption and a weak judiciary, although elections are generally free, though sometimes marred by violence. There are also authoritarian regimes, such as Nicaragua and Venezuela, where repression is notable, norms are eroding, freedoms are being curtailed and executive power is being consolidated⁷².

In 90% of LAC countries, the economy is characterised by extensive and intensive types of resource use. The competitiveness of these economies has declined significantly in recent decades. Only in a quarter of the countries in the region have developed a diversified economic structure based on services, IT, and other high-tech sectors. As a result of the intensified conflicts around the energy sector and the negative price conjuncture in these areas, the economically weakened LAC countries may act more independently in the world, including in the face of political and military challenges that threaten their sovereignty.⁷³

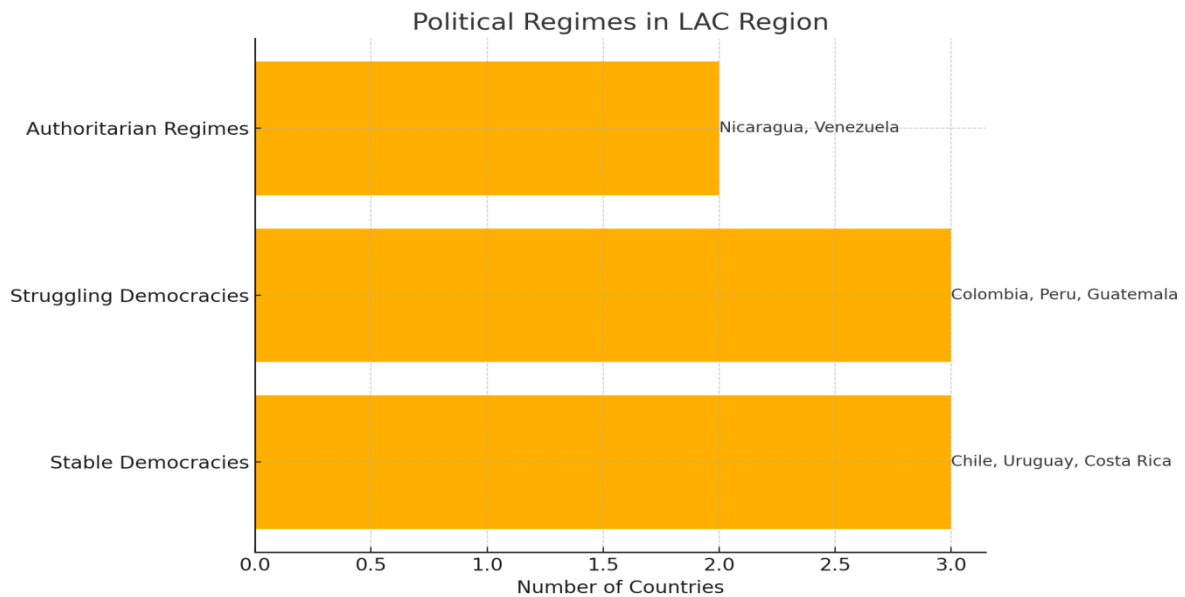
⁷⁰Freedom House, *Political regime in every LAC country Database*, https://freedomhouse.org/search?f%5B0%5D=content_type%3Acountry&f%5B1%5D=country%3A90.

⁷¹For an overview of the type of political regime in every LAC country consult the data base of Freedom House, https://freedomhouse.org/search?f%5B0%5D=content_type%3Acountry&f%5B1%5D=country%3A90

⁷²Freedom House, https://freedomhouse.org/search?f%5B0%5D=content_type%3Acountry&f%5B1%5D=country%3A90.

⁷³An overview of the LAC regimes based on the information available in the LAC countries reports made by the BTI Transformation Index, <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/regional-dashboard/LAC?&cb=00000>.

Figure 1 Political regimes in the LAC countries



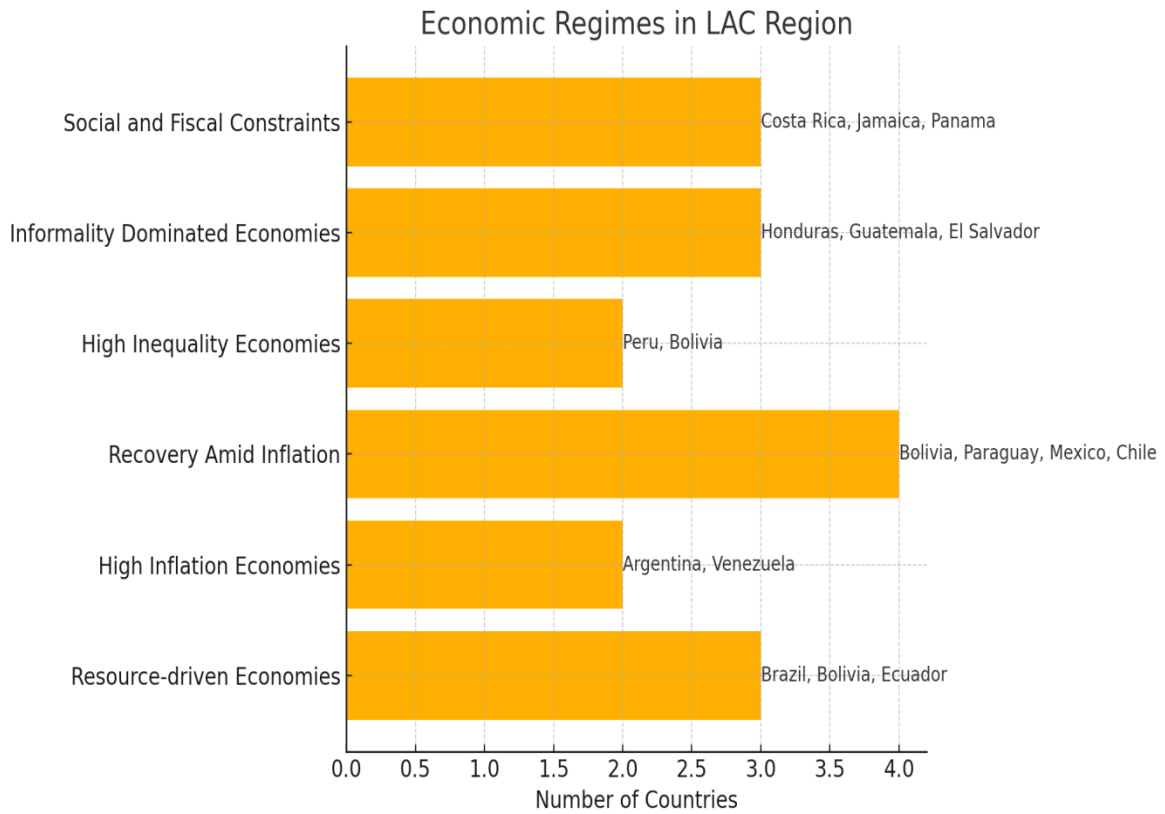
Categories with specific countries displayed.

Source: Author's conception based on information from Bastian Herre, "The 'Varieties of Democracy' data: how do researchers measure democracy?", <https://ourworldindata.org/vdem-electoral-democracy-data>, 2022.

Economic circumstances vary widely, but they share difficulties that have been exacerbated by the war of aggression in Ukraine. Resource-driven economies such as Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador, dependent on commodities, minerals, or oil, face market unpredictability that exposes vulnerabilities. High inflation plagues countries such as Argentina and Venezuela, often linked to over-reliance on specific sectors such as agriculture or oil. Many countries saw a modest recovery post-COVID, but faced inflation due to war-related increases in fuel and food prices. This hampered the recovery in Mexico and Chile, while leaving Bolivia and Paraguay vulnerable to commodity inflation. Poverty remains widespread throughout the region, disproportionately affecting indigenous and rural groups in Peru and Bolivia. Informality dominates employment in Central American countries such as Honduras, limiting social protection. Governments face fiscal pressures from underfunded programmes as in Costa Rica and Jamaica, while debt levels constrain investment in Panama and Jamaica⁷⁴.

⁷⁴ For an overview of each economy in the LAC region, consult the Open Data of the World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/country>.

Figure 2 Economic regimes in the LAC countries



Economic categories and associated countries.

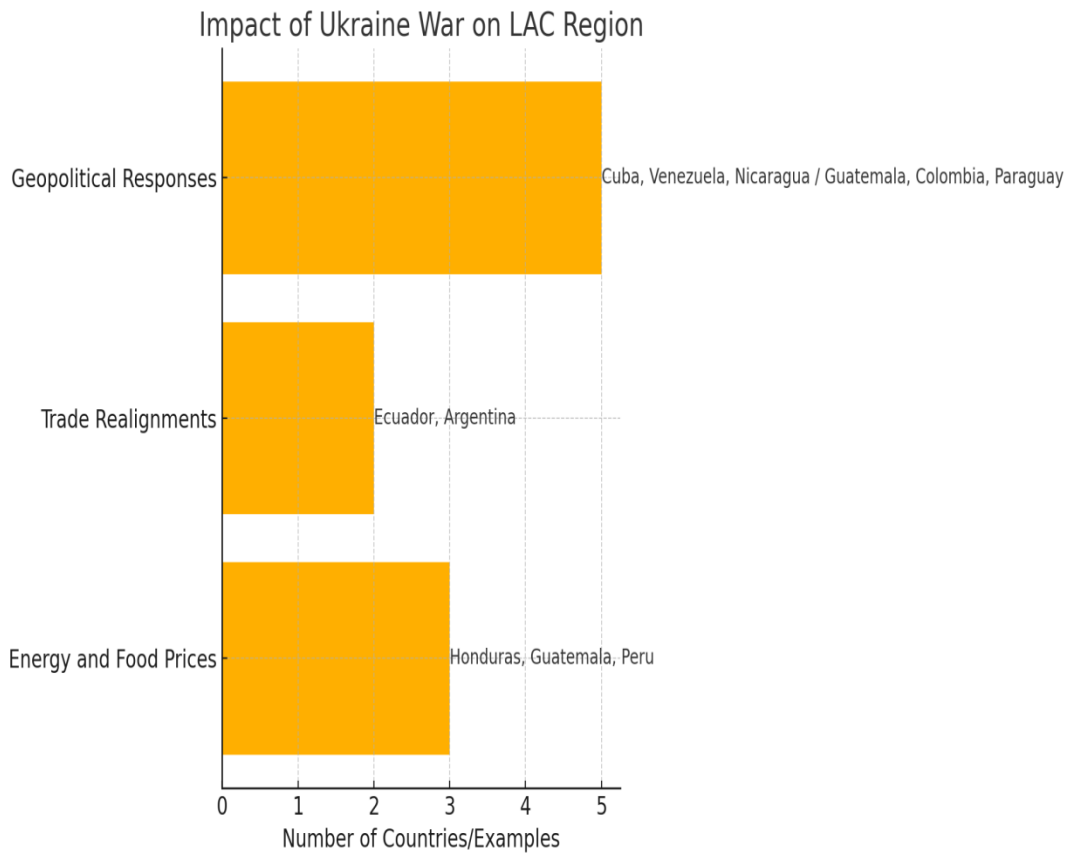
Source: Author’s conception based on the information from World Bank, *Global Economic Prospects*, January 2025. Washington, D, and data catalogue of the World Bank for every country in the LAC region

<https://data.worldbank.org/>.

The Ukraine conflict had several spillover effects. Inflation spiked, hurting vulnerable populations in Honduras, Guatemala, and Peru. Exporters such as Ecuador and Argentina benefited from commodity appreciation, but higher production costs offset the gains. Some countries strengthened ties with Russia, such as Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, while others actively supported Ukraine, such as Guatemala, Colombia, and Paraguay. Addressing challenges required nuanced, context-sensitive strategies.⁷⁵

⁷⁵World Bank, “Open Data of the World Bank”, <https://data.worldbank.org/country>.

Figure 3 The impact of the war of aggression in Ukraine on the LAC countries



The impact categories and affected countries.

Source: The Author's conception based on data from Statista, <https://www.statista.com/topics/8922/russia-ukraine-conflict-2021-2022/#topicOverview> and World Bank (for the period 2021-2024), <https://data.worldbank.org/>.

4. The impact of the war of aggression in Ukraine on the development of EU's Partnership with LAC

The conflict in Ukraine has transformed the continent's security needs and strategies and defined a new approach for the European Union's relations with LAC countries. The war of aggression has led to a reassessment of the EU foreign policy to break its dependence on Russian energy resources⁷⁶.

In this context, the emergence of the EU Strategic Compass (2022) aims to enhance the collective security of the EU over the next five to ten years. It prioritises resilience, rapid-response capabilities, and cybersecurity as core areas for investment and innovation. It recognises hybrid threats - including cyber-attacks and foreign interference - and notes that climate change is a threat multiplier.⁷⁷

It should also be noted that the Compass emphasises the need for cooperation with NATO and regional organisations, in order to strengthen collective defence. The EU is also seeking to integrate environmental considerations into missions, in line with the principles of the European Green Deal.⁷⁸ The LAC region is rich in natural resources such as lithium and copper, which could be a powerful key to the EU's green ideals and energy transition⁷⁹. For example, Chile and Argentina are among the world's largest producers of lithium, which is essential for batteries and renewable energy storage systems⁸⁰.

Last but not least, amid changing geostrategic contexts, the EU is pursuing stronger relations with LAC to respond to global security threats and cyber challenges.

Although geographically distant, Latin America is key to the European Union's overall foreign policy as it seeks to balance its relations with the United States, China and all the other major players in world politics.

⁷⁶One of the most significant vulnerabilities exposed by the conflict is the EU's former heavy reliance on Russian energy resources - including natural gas, oil, and coal. This situation has driven the EU to urgently diversify its energy sources and deepen partnerships with regions capable of supporting its option. Bauerle Danzman, S., and Meunier, S., "The EU's Goeconomic Turn: From Policy Laggard to Institutional Innovator", *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 62, 2024, pp. 1097–1115.

⁷⁷Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence - For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security*, Brussels, 21 March 2022, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7371-2022-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁷⁸Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence - For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security*, Brussels, 21 March 2022, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7371-2022-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁷⁹European Commission, "Renewable energy targets", 2023, https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/renewable-energy/renewable-energy-directive-targets-and-rules/renewable-energy-targets_en.

⁸⁰Romina Lucrecia López Steinmetz, Stefano Salvi, "Brine grades in Andean salars: When basin size matters. A review of the Lithium Triangle", *Earth-Science Reviews*, vol. 217, 2021, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S001282522100115X>.

China's growing presence in LAC⁸¹ (such as its Belt and Road Initiative-driven investments) has further raised the stakes in this competitive situation. In this author's opinion it is possible that the EU's desire to strengthen relations with LAC is also a result of China's growing economic influence. By offering a model of cooperation based on democratic governance, sustainable development, and shared values, the EU hopes to offset China's weight. The EU has realised that if it wants to remain influential in the region, it needs to offer shining examples of how to build partnerships. And it has learned from China that these need to be both competitive and value-adding before they will attract the attention of others. China's trade with LAC has grown at an incredible rate, from almost nothing in the 1960s to more than 400 billion \$ in 2025⁸².

The war has encouraged the EU to develop strategic partnerships with LAC countries in the political sphere. In multilateral forums such as the United Nations, where international law, human rights and global security are discussed, LAC countries have been staunch allies of the EU in shaping a multilateral response to the war, including support for sanctions against Russia and condemnation of serious violations of international law⁸³.

4.1. Divergent Reactions to the War of Aggression against Ukraine

Politically, the EU has attempted to rally LAC countries behind a common front of condemnation of Russian aggression, casting the EU and LAC countries as defenders of the international order and proponents of multilateralism.

But the response from LAC countries has been uneven. While most LAC countries have voted in favour of UN resolutions condemning Russia's actions, they have mostly avoided imposing sanctions on Moscow⁸⁴.

Regional powers such as Brazil and Mexico, motivated by long-standing commitments to non-alignment, have chosen to remain neutral. Brazilian President, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, for example, has called for peace, but insisted that sanctions are not a means to that end and criticised the continued supply of arms to Ukraine, which he argued, could prolong the conflict.

⁸¹R. Jenkins, "China's Belt and Road Initiative in Latin America: What has Changed?", *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, vol. 51(1), 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681026211047871>.

⁸² Zhang Yunbi, "China, Latin America trade ties to continue growing at high rate", 14 November 2024, <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202411/14/WS6735e3faa310f1265a1cd6a3.html>.

⁸³ News Ukraine (RBC Ukraine), "Latin American countries adopted a resolution condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine", 28 October 2024, <https://newsukraine.rbc.ua/news/latin-american-countries-adopted-a-resolution-1698460056.html>.

⁸⁴ United Nations General Assembly, *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 2 March 2022, Aggression against Ukraine*, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3965290?ln=en&v=pdf>.

Brazil countered with a commitment to dialogue and diplomacy as the best way to resolve conflicts, reflecting a more general stance across the continent that seeks to assert independence in foreign affairs⁸⁵.

Mexico's President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, echoed these ideas, suggesting that Mexico wouldn't participate in military commitments or sanctions because it has always had a non-interventionist policy. This ambivalence also reflects broader regional trends towards independence in foreign policy and scepticism of Western narratives. The reluctance to confront Russia directly stems from long-held beliefs about sovereignty, an aversion to the idea of spheres of influence, and a long-standing reluctance to accept foreign interference.⁸⁶

4.2. EU's Diplomatic Efforts

Despite these different approaches, bilateral contacts are nevertheless maintained, with the EU keeping high-level dialogue in LAC through mechanisms such as the **EU-CELAC** summit. **The July 2023 Summit** was a unique opportunity to deepen political engagement between the two. In her remarks at the Summit, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen reiterated that LAC countries are key partners of the European Union:

“This EU-CELAC Summit felt like a new beginning between old friends. These are times of great geopolitical change and like-minded friends like the EU and Latin American and Caribbean partners need to get closer. This is what we are doing with our new Global Gateway Investment Agenda, under which we will invest more than €45 billion in the region. We want to bring benefits to local communities, and create value chains locally, in the region. This is the spirit of our partnership.”⁸⁷

This outreach strategy has increasingly involved face-to-face engagement with countries, as well as sub-regional groups such as Mercosur and the Central American Integration System (SICA), the latter allowing for more focused diplomatic engagement in the geopolitical uncertainties disclosed by the war of aggression against Ukraine.

⁸⁵Euronews, “*The world needs tranquillity: Ukraine urged to give up Crimea by Brazil’s Lula*”, 8 April 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/2023/04/07/the-world-needs-tranquillity-ukraine-urged-to-give-up-crimea-by-brazils-lula>.

⁸⁶Inquirer, “Mexico president slams US military support for Ukraine”, 3 October 2023, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1840272/mexico-president-slams-us-military-support-for-ukraine>.

⁸⁷European Commission, “EU-CELAC Summit: towards a closer, stronger and renewed partnership between both region”, 18 July 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_3929.

The EU's diplomatic efforts are an expression of recognition of the unique intentions and interests in LAC, and a recognition that increased cooperation does not mean undermining any nation's foreign policy aspirations.

4.3. Economic Aspects: Trade, Investment, and the Effects of Sanctions

In order to better understand the economic relationship between the EU and LAC, several visualisations have been produced. These figures highlight the main dynamics of trade and investment over the last decade, with a particular focus on changes following the war of aggression in Ukraine.



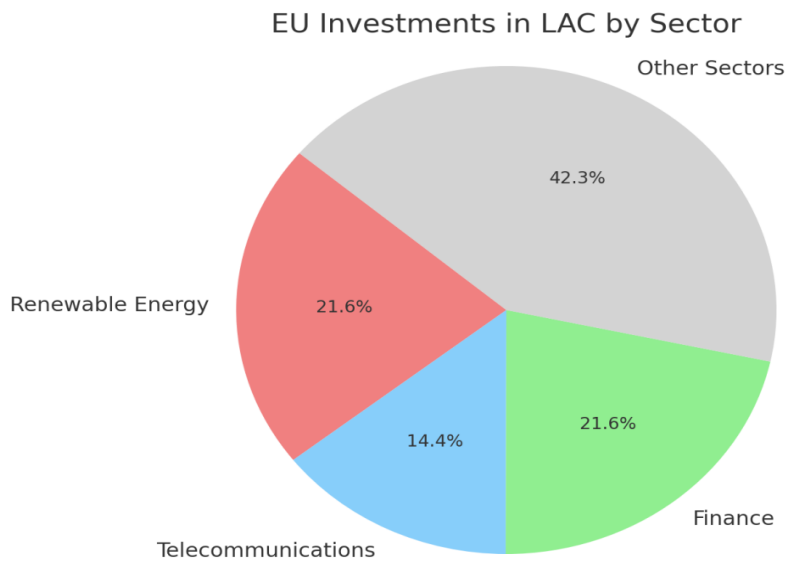
Increase in trade value between EU and LAC from €250 billion in 2013 to €369 billion in 2022.

Source: Author's conception from the data available for every LAC country from the European Commission dedicated online page, https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region_en.

The EU remains an important economic partner for LAC and is consistently one of the largest investors in the region, attracting significant investment in key areas such as renewable energy, technology, telecommunications and finance⁸⁸.

⁸⁸Grieger Gisela, *EU trade with Latin America and the Caribbean*, European Parliamentary Research Service, Brussels, European Union, 2023, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU\(2023\)751413](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU(2023)751413), chapters dedicated on FDI in the region of LAC.

Figure 5 EU Investments in LAC by Sector



Distribution of EU Investments across Sectors such as Renewable Energy, Telecommunications, Finance, etc.

Source: Author's conception based on data from the European Commission dedicated online page,

https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region_en.

Economic relations have been greatly strengthened by major trade deals. For example, the trade EU-LAC reached €369 billion in 2022, an increase of 66% compared to volumes between 2013 and 2022, proving that the two regions are trading in an integrate way, despite being affected by the global economy. EU investments have supported around 2.75 million jobs in the LAC region, and over 1 million jobs in the EU are also attributed to exports to LAC. Trade with the Mercosur countries, worth €144.5 billion in 2022, has always been at the forefront of economic relations between the EU and the LAC and negotiations to sign an agreement between the EU and the Mercosur bloc have been driven by a growing interest in diversifying supply chains, especially following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.⁸⁹

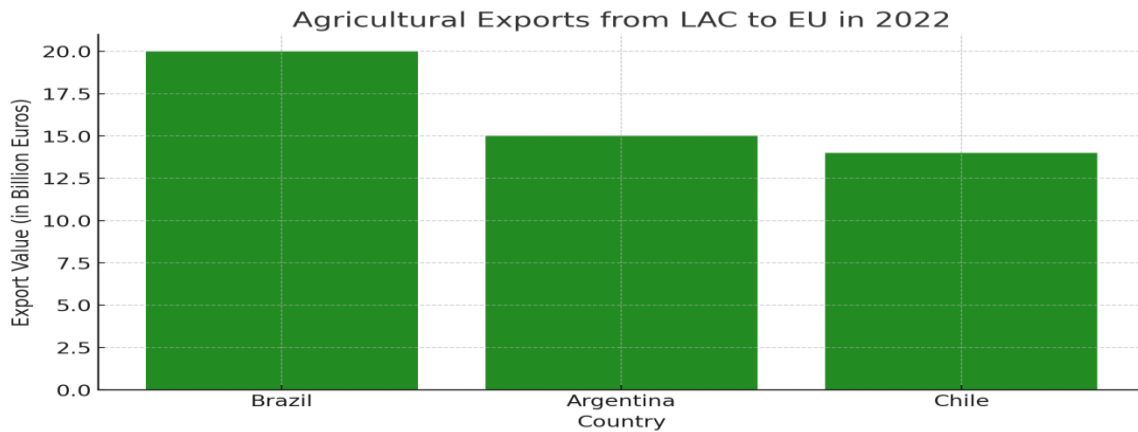
4.4. Mitigating Vulnerabilities in the Supply Chain

It was also the economic fallout from the conflict in Ukraine, which exposed sources of vulnerability in global supply chains and prompted the EU and LAC countries to reflect on their timely trade dependencies. For example, rising global energy prices and inflation due to disruptions in Russian gas supplies led to rising commodity prices across LAC, with agriculture

⁸⁹ The European External Action Service, *Strengthening a common EU-LAC trade and investment agenda*, 24.09.2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/latin-america-and-caribbean_en; for extensive information see https://www.eeas.europa.eu/latin-america-caribbean/eu-lac-trade-investment_en.

- an important sector for the region - being the most affected. In 2022, the EU imports of agricultural products from LAC amounted to around €39 billion, with Brazil, Argentina and Chile as the main exporters⁹⁰.

Figure 6 Agricultural exports from LAC to the EU (2022)



Agricultural export values from Brazil, Argentina, and Chile to the EU.

Source: Author’s conception based on data from the European Commission dedicated online page, https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region_en.

Under the Global Gateway initiative, the European Union has pledged to mobilise more than €45 billion in investment for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean by 2027⁹¹. This funding is intended to strengthen coordination in industries such as clean energy, key commodities, healthcare and education. The investments will aim to boost cooperation on issues that affect both regions, such as climate change, global health challenges and sustainable infrastructure connectivity.

*“I [European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, my note] am pleased to announce that Team Europe will invest over €45 billion in Latin America and the Caribbean until 2027 via our programme Global Gateway. We shaped a high-quality investment agenda together, to the benefit of both our regions”.*⁹²

The EU’s investments aim to build long-term resilience in the economies of LAC countries to promote sustainable development and mitigate external shocks. This is in line with the EU’s broader strategic objectives to promote stability and prosperity in its partner regions.

⁹⁰European Commission, *Agri-Food Trade Statistical Factsheet, European Union - Latin American Countries*, 15.04.2024, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/agrifood-latin-american-countries_en.pdf, p. 6.

⁹¹European Commission, 17 July 2024, “Opening speech by President von der Leyen at the EU-LAC 2023 Business Round Table”, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_23_3888.

⁹²European Commission, 17 July 2024, “Opening speech by President von der Leyen at the EU-LAC 2023 Business Round Table”, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_23_3888.

4.5. Security concerns & strategic alignments

The conflict in Ukraine has reaffirmed the importance of global security partnerships and has indirectly altered the security balance between the EU and LAC. The interests of the EU and the LAC region converge when it comes to stability, the defence of democratic governance, and the fight against transnational security threats such as organised crime and climate migration. However, divergent responses to the war of aggression in Ukraine highlight the difficulty of articulating a common security agenda.

The EU has expanded its diplomatic outreach to LAC countries, seeking to integrate them into European security agenda, particularly through multilateral fora such as CELAC. More generally, many LAC countries, due to their geographical distance from the European theatre and their focus on domestic priorities, have been reluctant to commit to a broader stance of security cooperation that would align them with the EU's position on the crisis in Ukraine. In many cases, LAC countries have adopted a “distant engagement” approach to the military conflict in Ukraine, supporting humanitarian aid to Ukraine, but avoiding direct support for military aid or sanctions against Russia.

4.6. Collaboration in Non-Traditional Security Areas

Despite this reluctance, the EU and LAC have identified areas of common security interest. Issues like food security, which has been exacerbated by the disruption of Ukrainian and Russian fertilizer and grain exports, have been the subject of bi-regional cooperation. To counter the impact of global disruptions, the EU has engaged closely with LAC countries to support agricultural production and address supply chain vulnerabilities, as well as developing new trade routes. Argentine Foreign Minister Santiago Cafiero said that the food security of their peoples must come first, and that they are ready to collaborate with partners, including the EU, to deal with the disruptions that global disputes bring with it and seek a viable chain of supply⁹³. Moreover, the EU's support for humanitarian assistance and contributions to socio-economic stability in LAC echo this joint vision, contributing to their joint commitment towards a human security agenda.

⁹³Nature News, “EU, Argentina to discuss *safe, fair* food supply chains”, 28 October 2022, <https://naturenews.africa/eu-argentina-to-discuss-safe-fair-food-supply-chains/>.

5. The Way Forward: Deeper Cooperation. Conclusions

Despite the many challenges, LAC countries may have realised that the war of aggression against Ukraine represents a revival of EU-LAC cooperation. International changes in the balance of power have forced these two regions to create new counterbalances by diversifying ties and building more resilient international cooperation mechanism.

For the EU, LAC is a natural partner with strategic natural resources essential for the transition to a green economy, and a significant political influence in international institutions such as the United Nations. In return, European development aid and investment opportunities help LAC countries find alternative development paths to Chinese aid.

Politicians in Europe and LAC have embarked on a process of strategic partnership to manage the global changes from secure trade relations, green and digital transitions to security and democratic values. As the EU-LAC diplomatic manoeuvres in the face of the war of aggression in Ukraine show, their interactions are becoming increasingly diverse and can no longer be confined to a few monolithic categories. **The 2023 EU-CELAC Summit was a positive step forward in this regard, and both sides are ready to reengage, deepen ties and face common challenges together.**

Through flexible and inclusive engagement strategies, the EU can strengthen its partnerships in LAC to mutual benefit and contribute to global stability. **The current turmoil caused on all fronts by the war of aggression in Ukraine gives a new geo-strategic importance to the EU-LAC cooperation. Deep global and cultural roots, developed over hundreds of years, have been renewed over the last two decades both economically and in terms of people-to-people exchanges.**

The war of aggression against Ukraine has highlighted the risk of the EU being held *hostage* to Russia through its energy supplies. LAC could play a crucial role in breaking this dependency. The economic opportunities are mutual; increased bilateral trade and strategic investments in sectors such as telecommunications, financial services, and renewable energy may boost growth in both regions.

On the other hand, the conclusion and application of treaties, such as the EU-MERCOSUR Treaty, can enhance mutual benefits and create a favourable environment for sustainable development.

A strategy of political alignment is needed. The different reactions of the LAC countries to the war of aggression in Ukraine, characterised by an orientation towards non-alignment and independent foreign policy, show the need for a deepened dialogue. Respect for sovereignty

and regional perspectives is essential, not only to dispel misunderstandings, but also to build sound political cooperation between Europe and LAC. Global competition, especially with China (which has extended its influence to LAC), underlines the need for the EU to come up with better alternatives.

Crises such as global warming, food security and migration are too substantial for one-size-fits-all type of solution. The military conflict in Ukraine has disrupted global supply chains, damaging agriculture and food security in LAC. Cooperation between the EU and LAC in these areas is essential if the people in both regions are to be resilient and prosperous.

With this in mind, it is realistic to take full account of regional diversity and to adapt cooperation strategies to the specific needs of each LAC country. This will make the partnership more effective. By recognizing and capitalising on this diversity, the EU-LAC partnership can establish a solid foundation to face current and future challenges. The EU countries need to broaden their relationships with LAC countries in the current geopolitical context.

The EU's partnership with LAC can be consolidated to the benefit of both regions as they face global challenges and embrace prospects for shared development with mutual benefits: good jobs for growing numbers of workers; a decent life for young people in currently marginalized communities who are coming of age. These regions can make a major contribution to global stability, the promotion of democratic values and the joint pursuit of sustainable development goals.

The EU-LAC partnership can show that with solidarity and joint efforts, today's world crisis are resolvable problems. Nor is it the last possibility a very significant one for the welfare of LAC peoples: that the EU might and could serve as a reference - or even be a model of regional integration for themselves. But, still, we are sure that this is not a problem to be solved in *nuestros tiempos*. This remains a question to be settled by further research and debate.

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