

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

TIME TO RETHINK THE EU STRATEGY IN THE WIDER ATLANTIC SPACE



The EU has a window of opportunity in the wider Atlantic Space, which includes the four regions bordering the Atlantic ocean: South and Central America and the Caribbean, North America, Europe, and Africa.

While the general perception by stakeholders across the Atlantic Space is that the EU has lost relevance in all the regions, a potential increase in influence is still considered positive. The EU needs to rethink its strategy to engage with the other Atlantic regions, as part of its global strategy to reposition itself in the world.

Atlantic Future is a Seventh Framework Programme project that analyses fundamental trends in the wider Atlantic Space.

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INTRODUCTION

Current trends point to uncertainty as one of the world's main features. Increasing interdependence and the on-going redistribution of power have dramatically transformed the world in recent years, and the wider Atlantic is no exception to this trend.

The Atlantic offers the EU a space in which to forge its position as a global actor. To reinforce its position in this area, strengthening links and connections with the Atlantic North is key, but not sufficient. The EU needs to embrace the South Atlantic too. Reaching out to Africa and Latin America should become a priority in order to take advantage of similar values and shared challenges. From migration to security, the environment, and economic growth, the Atlantic shares similar concerns as well as opportunities. The EU needs to come forward with a single strategy to reach out to this new area of opportunities. In this context, stakeholders interviewed across the Atlantic space highlighted two aspects. Firstly, Europe was found to be inward-looking and too focused on its own internal issues. Secondly, the EU is perceived to have no common foreign and security strategy. Instead, individual member states follow their own strategies and actions.

Based on 488 interviews carried out across the Atlantic Space within the framework of the Atlantic Future project, this policy brief will assess the perceptions of stakeholders from the Atlantic's four

continents and the role of the EU in the Atlantic space, and will highlight the aspects to be tackled to avoid the scenario of the EU losing relevance in this wider Atlantic realm.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

A total of 488 interviews were carried out between the autumn of 2014 and spring of 2015 in 25 countries in Europe, Africa; South, Central and North America; and in international organizations based in Geneva, New York and Washington D.C. Stakeholders in the Atlantic with different professional profiles and expertise were interviewed. The sample is limited, as only around 20 interviews were conducted in each country, due to the large geographical scope involved. This policy brief expressly wishes to acknowledge the limitations of such a sample, as the data collected through the interviews does not purport to be exhaustive and cannot be considered representative of the views and perceptions of the Atlantic regions. However, they do provide some preliminary empirical evidence of perceptions across the Atlantic Space.



Figure 1. Countries in the Atlantic where interviews were conducted.

Interviewees were asked on the role of the EU in the regions bordering the Atlantic and how the EU could be more influential in the Atlantic Space. The answers to these questions provide us with a sample that can be taken as preliminary evidence of perceptions of the EU across the Atlantic Space, and may provide us with food for thought to evaluate and reconsider how the EU should engage in this macro-region.

Different opinions and perspectives could certainly be identified in Africa, South and Central America, Africa and Europe. There was no unanimity as to the role and influence of the EU. However, it is worth mentioning that a majority of the interviewees still considered the EU to be relevant in their respective regions, while pointing to a loss of influence in recent years. Certain common opinions could be found throughout the Atlantic regions. As previously mentioned, a majority of interviewees in all the regions found Europe to be inward-looking and too focused on its own internal issues, and perceived that the EU has no common foreign and security strategy. At the same time, different regional perspectives could be appreciated. The main ideas found among stakeholders in each region are highlighted below.

Africa: Interviews were carried out in Angola, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Ghana, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa. The EU was viewed as relevant by a majority of interviewees in Africa, with a few caveats. While many interviewees acknowledged the relevance of the EU, particularly with regards to economic and developmental and humanitarian assistance aspects, many also underscored the fact that the relationship is unequal. The Economic Partnership Agreements were described as unfair by many of the interviewees, as they *“bring more benefits for the EU than African countries”*. References were often made to China to show the EU’s loss of relevance and to reflect on the need for African countries to open their economies to other markets. The EU was also criticised for adopting a paternalistic stance in the relationship between the two regions. A divergence of interests and the lack of a unified EU strategy were also cited.

Demands for increased dialogue, a deeper understanding of the region, a relationship of equals, as well as an improved relationship with Africa through the abandonment of double standards and a neo-colonial mind-set were expressed. Many stakeholders referred to the relevance of the EU due to its funding capabilities, while demanding more investment and technical cooperation in areas such as education, infrastructure, technology transfer and research. In the words of an interviewee, *“the EU sees Africans as only poor people and instead of helping them to develop by themselves they just give money, food, material goods in general”*. A common EU foreign policy and the need to rethink the EU’s strategy towards Africa were seen by many of the interviewees as key for the EU to increase its influence on the continent. As another interviewee pointed out, the EU should *“avoid having any EU country member taking the exclusive lead in formulating EU general policy towards the region”*.

South and Central America: Interviews were conducted in Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Honduras and Colombia. While acknowledging that the EU has lost influence in the last years, a majority of the stakeholders interviewed considered the EU to be relevant in South and Central America. Trade relations, investment and aid for development projects were often cited as the main reasons for such relevance. Having said that, many respondents also mentioned that cooperation has been developed *“from the perspective of the donor, and not necessarily approaching the reality as seen from the context of the receiver. (...) the result may be more effective if the format of cooperation between regions was more flexible”*. The EU as a model of integration (political as well as economic) was also mentioned several times. In the words of another interviewee, *“the cooperation and integration model have a very important role for the formation of South America as an economic and political regional space.”* Nevertheless, differences in the considerations could be seen depending on the country. For example, the relevance of the EU in peace building was mentioned among Colombian interviewees, and Honduran stakeholders highlighted the importance of the EU with regards to aid and cooperation. Stakeholders interviewed in Brazil, meanwhile, appeared to have a more critical view of the EU’s role, with some even questioning whether any role for it was desirable.

Generally, an EU that is too inward-looking and focused on its internal problems, a lack of interest in South and Central America, bureaucracy, and the lack of a common approach were seen as the main weaknesses in the EU’s role. Several stakeholders mentioned that individual countries such as Spain, Portugal, Germany or France have more of a presence in the region than the EU as such. When asked how the EU could become more influential in the Atlantic, it was repeatedly mentioned that the EU should solve its internal problems first, and that it should have a common view and strategy. In addition, the EU should deepen its engagement with South and Central American countries, not only with regards to economic and trade relations, but also other aspects, such as strengthening cultural links, security, democracy and the promotion of human rights. In such an engagement with the region, several respondents demanded a more equal and balanced relationship. In the words of an interviewee, *“it is necessary to adopt a format of cooperation and dialog that reflects a relation between equals. North Americans in this process attempt to prove they are right justifying arguments based on scientific knowledge, while Europeans impose a certain historical moral value of development”*.

North America: Interviews were conducted in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The EU is generally considered relevant for particular aspects. However, as an interviewee pointed out, the EU is *“relevant but not central”*. Investment and trade were considered to be the areas where the EU was most important. References to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) were made repeatedly. The lack of a common voice from the EU, the economic crisis, and the inward-looking attitude exhibited by the EU were cited as challenges that undermine its role in the region. Moreover, in the United States and Canada interviewees cited the handling of relations with Russia as something that could hinder the EU’s stance in the Atlantic. When asked about the role of the EU, Mexican interviewees often referred to the role of the EU in Latin America, the EU’s lack of interest in the region, and the need for more investment. In order for the EU to become more influential, several stakeholders in the three countries of North America stated that the EU should resolve its own internal problems, speak with a single voice, and take the lead. As a respondent mentioned, *“it is not clear if the EU still has the support of its own member states.”*

The view from Europe: Interviews were carried out in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. European stakeholders generally agreed that the EU has a role to play in the Atlantic. In their view the EU has been relevant as a supra-national governance model, particularly in terms of trade promotion (through the development of trade agreements and bilateral partnerships), as a human rights defender, as an environmental policy pioneer, and as an aid supplier (especially for Africa, and South and Central America). Nonetheless, interviewees acknowledged the negative consequences of the Euro crisis, extensive bureaucratic processes, the primacy of national interests and an inefficient decision-making process entail for the developing of a common EU security and foreign policy. Instead, according to most of the interviewees, individual countries have promoted their own foreign policy strategies. As an interviewee pointed out, *“unless Europe manages its internal divisions and conflicts, the EU will be unable to play a strong active role in the Atlantic.”*

International Organisations: Representatives from different international organizations were interviewed in the cities of Geneva, New York and Washington D.C. The majority agreed on the relevance that the EU has for the Atlantic region, and considered the EU a leading example of regional integration. In the words of an interviewee, *“It is still one of the most successful arrangements that we have in the planet in terms of impact to the citizens that form part of it and a huge impact as an example to other regions”*. However, they noted the risk the EU runs of becoming irrelevant if it does not manage to overcome the economic crisis and its functional deficiencies, refrain from promoting austerity measures, recover the EU’s stand on the promotion of human rights in multilateral forums, invest in its security and foreign policy, and handle challenges in its immediate neighbourhood such as the Ukrainian conflict and Russian hostility. Interviewees also pointed to the disenchantment in South Atlantic countries with the EU. In the view of international representatives, the EU should demonstrate fair treatment towards southern and neighbouring countries instead of making EU aid contingent upon change in the behaviour of governments, through the prospect of receiving either EU membership, an action plan, or a promise of partnership. In the view of an interviewee, *“funding has to be paired with a more sophisticated level of political engagement as an institution”*.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy implications

The main policy implication that may be drawn from the results of the interviews discussed above is that the EU is losing relevance in the Atlantic Space. While still recognised by the majority of stakeholders interviewed as a significant actor, there is general agreement on the fact that the EU has lost importance in the last years. The EU is perceived by the other Atlantic regions as being in disarray, too busy dealing with its internal issues to pay real attention to the external world.

There has been much talk in recent years – whatever the outcome – of the shift by the EU’s traditional partner, the United States, to the Pacific. The South Atlantic has also begun to look to the East. Asia, mainly China, has dramatically increased its presence and role in recent years, in South and Central America and in Africa.

In this ever more complex and unpredictable world, the EU faces two alternatives: to become a stronger global actor, or to run the risk of becoming inconsequential. As things stand at the moment, there is a real possibility that the EU will continue to lose stature, due to the lack of ambition to realise its full potential. The Atlantic Space offers the EU a unique opportunity to project its foreign policy in a macro-region where it enjoys a “privileged” position: there are commonalities between the four regions bordering the Atlantic (a common history, a shared culture, the idea that the EU could have a role to play), and there are also shared challenges that call for cooperation among Atlantic partners. Because of this, the EU should not squander this unique opportunity to reposition itself in the Atlantic space and strengthen its stance as a global actor.

Policy recommendations

- **The EU should integrate an Atlantic dimension into its foreign policy.** The EU needs to prioritise this region as a space to project its foreign policy. Within the framework of the review of the EU global strategy on foreign and security policy, promoted by the HR Federica Mogherini, the following is stated: *“The complexity and connectivity of our times are enhancing interactions in the wider Atlantic space, and the EU has only to tap this potential.”* The EU must take advantage of its privileged position in the wider Atlantic. Shared challenges make cooperation between the EU and other Atlantic actors more feasible, and relationships can be built on common understandings and similar values. In addition, the results from the interviews show that the EU is still regarded as a leader in specific areas: many interviewees viewed the EU as a model for integration, as a promoter of democracy, a human rights defender, and a pillar for the development of environmental policies. The EU should take advantage of these assets when engaging with the wider Atlantic space.
- **The EU should re-evaluate its strategy to engage with the South Atlantic.** While continuing to strengthen its relationship with the United States, the EU needs to rethink its strategy towards the South Atlantic. In the words of the HR Federica Mogherini, pronounced at the opening session of the EU-CELAC Civil Society Forum on 19 March 2015: *“when we speak of strong Transatlantic relations, we don’t only refer to the North Atlantic, but also to the South.”* It is to be noted, however, that the South needs to include not only Central and South America and the Caribbean but also Africa. Shared challenges and threats, but also opportunities, mean that including Africa in the Atlantic equation is not only advisable but a must. The EU is perceived by stakeholders from the South Atlantic as not having enough interest in the south, and not treating them fairly. The EU should genuinely listen to its counterparts and treat them as equals. For example, in the framework of the current negotiation of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the EU should make an effort to hear the concerns of the South Atlantic countries. Overall, the EU should reinforce dialogue in the Atlantic space. More flexible and regular meetings should be held with other Atlantic regions as a way to foster a more positive and equitable relationship. Furthermore, in terms of aid and cooperation, interviewees’ responses reflected the need of a more coordinated strategy with a focus on technical cooperation. An effort should be made not to decrease the EU budget for aid in spite of budget constrictions, and more coordination with initiatives from other actors should be pursued.
- **The EU should speak with a single voice.** While individual member states can pursue their own strategies based on their individual interests and priorities, it is vital that the EU be perceived as a single entity in its own right when acting in the world. The member states and the EU should find a way to align their national interests with the collective interest of

the Union. Member states need to become more conscious of the fact that, in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world, we are stronger together. The EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, to be presented by the HR Federica Mogherini in June 2016, needs to convince member states of the need to act collectively, and decision-making procedures should be more straightforward.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

Objectives

The overall aim of the ATLANTIC FUTURE project is to study the rationale for cooperation in the Atlantic area and to suggest strategies to the EU on how to engage with the broader transatlantic relationship in the context of the on-going redistribution of power and the overall rebalancing of relations around and within the Atlantic space. This has been operationalized through the following five objectives: (i) understanding the Atlantic, (ii) mapping change and transformation, (iii) collecting perspectives from stakeholders across the Atlantic, (iv) projecting trends and outlining potential future scenarios, and (v) identifying the potential of Atlantic cooperation in addressing global challenges and opportunities for EU foreign policy and other actors.

Together with other papers published within the framework of the Atlantic Future, this policy brief harbours the objective of identifying opportunities (and challenges) for EU foreign policy, based on the perspectives of stakeholders recorded across the Atlantic.

Methodology

The data used in this policy brief stems from 488 interviews carried out in the following countries of the wider Atlantic Space: Angola, Argentina, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Colombia, Belgium, Brazil, France, Germany, Ghana, Honduras, Italy, Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Poland, Portugal, Senegal, Spain, South Africa, the United States, the United Kingdom and Venezuela. Representatives of international organizations in Geneva, New York and Washington D.C. were also interviewed.

Interviewees were selected from professional profiles: public sector, private sector, academia, media and civil society, and from four areas of expertise: economy, security; political, social and cultural relations; and the environment and resources. A balance between profiles, areas of expertise, and gender was sought in each country.

The interviews were conducted by more than 20 researchers from the 13 institutions that make up the Atlantic Future consortium (see Project Identity for more details). The interviews were conducted face-to-face, except in some instances due to security concerns, in which case they were carried out via Skype or by phone.

A standard questionnaire was used in all the interviews. It consisted of three sections: one focused on regional dynamics in the Atlantic; one focused on the thematic areas of economics, security, resources and the environment, and political and social trends; and one focused on general perceptions of the convergence and divergence of norms, values, interests, regional and inter-regional relations and the potential emergence of the Atlantic space. The interviews were anonymous, carried out in the language of the country in which they were conducted, and reported in English. The reports were produced in each country to present the results of the interviews. In addition to the reports, the raw data was analysed using NVivo software for qualitative analysis.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Towards an Atlantic Area? Mapping trends, perspectives and interregional dynamics between Europe, Africa and the Americas (ATLANTIC FUTURE)
COORDINATOR	Jordi Bacaria Colom BARCELONA CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS (CIDOB) Barcelona, Spain www.cidob.org
CONSORTIUM	Coordinated by: Barcelona Centre for International Affairs – CIDOB (Barcelona, Spain) Aberystwyth University (Aberystwyth United Kingdom) Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas AC – CIDE (Mexico DF, Mexico) Ecologic Institute (Berlin, Germany) Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior – FRIDE (Madrid, Spain) Fundação Getúlio Vargas – FGV (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil) Institut des Hautes Études de Management – HEM (Rabat, Morocco) Instituto Portugues de Relações Internacionais – IPRI (Lisboa, Portugal) Istituto Affari Internazionali – IAI (Rome, Italy) Johns Hopkins University – JHU (Washington DC, United States) University of Pretoria (Pretoria, South Africa) German Marshall Fund – GMF (Brussels, Belgium / Washington DC, United States) Friedrich-Alexander- Universität Erlangen Nurnberg – FAU (Nuremberg, Germany)
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BUDGET	EU contribution: €2,495,276
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FURTHER READING

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