

# EU - Latin America – Caribbean Interregionalism and Effective Multilateralism

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## 1. Introduction

This paper seeks to contribute to the discussion on the question whether EU-driven inter-regionalism can and/or will lead to a region-based effective multilateralism.

Let us start from Telò's working definition of *multilateralism*: "[...] a form of collective transnational action and multilevel co-operation amongst states, regarding global governance and world politics. It implies generalized principles of conduct and diffuse reciprocity, and includes several degrees and types of institutionalization, from arrangements and regimes to international organizations" (Telò, 2006: \_). *Region-based* multilateralism or *regional* multilateralism refers to the (theoretical) possibility that regionalism and multilateralism are not only compatible but that progressing regionalisms can be building blocks for the architecture, functioning and legitimization of multilateralism. Regional multilateralism can be based on political or economic explanations (Telò, 2006; Baldwin, 2006), or a combination of both.

The idea of *effective* region-based multilateralism refers to the presumed capacity of regions to provide multilateralism with solid foundations, with "complementary multiple legitimacy and with enhanced efficiency as to the implementation of its commitments" (Telò, 2006:).

Region-based multilateralism implies interregionalism, not only because it refers to the logical horizontal interaction between regions (next to vertical interactions between different governance levels), but also because the actorness of a region depends on a process of mutual recognition, involving other regions (Van Langenhove, 2003). As it has been observed before, most of the literature on interregionalism is policy-oriented and descriptive (Hänggi et al., 2006:12), and adopts a European perspective. A (pluralist, eclectic) theoretical framework is under construction (Farrell, 2004; Van Langenhove and Costea, 2005; Roloff, 2006; Söderbaum and Van Langenhove, 2006; Söderbaum, Stålgren and Van Langenhove, 2006), and typologies of interregionalisms have been proposed (Hänggi, 2006).

The contribution of EU-driven interregionalism to multilateralism can theoretically be delivered through (at least) two different channels. First, the EU interregional strategy, if effective, can contribute to the strengthening of the other regions and to building a region-based architecture of a future world order. Second, interregional agreements can be used as

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tools to build consensus among regions on multilateral solutions and the strengthening of multilateral institutions. The former channel leads to questions of effectiveness of the EU strategy, the latter leads to questions of multilateralism as a convergence point between regions.

In this paper, we will focus on EU-Latin American (and Caribbean) relations, which have been identified as a case of particularly strong interregionalism (Söderbaum, Stålgren and Van Langenhove, 2006) between two regions showing cultural proximity (De Lombaerde and Pineda, 2002).<sup>4</sup> At the same time, recent events related to Latin American regionalism and interregionalism are, in our view, particularly relevant to test current thinking on EU-interregionalism.

## **2. Regionalism and Interregionalism as key feature of EU – Latin – Caribbean relations?**

### **2.1. Cold War era**

Relations between the European Community and Latin America, as they now stand, date back to the 1980s as well as the beginning of the end of the Cold War and the gradual revival of European regional integration. It were the armed Central-American conflicts and the difficulties encountered by the processes of regional integration in this area and in the Andes that led to the more coherent structuring of relations between these two sides of the Atlantic. Until then, the Community's strategy towards the Latin-American sub-continent seemed confusing. Above all, this strategy was lacking in political interest and was conditioned by the Cold War's bipolar system. But the conflicts that broke out in the Central-American isthmus led Europe to play a major political role as an international intermediary, just when European Political Cooperation (EPC) was being sketched out.

There are two main reasons for this European commitment. The first stems from the fear of the Community and the Member States that events in Latin America would result in a confrontation between the United States and the USSR, with serious repercussions for Western Europe (Roett, 1995). The second had to do with the interface position occupied by the Iberian countries – and especially Spain – between Latin America and the Community, before these countries had even joined the latter. The foreign policy of the Spanish socialist government of Felipe González had a twin priority: European integration and relations with Latin America. Spain would then try to play a leading intermediary role in the peaceful resolution of the Central-American conflicts while completing its membership of the European Community. The Spanish administration then pushed for the European Community and Member States to show more commitment in the Central-American isthmus (Schumacher, 1995).

The position defended by the Iberian authorities in this international policy dossier was similar to that seen in Community integration (Sberro, 2003). However, the European approach adopted in these conflicts was very different from that of the United States, in terms of the interpretation of these conflicts and the way to respond to them. While the Reagan administration interpreted the Central-American wars through the East/West split, the European Community was looking for their origins in the North/South split. Seeing the hand of Moscow and Havana in these conflicts and viewing them as the result of communist

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<sup>4</sup> See also, for example, Grabendorff and Seidelman (2005), Peña (2005), Torrent (2005), Santander (2006).

influence, Washington called for armed intervention. But the Europeans, who had clearly noted the critical economic and social situation in which the debt crisis had plunged Latin America (European Commission, 1984), saw the roots of the conflicts in poverty and the extreme inequalities in Central-American societies. They called, to the great displeasure of the United States, for a peaceful and negotiated solution to the conflicts, as set out in the Stuttgart Declaration adopted by the European Council of June 1983. The diplomatic initiative of the Community and its Member States not only ran counter to US policy, it also legitimised the Latin-American peace plans of the Contadora Group (Colombia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela) which were contrary to the objectives of US foreign policy (Smith, 1998). One of the reasons for European enthusiasm for this group was that it favoured an approach for the whole Central-American region, whereas the Reagan administration was proposing a peace plan for Nicaragua alone (Dabène, 1997).

In September 1984, the foreign-affairs ministers of the European Community, Spain and Portugal met with their Central-American colleagues (Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Salvador), members of the Central American Common Market (CACM) and with the Latin-American mediator, the Contadora Group. This meeting, the first in a long series, gave rise to the institutionalisation of an interregional political dialogue, better known as the 'San José Process'. The Community had agreed beforehand on a series of values and principles to promote in Central America – such as the rejection of authoritarianism, the institution of democracy and the defence of human rights and the promotion of regionalism (European Council, 1983; European Commission, 1984).

The San José Dialogue would become an opportunity for the Community to build an image as a benevolent actor. This was similar to that of a civil power (Duchêne, 1973; Telò, 2006) focusing on the legality of international law, the use of diplomacy, negotiation and cooperation between the unilateral-action nations and the use of force – while encouraging a development-oriented approach rather than an security-fixated one (Whitehead, 1999; Crawley, 2006). Moreover, the European authorities were particularly interested in reviving the Central-American integration process. Taking inspiration from its own experience, the European Community saw regionalism as the best way for Central-American nations to develop and consolidate cooperation that would ensure stability and development. The EC signed an interregional cooperation agreement with the CACM. It then assisted the Central-American regional integration with European know-how, in order to help regional development, boost the process of regional economic integration and the development of intraregional trade (Rubio, 2004). This agreement would also enable the Community to plan its own regional integration model and to enhance its international legitimacy. One of the consequences of the EC's involvement in Central America was the inauguration of new institutionalised relationships with Latin-American sub-regional groups which has expanded dramatically since the end of the Cold War.

## **2.2. Post-Cold War era: towards a strategic interregionalism?**

In the meantime, more effort was invested in revitalising Europe-Latin America relations. For while the erosion of the bipolar system during the 1980s had resulted in stronger links between Europe and Latin America, the fall of the Berlin Wall led to a new consolidation of the relationship. This was reinforced when the Soviet bloc's disappearance helped to remove the situation that underpinned the rivalry between superpowers. And so there was an opening of unprecedented opportunities to reinforce ties between the two sides of the Atlantic. The 1990s would become a fertile ground for the interregional relationship between Europe and

Latin America. So, the relationship between the two continents has substantially evolved over the past fifteen years. The EU has established regular meetings between the heads of state and government of the EU, Latin America and Caribbean giving way to the “Rio Process”. The first Summit held in Rio de Janeiro on June 1999 had as main aim “to strengthen the political, economic and cultural understanding between the two regions in order to encourage the development of a strategic partnership, establishing a set of priorities for future joint action in the political and economic fields” (European Commission, 2006). In so doing, the EU is gradually pursuing its strategy of *rapprochement* with Latin America and the Caribbean, a sub-continent that, for decades, has been subject to what could only be described as the discretionary domination of the US. The EU is now a relatively important economic and political partner for Latin America, it is the leading donor in the region, first foreign investor, and second most important trade partner after the US.

How do the countries of Latin America perceive this *rapprochement*? In fact they have greeted with enthusiasm the structuring of a Community strategy for their sub-continent precisely because they view it as the emergence of a new international player capable of rebalancing their relations with the United States. This strategic thinking is a constant in Latin America. For the Latin-American authorities have always sought an external counter-weight to offset the dominant power of the time (Medeiros, 2000; Whitehead, 1995).

As early as the 19th century and the start of the 20<sup>th</sup>, many Latin-American States had relations with European powers, especially Great Britain, as well as with the United States; the aim being to achieve a better counterbalancing of their foreign relations. After the Second World War, the situation changed. The countries of Latin America sought an external counterweight to the hegemonic power of the United States. Weakened by the war, Europe could no longer offer this counterweight; so they turned to Soviet power. But with the gradual consolidation of the European regional project and the *détente* that arrived in the second half of the 1980s, the Community began to be considered by the Latin-American authorities as an actor that should not be ignored in their international plan. Indeed, the Community and its Member States were viewed in the sub-continent as an actor on the international stage capable of presenting a ‘third way’ between the two Cold War superpowers (Crawley). Once Soviet power had been sidelined, the European Community appeared to be, in the eyes of Latin America, not so much an alternative as a balancing pole in the new relation that began to be established with the United States after the speech by President Bush (senior) in June 1990 on the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative (EAI).

It is clear that the Americas began to acknowledge the prestige of US power, thanks to the US ‘victory’ over the USSR, as well as that country’s intellectual and moral leadership. They also feared an emerging ‘Fortress Europe’. But in spite of all this, the EC/EU was seen by the Latin-American authorities – in the same way as the regional integration option – as the only real way of increasing their negotiating power with Washington and of counterbalancing the influence of the US in the sub-continent. Moreover, in the context of the structural reforms undertaken to revive the Latin-American economies, the EC/EU was seen as a potential partner for diversifying these countries’ opportunities and their sources of supplies, technologies and capital. So for both the Latin-American States and the new regional groups, the European Community represents now an ideal counterweight in the global balance of their foreign relations especially because the EU has been strongly supported Latin America regional schemes.

Integration is fundamental to an understanding of European-Latin American relations. Regionalism has become an important feature of the current foreign policy of the European and Latin American States. While the European Union has deepened its institutional architecture and strengthened its international influence without precedent, Latin America has reinvigorated regional structures. Mercosur has been created in 1991 and NAFTA in 1994; the Central American integration project and the Andean Community have been re-launched respectively in 1991 and 1997... The Europeans as well as the Latin Americans consider regionalism both as a way to reinforce its influence at the international stage and to prepare their respective economies to the global competition. The revival of the regional processes in Europe and Latin America created a common interest in outward-looking regionalism and interregional relations. Since the Treaty of Maastricht, the EU has adopted a new type of cooperation agreement in order to develop relations with third parties. These agreements have enabled the EU to negotiate region-to-region associations with other regional groups. This strategy has helped Latin Americans to reinvigorate their own regional integrations projects. However, since the late nineties the Latin American regionalism – as well as the European one – is going through a difficult period which may have possible consequences for the EU-LAC interregional relationship.

### **3. What are possible lessons and implications of current Latin-American (inter-)regionalism for our understanding of EU-interregionalism ?**

#### **3.1. Current evolution of Latin American regionalism**

Latin-American regionalisms and inter-regionalisms are going through turbulent times, especially in South America. In the Andean region, the Andean Community finds itself in a crisis. This is related to a series of factors: the withdrawal of Venezuela from CAN and its adherence to Mercosur, Perú's and Colombia's attempts to ratify bilateral FTAs with the US, and the (still somewhat ambiguous) post-electoral foreign (economic) policy re-orientations in Bolivia and Ecuador. It still remains to be seen how serious the repeated calls for re-animation of CAN will turn out to be and what the implications can possibly be of the rapprochement with Chile as a new associated member. Unclear scenarios also emerge on the inter-regional scene: negotiations for an Association Agreement with the EU, a project for a new trade-oriented initiative regarding a Pacific Coast free trade area (involving also Chile, Mexico and Central America), the South American Community, and the US bilateral FTAs are all on the agenda for the coming months. The G-3 is virtually dead after Venezuela's unilateral withdrawal.

In the Southern Cone, Mercosur has still not completely overcome the Papelera crisis between Argentina and Uruguay and is now slowly accommodating Venezuela as a new member country.<sup>5</sup> The latter has not only internal dimensions but also external dimensions; convergence and consolidation of common external negotiation positions (vis-à-vis the US, the EU, CAN, Mexico and at the WTO) is not made easier with the entrance of Venezuela. After Venezuela's lack of interest in negotiating a CAN-EU agreement, it is an open question, for example, how functional it will behave in the context of EU-Mercosur negotiations. It is also not clear how Uruguay's interest in an FTA with the US will be met, how the IBSA

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<sup>5</sup> Venezuela's entry to MERCOSUR was formalised by the *Protocolo de adhesión de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela al MERCOSUR*, signed on 4 July 2006 in Caracas. For further analysis of the repercussions of Venezuela's withdrawal from CAN and adherence to MERCOSUR, see for example, Malamud (2006a, 2006b, 2006c).

Economic Cooperation might interfere with Mercosur's external economic agenda, and what the implications could be of Bolivia and Ecuador entering Mercosur.<sup>6</sup> The alignment of Latin American countries with either the Venezuelan or Guatemalan candidacies for the UN Security Council in 2006 might also leave sequels for Mercosur's external relations. With regard to this situation the EU authorities have taken a wait-and-see position.

A number of additional elements contribute to the complexity of Latin American regionalisms. They include: the continuing division among Latin-American countries with regard to the policies of the Washington consensus and the FTAA, the implications of the US hub and spoke strategy, President Chavez' proposals for alternative integration models (the Bolivarian Alternative for the America's - ALBA, the People's Trade Agreement between Bolivia-Cuba-Venezuela, South-American integration in energy and telecommunications sectors, ...).

As evidenced by events that have taken place over the last year, like those related to the EU-LAC Summit in Vienna, developments in Latin American regionalisms and inter-regionalisms, often not anticipated by the European counterparts, have direct implications for the relations with the EU and the effectiveness of EU policies towards the Latin American region. The questions which then follow are 'to what extent do (recent) events and trends in Latin American (inter-)regionalism challenge our theoretical (and empirical) knowledge of EU inter-regionalism as a driving force behind an effective region-based multilateralism?', and 'what does the Latin American perspective add to the research agenda?'

### **3.2. Multi-layered regionalism, overlapping regions and the 'region-selection-process'**

One of the problems that EU-LA interregionalism has to face is related to the phenomena of multi-layered regionalism and overlapping regions. Although this phenomenon of regional organizations with overlapping jurisdictions is obviously not typical for any particular region in the world, it is more pronounced in certain regions than in others.

In Latin America, the proliferation and reconfiguration of regional integration schemes and bilateral agreements since the 1980s, and accelerated in recent years, has led to a complex situation with overlapping schemes and memberships. The situation in the Caribbean shows this very well (figure 1). Because of the hierarchical structure (concentric circles), the situation might be less complex than in other cases like in Africa with its partial overlap between COMESA and SADC and the (problematic) cases of the Congo, Egypt or South Africa multiple memberships (Kennes, 2003, UNECA, 2006), but it is in any case far more complex than the situation in Europe, the Pacific (and even West-Africa).

This complex situation of overlapping arrangements partly reflects a move towards more flexible forms of multi-level government and governance, but it also produces an economic cost for the region through the 'spaghetti bowl effect' (Bhagwati, 1995). However, more important for our purpose are the implications that it has for the inter-regional processes, in general, and for EU inter-regionalism, in particular. These implications are related to the fact that this complexity leads to the theoretical possibility of multiple routes in the inter-regional

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<sup>6</sup> At the Ministerial Meeting of the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Economic Cooperation in New Dehli in March 2005 it was decided to move in the direction of an FTA between the three countries. It is still not clear whether this proposal might evolve into an India-Mercosur-SACU FTA, which would be compatible with Brazil's and South Africa's memberships of customs unions (RIS, 2006).

process, depending on the actors and regions that become involved in it.<sup>7</sup> This 'region-selection-process' depends on internal (supply) and external (demand) factors.

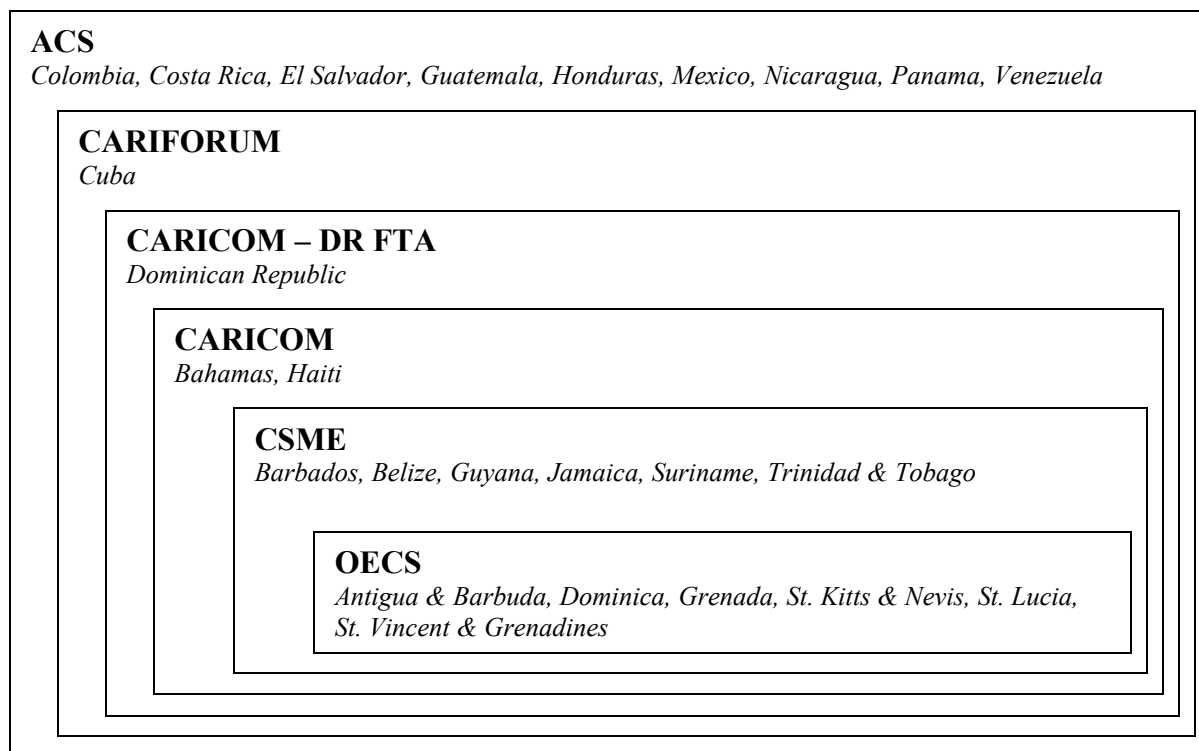
On the supply side, the existence of multiple levels and potential candidates to engage in inter-regional relations, may lead to inter-level competition and switching, making the inter-regional process less stable. In case different levels (regional organizations) specialize in specific and diversified policy areas, as often is the case, this might further add to the asymmetric character of the inter-regional relationship when the counterpart is a more integrated regional organisation. According to various analysts, the EU-LAC negotiation relationship does typically not take the diversity of the integration processes in the LAC region sufficiently into account (Peña, 2006).

On the demand side, the outside region may prefer to engage in an inter-regional process with one region rather than with another. In an asymmetric situation, this preference can even be imposed. The artificial LAC 'region', for example, pushed by the EU, has been severely questioned by several Latin-American observers and voices have been heard to take the inter-regional political dialogue further at the level of institutionalised regions at the sub-continental level (Meza and Tosheva, 2006). This is not only relevant from the perspective of the heterogeneity of the LAC region, but also because it unnecessarily seems to weaken the LAC negotiation position. Theoretically, the preferred region(s) in an asymmetrical inter-regional context may, as a consequence, see its (their) intra-regional political importance increase and occupy a dominating position at the expense of other contending regions. There are therefore two-way linkages between regionalism and inter-regionalism. In asymmetric situations, the outside region can even go a step further and re-shape the regional architecture in function of its own inter-regional strategy. Typical examples of this in this context are CARIFORUM (as part of the EU-ACP dynamics) and the LAC Summit process. Further work seems required to better understand this region-selection-process, both in a static and in a dynamic perspective.

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<sup>7</sup> See also, Söderbaum and Van Langenhove (2005:257-259).

**Figure 1: Overlapping memberships of regional organisations in the Caribbean**



Source: De Lombaerde (2005)

### **3.3. Stability and depth of regional integration processes**

Another point is related to the implications of the stability or instability of regions, on the one hand, and their depth or shallowness, on the other hand. Recent events in Latin America faced the EU with the problem that particularly the most likely candidates with which a more solid inter-regional relationship was envisaged (i.e. CAN and Mercosur) showed signals of instability.

The Latin American case leads to at least two interesting observations. The first is that stability should not be equated with depth: deeper integration is not equal to more stable integration. The relationship between the depth of the integration process and its stability might well take a U-shaped form. Shallow or ‘light’ forms of integration might well be stable precisely because their impact is limited (and sometimes marginal) and they are less the subject of political debate. Seemingly paradoxically, only when integration becomes deeper and mobilizes multiple stakeholders, might it become more unstable, until the regional institutions are solidly locked-in and a wide political consensus is reached on their role. The second observation is that, apparently, the ‘makability’ of regions from outside is limited. In the Latin American case, it is perceived that the impact of the European model on the process of current Latin American regional integration is low (Peña, 2006).

The challenge for theoretical and empirical work is to link typologies and/or indicators of stability and depth, on the one hand, with typologies and/or indicators of degrees of interregionalism, on the other.

### **3.4. Agenda-setting and sequencing issues**

From the perspective of Latin American observers, the issue of priority setting has been brought to the fore in the run-up towards the Vienna Summit. It has been suggested that the agenda put forward by the Europeans should be revised, giving less weight to strictly trade liberalization issues and more weight a broader economic agenda and to new themes as migration, social cohesion and eco-development (Torrent and Yépez, 2006; Bernal and Tosheva, 2006). This invites a closer analysis of the process of agenda-setting in inter-regional relations. One gets the impression that inter-regionalism is often viewed in too abstract terms.

Agenda and priority setting is linked to sequencing issues. In the EU-LAC context, for example, the conditioning of the negotiations that should lead to Association Agreements in terms of prior 'progress' in the field of regional integration (following the EU model) has been questioned and criticized (Meza and Tosheva, 2006; Adiwasio et al., 2006; Peña, 2006).<sup>8</sup>

## **4. Multilateralism as a central convergence point of the Europe-Latin America interregional partnership?**

We will now look at the relation between interregionalism and multilateralism and whether and how multilateralism can be a central convergence point in a interregional relationship. As we said before, the EU and Latin America have developed a strong common interest in integration processes. Indeed, the revival of the regional processes in Europe and Latin America has created a common interest in outward-looking regionalism and interregional relations, according to the WTO's rules and disciplines and in line with the dominant neoliberal model of the global economy. For the first time, the Europe-Latin America interregional agreements foresee a gradual and mutual liberalisation of trade. The Europeans are thus responding to a long-standing request from Latin America, for they could see a potential market emerging there.

The EU and Latin America have also developed a common interest for multilateralism. This is something that keeps appearing in the interregional political dialogue and in the trade negotiations. At each meeting, the heads of State and government of Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean make every effort, as happened at the Vienna Summit (May 2006), to say that "We further reiterate our shared commitment to a strong and effective multilateral system, to which end we are committed to advancing the multilateral agenda as a cross-cutting issue and as a priority for our bi-regional relations" (Vienna Declaration, 2006). And to show the interregional alliance's commitment to multilateralism, the parties invited the Secretary-General of the United Nations to take part in the Vienna Summit. Two years earlier, the parties dedicated the Guadalajara Summit (June 2004) to multilateralism where they declared: "multilateralism is our time's need".

<sup>8</sup> This, in turn, leads to another theoretical and empirical question: why is it that the EU approaches and designs its different inter-regional relations with different regions in the South in different ways? See also, Söderbaum and Van Langenhove (2005) and Söderbaum et al. (2006) on this point.

In fact, European integration and the regional groups of Latin America would like to see a world based on economic and political international rules – all framed by a set of interdependent multilateral institutions, such as the World Trade Organisation and the International Criminal Court. For the parties believe that multilateralism helps avoid unilateral and arbitrary behaviour. They also think that multilateralism is a way of ‘taming’ an international system based on the concept of the balance of power. This shared interest in multilateralism also stems from the relative homology between the multilateral organisations and the regional groups of Europe and Latin America, since both are institutional bodies that owe their very existence to multilateralism, negotiation, compromise as well as the rule of law.

From the early 1990s, multilateralism became one of the main convergence points between Europeans and Latin Americans. This was not the case before: until the mid-1980s the Latin-American countries, with the exception of Brazil and Chile, had refused to join GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and were mainly against trade multilateralism (Grilli, 1993). But conversion to the economic policies of the ‘Washington Consensus’ encouraged the Latin-American authorities to choose a multilateral entry into the world economy. This inevitably brought them closer to the EU, which has made trade multilateralism one of the main planks of its foreign trade.

It has been more than 15 years since the interregional relation entered its new stage. This has given observers plenty of time to analyse the match between official words and reality. Put another way, is the interregional affinity for multilateralism genuine or superficial? This question is particularly important, because Europeans and Latin Americans do not seem to share the same definition of multilateralism.

Initially, Europe and Latin America appeared to have similar visions of and concerns about many subjects to do with multilateralism (liberalisation of multilateral trade, the environment, international criminal justice, etc.). These subjects have often been at the heart of the political dialogue between The Rio Group and the Community and its Member States. This dialogue was institutionalised in 1990, with the aim of “exercising an active common role in the international society of the future.” It was with this in mind that the heads of State and the governments of the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean met nine years later in Rio. The aim of the gathering was to set up a ‘strategic partnership’ between the two sides of the Atlantic. Political dialogue has been set up as one of the main pillars of the new strategic relation. It has enabled the partners to use the multilateral authorities to highlight the areas where there is a convergence of view and interests. But this has only happened twice: during the World Conference Against Racism and at the Conference on Climate Change. But there is no real common agenda and any similar viewpoint held by the parties only rarely leads to common positions in the international bodies. This difficulty in acting together has weakened the political dialogue, as a result of which it seems unlikely we will see the creation of a strategic interregional alliance capable of responding with a single voice in multilateral fora (Santander, 2004).

One of the main reasons for this development is surely linked to the different conception the partners have of multilateralism. In Latin America, multilateralism is seen as something defensive. That is to say it is perceived essentially as a way of guaranteeing the sovereignty of countries. This conception is directly linked to the actual history of Latin-American countries. One could even say that this desire for sovereignty also predetermines the conception that

they have of regionalism. For regionalism is seen more in the respect for and strengthening of the sovereignty of the States, in contrast to the process of European integration.

The European approach toward multilateralism is different. One could in this respect speak about an “active multilateralism”, ready to adopt new international regimes that would consider limitations on State sovereignty. Indeed, Europeans see multilateralism as an activity that may call for forms of delegation of sovereignty by the States. One example is the international protection of human rights. It is well known that Europeans and Latin Americans lent their support to the creation of the International Criminal Court. That said, they do not vote in the same way within the Commission on Human Rights and the General Assembly of the United Nations, because a large majority of Latin-American countries regularly cite the principle of non-intervention (Van Klaveren, 2004). There is thus an important difference between the discourse and the reality. Officially the interregional strategic partnership is presented as a lever for the development of multilateralism. But due to the absence of a common definition for multilateralism, in practice the parties experience great difficulty adopting common positions in the multilateral organisations. This difficulty can also be seen in the field of commercial multilateralism

As we said before, regional integration and group-to-group relations have become a fundamental feature of EU-Latin America relations. Indeed, with the end of the cold war, the EU has been able to develop a series of new and ambitious interregional agreements. These agreements include the group-to-group association that is being separately negotiated with MERCOSUR (Santander, 2006), SICA (Lagos, 2004) and the Andean Community (Adiwasito, De Lombaerde and Pietrangeli, 2005). The interregional agenda now includes mutual trade-liberalisation programmes in keeping with the rules and disciplines of the international economic institutions, such as the WTO. These programmes are even more ambitious than those at the multilateral level. For the EU, this type of agreement should act as a propeller for multilateral trade liberalisation: for the Latin Americans, who have always wanted to have access to the European market, this is a very positive stand.

However, even if Europeans and Latin Americans support multilateral trade and consider its interregional relations as a way to foster multilateral trade negotiations, they do not share the same interests. The position defended by the EU at the multilateral level is similar to the interregional one. The EU is asking Latin America to have a more open market with regard to services, investment and public procurement, yet at the same time the EU continues to protect its agricultural market. Latin-American authorities take the opposite position: at the global level they support a liberalised agriculture, but they fear a liberalisation of services, investment and public procurement. Thus the interregional relationship between the EU and Latin America cannot really foster multilateralism.

In theory, the EU and Latin America are in favour of a world order managed by multilateral rules. However, they disagree about the definition of multilateralism and they do not stand together when they are involved in multilateral negotiations. So in practice, the interregional EU-Latin America partnership is unable to help with multilateralism.

## **5. Conclusions**

This paper looked at the case of EU-LAC interregionalism in order to evaluate the double thesis of the emergence of region-based multilateralism and the effectiveness of EU-interregionalism in contributing to it. Theoretically, two channels can be distinguished: first, the EU as an external actor effectively promoting the strengthening of LA regionalisms as building blocks of a region-based multilateralism, and second, the EU-LAC interregional process as a vehicle to build consensus on multilateral solutions.

Our conclusions can be summarized in six points:

First, interregional relations today are the result of a particular historical process; static theoretical approaches (based on 'interests', for example) will not be satisfactory since they do not take irreversibilities, permanent effects of historical accidents, etc. into account. The San José process, for example, is still colouring current EU-LAC relations.

Second, in order to understand the dynamics of a bi-regional relationship, its connections with third countries, regions and processes should be taken into account, as well as possible strategic behaviour. In our case, EU-LAC relations cannot be understood without the triangular perspectives involving the US.

Third, in a context of multi-layered regionalism and overlapping regions, the process of region-selection becomes a crucial element in interregionalism. Especially in a-symmetric power situations it may have a number of implications, both for the regionalization processes as for the inter-regional dynamics.

Fourth, stability and depth of regional integration processes (or the lack thereof) are important for the inter-regional processes in which the regions are involved. However, our case-study shows that the relationships are not necessarily trivial.

Fifth, especially in a-symmetric relations, the process of agenda-setting and sequencing issues should be closely looked at.

And finally, it has been shown that multilateralism will not necessarily be reached easier through a strategy of seeking bi-regional convergences around multilateral solutions, even if the process is started with pairs of culturally and historically close regions.

## 5. References

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