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THE INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND LATIN AMERICA

ABSTRACT

To promote dialogue among cultures and civilisations internationally is an important objective to be achieved by the European Union, and in the case of Latin America it should be seen as the aim of both regions to strengthen traditional partnerships. Nevertheless, the historical and cultural legacy uniting the two regions, and the common commitment to democracy, human rights, and multi-lateralism are apparently no longer sufficient. Any future strategy to enhance these relations should take into account the challenge of improving mutual understanding, and to look forward for new strategies in the fields of politics, economics, and mutual scientific and cultural cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

The build up of democratic nations in Europe and Latin America (LA) is closely related. However, different timings and intensity characterise both sides of the Atlantic. On the one hand, it is worth to mention the European liberal scheme crisis, which led to the creation of totalitarian regimes, the limits of the welfare state project, and the many difficulties in the construction of a post-national democracy; on the other the remarkable hegemony of US in Latin America, and the winding road walked by LA nations when it comes to build inclusive societies. Actually, Europe and Latin America face new challenges to go on with the integration process¹, and as a new approach to dialogue and communication inside and

abroad², the European Commission recently proposed the intercultural dialogue with other regions.

One of the main aims is to promote dialogue among cultures and civilisations internationally, and as Professor Antonio Papisca sharply has pointed out, «since multicultural situations and processes have become a crucial governance issue at local, national, regional and international level, it needs to be addressed in a more specific and articulated way than in the past»³. In recent years, a significant number of Community actions involve the general theme of intercultural dialogue, but with different objectives and aims. Significant intercultural dialogue initiatives have been launched or planned in various fields⁴. Therefore, the intercultural dialogue between the European Union and Latin America should be also seen as an aim of both regions to strengthen their traditional partnership. Nevertheless, the historical and cultural legacy uniting the two regions, and the common commitment to democracy, human rights, and multi-lateralism are apparently no longer sufficient. Any future strategy to enhance these relations should take into account the challenge of improving mutual understanding.

Both, the European Union and Latin America are interested in promoting a series of strong regulations in international relations. However, it is necessary to pinpoint the specific areas where positions and strategies can be agreed upon when dealing with multilateral forums and other important matters such as: how to develop international democracy, how to improve local democracy and promote human rights and social inclusion as a prerequisite for social cohesion in the case of Latin American countries.

As it is well known, democracy is not just a matter of elections; it must be anchored in democratic institutions, separations of powers, human rights, the rule of law, tolerance, good governance, and justice. However, it is necessary to recognise historical differences. Culture and society mean that the paths taken towards democracy and the rule of law will be different and that the systems of government that result will be varied, reflecting local traditions and preferences. Democracy, while it is based on universal values, will not be uniform. The desire for justice, freedom, human rights and accountable and representative government is universal. In the long term, only systems responsive to the wishes of the people they govern can achieve political stability. The link between democracy and human development goes far beyond the majority rule, because

it is essentially conceived as a social practice. Democracy is a key element in human development by granting political freedom, the effective application of rights, highlights social demands (including economics), and allows comprehensive social learning in the creation of values and priorities.

In this context, democracy linked to human development and human rights goes beyond the rule of the majority because it is essentially conceived as a social practice. Indeed, democracy is an intrinsic element in human development ever since it grants political freedom, exercise of civil rights, political awareness of social needs (economic inclusive), and because democracy allows social learning in the creation of values and priorities. Therefore the idea of human development as a new conceptual framework turns the growth-democracy argument obsolete⁵. Briefly, despite how growth rates can be achieved, the restrictions to freedom due to inequality or to the lack of access to policy-making reflect the weakness of overall development.

The key element here is that earning-making prevail over human development needs when comes to implementing public policies. The notion of human development as a new conceptual framework overtakes the arguments about the link growth-democracy. Briefly, and even though high growth rates can be achieved, reduction of liberties due to inequality or lack of access to policy-making produce low development levels. Including new conceptual requirements has enhanced the notion of human development; as well the debate on the democratic program is widely enriched. The concept of democracy has now many different constitutive elements remarkably a multidimensional vision of democratic policy for the times ahead. Actually it is of utmost importance to consider that the future of politics depends of ongoing democracy-making processes, because the risk of totalitarian regimes shadows the path of developing nations.

Indeed, a number of deep asymmetries can be found between the European Union and Latin America. The GDP of the former is four times greater than it is in the latter region, but the surface area covered by LA is about four times as great as the EU, which gives a good indication of the extensive territory and the large quantities of natural resources that Latin America still possesses, which is necessary to preserve and exploit accordingly to a sustainable development⁶ and social inclusion. Latin America is not sufficiently

prosperous to be a full EU partner; neither does it qualify for an assistentialist approach. What it needs is an approach that is different from other areas or countries, and this has yet to be defined in the European external vision⁷.

Coherence with other European policies and objectives is very important in the EU's relations with Latin America. Intercultural dialogue (while developing synergies between programs), should contribute to achieve a number of strategic priorities; in particular respect for human dignity, the principles of democracy and the rule of law as well as respect for human rights, liberty, equality, non-discrimination, solidarity, and social cohesion.

Unfortunately neither the weak mechanisms for political agreement that prevail in Latin America, nor the current channels for bi-regional political dialogue facilitate this task. To succeed in getting the two regions to act increasingly as strategic allies on the international scene, strengthening the multilateral system and world governance in general, is necessary to develop the intercultural dialogue as well as other instruments to facilitate the implementation of strategic priorities for the Union and for the Latin American countries.

CHANGING PRIORITIES IN THE EU'S FOREIGN POLICY

Historically, the EU has been build up as a factor for peace and is forced now to act accordingly with this highly important objective. The terrorist attacks of 11 September, have forced it to focus its attention mainly on those countries sharing a closest geographical neighborhood; the priority has become to increase European security. Security matters have led also to substantially increase European aid for conflict areas such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Palestinian administered territories. The primary item on the international agenda was and still is the fight against terrorism, and Latin America appears to have been relegated in importance in EU's foreign policy⁸.

Threats to pacific coexistence among nations as well as global terrorism has enhanced the EU's need to fortify its capabilities in the fields of international security and world-wide politics⁹. Actually, the European Union is not directly challenged by any state or states-alliances; however, EU's security is closely linked to instability

derived from global conflicts, mainly in the European neighborhood. Likewise, the crisis of multi-lateralism represents a major challenge for global power asymmetries, and is reflected mainly in the unilateral position of George W. Bush's foreign policy. Although politics are not easy to predict, the EU has enough elements for handling regional complexities even beyond limitations set by the Union's own enlargement process. On this basis and supported by NATO's second enlargement stage, Europe can contribute to create a large space of peace and stability.

The EU's agenda is widely and urgent. The scope of the Communitarian project can create a number of problems when surpassing its limitations. Therefore, we can assume that the EU has lacked of the adequate space to develop a strategic alliance with Latin America. But, in spite of this, huge and important resources back the European integration process. The ongoing strategy that supports the EU's enlargement process highlights the role of the Union in the international scenario. In this sense, the European Union must keep on working its political strategy towards LA.

As a global player¹⁰, the EU needs to consolidate its relations with its closest partners like Latin America, which despite deep asymmetries with the EU, shares a common commitment to human rights¹¹, democracy and multi-lateralism. A big challenge is to combine in a coherent way all dimensions of democracy at the local and international level. Therefore the EU must accept and enhance the capabilities and the assets of Latin America as a partner in international relations. Strengthening and democratising the United Nations system for example, should become a common goal as well as developing a more effective strategy concerning human development, social justice and world economy in the global context.

Although bi-regional relations and Latin America's relative position on the European Union's external agenda were necessarily affected by changes in the international scene, current relations established between the EU and Latin America are not irrelevant. Taken together, these countries account for a quarter of all the states that comprise the international system, and a major part of what is identified as being the West, with around one billion persons interrelated in different ways. The number of inhabitants living in the EU with its 25 member states is similar to the population in Latin America (450 million and 485 million inhabitants, respectively). Latin America and the European Union are still the only two

regions in the world which actively encourage regionalism¹².

From this perspective, not only the EU but also Latin America would have greater autonomy, but also greater shared interests and responsibilities *vis-à-vis* the challenges of governance and international security. The globalisation process continues to be one of the main factors of change in the international system. Undoubtedly, it offers opportunities for the two regions, but it also poses challenges regarding security, democratic governance, economic welfare, equity, environmental preservation, and the issue of constructing collective identities¹³.

For many years the European Union has been seen by Latin American countries as the great development alternative to overcome the internal and external problems faced by this region, but for many reasons it did not happen this way. In recent years, the EU has become the largest foreign investor in Latin America. And if the EU were just one country – and from a trade perspective it is undoubtedly the case that it acts as one – it would be Latin America's second commercial partner. However, its total trade barely reaches one third of the amount of trade flows between Latin America and the United States of America, the former's main partner for Mexico and Chile.

By contrast, European cooperation toward Latin America is almost twice as much as that of the USA. Association agreements signed with Mexico and Chile, and the political consensus forged by the two regions around the international agenda are other good examples. Both agreements mainly respond to the need to reinforce the market position of EU companies within the framework of the free trade agreements that those two countries have also signed with the United States. Other countries in the region have not had the chance to participate in this type of agreement. With Mercosur (the primary trading partner for the EU) the negotiations have been slow and difficult especially because the European Union has not liberalised the European agricultural sector¹⁴. In terms of getting foreign currencies, the agricultural exports remain the top productive sector for Mercosur's member countries, therefore they are not willing to reach a trade agreement which will not include agricultural goods.

Another agreements were signed in 2003 between the EU and the Andean Community of Nations (ACN), and Central American countries, but they are more limited, as they do not include commitments for the establishment of free trade areas. The exports

for both groups were subject to the non-reciprocal preferential regime of the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP-drugs), which will be replaced in 2006 by a regime that many in Latin American countries consider to be less advantageous. As the Guadalajara Declaration states, in the near future the relation of the EU with these two sub-regions will depend on the strengthening of their respective integration processes.

The EU still remains highly resistant to make further concessions in agricultural trade negotiations (Doha Round), which have been at a standstill since the Cancun failure of 2003. At the WTO Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong last December and recently in Geneva, the EU fought to extend to 2013 the deadline accepted by the other countries. The term for eliminating other subsidies remained undefined. In addition, no agreement was reached for ending internal subsidies. Since most of these trade mechanisms apply to exporting goods, they are in reality hidden subsidies. For example, the formal subsidies for US cereal exports were reduced from 2.2 billion euros in 1992 to 121 million euros in 2002. However, internal support under the form of direct payments to cereal exporters rose from 117 million euros in 1992 to 1.3 billion in 2002¹⁵. Therefore, there is still a long way to improve bilateral economic and trade relations¹⁶.

THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION AGENDA

The political dialogue between the EU and Latin America has taken place through the summits of heads of state and government¹⁷, which were established in 1999 with the aim to strengthen political links. On quite a few matters there is a lack of understanding about the situation, the problems, the interests and the visions that the other party has about the future. In general terms these two regions share views and values about the importance of democracy, and how to improve the ways in which the international system works, and they are very close together in matters concerning the role of the state and regional integration in development, and it was made very clear in a specific document concerning these summits¹⁸.

The concept of «strategic association» promoted particularly by the European side at the beginning, aroused excessive expectations among Latin American countries, which were not materialised. Even

more, using the concept of strategic association seems to have caused a certain amount of misunderstanding and skepticism. This term has been applied by the EU's external relations with many other third countries, and led to it being devaluated. Part of the problem lies in the fact that what the term of strategic association actually meant was never clearly defined.

Taken literally it means a bond that is based upon common aims and interests, with agreements being made with respect to the resources to be used for achieving them, and planning for the long term. However, as far as the EU external relations are concerned, this expression would seem to mean different things to each partner, and in the case of Latin America, it has proved to have very little real content¹⁹, because from the European perspective key questions are not in play, such as security, which are present in the Balkans or the Mediterranean; and neither is the expression of priorities for European solidarity, like those that can be adduced in the case of Africa.

This situation could have caused certain confusion between the strategic association and the Council's common strategies for several countries and regions where there are major interests in terms of security and stability, but this option has not been considered for Latin America. At present, relations with Latin America are consistent with the documents emanating from the summits held between heads of state and government; with different communications issued by the Commission and adopted between 1996 and 2006, which vary considerably in scope and content; and, from a legal perspective, with standards adopted within the framework of the common trade policy and the development policy, and specifically, to an obsolete regulation.

Reinforcement of the strategic partnership between the EU and Latin America should be guided by «real politik». It would be wise to think of making relations more sincere, replacing statements of agreement with more pragmatic, concrete proposals. A substantial increase in EU's international cooperation for Latin America appears rather unlikely in the short term. However, there is a lot of room for improving the quality of cooperation between the two regions, beyond a push to increase or maintain the volume. Regarding economic cooperation, the EU is the largest donor for Latin America, and represents almost half the official development assistance received by this region during the last decade. However,

European assistance of Latin America is barely 9% of global European aid. The limited importance of Latin America in EU international cooperation has to do with the region's relative well-being compared to other poorer areas, but it also shows how the region is a minor stakeholder for the EU in terms of trade and geopolitics. Cooperation perspective seems to go hand in hand with development of economic interests bi-regional trade agreements.

In 2005, the European Union was disposed to lead the fight against poverty and to set an example of well acting as a catalyst for improved and more effective donor action²⁰. In this regard the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations initiative) was a great opportunity to define concrete actions to implement the EU's international commitments in this crucial field, and to achieve the objectives proposed. The actual trends, however, indicate that the volume of EU's cooperation for Latin America will not rise in the next few years. Improving the quality of cooperation between the two regions is an option. If changes are made to improve the quality of its use, they could have a strong impact on development cooperation in the region.

The key issue here is to improve the quality of assistance so that it complies efficiently and in a timely manner with its proposed objectives. From this perspective, it is obvious that a more coherent, precise strategy is needed for social cohesion, considered the cornerstone for the strategy of cooperation between the two regions. A working instrument for improving the quality of foreign aid could be the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness. To this regard, any cooperation initiative should be developed taken into account the civil society²¹.

The intercultural dialogue between these two regions must be embedded in daily life. The cooperation policy of the European Union should stimulate the dialogue between, academics, intellectuals, journalists, and economic and political actors. The economic and technical cooperation should be concentrated in key sectors, avoiding a proliferation of projects in disperse areas, and that complementariness should be reinforced for the purpose of developing synergies and a better division of labor among the cooperators. Administrative simplification and decentralisation could also be achieved, transferring decision-making and negotiating capacities to representatives of the cooperating offices located in the Latin American countries. Formulation of a more

coherent, precise strategy is needed for social cohesion, and relevant programmes and extensive resources need to be included in the new 2007-2013 EU's budget.

LATIN AMERICA HAS TO TAKE ITS OWN RESPONSIBILITIES

Latin American countries started the 21st century path under severe economical and political conditions, which represents a major barrier to succeed in global challenges. The CEPAL Paper *Equity Divide in Latin America and the Caribbean* from 15 March 2000 reinforces this perception. One of the main figures deals with extreme poverty (36% of all homes) even though economic recovery in 11 out of 14 nations has reduced marginality 5% in regard of the so-called «Lost Decade». However, this scarce social recovery is shadowed by persistent and extreme income distribution inequalities. LA is still the world's number one uneven region, as reflected in the fact that only 5% of the population holds 25% of total regional wealth, while the poorest people receive an offensive 7.5% of overall national income.

The dramatic consequence is that a subcontinent with 220 millions inhabitants, 45% of them have scarily resources. Even worst, 150 million (30% of the population) subsists with less than two USA dollars daily²². And if we take a look at the figures produced in the IMF-WB Joint Spring Meeting of 20 April 2006, Latin American development has increased in regard of 2004 but insufficient enough to promote meaning achievements in poverty reduction. Poverty rates in Latin America for 2002 were lower among other developing regions, but the recovery trend has also been slower: less than 1% between 2002-2005. This report shows that coverage and infrastructure scope has improved in the last ten years. However, as with macroeconomic reforms, it has not yet produced benefits to support regional/national economic development²³.

Poverty is an ongoing issue for Latin America due to a number of factors. Indeed, because of its size and complexity, poverty rates cannot be analysed only in terms of economic development, even though this is a key prerequisite to deal with the region's huge social debt. Unfortunately, the evolution of Latin American economies shows any tendency towards strong development; instead

destructive contingencies such as Argentina's recent economic crisis are regional features²⁴. Indeed, LA's outlook is scary. In spite of huge macroeconomic measures taken, the risk of returning to the turmoil of the 80s is high. Once again, the issue of regional external debt of 749 billion dollars is on the agenda²⁵, and implies massive net financial resources transfers abroad.

Deep concern prevails about the future of democracy and human rights in Latin America. The expectations created after the end of dictatorial regimes in the region have evolved towards uncertainty. The political balance has more shadows than lights. In this regard, let's take a look at the United Nations Program *Democracy in Latin America: Towards a Democracy for Citizenship*²⁶, which reflects the complicated perspective to achieve democratic development in the region. The key element in this survey is that together with improving political processes, the lack of solid institutions, poverty and state deficiencies leave an open door to critical comebacks.

It seems that the consolidation of democracy and respect for human rights in Latin America will take more time than previously expected, as well as huge efforts from both citizens and political parties. As well, more freedom achievements in democratic living and social coexistence are still required, and also generating universal opportunities for human development, which are closely linked to human rights. The main threat for the consolidation of regional democracy deals with increased inequalities due to operational market dysfunctions, as well as distortions and state immobility. The insertion of Latin America in modern politics is still an undone project²⁷. Therefore, both internal and external political forces (mainly from Europe) must foresee the regional democratic process started only a decade from now, as well as respect for human rights under the scope of human development.

¹ Both regions coincide in the importance of integration processes although with different experiences and realities.

² Commission of the European Communities, *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and to the Council Concerning the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue* (2008), Brussels, 5 October 2005, COM(2005) 467 final, 2005/0203 (COD), pp. 1-29.

³ A. Papisca, *Intercultural Dialogue and Human Rights: Inclusive Cities in an Inclusive Europe*, working paper, University of Padua, p. 1.

⁴ Intercultural dialogue is an important dimension of the many Community policies and

instruments in the various fields of education, youth, culture, citizenship and sport, combating discrimination and social exclusion, lifelong learning, combating racism and xenophobia, policy on asylum and the integration of immigrants, audiovisual policy and research.

⁵ U. Rödel, G. Frankenberg and H. Dubiel's essay on democracy is an interesting view on this subject because it laid down the basis to critically deal with the reactivation of civil practice against the illegitimate monopoly in policy-making. To avoid the use of democracy as an elitist management tool, this essay underlines the need to strengthen underdeveloped elements of social participation. As well, the «culture of coherence» has died with the arising of many ways of life, arguments and interests, current post-totalitarian societies cannot take advantage of different sources of identification community and not paying the price of turning back to authoritarian pre-modern societies. Integration is no longer feasible only through the action of similar patterns like religion, ethnics, or national traditions, but only through differences or at least by means of an «historic capital of tolerant divergence», U. Rödel, G. Frankenberg and H. Dubiel, *Die Demokratische Frage*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1989.

⁶ C. Freres and J.A. Sanahuja, *Study on Relations between the European Union and Latin America. New Strategies and Perspectives*, Madrid, ICEI, 2005.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ The influence of the EU in the Balkans has been paramount, and has oriented nations with ethnic struggles to democratic principles. As well, it is required to have closer ties with Russia and the former soviet nations. However, the critical task of this project for stability is in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East, mainly in the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and the extended conflict to Lebanon, Syria and Iran.

⁹ In the face of terrorist challenge, the EU basically holds that accurate concepts and actions are required to deal with issues generated by fundamentalist networks. While the US sees this issue as a war oriented conflict, the EU claims the advocacy of European societies in terms of a multi-sided battlefield. One particular aspect in EU's security challenges is that most of them are increasingly external oriented.

¹⁰ The process of making the EU a global player (to the extent that it affects EU-LA relations) will involve interests of the EU as such, beyond individual interests of member states, and its capacity to act beyond its own frontier would be strengthened through the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), and other Community policies that affect relations between the EU and LA.

¹¹ Mainly to improve the credibility and effectiveness of the UN human rights system, responding promptly to human rights emergencies and to address situations of violations of human rights.

¹² R.M. Piñón Antillon, *Globalization and Regional Integration, the European and Latin America Experiences*, ECSA Mexico, Jean Monnet Project, European Commission, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, National University of Mexico, 2006.

¹³ C. Freres and J.A. Sanahuja, *Study on Relations between the European Union and Latin America...*, cit, p. 16.

¹⁴ The WTO Doha Round wasn't able to succeed in this field in 2006.

¹⁵ C. Freres, *The Euro-Latin American Partnership: Between the Process Today and a Different Possible Partnership*, draft, III European-Latin American Caribbean Civil Society Forum, Vienna, Austria, 30 March-1 April 2006.

¹⁶ Economic and trading ties between Europe and Latin America have been increasingly weakening. European investments in Latin America, which had been growing until 2000, are now in decline. Trade between the EU and Latin America, which accounted for one-fourth of Latin America's imports and exports in 1990, has fallen off to its current level of 16% of Latin American imports and 12% of its exports.

¹⁷ Rio in 1999, Madrid in 2002, Guadalajara in 2004, and Vienna in 2006.

¹⁸ R.M. Piñón Antillon (ed.), *Guadalajara Summit 2004. ¿Historical Alliance or Strategic Association between the European Union and Latin America?*, ECSA Mexico, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, National University of Mexico, CELARE, ITAM, IEIE, 2004.

¹⁹ The EU's strategy with Latin America must adapt to the heterogeneous nature of Latin American countries. Frequently reference is made to the region as a whole, but there are many

political, economical and cultural realities in those countries that require different approaches within a coherent framework.

²⁰ European Union, *Millennium Development Goals*, February 2005 and The EU Development Policy website: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/index-en.htm>.

²¹ Latin American civil societies seem to have become stronger actors in politics, meanwhile party systems remain weak.

²² ECLAC, *Latin America's Social Outlook 2001/2003*, Santiago de Chile, CEPAL, 2002.

²³ IMF-WB Joint Evaluation of MDG's, La Jornada, Mexico, 21 April 2006.

²⁴ «Y aunque la situación varía de país a país, las bajas tasas de crecimiento, la inestabilidad económica y la desigual distribución del ingreso, así como la debilidad progresiva de las políticas sociales se traducen en el deterioro de condiciones de vida de por sí precarias. La contracción del mercado laboral y la caída de las remuneraciones reales impulsan el crecimiento del sector informal de la economía y la migración. El marco de tales procesos es la inoperancia cada vez más patente del Estado de derecho, minado por la corrupción, el estancamiento educativo y un incremento prácticamente insalvable de las demandas sociales».

²⁵ ECLAC, *Preliminary Balance of Latin American and Caribbean Economies*, Santiago de Chile, 2002.

²⁶ UNDP, *Democracy in Latin America: Towards Democracy for Citizenship*, Peru, UNDP, 2004.

²⁷ Although situations vary from one country to another, reduced growth rates, economic instability and income distribution inequalities, and progressive weakness of social politics translate into deterioration of living standards. The contraction of the labour market and the decline in real wages propel informal sector growth in the economy and migration flows. The framework of these processes is the dysfunction of the law, undermined by corruption, educative stagnation and a huge increase in social demands.

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