

# Addressing Multilateralism in Interregional Forums: Evidence from the Dialogue between the European Union and Latin America<sup>1</sup>

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*The emergence of economic, political, social, and health crises brings to light the fact that, in a globalised world, isolated state responses are insufficient to face upcoming international challenges. Cooperative action, not only between states but also between regions, has become crucial. A salient case is the relationship between the European Union and Latin America. This biregional partnership is characterised by its foundation on common values inherited from a shared historical background. These values are closely related to a liberal standpoint that promotes multilateral cooperation as a way to find solutions to global issues. By studying this case, this paper aims to understand how interregional dialogue can become a driver of multilateralism and how it might reflect a political will to foster multilateral agreements. The expected result is a complex assessment of the EU – Latin American interregional dialogue examining how the official speech on multilateralism has evolved over the years and identifying whether multilateralism is a priority in the biregional agenda.*

**Keywords:** *multilateralism, European Union, Latin America, interregional dialogue*

## Introduction

International cooperation within the framework of multilateralism has become crucial given the emergence of increasingly complex global challenges. Yet, multiple phenomena jeopardise the progress of multilateral collective action. The rise of populist leaders has been closely associated with an anti-multilateral view as they tend to reject what they

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perceive as external interference beyond their personal control.<sup>3</sup> Nationalism is also seen as an obstacle to engagement with multilateralism as some nationalist governments view multilateral commitments as impositions that threaten sovereignty.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, multilateral forums are key decision-making instances for dealing with arising economic, political, social and health crises at the international level.

Multilateralism has been analysed from multiple perspectives. Particularly, the study of interregional relations contributes to understanding how regional blocs associate and agree on common behaviour in the context of multilateral forums. In this setting, one of the most studied cases is the relationship between the European Union and Latin America. This relationship relies on deep historical roots dating back to colonial times. Despite some difficulties, a common understanding between these regions has prevailed over time. In this context, this paper aims to examine whether multilateralism has been part of the agenda at the EU – Latin American summits and how it is portrayed in the official declarations. To this end, qualitative content analysis is conducted by examining all the summit declarations to identify patterns related to support for multilateralism and recognise specific proposals aimed at promoting multilateral actions. The documents were analysed individually by identifying mentions of multilateralism to compile and organise them, which helped to understand how this topic has been addressed by the biregional dialogue over the years.

The article is organised according to the following structure. First, the contextual framework is presented to describe the background of the relationship between the EU and Latin America. Secondly, an analysis of each summit declaration is provided to explain the main ideas and proposals on multilateralism identified in the texts. Thirdly, key patterns and changes are examined to provide an overview of the evolution of multilateralism as a key topic in the biregional agenda over the years. Later, a brief assessment of the main challenges of the EU – Latin American dialogue in promoting agendas in multilateral forums is presented. Finally, the article concludes by summarising the main findings and outlining possibilities for further research.

## Contextual framework

The relationship between Europe and Latin America is based on deep historical roots dating back to colonial times. Several milestones in the history of Latin America are closely related to phenomena originated in Europe.<sup>5</sup> Although the relationship has had periods of ups and downs, economic, social, cultural and political ties have remained strong over time. Particularly, the biregional relation acquired special relevance during

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel W. Drezner: The Angry Populist as Foreign Policy Leader: Real Change or Just Hot Air. *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 41, no. 2 (2017), 23–44.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Meyer et al.: *Cultures, Nationalism and Populism. Challenges to Multilateralism*. London, Routledge, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Anna Ayuso – Gian Luca Gardini: EU – Latin American Relations as a Template for Interregionalism. In Frank Mattheis – Andrés Litsegard (eds.): *Interregionalism across the Atlantic Space*. London, Springer International Publishing, 2018. 115–130.

the decade of 1990 due to major changes in both regions. On the one hand, after the period known as “the lost decade” in Latin America, a set of neoliberal reforms were implemented in the region to bring the economies to order. These reforms provided possibilities for investment in state-owned companies, which attracted European investors to the region.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the creation of the EU and the development of its foreign policy played an important role in the rapprochement with other regions, especially those with which there were shared values and common understandings.

In this context, the EU sought to establish a more institutionalised relationship with Latin America.<sup>7</sup> In 1999, the First Summit between the Heads of State and Government of the EU and Latin America was held in Rio de Janeiro. During this event, the EU – Latin American strategic partnership was created aiming to establish a permanent communication channel between these regions and promote a set of joint action programs to strengthen their relationship. The strategic partnership was based on three main pillars: political dialogue, cooperation and trade.<sup>8</sup> Since 1999, biregional summits were held every two years, as it is shown in the table below. Major decisions regarding the joint programs were taken at these biennial events. Summit diplomacy became a key element of the interregional relationship.

*Table 1: The European Union – Latin America biennial summits (EU–LA summits)*

Summit	Place	Dates
I EU–LA Summit	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	28–29 June 1999
II EU–LA Summit	Madrid, Spain	17–20 May 2002
III EU–LA Summit	Guadalajara, Mexico	28–29 May 2004
IV EU–LA Summit	Vienna, Austria	12–13 May 2006
V EU–LA Summit	Lima, Peru	16–17 May 2008
VI EU–LA Summit	Madrid, Spain	17–20 May 2010
VII EU–LA Summit (named I EU–CELAC Summit)	Santiago, Chile	26–27 January 2013
VIII EU–LA Summit (named II EU–CELAC Summit)	Brussels, Belgium	10–11 June 2015

*Source: Compiled by the author based on Quevedo Flores (2017): op. cit.*

The lack of a regional organisation representing Latin America was an obstacle to the relationship from the beginning. The divergence of interests among countries made it difficult to reach consensus before attending biregional summits.<sup>9</sup> In 2012, with the

<sup>6</sup> Wolf Grabendorff: La estrategia birregional y sus limitaciones en un mundo unipolar. *Nueva Sociedad*, no. 189 (2004). 97–109.

<sup>7</sup> Christian Freres – José Antonio Sanahuja: *Study on Relations between the European Union and Latin America. New Strategies and Perspectives*. Madrid, Instituto Complutense de Estudios Internacionales, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> Rafael Cervantes: Una nueva asociación estratégica birregional: la Cumbre América Latina y el Caribe-Unión Europea. *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior*, no. 61 (2000). 128–142.

<sup>9</sup> Wolf Grabendorff: La asociación estratégica Unión Europea-América Latina: ¿unas relaciones birregionales con geometría variable? *Comentario Internacional*, no. 13 (2013). 155–171.

creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the first bloc that brings together all Latin American and Caribbean countries, a new stage in the biregional relationship began. CELAC was recognised as the official interlocutor of Latin America and the Caribbean, which would facilitate relations with other actors such as the EU.

CELAC was expected to help consolidate the biregional dialogue by becoming the single voice of Latin America.<sup>10</sup> However, the proliferation of subregional initiatives has shaped the relationship since it became a dialogue between the EU, as a single actor, and a plethora of organisations and schemes on behalf of Latin American countries (such as Mercosur, CAN, Caricom and SICA).<sup>11</sup> While the creation of CELAC was the attempt to gather all Latin American countries together in a single entity, a common position and understanding in the region remain an unachieved goal.

Nowadays, the EU – Latin American relationship is going through one of its most difficult moments. Phenomena such as the Euro crisis in 2008 and the migration crisis in 2015 had a negative impact on the EU's interregional relations.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the Brexit process and the health emergency triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic are demanding a lot of attention in the region. Some consequences of this situation are the decrease in cooperation funds to Latin America, the lack of new initiatives and, in general, a greater skepticism of Europe towards the biregional relation. In this context, Latin America has been set aside in European foreign policy as other actors and areas have become more relevant.

On Latin America's side, CELAC's low level of institutionalisation, the ideological divisions around the Venezuelan crisis, the economic instability caused by low commodities prices and the Covid-19 pandemic and, in general, the lack of regional consensus have been detrimental to the EU–LA relationship. As a result of these intraregional crises, no biregional summits have been held since 2015, which is unprecedented. While a couple of ministerial meetings have taken place, they do not have the same relevance and impact on decision-making that the biennial summits between Heads of State and Government have.

Despite this hostile scenario, the strategic partnership remains in place and some of the biregional initiatives are active to date. In this regard, it is important to note that the EU–LA relationship is composed of a set of mechanisms and programs involving both governmental and non-state actors, making this relation an example of complex and polymorphic interregionalism.<sup>13</sup> Although the most important forum of the biregional partnership is the biennial summits, there is a multiplicity of mechanisms that create a complex network of agreements and cooperation projects around which the relationship evolves and remains.

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<sup>10</sup> Lourdes García Rodríguez – Fernando Jiménez Valderrama: Balance de la asociación entre América Latina y el Caribe y la Unión Europea. *Revista IUS*, no. 33 (2014). 7–33.

<sup>11</sup> Mercosur stands for Mercado Común del Sur, CAN refers to the Andean Community, Caricom stands for the Caribbean Community and SICA refers to the Central American Integration System.

<sup>12</sup> Anna Ayuso: 20 años después ¿Hacia dónde va la asociación estratégica? *Pensamiento Propio*, no. 49 (2019). 53–84.

<sup>13</sup> Ayuso–Gardini (2018): op. cit.

## The EU–LA summits: An analysis of the declarations

Considering the role of the summits as the main decision-making instance for the EU–LA relationship, the most relevant topics on the biregional agenda are reflected in the official declarations resulting from these meetings. In order to understand how multilateralism has been addressed in the EU–LA dialogue, a comprehensive review of these documents is necessary. Therefore, in this section each summit declaration is examined to identify how multilateralism is portrayed in these documents, how often it is mentioned, and whether there are specific proposals aimed at fostering multilateral actions. Content analysis has been used to categorise and quantify the data obtained from the summits declarations observing key trends, patterns and changes regarding multilateralism in the biregional agenda. In total, eight documents were analysed; they correspond to the eight biregional summits held during the study period (from 1999 to 2021).

### I EU–LA Summit (Rio de Janeiro, 1999)

The first summit between the EU and Latin America laid the foundations of the biregional relationship and introduced the main objectives of the strategic partnership. The Declaration of Rio de Janeiro provides details of these first commitments highlighting the importance of the shared values inherited from the common history between the two regions. Regarding multilateralism, at the beginning of the document it is mentioned that the strategic partnership between the EU and Latin America is established in full compliance with the purposes and principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations.<sup>14</sup> This first mention of the UN is the prelude to a set of references to this organisation, as one of the main messages of this declaration is that both regions have the political will to find solutions to global problems through collective action and multilateral institutions, mainly in the framework of the UN.

Throughout this declaration, the EU and Latin America stated their support for multilateral initiatives and treaties such as the Panama Comprehensive Action Plan on Drug Policies, the Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Constitutive Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Fourth World Conference of Women, the Ottawa Convention on the prohibition of use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines, the Rio Convention on climate change, biodiversity and desertification, the Kyoto Protocol, the Uruguay Round, the World Summit for Social Development, among others. They also recognised the importance of international cooperation in areas such as the protection of human rights, the defence of democracy, gender equality, sustainable development, trade liberalisation, environmental protection, nuclear non-proliferation and the fight against transnational crime, among others.

In this document, the leaders of both regions pledged to “strengthen multilateral institutions as fora for international dispute resolution and the promotion of development”.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Declaration of Rio de Janeiro* (1999), Article 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Declaration of Rio de Janeiro* (1999), Article 31.

Furthermore, they affirmed that they would “jointly support intensifying multilateral relations, including advancing the process of reforming the United Nations system, in the search for a new balance between its principal organs, so as to improve their effectiveness”.<sup>16</sup> Particularly, the last part of the declaration reveals how the EU – Latin American strategic partnership is at the service of multilateralism since, for example, both regions resolved to participate actively in the design of a new international financial architecture within the framework of the UN consultations<sup>17</sup> and to use multilateral fora to promote cultural diversity and pluralism in the world.<sup>18</sup> Finally, they committed to:

Promote closer cooperation and exchange of points of view in international fora on matters of common interest. Work jointly for the improvement of the capability of the United Nations Organization to respond in an ever more effective manner to its tasks in the new millennium, with full respect for the objectives and principles of the Charter, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations 50 years ago.<sup>19</sup>

## II EU–LA Summit (Madrid, 2002)

In this summit declaration, the continuity of the previous summit patterns is observed as some of the main statements are repeated. The representatives of the EU and Latin America pledged to “strengthen the multilateral system on the basis of the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter and international law”.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, one of the commitments in the declaration was “to reinforce biregional political dialogue in international fora and consultations in the UN system and in major UN Conferences on the main questions of the international agenda”.<sup>21</sup>

One of the main topics of this summit was the fight against terrorism in view of the 9/11 attacks in the United States the year before the summit was held. In this regard, both regions committed to “promote the conclusion of, and adherence to, all international conventions relating to terrorism and the implementation of UN resolutions on the matter”.<sup>22</sup> However, the summit was not limited only to that topic. As at the Rio de Janeiro summit, the leaders addressed various issues such as the protection of democratic institutions and the rule of law, poverty alleviation, gender equality and women’s empowerment, preservation of cultural heritage, the fight against racism, and nuclear non-proliferation, among others.

The declaration reflects the support of European and Latin American leaders for multilateral institutions and agreements such as the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the Doha Work Programme, the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative,

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<sup>16</sup> *Declaration of Rio de Janeiro* (1999), Article 31.

<sup>17</sup> *Declaration of Rio de Janeiro* (1999), Article 53.

<sup>18</sup> *Declaration of Rio de Janeiro* (1999), Article 60.

<sup>19</sup> *Declaration of Rio de Janeiro* (1999), Annex, Article 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Declaration of Madrid* (2002), Article 1.

<sup>21</sup> *Declaration of Madrid* (2002), Article 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Declaration of Madrid* (2002), Article 4.

the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, the World Summit on Sustainable Development, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the International Conference on e-Government for Development, the World Food Summit, the Declaration on Cultural Diversity, among others.

A particularity of this summit was the understanding of multilateralism from an international trade perspective. In this regard, the leaders claimed:

We support an open and transparent non-discriminatory multilateral trade system, in which the progressive opening of markets and the removal of trade barriers, based on stronger more transparent multilateral rules, allows everyone to benefit from the comparative advantages of their respective economies and fosters competitive integration in world trade and reduces the scope for protectionism.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, they stated their firm rejection to all kinds of unilateral practices, especially those occurring in international trade. Lastly, it should be noted that, in this declaration, the leaders of both regions emphasised how the relationship is strengthened by their dialogue in international forums. In this sense, they stated: “Our biregional strategic partnership is being reinforced by deepening and widening our dialogue in international fora, particularly through political consultations in the United Nations fora and in major UN Conferences”.<sup>24</sup> Thus, not only is multilateralism strengthened by the biregional dialogue, but joint participation in multilateral fora strengthens the biregional relationship itself.

### III EU–LA Summit (Guadalajara, 2004)

The structure of this summit declaration is different from the two previous ones. This declaration is divided into three main sections: multilateralism, social cohesion and biregional relationship. Devoting one section to multilateralism in the document reflects the central role of the topic in this summit’s agenda. In this regard, multiple mentions were made of the UN system and the importance of its agencies and treaties in addressing multilateral issues at the international level. For example, Article 8 of the Declaration states: “We reiterate that an effective multilateral system, based on international law, supported by strong international institutions and with the United Nations at its centre, is essential for achieving peace and international security, sustainable development and social progress.”<sup>25</sup>

Particularly, the importance of the UN system is emphasised when addressing issues such as the eradication of poverty and hunger, crisis management and peaceful resolution of disputes, illicit weapons trafficking, the prohibition of torture and other degrading

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<sup>23</sup> *Declaration of Madrid* (2002), Annex 1, Article 45.

<sup>24</sup> *Declaration of Madrid* (2002), Annex 1, Article 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Declaration of Guadalajara* (2004), Article 8.

treatment, the fight against transnational organised crime, the fight against corruption and the prevention of climate change. However, it should be noted that the EU and Latin American leaders recognise the need to reform and revitalise the UN system, including the roles and structure of the Security Council and the General Assembly in order to “make the multilateral system more responsive and effective in meeting global threats and challenges”.<sup>26</sup>

The role of the UN as the focal point for multilateral initiatives is not only stated in the section on multilateralism but is also mentioned several times in the sections on social cohesion and biregional relationship. This fact reflects the firm belief of the EU and Latin America that the UN is the cornerstone of multilateral efforts in all areas and must be strengthened despite its flaws. Yet, both regions recognise that multilateralism also takes place in other instances and meeting spaces. Some of the multilateral conventions and treaties outside the UN system mentioned in the declaration are the Panama Action Plan on maritime cooperation, the Doha Round, the Cotonou Agreement, the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, the World Water Forum, the Johannesburg Renewable Energy Coalition and the World Summit on Information Society.

#### IV EU–LA Summit (Vienna, 2006)

This declaration has fourteen sections corresponding to the areas of action prioritised by the EU–LA leaders at this summit. One of them is entitled *Strengthening the Multilateral Approach to Fostering Peace, Stability and the Respect for International Law* and, as its name indicates, contains information on multilateral actions promoted by both regions. In this regard, at the beginning of the declaration, the leaders stated: “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 crosscutting issue and as a priority for our biregional relations.”<sup>27</sup>

As in previous summits, it was claimed that the UN system should be at the center of multilateral efforts. Yet, the EU–LA leaders insisted on the need for changes in this system and reiterated their commitment to “a comprehensive reform and revitalization of the UN reinforcing its democratic nature, representativeness, transparency, accountability and efficiency”.<sup>28</sup> Some of the multilateral cooperation areas mentioned in previous summit declarations also appear in this document, for example the fight against terrorism, the protection of human rights, the defence of democracy, gender equality, nuclear non-proliferation, the prevention of climate change, the eradication of poverty, among others. However, the detailed thematic division of this declaration provided a more organised structure to the text compared to the previous ones, allowing for more details on the initiatives corresponding to each topic.

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<sup>26</sup> *Declaration of Guadalajara* (2004), Article 12.

<sup>27</sup> *Declaration of Vienna* (2006), Article 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Declaration of Vienna* (2006), Article 11.



A particularity of this document is the greater prominence given to biregional initiatives to address the common challenges faced by both regions. In this sense, the leaders expressed their support for biregional cooperation spaces such as the EU–LAC Inter-Parliamentary Conference, the Eurosocial program, the European – Latin American – Caribbean Civil Society Forum, the EU–LAC Mechanism for Coordination and Cooperation on Drugs Policies, the EU–LAC Ministerial Information Society Forum, among others. Furthermore, the agreements between the EU and subregional blocs such as the Andean Community, Mercosur and Cariforum received special mention in the declaration. However, multilateral bodies, and multilateralism in general, continued to be a priority on the agenda.

## V EU–LA Summit (Lima, 2008)

In this summit, unlike the previous ones, multilateralism played a secondary role in the biregional agenda but was still mentioned and recognised as relevant for the strategic partnership. For example, Article 3 of the declaration mentions that, in order to harness the potential of the relationship, both regions will:

Strengthen the multilateral system making it more effective and reinforcing its democratic nature, with the UN at its centre, through greater LAC-EU coordination and cooperation, particularly in matters on which we have undertaken specific initiatives, as well as on global issues of common interest.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, the leaders of both regions argued that unilateral coercive measures pose a serious threat to multilateralism, especially in terms of trade.<sup>30</sup> They claimed that, in the medium and longer term, a lasting response to global problems requires coordinated action from the international community.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, they reaffirmed their commitment to initiatives such as the Doha Round and reiterated their willingness to reach an agreement in order to promote social development in the world.

One of the central topics of this summit was sustainable development and environmental protection. In this regard, the leaders recognised that the achievement of sustainable development is based on strengthening international cooperation, for which both regions reaffirmed their commitment to support environmental governance in the UN System and multilateral initiatives such as Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Convention on Desertification. In addition, biregional mechanisms such as Euroclima and the EU–LA dialogue on environmental policy were created to provide a biregional response to the challenges arising from climate change.

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<sup>29</sup> *Declaration of Lima* (2008), Article 3.

<sup>30</sup> *Declaration of Lima* (2008), Article 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Declaration of Lima* (2008), Article 8.

The other main theme of this declaration was the eradication of poverty, inequality and exclusion. This section stressed the importance of the implementation of effective social policies, the need for economic growth with a distributive impact, and the promotion of social participation and a sense of belonging. Although the social agenda gained more importance, little mention was made of the need to foster multilateral cooperation to solve these issues compared to previous summits. In this area, biregional action was also prioritised by highlighting the role of initiatives such as the Eurosocial program. The special emphasis on the social agenda at this summit could be attributed to the greater role played at that time by left-wing governments in Latin America and their influence on the regional dialogue and establishment of priorities.

## VI EU–LA Summit (Madrid, 2010)

This declaration is divided into three main sections: partners in jointly addressing global challenges, strengthening our biregional partnership, and promoting innovation and technology on a biregional scale for sustainable development and social inclusion. References to multilateralism were made mainly in the first section. In this part, both regions reiterated their commitment to multilateralism, mainly within the framework of the UN system, with the aim of promoting peace, security, freedom, democracy, human rights and prosperity.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, they stated:

We shall intensify our efforts at both subregional and biregional levels to identify common interests and, whenever possible, coordinate positions and actions in the multilateral organizations and fora of which our countries are Parties. In order to continue promoting an effective multilateral system, we remain willing to cooperate in the reform of the United Nations, with the aim of strengthening the capacity of the UN to face the many challenges posed by the new millennium.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, the leaders reaffirmed their commitment to support a set of multilateral initiatives such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the UN Conference on the Arms Trade Treaty, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the UN Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis, the Convention to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), the Monterrey Consensus, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity, among others.

A particular characteristic of this declaration is its mention of the need for international cooperation to address the global consequences of the economic and financial crisis of 2008. In this regard, the EU–LA leaders declared:

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<sup>32</sup> *Declaration of Madrid* (2010), Article 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Declaration of Madrid* (2010), Article 2.

We reaffirm our commitment to work together towards a new international financial architecture, including the reform of the international financial institutions, giving increased voice and voting power to underrepresented developing and transition countries while also delivering on non-quota governance reforms.<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, in terms of trade both regions “remain determined to favour an open and non-discriminatory, rules-based multilateral trade system and fully respect its disciplines, and recognize its contribution in promoting the recovery from the economic crisis, and in promoting growth and development”.<sup>35</sup> They also pledged to avoid protectionism in all its forms and intensify their efforts towards achieving a rapid conclusion of the Doha Development Round.

The second and third sections of the document focused on biregional initiatives that were being implemented to advance in priority areas of action for both regions such as social development, migration, drug trafficking, prevention of natural disasters, infrastructure, innovation and technology transfer, among others. It was preferred to address these areas of action at the biregional level, but without ignoring the importance of the broader multilateral environment. In this sense, both global multilateral initiatives and biregional mechanisms were of equal importance in this summit declaration.

## **VII EU–LA Summit (named I EU–CELAC Summit) (Santiago, 2013)**

This biregional summit was the first in which CELAC participated as the official representative mechanism of Latin America, providing an opportunity for the region to speak under one single voice. However, this novelty did not seem to imply big changes in the form of the biregional dialogue since the summit declaration follows the same agenda patterns as previous ones. The document is divided into four main sections: new CELAC–EU Dialogue, shared values and positions in the international and multilateral arena, progress in the biregional strategic partnership process, and alliance for sustainable development: promoting investments of social and environmental quality. The second section contains most of the references to multilateralism.

In this section, the leaders stated: “We ratify the consensus reached in our previous summits which have reinforced our positions in the international and multilateral arena, and in this regard, we reaffirm our commitment to multilateralism.”<sup>36</sup> They reiterated their support for the principles enshrined in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Likewise, they committed to continue their efforts in the fight against terrorism, transnational crime, climate change, corruption, poverty and inequality. They

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<sup>34</sup> *Declaration of Madrid* (2010), Article 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Declaration of Madrid* (2010), Article 12.

<sup>36</sup> *Declaration of Santiago* (2013), Article 4.

insisted on the importance of the UN in addressing these global problems as well as the relevance of biregional initiatives to tackle some of them. The last part of the document highlighted sustainable development as the main theme of this EU–LA meeting and mentioned both global and biregional agreements that should be strengthened to address this issue.

## **VIII EU–LA Summit (named II EU–CELAC Summit) (Brussels, 2015)**

This was the last summit held between the EU and Latin America before the current non-summit period began. The main theme of the summit was: “Shaping our common future: working together for prosperous, cohesive and sustainable societies for our citizens.” This declaration includes most of the topics addressed at previous summits. The text is composed of four sections: global challenges, biregional association, an updated biregional Action Plan and future of the partnership. References to multilateral actions were made mostly in the first section. In this part, the EU–LA leaders asserted:

We underscore the need to strengthen the multilateral system and to promote more effective and inclusive global governance, respectful of international law. To that end, we renew our commitment to its reform with the view to its democratization, inclusiveness and transparency in order to strengthen our collective capacity to face the many challenges posed by the new millennium.<sup>37</sup>

They also reiterated their interest in strengthening their cooperation on the global agenda and agreeing on common positions in international forums.<sup>38</sup> In addition to mentioning the traditional areas of multilateral cooperation from previous summits, this declaration highlights multilateral initiatives to address issues such as trans-border intelligence sharing and law enforcement cooperation, citizen security, digital gap, the protection of indigenous peoples’ rights, among others. The implementation of biregional mechanisms is presented in the other sections of the declaration as well as the results of cooperation dialogues between the EU and some subregions of Latin America. In sum, the EU–LA relationship makes use of both global multilateral forums and biregional initiatives to address their common challenges, thus becoming advocates of joint solutions to shared problems at all levels of cooperation.

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<sup>37</sup> *Declaration of Brussels* (2015), Article 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Declaration of Brussels* (2015), Article 7.

## Key patterns and changes over the years

The analysis of the summit declarations made it possible to identify two main patterns: strong support for multilateralism and the importance of the UN system as the focal point for developing multilateral initiatives. Firstly, support for multilateralism is a constant feature of all the analysed declarations, which is reflected in the mention of a multiplicity of multilateral initiatives on various issues and the insistence on the importance of taking part in them. Furthermore, many of the commitments made in the summit declarations are inspired by proposals from multilateral bodies in which European and Latin American countries have participated. The mention of multilateral agreements such as the Doha Round, the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Kyoto Protocol, among others, is very frequent.

Secondly, the role of the UN system as the centrepiece of multilateralism is the other recurring theme in the declarations. Many of the paragraphs refer to the participation of the EU and Latin American countries in UN conventions and bodies on diverse topics. Similarly, encouragement to other countries to join UN conventions is very often in these documents, highlighting the level of importance that both regions attach to the UN system. However, most of the declarations mention the need to reform the UN system to make it more inclusive in line with current international trends.

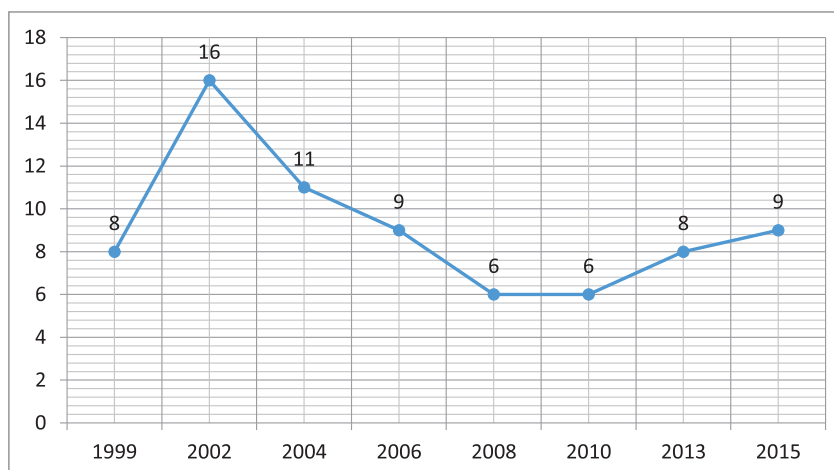


Figure 1: References to “multilateralism” and “multilateral” in the EU–LA Summit Declarations

Source: Compiled by the author based on the calculations resulting from the content analysis.

The table above presents the number of references to the terms “multilateralism” and “multilateral” found in the summit declarations. Aggregating the results of all the declarations, the words multilateralism and multilateral appear 73 times in total. However, a downward trend is observed since 2002. A preliminary hypothesis from this result is that the decrease in the inclusion of references to multilateralism in the summit declarations

may be related to the rise of populist leaders in Latin America. As mentioned above, populist leaders tend to reject what they perceive as external interferences beyond their control, in this case, multilateral initiatives. Yet, further research is needed to determine whether the correlation between the rise of populist leaders and reduced attention to multilateralism at summits implies causality between them.

## **The EU–LA summits and multilateralism: Main challenges**

With its sixty countries, the Euro – Latin American space accounts for nearly one-third of the UN members, which raises the question of the international prominence of these regions in tackling current global problems through multilateralism. In this sense, joint action between the EU and Latin America could play a greater role in the international arena by establishing priorities and pushing ahead specific topics on global forums. Yet, despite the importance that multilateralism has for these regions according to statements made at the summit declarations, the relationship falls short of its potential when it comes to shaping agendas in multilateral forums.<sup>39</sup>

The possibilities for multilateral action promoted by the EU and Latin America are threatened by several issues. Firstly, Latin American countries have not been able to coordinate their foreign policies due to the persistent regional fragmentation in terms of ideologies and interests. Therefore, the possibilities of harmonising positions with the EU seem even more uncertain. Secondly, the EU has faced its own intraregional disagreements, which makes it difficult to reach common positions among its members on certain issues. Moreover, the EU does not act as a single actor in some multilateral spaces, thus some countries may behave in a way that disregards the regional interest. As a result, it has been challenging to achieve, for example, a joint vote of the EU and Latin American countries in the UN plenary.<sup>40</sup> In this sense, coordinating common positions in multilateral forums is a yearned but unachieved goal. Furthermore, the lack of summits since 2015 has aggravated the situation.

However, it should be mentioned that there was a virtual meeting in December 2021 that gathered the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the EU and the Heads of State and Government of seven Latin American countries holding the presidencies of regional and subregional organisations in 2021. This virtual meeting addressed the issue of the post-Covid recovery aiming to build a more resilient connection between the EU and Latin America in the context of the lack of summits.

In this meeting, the leaders held discussions on topics such as pandemic prevention, fight against climate change, digital innovation, sustainable economic recovery, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms and cooperation on citizen security,

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<sup>39</sup> Susanne Gratius et al.: *Alcances, límites y retos de la diplomacia de cumbres europeo-latinoamericanas*. Alcalá, Instituto de Estudios Latinoamericanos de la Universidad de Alcalá, 2011.

<sup>40</sup> Gratius et al. (2011): op. cit. 33.

among others.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the importance of multilateral action was highlighted in the discussions as the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, stated that the EU and Latin America have a decisive role in shaping the multilateral agenda and in addressing key global challenges considering the weight of their membership at international forums.<sup>42</sup> In general, the expectations of resuming biregional summits and advancing the multilateral agenda remain despite adverse conditions at the intraregional and international level.

## Conclusions

The biregional relationship between the EU and Latin America has given multilateralism a privileged place on the summits agenda over the years. From the biregional perspective, the practice of multilateralism is closely related to the United Nations system and depends strongly on it. However, it is important to note that the leaders of both regions are aware of the need to reform some structures of the UN system to improve its management and broaden the scope of their actions. An examination of the EU–LA summit declarations reveals that, for both regions, the most relevant issues to be addressed in the multilateral framework are the protection of democracy and human rights, sustainable development and climate change, gender equality, eradication of poverty, trade liberalisation as well as the fight against terrorism, illegal arms trafficking and nuclear proliferation.

Some summit declarations, specifically the last ones, mention the coordination of common positions between the EU and Latin America in multilateral forums, but there is no specific reference on how they plan to implement it. Moreover, this aspiration faces big challenges as joint positions at the intraregional level are difficult to reach, thus interregional consensus seems even more uncertain. Nevertheless, the dialogue between these regions has become a driver of multilateralism as it has been a space to encourage the participation of the EU and Latin American countries in multilateral bodies and to foster the search for solutions to global problems in these meeting spaces. Although in some summit declarations biregional mechanisms appeared to have more relevance to address common challenges, global multilateral bodies and multilateralism in general continued to be a priority on the agenda.

Finally, this analysis provided an overview of the observable trends in the texts as a mapping exercise and a preliminary assessment of the phenomenon. However, considering the limitations of the selected methodology, further research on this topic is recommended to discover the reasons behind the trends that appeared in the summit declarations. As Soriano points out, content analysis only examines the information that can be observed in the surface structure of the texts and it is not concerned with the latent or “hidden” content.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, discourse analysis and other methodologies can

<sup>41</sup> European Council: EU-Latin America & Caribbean Leaders’ Meeting: Joining Forces for a Sustainable Post-Covid Recovery – Press Release by Presidents Michel and von der Leyen. *Press Releases*, 02 December 2021.

<sup>42</sup> European Council (2021): *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> Juan Pablo Soriano: High Expectations. Interregional Agendas on Global Security Challenges: East Asia, Europe and Latin America. *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, 62, no. 1 (2019). 1–24.

be applied to this case to provide explanations of the revealed patterns by considering the political and economic context of the biregional summits between the EU and Latin America.

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