Assessing the Value and Potential of the Bi-Regional Relationship Between Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, a Few Months Ahead of the 2025 CELAC-EU Summit

Report of the EU-LAC Think Tanks Meeting 2025



Written by Ida Maria Daugaard, Marie Kolling, Stine Krøjier, David Lyndorff Paris, Jacobo Ramirez, Helene Risør, and Georg Wink.

Reviewed by the EU-LAC International Foundation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The EU-LAC Foundation, in cooperation with Carolina Foundation, the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), the University of Copenhagen, the Jacques Delors Institute, the IE University and the Embassy of Colombia in Denmark, convened a two-day dialogue among representatives of Think Tanks in early September 2025 in the context of the Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in Copenhagen. The Meeting gathered around 20 researchers from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), as well as from Europe (EU), alongside high-level authorities and representatives from international organisations, with the objective to generate analyses and proposals towards the preparation of the CELAC-EU Summit[1] of States and Governments to be held in Santa Marta, Colombia, on 9 and 10 November 2025. Participants, all with recognised expertise in bi-regional relations, discussed key challenges and opportunities for EU–LAC cooperation.

Participants agreed that, in the current global context, where both the rules-based trade order and the broader rules-based international order face increasing pressure, the EU and CELAC should reaffirm their commitment to these frameworks. It is essential to support, and at the same time strengthen and transform international organisations in a moment in which we are witnessing moves to weaken them. The CELAC-EU Summit was called upon to restore confidence in international cooperation as a tool to address existential global challenges such as climate change. More than the previous Summit held in July 2023 in Brussels, the November 2025 Summit should deliver tangible outcomes and secure media visibility to demonstrate the relevance of the partnership. With politics regaining centrality in global affairs, the upcoming Summit will be a crucial opportunity to strengthen EU–LAC ties and reaffirm shared commitments to multilateralism.

The discussions of the Meeting, structured into four thematic sessions, identified three overarching strategic goals: 1) Changing the narrative; 2) Changing the relations; 3) Advancing concrete proposals.



1 For more information on the work of the EU-LAC International Foundation towards the CELAC-EU Summit 2025, please visit: https://eulacfoundation.org/en/iv-celac-eu-summit-2025.

1. Changing the Narrative

Participants stressed the importance of placing mutual solidarity at the core of EU–LAC strategic partnership. This shift responds to the growing crisis and conceptual weakening of multilateralism and strategic autonomy. The enhanced defence of universal human rights and the rule of law should remain central. Solidarity also requires commitment to people and victims of violations of rights, with a particular focus on "young voices" of emerging social leaders, who face mounting pressure and threats. Also, engagement should widen participation to include new grassroots actors. To make solidarity compatible with autonomy and sovereignty, controversial topics (e.g., Gaza, Venezuela, Ukraine) should be openly addressed, despite electoral sensitivities. Leading by example requires confronting these issues directly. Cooperation should integrate LAC perspectives and pay particular attention to subregional dynamics (e.g., the Caribbean and Central America) and the role of small states, rather than treating LAC only as part of the "Global South" bloc. Reviving the concept of "development" is essential. This discourse, recently dominated by China, should be reconnected to the green transition. Debate should critically assess the impacts of transnational corporations on environmental and human rights while also showcasing positive examples of responsible practice.

2. Deepening the Relations

Under the principle of realism, participants urged both sides to ask fundamental questions: Is the EU still a privileged partner for LAC? Can the EU substitute for the United States in key areas? Why do some LAC countries prefer alternative partners, such as China? Rather than merely adapting to the gaps left by the United States, the EU should consider how to actively fill these gaps through concrete strategies. **Economic Relations:** Current economic relations underperform and should be improved through effective measures. LAC companies would also benefit from increased EU technical assistance in accessing European markets. To strengthen bi-regional partnerships, the EU–Mercosur agreement was emphasised as a matter of strategic geopolitical importance, extending far beyond economic dimensions and meriting central attention in summit discussions. **Political Relations:** New transversal themes should be identified to engage diverse partners, including United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) member Mexico and Caribbean states. Shared concerns such as narcotrafficking and social inequality offer potential entry points for cooperation.

3. Advancing Concrete Proposals

Several proposals recurred across discussions: A strong investment in media presence is critical to promote the CELAC-EU Summit and communicate the partnership's relevance "for the common good". Visibility is also a key element in resisting the weakening of the multilateral system. The EU's Global Gateway, which currently offers the same approach (green transition, digital transition, socio-economic transition) to the regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean, should be revised for the specific situation, interests and needs of LAC. A tailored agenda should connect to a renewed development narrative that integrates rights-based sustainable development, justice, education, care and the reduction of organised crime into the bi-regional framework.

The search for shared values in a shifting world order must also take differences seriously, including divergences between the EU and LAC, and between LAC and other regions such as Africa. Mutual misunderstandings need to be explicitly addressed to avoid undermining dialogue. "Conocimiento" (knowledge) and "confianza" (confidence) should be added to the existing three "Cs" (coordination, cooperation, collaboration) that have thus far defined bi-regional relations. Scientific knowledge—particularly regarding the links between extractivism, human rights, and green transition—should inform policy debates. Traditional values such as due diligence, legal security, and citizenship should be reaffirmed as guiding principles of cooperation. Security cooperation has to confront new digital threats, including

online disinformation that undermines decision-making processes. Parallel efforts should support capacity building in digital transition and strengthen independent journalism.

Special attention should be given to vulnerable states facing human rights and humanitarian crises as well as climate impacts, such as Haiti. The gender dimension of social vulnerability should also be explicitly integrated into the EU–LAC agenda. Another central question is whether the EU is able and willing to fill the gap left by the reduction of U.S. development assistance (USAID). If so, this requires a coherent strategy and concrete commitments. Examples such as transitional justice were highlighted as potential paradigms for shared multilateral values and should be promoted as models for cooperation. Constructive dialogue was encouraged to help confront structural challenges such as human mobility (linked to demographic change and brain drain), drug trafficking, and money laundering.

The dialogue highlighted urgent priorities for EU–LAC cooperation. To remain relevant in a rapidly changing global order, both regions need to:

- Place solidarity and human rights at the centre of cooperation.
- Address difficult political issues with openness, coherent principles as well as clear and transparent rules.
- Adapt economic and political strategies to realistically engage EU and LAC partners.
- Invest in visibility and communication to demonstrate the value of bi-regional relations.
- Tailor the Global Gateway to LAC's specific needs and opportunities.
- Incorporate scientific knowledge, digital security, and independent journalism into the agenda.
- Prioritise vulnerable states and integrate gender-sensitive approaches.
- Explore the EU's capacity to fill the development gap left by the United States.

The November 2025 CELAC-EU Summit should deliver concrete outcomes, supported by effective communication strategies and involving civil society, to reaffirm multilateralism and establish the partnership as a cornerstone of global governance.

BACKGROUND

On 1 and 2 September 2025, the EU-LAC International Foundation, in partnership with the Carolina Foundation, the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), the University of Copenhagen, the Jacques Delors Institute, the IE University and the Embassy of Colombia in Denmark, convened representatives of European, Latin American and Caribbean research centres for a dialogue entitled 'Assessing the Value and Potential of the bi-regional Relationship between Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean – few Months ahead of the CELAC-EU Summit 2025'. The face-to-face meeting was held at the Embassy of Colombia in Denmark and at the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). The purposes of this meeting were:

- Frank exchange of ideas aimed at generating "out of the box" discussions among analysts and intellectuals from both regions with the goal of bringing fresh impulses and innovative ideas to the bi-regional agenda;
- Assess the state of play in three key areas of bi-regional cooperation featuring high on the EU-CELAC Summit agenda in 2023 and, potentially, in 2025;
- Open deliberation on the steps required for bi-regional relations to achieve their full potential vis-à-vis the current global context marked by rising tensions and uncertainties and narratives that question multilateralism and international law;
- Generation of recommendations towards decision-makers preparing for the CELAC-EU Summit that will take place in Colombia in November 2025.

PARTICIPANTS, STRUCTURE AND FORMAT

The meeting was attended by representatives of universities, research centres, think tanks and foundations from LAC and the EU. All have outstanding expertise in the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean, and bi-regional relations. From the LAC region, the Meeting was attended by participants from: Centro de Estudios de Derechos, Justicia y Sociedad (DeJuSticia), Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales, Global Peace Foundation/Fundación Esquipulas, International Center for Political and Social Studies (CIEPS), Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Tecnológico de Monterrey, and Universidad de la Habana. On the European side, the event was attended by representatives from: Carolina Foundation, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), European Centre for International Political Economy (ECIPE), IE University, Nova University of Lisbon, Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), Portuguese Institute of International Relations (IPRI-NOVA), Real Instituto Elcano, University of Copenhagen, University of Oslo, University of Salamanca, and University of Warsaw. In addition, representatives of CAF Development Bank for Latin America and the Caribbean as well as Suffolk University in the U.S. contributed to the Meeting's discussions.

The meeting was also attended by representatives the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Colombian Pro Tempore Presidency of CELAC.

Among high-level political representatives, the meeting included interventions by Lotte Machon – State Secretary for Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Denmark and Enrico Letta, President of the Jacques Delors Institute, Dean of the IE School of Politics, Economics, and Global Affairs at IE University and former Prime Minister of Italy.

Together with collaborators from the co-organising institutions and representatives of EU-LAC International Foundation, 34 participants attended the event.

The meeting was held face-to-face for two days, divided into an inaugural dialogue, four thematic sessions, summaries presented by the rapporteurs of each thematic session, final reflections and recommendations.[2]



2 Further information on the concept note and the agenda is available at the following link: https://eulacfoundation.org/en/eu-lac-think-tanks-meeting

MAIN TAKE AWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SESSIONS

Dialogue: Lifting the Potential of Economic Cooperation between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Participants stressed the urgency to move in the EU-LAC cooperation from statements to results and expressed optimism due to the timely momentum. Lotte Machon, State Secretary for Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Denmark, appealed to defending a rule based democratic world order and reminded that Europe must engage in a less teaching and more listening approach in the dialogue with LAC, going beyond trade interests and building stronger political alliances. She expressed all possible support for Brazil's role in climate change mitigation politics, especially regarding COP30, and defined the core areas for cooperation as Green Transition, Digitalisation, Infrastructure, and Supply Chains Security, particularly regarding critical minerals.

Enrico Letta, President of the Jacques Delors Institute Dean of the IE School of Politics, Economics, and Global Affairs at IE University and former Prime Minister of Italy, stressed the single market as the European Union's greatest achievement, central both to European integration and to the EU's global role. It gives the European Commission international visibility, enabling it to engage as a key actor with powers such as the United States and China. Beyond economics, the single market demonstrates how integration at national and regional levels strengthens Europe's influence abroad, particularly in relations with Latin America and the Caribbean. Letta highlighted global challenges to the rules-based international order, noting that principles once taken for granted—decisions based on law rather than power—are now contested. This context underscores the need for strong international organizations, especially the United Nations, which faces an unprecedented crisis. The selection process of the next UN Secretary-General will be crucial for revitalising multilateralism.

For EU–LAC relations, trade agreements such as EU-Mercosur, EU-Mexico and EU-Caribbean were identified as priorities, alongside cooperation on sustainability and climate change. The Green Deal should be relaunched with global partnerships at its core. Enrico Letta cautioned against reducing cooperation to economics alone, stressing that it must remain about people, values, and politics. With politics regaining centrality in global affairs, the upcoming Santa Marta Summit was framed as a historic opportunity to strengthen EU–LAC ties and reaffirm shared commitments to multilateralism.

After these interventions, researchers offered short analyses in which they highlighted the need to address, in the context of democratic backslides, the crisis of multilateralism, economic geopolitics (geoeconomics), and strategic autonomy across the Atlantic. Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) feel pressure to choose allies, similar to a "new cold war," and expects the European Union (EU) to fill the gap left by the US, leading through example in a pragmatic but not complacent way. Researchers recommended a pragmatic approach, emphasising the need for critical awareness of both the differences and commonalities between and within regions. The reciprocal economic relations face challenges regarding established high standards, complex regulations and the lack of multilateral funds. Therefore, it is important to look closely at areas where collaboration succeeds and how Latin American 'unicorn' examples can be enhanced.

Session 1 | Stock taking of the bi-regional cooperation advanced since 2023 in trade and investments to boost growth, competitiveness, productivity and job creation



The overall objective of this session was to examine **progress** in bi-regional cooperation between the EU and LAC in trade and investment. Special attention was given to the impact of elements from the 2023 EU–CELAC Summit Declaration and the EU-CELAC Roadmap 2023-2025. **Guiding question** were: How do participants assess the Global Gateway Investment Agenda (GGIA)? What is the impact of the European Green Deal (EGD) regarding new trade opportunities and environmental and labour regulations in LAC? What is the scope and impact EU-Mercosur agreement under ratification? What challenges exist in relation to these?

Discussions addressed four key dimensions:

1. Evolving geopolitical dynamics and their implications for trade and investment;
2. Latin America's role in the green and digital transitions, focusing on critical resources and renewable energy;
3. Caribbean structural vulnerabilities and financing needs;
4. Pathways to strengthen the EU–LAC partnership, including value-chain diversification and institutional coordination.

With respect to **advances in bi-regional cooperation**, participants noted several significant advances in the last two years: The Global Gateway Investment Agenda (GGIA) has created opportunities for joint investments in renewable energy, biodiversity, digital infrastructure, and technology transfer. The conclusion of the EU–Mercosur Agreement after 25 years of negotiations was recognised as an important milestone for bi-regional economic integration. There is growing interest in urban governance partnerships and the potential for the European Investment Bank to support sustainable urban development and infrastructure projects.

Regarding **key challenges** identified, despite these advances, participants highlighted several persistent challenges: Geopolitical shifts imply the growing influence of other global actors, particularly China and the United States. This is reshaping trade, investment, and technological dynamics in the region. Strategic ambiguity raises concerns about the need for the EU to define a clearer long-term vision for its engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean. Fragmentation among LAC institutions and countries affects regional coordination and constrains the ability to leverage collective bargaining power and negotiate effectively.

Considering the **Caribbean's particular structural vulnerabilities**, researchers pointed to the heavy dependence on tourism and limited fiscal space, high debt burdens hindering economic growth and the severe exposure to climate change impacts and inadequate adaptation financing. Challenges also in-

clude implementing commitments under existing EU agreements, as well as implementation gaps that limit progress on technology transfer, e-commerce integration, and cultural cooperation, which restricts the potential for innovation-driven partnerships. Finally, regulatory asymmetries result in difficulties in complying with European Green Deal (EGD) standards and sustainability-related requirements, particularly for smaller and climate-vulnerable economies.

Regarding **recommendations and proposals**, in preparation for the upcoming CELAC–EU Summit in Santa Marta, participants proposed several recommendations: Accelerate the deployment of the GGIA by improving financing mechanisms and institutional coordination; strengthen technology transfer, digital transformation, and capacity-building initiatives to enable effective participation in sustainable value chains; support production diversification and develop regional value chains to reduce dependence on raw material exports and enhance competitiveness; expand intra-regional trade and encourage deeper integration within LAC to improve collective bargaining power; increase the presence and role of the European Investment Bank in supporting infrastructure, energy transition, and climate adaptation measures; address the specific needs of the Caribbean by prioritizing adaptation financing, debt relief strategies, and sustainable economic diversification.

As **final reflections**, participants emphasised that Latin America and the Caribbean are strategically important for Europe's green, digital, and trade ambitions. However, achieving these objectives requires turning commitments into concrete actions and ensuring that cooperation frameworks balance sustainability, competitiveness, and inclusion. The session underscored the urgency of strengthening institutional coordination, diversifying value chains, and securing sustainable financing. Ahead of the CELAC–EU Summit, participants stressed the importance of translating shared priorities into tangible benefits for both regions while enhancing resilience in a rapidly evolving global order.

Session 2 | EU and LAC – joint initiatives in the promotion of multilateralism and a rules-based international order



In this session, the overall objective was to analyse how the commitments and actions set out in the 2023 EU-CELAC Summit Declaration and the EU-CELAC Roadmap 2023-2025 relate to strengthening **multilateralism** in favour of a more just, inclusive and effective international order. The debate focused on

three **guiding questions**: In what areas have both regions demonstrated leadership? How should multilateralism be understood and advanced in the current global context? How can EU–LAC cooperation strengthen both regions' roles as global leaders? The discussions revealed both significant opportunities for joint action and pressing challenges related to visibility, coherence, and global competition.

Regarding leadership and integration, from an institutional perspective, both the EU and LAC have pursued integration systems. Yet, participants noted that citizens often feel detached from these processes. While Latin America has faced political challenges, it has also achieved four decades of democratic progress and is currently the only region in the world free from interstate war. This peaceful record should be capitalised upon as a global asset. Speakers stressed that democracy and integration cannot remain abstract. Citizens – particularly youth – must be actively involved through civil society participation. Without this engagement, concepts such as multilateralism risk losing meaning and relevance. Both regions were urged to ensure that integration is not only institutional but also inclusive, visible, and citizen-centred.

Multilateralism was identified as an area in crisis but also as a space for renewal. The EU and LAC approach it from different vantage points. For the EU, multilateralism is part of its institutional identity, embedded in its foreign policy and self-conception. For LAC, multilateralism is more aspirational, a principle to join and strengthen as part of a broader international system. These differences complicate the possibility of joint leadership but do not preclude it. On the contrary, they create space for complementary roles. Both regions agreed on the need to redefine multilateralism so that it remains credible, adaptable, and relevant to current and future global challenges – including digital transformation and artificial intelligence.

The debate identified at least **seven priority areas** for EU-LAC cooperation:

1. **Environment and Climate Change:** Out of 35 initiatives agreed at the last EU–CELAC summit, nine focused on environmental cooperation. Climate action remains a promising field where both regions can demonstrate global leadership.
2. **Anti-Drug Trafficking and Citizen Security:** Another nine initiatives addressed anti-drug efforts. Organised crime and trafficking pose significant threats to stability and investment in LAC, while also affecting Europe. Proposed measures included a 'citizen security alliance,' greater EU–LAC collaboration on port security, and stronger links with European experiences in Rotterdam and Hamburg.
3. **Migration Governance:** Collaboration on human mobility remains minimal, largely due to EU internal divisions. Given the scale and complexity of migration flows, participants underlined the importance of placing this issue on the bi-regional agenda.
4. **Digital Cooperation and Artificial Intelligence:** The EU–LAC Digital Alliance was highlighted as a positive example of flexible and inclusive cooperation, growing from fewer than 20 to 25 members. Areas such as AI, supercomputing, privacy, and digital governance represent opportunities for joint leadership, particularly in protecting electoral integrity and democratic processes.
5. **Trade and Integration:** While the EU–MERCOSUR agreement remains politically sensitive, it was noted that EU trade agreements with LAC not only strengthen bi-regional links but also encourage intra-LAC cooperation by aligning standards. This, in turn, could drive greater regional integration.
6. **Green Transition and Sustainable Development:** Post-pandemic recovery and the war in Ukraine have underscored the urgency of supporting LAC's green transition. EU financial and technical support in this area was identified as critical.
7. **Youth and Civil Society:** Both regions must invest in youth leadership and civil society engagement. The threats faced by young environmental defenders and social leaders in Latin America were highlighted as a matter requiring EU support.

Regarding **strategic action**, the debate draw attention to the following points: The forthcoming EU budget (Multiannual Financial Framework - MFF) for 2028–2034 presents a strategic opportunity for LAC to secure funding for joint initiatives. Participants stressed the importance of engaging early in these negotiations. At the same time, greater visibility for EU–LAC summits is essential. Compared with bilateral meetings such as those involving the United States, these summits attract little media attention despite representing one-third of UN membership. Without stronger communication strategies, EU–LAC initiatives risk being overlooked both globally and domestically. Visibility was repeatedly identified as a decisive factor. Summits and agreements must not only produce declarations but also communicate their significance to wider audiences. Therefore, participants recommended developing coordinated communication strategies across both regions and highlight symbolic elements, such as Latin America's tradition of peace within the region and the historical role of Panama, to strengthen narratives.

Finally, the debate focused on the **broader geopolitical environment** which presents both risks and opportunities. The crisis of multilateralism is exacerbated by the assertiveness of the United States, China, and Russia. Within this context, EU–LAC cooperation can serve as a counterweight and a model for constructive multilateral engagement. Together, the two regions hold one-third of UN votes, giving them considerable influence if they coordinate effectively. However, internal divisions within LAC and the EU—on issues such as Ukraine, Gaza, Haiti and Venezuela—complicate consensus. The EU was encouraged to recognise these sensitivities while continuing to support common ground, particularly in areas like climate change and sustainable development. Cuba's role was also noted. As the EU's second-largest economic partner, Cuba illustrates both the complexity and the strategic value of maintaining inclusive engagement.

As a conclusion, the discussions underscored both the promise and the challenges of EU–LAC cooperation. The two regions already demonstrate leadership in areas such as peace, democracy, environmental protection, and anti-drug cooperation. They also have the potential to expand this leadership into digital governance, migration, and citizen security. To seize this opportunity, the following steps are recommended:

1. Redefine multilateralism to make it citizen-centred, youth-inclusive, and adapted to emerging challenges such as AI.
2. Capitalise on leadership areas—particularly climate action, anti-drug cooperation, and digital governance—to project joint influence globally.
3. Strengthen visibility by developing coordinated communication strategies, engaging the private sector, and highlighting symbolic narratives.
4. Leverage financing opportunities by actively participating in EU budget processes and securing resources for joint initiatives.
5. Deepen people-to-people ties by supporting civil society, protecting young leaders, and ensuring that local governments and smaller cities benefit from cooperation.
6. Maximize UN influence by coordinating positions to leverage their combined one-third of votes in the General Assembly.

The current geopolitical moment—marked by crisis but also by opportunity—provides a rare chance for the EU and LAC to deepen their partnership and jointly shape the future of multilateralism. Success will depend on moving beyond declarations toward visible, inclusive, and actionable outcomes.

Session 3 | Assessing the cooperation advanced since 2023 in the promotion of peace & security, democracy, and human rights



The overall objective of this session was to examine how the agreements and priorities set out in the 2023 EU–CELAC Summit Declaration and the EU–CELAC Roadmap 2023-2025 have fostered joint progress in the areas of **Peace, Security, Democracy, and Human Rights** across Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The **guiding questions** were: what kind of specific progress has already been achieved? Which lessons can be learned? How can these insights be transformed into practical tools to advance bi-regional collaboration between Latin America and the European Union?

From the Latin American perspective, it was said that two main issues affect bi-regional cooperation with the EU: the **fragmentation and strained relations** among current political leaders in Latin America, and the **broader crisis of multilateralism**, shaped by recent shifts in U.S. policy, the war in Ukraine, and the growing role of China in the global order. It was highlighted that these dynamics have fuelled polarisation, strengthened populism, and deepened democratic crises, all of which have complicated relations with Europe.

It was also discussed that Latin America has a history of progress in tackling **drug economies** and improving **public security**. These advances were achieved through regional cooperation and by learning from other parts of the world. It was emphasised that such experiences could serve as lessons for addressing current conflicts internationally. To achieve sustainable security, it was underlined that no progress can be achieved without acknowledging history and the victims of violence. While Europe is currently facing its own security challenges, it was said that its institutions and approaches to peacebuilding could still provide valuable tools for Latin America. Strengthening synergies between the two regions was highlighted as a key step toward building credibility in international diplomacy.

With regard to **human rights and civil society**, it was pointed out that in Europe, much of the work is carried out through international organisations partly funded by philanthropy. It was emphasised that this model is less viable in Latin America, where traditions of philanthropy are weaker in supporting human rights work. It was suggested to call for more funding for the EU and international society, but by creating new mechanisms for dialogue and reflection, with commitments anchored in summit declarations. However, it was also noted that the absence of a common set of values and standards across Latin American states makes a unified agenda difficult. In this sense, participants called for a greater consistency between international frameworks on the one hand and national frameworks on the other hand.

One example where human rights violations are a pressing challenge is in the mining of natural resources. **Extractivism** in Latin American states presents a complex challenge, including the amount of wealth leaving the country, labour conditions, environmental protection, and the enforcement of laws. The responsibility for these issues was also debated, falling on companies, the legal system, or the state itself. It was pointed out that international standards and declarations often do not make a real difference if the involved international actors, large transnational companies, or their states, sign the agreements but fail to actively follow them and ensure that they do not violate human rights.

Finally, it was said that institutional cooperation should be enhanced. The EU practice of regular meetings and exchanges among member states was highlighted as an example for Latin America. The idea of creating a regional body similar to Europol was discussed as a possible solution to fight drug trafficking and organised crime across borders, as well as other realms of trafficking such as illegal mining of gold, timber, arms, and people. It was emphasised that existing Latin American institutions should be better utilised, and that more frequent ministerial-level meetings could strengthen cooperation and build trust.

Overall, the participants in the debate generally agreed that future declarations should place greater emphasis on advancing women's rights, strengthening commitments to combat trafficking and organised crime, and the spread of disinformation. It was noted that the issue of human rights is complex and involves greater nuance.

Session 4 | Looking ahead of the CELAC-EU Summit 2025 – how to strengthen key axes of the bi-regional cooperation – multilateralism, trade and investments, democracy - vis-à-vis the current global challenges?



This session had the overall objective to take a forward-looking perspective on the **strategic adjustments** needed to reinforce the key pillars of the EU–CELAC bi-regional relationship. The **guiding questions** were: Which agreements, instruments, programmes, and bi-regional partnerships should be scaled up and expanded? With which actors, alliances, and international platforms should both regions seek to deepen cooperation or forge new links? What strategies could be secure that the EU–LAC partnership maintains its genuine value vis-a-vis the relations both regions pursue with other global and regional powers?

The participants expressed the desire to strengthen the ties between the EU and LAC. There is a need to deliver on the potential for collaboration, considering that the two regions are not only united by history but by shared interests, and to develop a strong common narrative. This involves the EU being more considerate of its partners' interests. At the same time, researchers reminded that the regions are not two 'units', but comprise many different countries, which requires support for increased integration. Yet, in the face of a multipolar world order and growing political polarisation, both nationally and internationally, EU and LAC need to stand together in defence of a multilateral rule-based order and in the reaffirmation of shared values.

Participants highlighted the shared geopolitical interests, and the potential for EU 'filling the gap' left behind by other hegemonic powers. Still, an increased collaboration would require enhanced respect for the different interests of countries in the region, the socio-economic differences among countries, and an observance of the social needs of the population. In terms of the diagnostics of the actual situation, it was highlighted how the domestic political situations in singular countries affect their role and position in multilateral spaces.

Special attention was given to COP30 in Belém/Brazil, representing a possibility for strengthening the international leadership of Brazil and to reaffirm the importance of multilateralism. In addition to enhancing respect for a rule-based world order, this also represents a possibility of delivering on climate and the green transition, increasing investments in green energy, energy connectivity and critical minerals, as well as a potential for strengthening in digital collaboration (see topics of the Global Gateway).

The global setting is marked by political pressure, which causes LAC a sense of having to choose between countries and making alliances. Practically, **'multilateralism'** can have different meanings, including solidarity. In this context, both relations to China, Russia and the US were mentioned, alongside the need to be 'pragmatic without being complacent.' While recognising the risk of complicating discussions and achieving effective results, some participants expressed the hope that the Summit would address the situations in Ukraine Gaza, Haiti, Panama, and between the U.S. and Venezuela, for example, regarding the respect for territorial integrity.

Regarding **trade and investments**, the EU is pursuing greater strategic autonomy, which is an aim shared by some Latin American countries. Researchers highlighted how this may mean different things to the states in the two regions. For example, autonomy is a fundamental concept for LAC regarding development from the 'Global South'. Some researchers mentioned a need to stand up for international trade in a time of increasing protectionism. This includes the approval of the Trade Agreement with MERCOSUR. On the contrary, others stressed that EU investments in LAC should not only increase significantly, but also increase diversification of the economy, enabling Latin America to move away from a position as exporters of mainly raw materials and start a productive transition. It was highlighted that the disagreements around EU conditionalities on trade were also a reflection of social and political conflicts in Latin America about economic policies. The exploitation of critical minerals such as lithium was mentioned as an example of an opportunity to build up domestic production. In the case of the Caribbean, a similar point was made around tourism.

Regarding **peace, security, democracy and human rights**, participants expressed a clear intention not to leave behind the issue of democracy, currently under immense pressure in many countries. The Summit should reaffirm common values on democracy and human rights, even when individual countries – both within the EU and among LAC – might not fully agree on what these terms imply. In particular, researchers identified a clear need to strengthen legal protection and to avoid backslides. The participants manifested the urgency to continue collaboration on transitional justice, which allows Europe to learn from the experience in Latin America. They also recommended continuing financing for development in the region, strengthening national human rights mechanisms (such as NGOs), as well as supporting the regional mechanisms that protect human rights. Finally, the need for enhancing company due diligence and protection of environmental defenders were mentioned in the context of the exploitation of raw materials and the green transition projects, also to ensure that these involve tangible social benefits.

Participants agreed that EU-LAC collaboration should move ahead and several concrete areas and avenues for collaboration were promoted. These include the global green bonds initiative, just energy transition partnership, green transition in view of broader sustainable development, digital transition and digital sovereignty, AI and information, education, science and innovation, as well as cooperation in the care sector. The potential of working together on human mobility and 'the freedom to stay' as well as on questions of misinformation and its impacts on democracy were also highlighted. Clear expressions of interest were given for bi-regional collaboration on organised crime and security.

EU-LAC Foundation
ABC-Strasse 2
20354 Hamburg
Germany
+49 40 806 011 450
info@eulacfoundation.org

For more information visit:
eulacfoundation.org

Follow us on:
@eulacfoundation