

ISSUE BRIEF

# Challenges and Opportunities of a Triangular Transatlantic Relationship<sup>1</sup>

To elevate the importance of these relations, the VII Trilateral Forum Europe – Latin America and the Caribbean – North America was organized as a space for dialogue and reflection aimed at analyzing the state of relations between Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America, with participation of authorities and academics from the three regions. There are numerous areas that, due to their complexity, scope, and dimensions, would undoubtedly benefit from triangular collaboration. Among these areas, the Trilateral Forum focused on three priorities: (1) Strengthening democratic governance; (2) Addressing disinformation and polarization; and (3) A comprehensive approach to migration.

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In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in the North Atlantic, driven by economic and geostrategic realignment. The European Union emphasized this at the EU-CELAC Summit held in July 2023, largely driven by the Spanish presidency of the Council of the European Union. After eight years without political dialogue, leaders of both regions confirmed their willingness to work together to address various global challenges. The United States, in turn, established the Americas Partnership for Economic Prosperity (APEP) with American countries with which it already has free trade agreements.

The reasons for this rapprochement echo those heard in Europe: combating the growing presence of China in the Americas, strengthening value chains in geographically close countries with ideological affinities, defending shared values such as democracy, human rights, and free trade, and guaranteeing critical minerals essential for the green transition.

It is striking and paradoxical that despite efforts to strengthen LAC-US, LAC-EU, and US-EU cooperation, there is no mention of enhanced cooperation among the three blocs: the United States, the European Union, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The possibilities offered by a triangular relationship do not seem to be on the radar for the time being. An illustrative example is the official statement following the US-EU Summit in Washington in October 2023, which references Africa, China, Russia, and the Indo-Pacific but not Latin America and the Caribbean.

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<sup>1</sup> The conclusions and recommendations contained in this document reflect the views expressed by the participants in the Forum and therefore do not necessarily represent the position of the convening institutions.



REUTERS/Gonzalo Fuentes

three priorities: (1) Strengthening democratic governance; (2) Addressing disinformation and polarization; and (3) A comprehensive approach to migration.

The seventh edition of the forum was organized by the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB, for its Spanish acronym), the Elcano Royal Institute, and the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center of the Atlantic Council and took place in the cities of Madrid and La Granja (Segovia), Spain, in February 2024. This document summarizes the main policy recommendations presented during the forum.

### 1. Strengthening Democratic Governance

With growing concern over the deteriorating state of democracy worldwide over the past 18 years, it is imperative that democracies in Europe, North America, and Latin America and the Caribbean recognize the seriousness of the context and its far-reaching implications. Given the complexity of the situation, it is recommended that an alliance be formed to bring together the democracies of these three geographic regions. The main objective of this alliance would be to carry out a permanent dialogue on concrete measures to protect and promote democratic institutions and values at the state, regional, and international levels to ensure sustainable development,

citizen security, and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights. An effective alliance among democratic governments that includes different political positions and traditions would send a powerful message of unity, solidarity, and greater cohesion among democracies, demonstrating that dialogue and cooperation can prevail over political divisions and differences. For the same reason, it is critical to revitalize the prioritization and importance of Latin America for the United States, strengthen relations with Canada, and expand the number of European Union member countries interested in deepening ties with Latin America.

Recommendations:

- Address the security crisis and organized crime as a multinational problem and emphasize the importance of combating it using the multilateral system as a key factor in halting the further erosion of the democratic structure. Any effort to address insecurity and transnational crime needs to respect human rights and international law.
- Strengthen cooperation with political parties and governments to improve the functioning of democratic institutions and emphasize the relevance of their responsibility in decision-making and their role in the promotion and defense of

democratic values. Emphasize the importance of transparency in international economic collaborations, including agreements between Latin America and the Caribbean and China.

- Build advocacy mechanisms to demonstrate the benefits of democracy as a political system and recognize the importance of reconnecting society with its practical value. Use social networks, institutions, and influencers to promote a democratic political culture, especially among young people.
- Strengthen civil society as a key player and pillar of a solid democracy. Include civil society more intentionally in dialogue processes, decision-making, and follow-up mechanisms of forums such as the Ibero-American Summit, EU-CELAC Summit, and Summit of the Americas.

## 2. Addressing Disinformation and Polarization

Disinformation and polarization represent major challenges for the United States, Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean that require a comprehensive approach and the incorporation

of new technologies. In this regard, the partners in the triangular transatlantic relationship should conduct comprehensive analyses to identify vulnerabilities both online and offline that contribute to the spread of disinformation and develop specific policies and preventive measures to mitigate identified vulnerabilities. In addition, effective containment strategies should be researched and proposed, especially those aimed at protecting democracy from disinformation campaigns carried out by actors such as Russia and China, fostering international collaboration, and sharing best practices and successful approaches in the fight against disinformation.

Recommendations:

- Integrate the teaching of skills such as critical thinking and digital literacy at all levels of the education system as part of the academic curriculum of mandatory civics and/or social studies courses, with a focus on equity, especially in remote or disadvantaged regions.



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- Combat the lack of financial sustainability in journalism, especially the local press, through policies that promote quality and news independence. Take note of lessons from innovative tools such as media tax exemptions, the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium’s model of grants awarded to projects that improve the quality and availability of information, and the creation of seed funds financed by philanthropic contributions.
- Developing strategies to address widespread distrust of the media. Recognize and manage the influence of public figures in shaping societal opinions and attitudes, including the role of political leaders and candidates in fostering narratives that sow distrust in the press.
- Promote projects that analyze the complex interaction between users, information platforms, and algorithms. Develop policies that effectively address the challenges associated with the relationship between users and digital platforms. Urge technology companies to implement their rules of use consistently across languages and regions.

### 3. Comprehensive Approach to Migration

Global migration flows require an articulated response from the triangular transatlantic relationship that strengthens mul-

tilateral coordination to address this issue at the global level. This should include international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the multilateral development bank (MBI), the Organization of American States (OAS), among others. This cooperation must be organized around principles of respect for human rights and must recognize the sense of agency and the right of people to leave any country, including their own, and to return to their country. In addition, the participation of the private sector, academia, organized civil society, and the media should be promoted as key actors in the search for sustainable solutions in migration management. These solutions may include: possible regularization measures, social and economic integration measures for the migrant population, active management of migratory transit flows, capacity building at origin and destination, active management of informed narratives to combat xenophobia, and the promotion of new employment opportunities.

Recommendations:

- Study and invest in migrant integration and its impact on the economies and societies of receiving communities. Adapt institutional and regulatory frameworks to address mixed migratory flows, in some cases through the creation of new governmental units, and in others through the issuance of

laws, policies, and regulations governing protection and integration measures for the migrant and refugee population. Expand access to basic services such as education, health, housing, and social protection for the migrant population, while addressing the needs of host communities, which in many cases had pre-existing lags in their levels of human development.

- Increase direct and concessional funding for the Latin American region to address the humanitarian crisis and manage migration more effectively. Prioritize investments in countries with robust integration policy frameworks to stabilize migration flows in Latin America and to Europe.
- Create diaspora forums to strengthen diasporas' capacity to organize and act on behalf of their compatriots in order to provide comprehensive information and support to migrants and promote orderly, safe, and regular migration efforts. Actively manage negative and under-informed narratives about migration through formats, spokespersons, and communication channels used by the migrant population, including social networks.
- Address the role of organized crime in the victimization of migrants, including extortion, smuggling, and human trafficking schemes. Address the needs of some particularly vulnerable populations, such as unaccompanied migrant children, women, persons at risk of statelessness, and trafficked and smuggled persons.



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