The 2018 Ibero-American summit

The Ibero-American Summit of heads of state or government is a unique multilateral forum of 22 countries from Latin America and Europe sharing a common history, values, culture and languages. Two EU Member States – Spain and Portugal – are full members of the summit, and four others are associated observers. The 26th summit was held in Guatemala in November 2018, with a focus on establishing a common road map towards implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

The 26th Ibero-American summit

On 15 and 16 November 2018, the 26th Ibero-American summit was held in La Antigua Guatemala (Guatemala) under the motto ‘A thriving, inclusive and sustainable Ibero-America’, with the participation of 19 Latin American countries plus Spain, Portugal and Andorra. Fifteen heads of state or government attended the summit, plus vice-presidents and foreign ministers, representing some 670 million citizens on both sides of the Atlantic. The final declaration featured the following points:

- strengthening the Ibero-American joint action towards the implementation of Agenda 2030;
- deepening dialogue and establishing cooperation mechanisms with the EU to enable new alliances to achieve Agenda 2030 and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- moving towards a common Ibero-American migration agenda and promoting actions to facilitate the respect of the principles, objectives and commitments of the UN Global Compact for Migration;
- fighting violence against women, committing to gender equality and ending women’s discrimination at work;
- supporting the action plan to implement the rights of indigenous peoples and strengthening the permanent dialogue and concertation mechanisms of indigenous peoples and afro-descendants;
- promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities;
- supporting academic mobility by strengthening the Ibero-American framework to this effect;
- promoting an Ibero-American innovation strategy;
- recognising the contribution of the laboratories of social innovation in the production of innovative solutions for the fulfilment of Agenda 2030;
- contributing to the achievement of the Paris Agreement goals on climate change.

The summit also adopted the Guatemala Resolution and the Guatemala Action Programme, detailing the areas of cooperation, as well as 20 special communiqués proposed by the member states, including on migration and refuge, South-South cooperation, climate change and natural disasters, the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, and decent work. A second four-year action plan for Ibero-American cooperation (PACCI) was approved for the 2019-2022 period.

Also during the XXVI summit, the Ibero-American General Secretariat presented:

- the Ibero-American Observatory for sustainable development and climate change, and its first La Rábida-Huelva report on climate change and sustainable development in Ibero-America;
- the Ibero-American Programme on the rights of persons with disability, which is the only regional programme on disability in the world;
- mobility grants for students, teachers and researchers worth US$2 million, with priority for women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and the launch of the Ibero-America Campus web portal offering mobility opportunities for students, researchers and workers;
- a report on ‘A Decade of South-South Cooperation in Ibero-America’, analysing over 7 000 projects.

Among the other events related to the summit were the first Ibero-American forum of national mechanisms on the implementation of Agenda 2030; a meeting of Ibero-American businessmen and businesswomen, where they agreed for the first time to work towards Agenda 2030; and a meeting of Ibero-American think-tanks to discuss South-South cooperation and its importance for sustainable development.
The next Ibero-American summit will be held in Andorra in 2020. This European country has assumed the pro tempore presidency of the Ibero-American Conference for the next two years.

Why this summit was so important
The 2018 summit in La Antigua Guatemala was important, because, among other things:
1) The continuity of Ibero-American summits represents a clear commitment to multilateralism against the current background of growing isolationism and decline of pluralism in the international arena. The Guatemala summit has offered a renewed opportunity to advance with regard to this commitment;
2) The summit has compensated for the stalling of the EU-CELAC strategic bi-regional alliance due to the temporary suspension of the EU-CELAC summits, with Spain and Portugal acting as a link between both sides;
3) The Guatemala summit was the first Ibero-American summit with a global agenda focused on the future, where participant countries discussed and explored ways to reach the UN SDGs in order to achieve 'a thriving, inclusive and sustainable Ibero-America'. The summit served to chart a common road map towards achieving Agenda 2030.

The Ibero-American cooperation system
The Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government is the highest authority of the Ibero-American Conference, and meets every two years. The heads of state or government of the 22 member countries are invited to participate in these summits, which have been held uninterrupted for nearly three decades without any of the members having ever been expelled or vetoed. The pro tempore secretariat, provided by the country hosting the current summit, coordinates the activities, subject matter and agenda, as well as the sectoral ministerial meetings. The Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) is the permanent body that provides institutional, technical and administrative support to the conference, working closely with the pro tempore secretariat in the preparation of summits, and also coordinating the different agencies of the Ibero-American Conference with the other organs of the Ibero-American cooperation system.

The political agreements and commitments adopted by the Ibero-American heads of state or government at summits are translated into concrete actions through a unique cooperation model, with a wide and inclusive regional scope and a horizontal and flexible design; this allows countries to participate on a voluntary basis and according to their national priorities. The main instruments of Ibero-American cooperation are its programmes, initiatives and projects, focused mainly on three priority areas: knowledge, culture and social cohesion. In 2015-2016, this cooperation mobilised over €411 million.

The EU and the Ibero-American Summit
Two Member States of the European Union – Spain and Portugal – are also full members of the Ibero-American Conference and participate in the summits. Other EU Member States – Belgium, France, Italy and The Netherlands – have associated observer status. The initiative to hold permanent dialogue at the highest level between Latin American and Caribbean countries and the EU, which would evolve into the EU-LAC and later into the EU-CELAC summits, was first proposed by Spain at the 1996 Ibero-American summit.

Since they became biennial in 2014, Ibero-American summits are usually held in the years before and after EU-CELAC summits, so that they can help provide continuity and improve relations between the two sides, as well as complement the EU-CELAC partnership. Moreover, institutional representatives from the Ibero-American conference and the EU are increasingly present at each other’s meetings. Thus, the MEP and Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat) Co-President, Ramón Jáuregui, (S&D, Spain) was invited to participate as an observer in the 2018 Ibero-American summit, while Ibero-American Secretary General, Rebeca Grynspan, attended the EU-CELAC meetings of foreign ministers in July 2018 (at which Agenda 2030 was a major topic, with a focus on consolidating multilateralism and strengthening cooperation in global fora), and in March 2017, Rebecca Grynspan also attended both 2017 EuroLat plenaries. This implies greater recognition of the role played by the European Parliament and EuroLat in the Ibero-American context, and by the Ibero-American Conference in EU-CELAC relations.