

EU-CELAC Strategic Partnership

A cooperation in need of a paradigm shift

On 17 and 18 July, after 8 years, leaders from Latin America and the Caribbean countries and the EU are coming together in Brussels for the EU-CELAC Summit. This Summit is a turning point for a new cooperation agenda and strategic partnership between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean. On 3rd July, the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament brought together a wide variety of stakeholders from both sides of the Atlantic to better understand the potential of this strategic partnership and how it can stand up for people and planet in the EU and Latin America and Caribbean countries.

If this Summit wants to live up to its own expectations as an opportunity to relaunch our partnership, it is necessary to start thinking of actions for the immediate future and create follow-up multi-stakeholder mechanisms to strengthen agreements and our cooperation. For the Greens/EFA, it is pivotal in the current state of the world that fundamental rights, people, and the climate must be at the core of the EU's international activities. We can no longer allow unequal partnerships or trade agreements where one country tends to benefit from the other, perpetuating Latin American economies in the role of low value-added commodity exporters, which comes along with high environmental and social costs. After having discussed the potential of the EU-CELAC strategic partnership during our discussion, this is what we expect it to deliver:

For us, international partnerships should be based on social equality, inclusivity, and sustainability instead of exacerbating existing asymmetries. This should be a central pillar of international relations. We need to ensure that no-one is left behind, especially in times where the European Union seeks alliances with like-minded partners in the global political arena. Latin America and Caribbean countries are natural partners for the EU. **International standards, as per the Paris Agreement and the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, are becoming increasingly important for meaningful, equal, and sustainable international partnerships.** Trade agreements should be fully aligned with these goals and should not restrict Latin American countries' ability to pursue an ambitious social and environmental agenda.

At this very moment, the EU is about to conclude a free trade agreement with the Mercosur region and modernise the deals with Chile and Mexico. These agreements continue to foster Latin American countries' exports of low value-added commodities and raw materials in exchange of European high value exports of industrial products, chemicals, and services. Yet, each agreement lacks ambition when it comes to sustainable development, not having updated its Trade and Sustainable Development Chapter (TSD) since the review came out. Another concern is that big agri-businesses are the ones benefiting most from these deals, in particular in Latin America, instead of more sustainable alternatives. Both in the region and in the EU, small farmers will be put

under stronger pressure from big players. Moreover, the agricultural model pushed by these agreements will further undermine the EU's Farm to Fork goals and EU farmers, who will need to abide by higher standards, for example in terms of phasing out the use of pesticides. **The EU-Mercosur trade agreement, which has taken 20 years to negotiate, is high on the agenda with both regions eager to conclude the deal by the end of the year. However, the deal, in its current form, is asymmetrical and hence unacceptable.** It is out of touch with the urgency of climate change and unfit for the collective challenges we are now facing. It's a bad compromise, not even in line with international ambitions in relation to climate and sustainable development.

With none of the trade agreements up to speed when it comes to sustainable development, climate, democracy, or human rights (including workers' rights and freedom of association), both regions must look into different ways of collaboration to ensure no deals are signed when we know the negative impacts in terms of climate and sustainable development goals would be unavoidable. Cooperation between both regions is a must. **The EU should provide support through sufficient funding and should shape the collaboration between the regions around pillars, such as, furthering scientific research, tackling tax evasion and illicit financial flows, addressing social inequalities, fostering tech transfers, ensuring access to affordable medicines, and enabling the green transition.**

Trade agreements aren't the only instruments to foster cooperation and pursue green and inclusive partnerships between the EU and Latin America and Caribbean countries. Therefore, we expect from the new Strategic Partnership:

For the EU, Latin America, and the Caribbean countries to see to the **protection of the Rule of Law and human rights**, and to consider these to be among the key areas that will have to define the future strategic partnership. Through collaboration, fundamental rights violations must be eliminated on both sides of the Atlantic, ensuring gender equality, fighting discrimination, and ensuring freedom of association and expression and the protection of human rights defenders and civic space. We call for the EU-CELAC Summit and this renewed strategic partnership to place the promotion and protection of human rights at the centre of its discussions and future cooperation policy.

This renewed strategic partnership is also an opportunity for the **EU to be a relevant partner for the CELAC region**. We are living in difficult times in which the defence of fundamental rights must be priority. The EU has an important role to play, especially as other powers, such as China and Russia, are having an increasingly prominent role in the region.

To **strengthen democratic processes and Rule of Law** in both regions, the strategic partnership must ensure that hate speech and disinformation are peacefully combated. In particular, the focus should be to strengthen democratic institutions, including electoral and judicial systems. In fact, one crucial element in the fight against impunity and corruption is to ensure strong judicial systems and strict separation of powers. The

paradigm shift will inevitably require these strengths and they must be our first priority. The EU should also play an important role in strengthening peace processes, and we have to ensure our continued support for these processes.

For this, the EU and its Member States must place **transparency and tax justice as key conditions** to its cooperation programs. We should ensure we strengthen existing initiatives in the regions with adequate funding.

To counter shrinking civic space in both regions, the strategic partnership must allocate sufficient **funding and political support to civil society organisations**. Solely by strengthening civil society can both regions promote greater civic and political participation, provide the needed safety and support to human rights defenders, journalists, whistle-blowers, and activists who speak out risking their lives. In particular for women, communities and indigenous populations who are very often excluded from decision making spaces. Civic space is pivotal for resilient democracies. The strategic partnership and cooperation programs must help shift the paradigm and not contribute in any way to current repressive and punitive policies.

In terms of advancing gender equality and reducing inequalities, the strategic partnership must ensure the implementation of the Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) whilst making sure the partnership is inclusive and gender mainstreamed (including SRHR). Taking into account the profound inequalities existing in both regions, it is imperative to focus on the systematic inclusion of **gender mainstreaming** in its policies and activities. Moreover, the strategic partnership must make sure that solid steps are taken to stand up for those most marginalised, such as LGBTQIA+ communities, minorities, people with disabilities and children, advancing social inclusion and equality throughout. We call for the inclusion of indicators to monitor whether social and gender policies are effectively implemented and benefit the population.

The EU has always been a key player to accompany **regional integration** in the Latin American and Caribbean region. This strategic partnership should continue to strengthen these practices and continue to work hand in hand to strengthen regional bodies.

The Strategic Partnership should be an opportunity to promote a dialogue on changing the current paradigm of punitive **drug policies towards a comprehensive approach to prevention**, as these policies have had particularly negative consequences on vulnerable groups, especially women and youth.

In the past years the EU has made some significant steps to **move closer towards climate goals as per the Paris Agreement**. Through the European Green Deal, the Deforestation Regulation and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, the EU has made some significant steps. Both regions need to come together to learn from each other's best practices. In our view, the strategic partnership presents an unprecedented opportunity to collaborate towards more green investments, the green transition (incl. energy), sustainable value chains (Global Gateway), better defence of our

biodiversity, the promotion of food and nutritional safety, sustainable agricultural and rural developments promoting increased sustainable food production and food availability, as well as a fairer, more transparent, equitable and predictable international trade system for agricultural goods.

As the Greens/EFA, we are convinced, today more than ever, about the urgent need to strengthen our relations and ties with Latin America and Caribbean countries. In a globalised world, we must globalise our hopes, our challenges and link our ambitions to build a joint path based on what unites us.