The Road to 2023: A qualitative leap in EU-LAC relations

The partnership between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) rests on a solid foundation of shared values, like-mindedness and cooperation. This partnership needs to be reinvigorated and recast in light of the new geopolitical reality, taking account of the twin transitions (green and digital), the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing rise of Chinese influence, and the fallout from the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

The EU needs to strengthen relations with a region that can be a strategic ally in the pursuit of its values and interests, a key partner in multilateral fora to address global challenges, and an important trade and investment partner. Further strengthening people-to-people ties should be an important part of this endeavour.

Now is the time for the EU to engage more strategically and effectively, mobilising its policies, instruments and resources in a coordinated way and working with all Member States in a Team Europe approach.

The Road to 2023 sets out the path for such a qualitative leap, anchoring the EU’s relations with the region in the new geopolitical reality. Building on and operationalising the 2019 Communication “European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean: joining forces for a common future”, it outlines a forward-looking, substantive and positive agenda for EU-LAC relations and prepares the ground for a fully-fledged EU-(CE) LAC Summit in the second semester of 2023. It identifies a number of milestones and priorities under the Global Gateway complemented by a comprehensive political strategy along four lines of action and two cross cutting priorities:

I. Commit to high-level engagement and take forward political dialogues: High-level engagement and visits by the Presidents of the Council and the Commission, the HRVP, Members of the Commission, EP, and EU MS Ministers are a visible expression of the Union’s commitment to LAC, providing unique opportunities for dialogue and for passing political messages, often setting in motion positive actions and dynamics. They give a human face to our relations, provide media opportunities and highlight the relationship to the wider public. Addressing the wide-ranging consequences of Russia’s aggression of Ukraine will remain essential for the EU’s engagement with the region.

II. Strengthen and complete the network of trade and association agreements: The EU has negotiated association, trade or framework agreements or MoUs with most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. These agreements provide a framework for political and sectoral cooperation, trade and sustainable development. Trade agreements open up opportunities for EU business in a market of over a billion people and help ensure market share in the face of competition from China in particular. The EU should intensify its efforts as well as engagement with partner countries to make progress and finalise the pending agreements, while helping these partners to commit to and implement ambitious green agendas.

III. Build political alliances/partnerships around priority areas, taking into consideration the external aspects of EU policies, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. With the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe, the EU has allocated EUR 3.4 billion for cooperation with LAC for 2021-2027. This allocation will be complemented by contributions from EU Member States and European development finance institutions, notably through Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs), loans, and the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+). Five priority areas are proposed, which should be flanked by regular political dialogue at Ministerial level and championed by different Members of the College and EU Member States:

1. Green Transitions: Regional and country TEIs (including Amazon), EU support to disaster preparedness/emergency response to natural disasters, EU-LAC Environment
Ministerial (tbc), the Global Alliance for Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency and the LAC Circular Economy Coalition, Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Green Alliances, critical raw materials…

2. **Digital Transformation**: EU-LAC Digital Alliance, as a Global Gateway flagship initiative including: BELLA expansion; Copernicus data centre; regional digital dialogue, cybersecurity, Digital Accelerator for private sector, digital innovation and growth…

3. **Sustainable and inclusive economy**: country TEIs, support to implementation of EU trade agreements (including on trade and sustainable development), Global Green Bonds Initiative (GGBI), Business Forum/Summit, research & innovation, policy and regulatory reforms …

4. **Human Development**: Health/Vaccines, Social cohesion/addressing inequalities (regional TEI), education & skills, youth, gender, EUROSOCIAL4, Erasmus+, bi-regional youth forum, migration…

5. **Internal security, fight against transnational and organised crime**: Regional TEI on Security and Justice, including cooperation on drugs policy, CLASI, visit of LA Ministers of Justice, AMERIPOL…

IV. **Promote peace, democracy and human rights; humanitarian assistance**: The EU will continue to support peaceful and democratic solutions in LAC, e.g. to the peace process in Colombia or the International Contact Group on Venezuela as well as Election Observation Missions (EOMs). Other key initiatives include the signature of CSDP Framework Participation Agreements with LAC countries, humanitarian assistance, addressing democratic backsliding and human rights’ challenges including women’s rights, minority rights, environmental rights, freedom of assembly and expression, and shrinking humanitarian and civil society space. The humanitarian-peace-development nexus will remain at the core of the EU’s engagement. The EU will continue to engage on forced displacement/migration, with a focus on vulnerable people on the move.

V. **Partner at the multilateral level**: The EU Member States and LAC countries together represent nearly a third of the UN membership. In the face of increased competition for votes in multilateral bodies and challenges to the very foundations of the rules-based international order, it is in the EU’s interest to step up outreach and coordination in multilateral fora, including to deliver on a WTO reform, and in negotiation of multilateral agreements.

*Increase the visibility of the partnership through strategic communication and public diplomacy, including cultural diplomacy*: Through an integrated approach to strategic communication and public diplomacy, the EU will provide a long-term, positive narrative for citizens and different audiences to understand the importance of the EU-LAC partnership. The aim would be to enhance the EU profile and brand as well as raise awareness of the importance of working in partnership. It should focus on building strong networks at all levels of society so that different actors can carry the EU’s message and talk about the EU as a trusted partner. At the same time, special efforts will be deployed to counter disinformation and foreign information manipulation.