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César Villanueva**RE-SHIFTING PRIORITIES: REPLACING LATIN
AMERICA INSIDE THE EUROPEAN UNION
VIS A VIS ENLARGEMENT**

Can Mexico have membership in the European Union by the year 2020? Nope. What about Chile, Brazil or Argentina? Not a chance. Too much distance, too little influence. In any case, they all are American countries (in the strict sense), have different priorities and belong to the US sphere of influence. But, making a parallel, what would have been the answer had we been asked the same thing about Poland, Czech Republic or Rumania sixteen years ago, in 1988? I suspect the USSR would have been such an international heavy-weight at the time that any suggestion of this kind would have been pure speculation leading to a thick red wall. And yet, there it is: this year ten countries – of what is loosely known as Eastern Europe – finally realized a dream long searched for: to be part of a Union that promise prosperity, peace and freedom. Yes, common geography and history matters, but in an age of global exchanges, the dreams, ideas and values of people play a big role too. After all it was Victor Hugo who began this nonsense in the XIX century when claiming inside the French Assembly for a United States of Europe. Why not launching support now for a Euro-Latin Union in the XXII century?

Let's get serious here and try to answer one single question: What is going to be the place of Latin America for the European Union after 2004? The answer implies both recognizing commonalities and differences in projects and objectives between two contrasting regions. In both cases, my main argument is that Latin America is to be "re-placed" inside Europe in two contrasting ways: first, in the literal sense Latin America is going to be replaced by the new Euro-agenda which has its own endogamic priorities; secondly, Latin America will be re-placed in the sense of finding its own new domain and status *vis a vis* the EU. We have to acknowledge that Latin America has been in the interest of the EU, but only marginally. The economic and financial agenda dominates the multilateral relations of co-operation between the two regions. And this cooperation is asymmetrical

and uneven, structurally eroding the real possibilities if Latin America to succeed in the global world. The III Summit of Guadalajara is a composite of good intentions disguised in discourses that hide the real strings of power and domination. It is clear that Spain, England and Germany will keep their strong ties with the Latin American region and to a lesser extent Portugal, France and Italy. But it is very unlikely that other EU countries, specially the incoming ones, will have any incentive in expanding their interests to Latin America in the short run.

1. LATIN AMERICAN SKETCH

Let me take the first question again: why should Mexico or any other country in the Americas seek to join the EU? What would be the advantages of such venture? In many ways, such political project means a geographical and historical inconsistency. Latin America, beginning in the north with Mexico and ending in the south with Argentina, packs together around 30 countries with five different official languages mainly (Spanish & Portuguese mainly, but also English, French and Dutch), 490 million people all in all. With around 20,000,000 square kilometers, its net territory is roughly tree times the size of the European Union and similar to North America (excluding Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean). Shouldn't the region try to integrate itself to gather the potential powers of its natural resources, its common heritage and the people in the first place? While this seems the logical step forward, for those who know the intricacies of the region, the odds are against the Latin Americans once again. The political will and economic structures of domination of the Latin American elites – aligned to the US sphere of influence – are the main obstacles to get the region beyond the meager multilateral agreements among the countries. The initial question should then be: Why can't the Latin American countries build a prosperous region together?

It is clear that academically speaking the main agenda for the region is of social nature: development, education, and welfare. Then political: democracy, participation and corruption. And finally economic: growth, markets and exchange. Of course, a combination of the three in their own *momentos* is required. However the ideological neoconservative wave of the nineties insisted in the Washington Consensus agenda: trade, commerce and business. Oh, and a bit of democracy and development as a condiment... yes sir. The results of not setting the right priorities straight have been unfortunate for the region during the last fifteen years: increased unemployment rates, high

social polarization, low education rates, modest economic growth, and a low sense of justice given the current legal structure. Some of the consequences of this basic formula are out there: high emigration, high criminality, structural corruption and a sense that the novel democratic arrangements are powerless to change anything.

Once the Cold War ended, Latin America hoped to build a different relation with its mighty northern neighbor. Had Clifford Geertz been Latin American, he would have had a hard time understanding the difference between the US foreign political wink and twinkle. Towards the mid 90's President Clinton sent signals which made it difficult for the region to clearly see what their place in the hemisphere was. On the one hand, Clinton was committed to promoting the ALCA (Free Trade Area for the Americas) and democracy development under the logic of the Washington Consensus. On the other hand, the real structural factors that prevent freedom and urgent social development to take place (i.e. foreign debt, poverty and corruption) were ignored. US development aid to Latin America in the nineties was limited, selective and precarious. US shifted priorities after September 11 and Latin America became – once again – the forgotten relation or the lost continent as Jorge Castañeda has argued. This may be the reason of the increased attention being paid again to the EU by some Latin American countries (2003a).

However, the real task for the region seems to be first to understand why things have gone so wrong in recent years for the majority of the people. The liberal-conservative argument is that the region is now more democratic, has an increased integration with international markets and the national product has modestly increased in the last years. They suggest that the vast economic resources channeled through the seventies and eighties to the region via public debt had been inefficiently used by financing public spending – and not infrastructure and long term investment. They also point out that the increase of the inefficient public sector was part of the failure, along with lacking the legal and political rules to make competition and the markets work (Zoellic 2003). What needs to be said, however, is that to uncover the real structures of domination in the region, one need to look into different sources: most of the billions of dollars given to the region by the international financial institutions lacked the scrutiny, checks-and-balances, and social tags necessary to benefit society and control the often dictatorial/authoritarian and corrupt governments of the times. A few other consequences:

a) The Gini index in the region is among the worst in the world (the top 10% of the Latin American elite engross 49% of the net wealth), specially worse in the best 5 economies (Brazil and Mexico being the epitome); (CEPAL 2002),

b) The role of the dictatorial governments of the eighties has been replaced by a group of authoritarian managers in the nineties (with little concern for social demands and fully ignorant of the democratic welfare state systems); and

c) The traditional tangible and intangible interventionist role of the United States has contributed to underdevelop the social and political agenda in the region, in favor of the economic benefit of their elites.

The classical economic prescription of the nineties for the region was to impose a strict fiscal policy, eliminate social programs (many of them labeled as unnecessary) and implement efficient tax systems. The state size had to be squeezed by privatizing public institutions and services to make the whole public sector more efficient – they argued – and attract foreign direct investment to finance the infrastructure and the long term projects. The idea was to encourage the region's participation in the world markets as the new development strategy. The market solution was the main prescription. However, these strategies lacked the understanding of specific context (history, social traditions and political practices) which led to pervasive and inefficient privatizations, which many times ended up in the depredation of the public sector. Just in Mexico, the privatization of the Bank system in 1990–92 gave the government public resources which had to be reinvested five times over in 1997 after a bank crisis (FOBAPROA) of gigantic dimensions, to rescue the financial system and the banker's interests. Therefore, the Public debt increased in the Latin American region from around 230 billions at the beginning of the eighties to almost 700 billions at the end of the nineties. As a point of reference, the total external debt of the developing world (or global south) was calculated to be of a trillion dollars by 1992 (McMichael 2001: 165–67).

2. THE NEW AND WHOLE EUROPE IN A NUTSHELL

After the two catastrophic world wars of the first part of the XX century, it would seem absurd to suggest that Europe would have any strength to construct a common future towards the end of that same century. The wounds were so painful, winners and losers were so confronted, the hatred and memories were so profound that there was very little room for any hope. The European nations were divided and torn against themselves. Out of all that misery, Robert Schuman, Minister of Relations of France formulated a project in 1950 which culminated in the Steel and Coal Community associating France, Germany, Italy, Holland, Belgium and Luxemburg under a basic trade common project. Later on, in 1957 the Treaty of Rome

signified European Community of the Six with a higher goal: free circulation of goods, currency and people. Rather quickly, the original six-pack turned into twelve and later into fifteen. This year ten countries from -the misguidedly called- Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean joined the club under a common Constitution and Parliament, a Euro-currency growing and a dream for democratic institutions, prosperity and peace.

The Euro region changes its shape from the original fifteen and 376 million Europeans bringing in a “New Europe” of 77 millions inhabitants more (a total of 453 millions compared to the 542 Latin Americans with 30 nations or 450 “North Americans” including Mexico, US and Canada only). Clearly, this Euro-enlargement is the greatest in terms of inhabitants, but also the poorest in economic grounds. Poland, a nation with over 40 million inhabitants, has an income per capita less than half the mean of the fifteen European nations. A similar situation happens with the whole New Europe: there are economic gaps to consider in the equation. Patience is needed to reach the traditional welfare and standards of life of richer Europe. It is necessary to take into consideration for example the Irish, Greek, Spanish and Portuguese integration experiences which at the time of their membership (1973, 1981 and 1986 respectively) already had around 60% of the European income per capita (Barry 2003: 897). And for most of these nations, it took between 20 and 30 years to even up their European mean in both income and levels of economic prosperity. The experiences of the Eastern block with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in the eighties produced obvious failures: by the early 1990’s, Eastern European per capita income resembled those of the so called Third World. The Per capita incomes of Poland and Mexico were about the same, as were those of Hungary and Brazil (McMichael 2001: 160–161). And yet the dilemma is there: how to launch an efficient take off for ten new economies? Yes, the Euro-funds will arrive but the leaders of the new Euro-nations will have to make an intelligent use of the resources and make sure they prompt development. There is already a sense that if this process is not carefully crafted, a growing mistrust may erupt on the side of the experienced Euro-nations, under the simplistic archetypal accusations of wasting euro-resources, disrupting fiscal regimes, promoting chaotic migration and cheap floating labor, all of which leads into high national unemployment rates. The challenge will remain if the EU can be a region of increasing equalities among countries or if the Whole Europe will increase inequalities, making the Union a two or three speed community.

Politically speaking the situation is more complicated. Even though the domestic democratic institutions are on their way in most of the “New European” nations, there are still authoritarian inertias, corrupt pulsations and a lack of civic public life at the micro level which may hamper the

track to a successful transition. Fragile parties, demagogical discourses and poor participation in elections are not rare signs of these political disorders inside the ten new nations. Clearly, a country like Poland requires advancing their political reforms to make the democratic culture impregnate the civic life of the nation, particularly in the rural areas and smaller towns, if for example the traditional *Sejmiki* culture is to be eradicated. It is my impression that most of the New European nations require to come to terms with their ideological past, making a critical review of their communist heritage, to build a political identity coherent with the liberal times. The New Europe has higher levels of education than those of Latin America, but the collapse of their formerly comprehensive state subsidies and social consumption quickly put their societies to the mercy of the market, leading to a “Third Worldization” of their economies in the nineties. Ideally, the new Euro-democracies would not make a simplistic rupture into rampant and innocent liberalism (praising America’s freedom uncritically) but review their own social principles to strengthen their communities in front of rapid changes. In these sense, the Scandinavian nations can be seen as referent models of a special kind: a blend of prosperity, freedom, democracy and social security (cf. Rothstein 2001: 206–240).

The macro-political agenda is not easy neither. Even when Costas Simitis – president in turn of the EU at the time of enlargement – expressed the goals and ambitions of the Union as a pole of peace, solidarity and cooperation, with all the countries of the world, there are more question marks than assertive answers regarding the future common political project. The main problems seems to be the institutional design of the Union, the new forms of participation and leadership and how to make Brussels and the Euro-bureaucracy closer to the average European citizen. The Euro-constitution approved in June still requires ratification – and amendments – of the national parliaments. The European Council struggles to make the multifunctional institutional arrangements work with ten new members and France, England and Germany try to build consensus on a continental classic leadership which sparks skepticism all over, specially in the Scandinavian countries which cannot come to terms fully with the Euro-currency. And the Bush US government cannot wait to fulfill the apparent power empty space. The role of NATO and the global security agenda are issues to be dealt with since the Euro-approach is different from the American one, a gap especially evident during the US Irak invasion in 2003 (Gordon 2003).

However, the agenda for the New Europe into the Whole Europe is of social and cultural nature. How to bring the educational levels, health and welfare programs into a common European standard? How to build a sense of tolerance and social integration confronted with a rapid multicultural

change? How to build a common Euro-identity when a Slavic majority, a Maltese minority, and Greek-Cypriote group claim spaces among the Estonians, the Russian-Latvians and the Hungarians? Not to mention the Turk-Germans, the Algerio-French and the Indo-English Europeans. From the 20 official languages accepted in the Union, only French English and German are the institutional working languages, but English is without any doubt the *lingua franca* of all. The assertions of a laic European institutional life collide with questions from the Protestant, Catholic, Muslim and Jewish communities who claim to be part of the cultural common European heritage, and therefore, want to have more participation in the decision making process. Do not forget the Vatican is a European nation with the Pope John Paul II being the official head of state (Sberro 2004).

3. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS REDUX

The last week of May 2004 we witnessed the III Summit of heads of state of Latin America and the Caribbean with those of the European Union in Guadalajara, Mexico. The purpose of the event was officially “to continue with the dialogue for the setting up of multilateral agreements which will allow development under the premise of a common project”. This summit is the successor of two previous gatherings, the Madrid II Summit in May 2002 and the First Rio de Janeiro Summit in June 1999 which left a Declaration and a Plan of Action whose intentions are “to promote an strategic bioregional association” under the assumption of common histories, cultures, values and principles to build a common approach over the main international issues. The official discourse stresses the interest in promoting a rich regional dialogue to strengthen the multilateral institutions and international law as the means for security, prosperity and international welfare. Clean and nice (cf. SRE 2004). However, what are the real forces and interests behind these discursive associations? What is the role of Latin America for the EU after the 2004 enlargement? What are their new orientations and interests? These seem to be the questions to ask when analyzing the two regions’ potential collaboration for the future.

A close reading of the official discourses shows that the phrases “social cohesion” and “multilateralism” are essential components of the final documents. The first concept is presented in a comprehensive manner, including poverty relief, social and development policies, democratic governance, employment promotion, income redistribution, migration flows and the role of regional integration. Multilateralism is seen as international

security, peace promotion, the international financial system, external debt, crisis prevention and cooperation for development in three topics: education, culture and science and technology. The official documents also stress three specific goals for the decade elaborating on the previous agenda as the “three dimensions of the strategic association”: “political dialogue, economic association and cooperation, and the State efforts to bring together the international institutions, the private sector and the civil society”. The key “Declaration of Trieste” on the eve of the entry of ten new countries into the European Union, states that “the expansion process will present the European Union with an opportunity to further develop with regard to the national entities that support these relationships of friendship and cooperation [...] contributing to a “New Europe” and to a “New Latin America”, more just, loyal and democratic, inspired by principles of tolerance, respect for variety and living together in harmony” (SRE 2004b). Nice and clean rhetoric again. Let’s take a closer look at the real material meaning and purposes of these policies.

When discussing “social cohesion”, most of the Latin Americans will be suspicious about the term expressed through the discourses of the elites. The idea is not all new for the less developed world – including most of the less developed Europe. Most of the traditional societies know that the only way to survive through restricted economic times is by holding together with their families, friends and communities. This is what they have learnt for decades, where “social cohesion” meant solidarity and support in a sort of informal social net which operated as welfare when the State and the private groups left them behind. The learnt lesson is that nowadays the type of Summit Diplomacy rhetoric evades the real issues by corrupting the language in strings of nice phrases which mean very little in practical terms. The real fact is that the eighties and nineties meant lost decades for most of the Latin American countries and the beginning of the century does not look good neither. Just in the nineties, the average GNP in the Latin American economies grew by 2.3% in sharp contrast with 4.7% devoted to external debt payments. Devaluations and inflation made it extremely difficult for the majority to keep an income that allow them to fulfill their basic needs (CEPAL 2002). The question is of a different nature: Do the heads of State of Europe and Latin America really have the intention of changing the current dynamics which favor their own elites, the interest of the financial organizations and the logic of the domination that Great Powers continue to impose?

My impression of Latin American side is that the European Union is doing very little to change anything positive on the other side of the Atlantic. And in fact, a political claim can be made that in real terms the EU policies

are taking advantage of the region's vulnerability, in association with the weak leadership of their politicians under a restrictive neoconservative agenda. The EU is the first world power when it comes to commerce since around 40% of the exports and imports go through them in comparison with the second pole, the US with around 25% (WTO 2004). EU influence on international organizations (such as World Bank, IMF and the World Trade Organization, where it holds around 27% of the votes) is essential but their practices keep a constant conservative tone: the broad consensus that their abusive agricultural subsidies are in contradiction with the ideological prescriptions to the rest of the world, is usually overlooked. McMichael develops a similar argument when he claims that Global Governance is a sort of control of the weaker countries by the stronger regions (cf. McMichael 2001: 147–235).

Therefore, even when a “transatlantic market” project sounds good and fine in principle, it is essential to reconsider the real differentials between the two regions (if Latin America is to be considered at all). There is no doubt that the language used by Pascal Lamy as the head of EU commercial interests insists on a “Global Governance” through commercial agreements and International Institutions such as the WTO. And this agenda is part of what has been termed as the “Transatlantic Unitary Market” which was discussed on the EU-USA 2004 Summit in Ireland. The key figure is the commercial participation between the two regions (Europe-America) which at the beginning of the decade is close to nothing: for Europe, Latin America represents only 2.2% of the net exports and 2.2% of the imports. The difference with North America is sharp: around 25% of the exports and 21% of the imports to and from the EU, with a total trade volume of \$557,146 billion dollars in the nineties (Hufbauer et al. 2002). This is an indication of the poor economic relevance of the Latin American region for the interests of European capitals. The real strategic plan of the EU is to maintain an aggressive agenda of economic liberalism which is highly selective and unequal in terms of the quality of the exchanges, not to mention their lack of social concern for other regions, including Latin America. To provide an example, the EU leadership in trade has been vociferous in promoting the Singapore agenda, well known for its emphasis on the protection of the interests of foreign investors, the participation of firms in government affairs via privatization, and the liberalization of the entire service sector for all the WTO members. There is an obsession in their discourse with diminishing the social role of the State, making everything inside the public sector a simple commodity. In the same tone, the Lisbon Agenda has as its main purpose the construction of the greatest economic space in the world in a decade, under the rules of “competition”, which translates in the erosion social and political agreements, vital to the

Communitarian Foundational Pact (European Commission 2004). What I am trying to show is that there is little consistency between the discourses presented in Guadalajara and the one-way profit oriented practices the EU leadership imposes on the rest of the world via the international organizations. What is then “social cohesion”?

When it comes to cooperation the situation is not so different. Perhaps the most pervasive problem for Latin America is the size of the external debt which paralyzes all possibilities of constructive development. Nowadays Latin America is the greatest debtor of the world with close to 790 billion dollars, which accounts for 32% of the net Third World debt (US \$2,450 billion dollars) in 2001 (NOTIMEX 2002). At the beginning of December 2002 the headings of many newspapers in Latin America had bad news from the region according to SELA: “Latin America pays in external debt more the net sum that USA devoted to reconstruct Europe after the war”. While some of the numbers can be discussed further, the conclusion would be similar: 76 billion dollars were channeled out from Latin America to pay for the debt service between 1990 and 2001. This accounts for 912 billion dollars at that time which is more than the net sum of the whole foreign debt as expressed before. And it comes as no surprise that the EU is the greatest creditor for Latin America with close to 41% of the total (having US as a “second best”). The payments for the external debt for most of the countries of Latin America is around 12 percent of their GNP which accounts in most of the cases for the total sum devoted to education, health and shelter, i.e. social programs (World Bank 2002). The composition of the debt has also changed in its substance: nowadays the net debtors are mainly private banks (76% in 2000), then bilateral and finally by the financial organizations. The change from having mainly a multilateral debt (IMF, WB, etc.) to a private and bilateral one has taken place in twenty years and for Latin America this shift has been a part of the liberal policies of the nineties which emphasized the privatization of the bank system. The Latin American national bank system has been swept away by mainly Spanish, French, German, American and Japanese firms with all the financial implications for the domestic policies. Just in the case of Mexico, 94% of the bank system is in the hands of foreign investors by the year 2004, mainly European (60 percent of the total) and American. The counterbalance is peculiar: the EU devotes 0.2% for development support into the region which traduces in 2 billion dollars (ODA). A sharp contrast with the 30 billion dollars plus sent to the European creditors per year from the Latin American governments (Hernández 2004). What kind of cooperation are the leaders gathered at Guadalajara talking about? Let’s keep in mind that this is a history of challenges where Latin America is far behind Europe and their own priorities are not clearly recognized by the world leaders in the two regions. A concrete comparative example of the differences I am suggesting can be

seen through welfare development. Europe has enjoyed for decades a relative strong and comprehensive group of social services in the forms of health, education, and housing, not to mention the unemployment insurance that has been part of the different welfare models. Even with the EU enlargement, the region enjoys the strongest social security in the planet. For example, in the health sector Sweden invests \$2,270 US per capita, where 85% comes from the public sector. This guarantees a universal comprehensive healthcare system in a nation of 8.9 million inhabitants. A basic comparison with Mexico, one of the more advanced welfare models in Latin America shows that investment in healthcare is \$526 US per capita (\$629 US for Poland) and only 45% of the total investment comes from the public sector (72% for Poland), which makes the protection for the 100 million people both inefficient and expensive (OECD 2003). The reflexion I am suggesting here is that a realistic collaboration between the two regions should emphasize social and political aspects of the cooperation (and not only commercial) where Europe can actually influence the norms and practices of the public policies of countries in Latin America.

The commercial agreements between the EU and Mexico and later Chile are important pieces to understand the dynamic of domination disguised as cooperation. The two countries are hemispheric leaders with relative strong economies who are also integrated into the North American Free Trade Agreement, with US and Canada. Their economic reforms and the liberalization of their markets have been presented as models for the region. Mexico has opened its markets widely and is, just as Chile, one of the countries with more free trade agreements in the world. However, the macro figures (the triadic formula of strict fiscal policy, low inflation, high FDI) do not match with the social results expressed earlier. The two former authoritarian regimes have struggled to match the preconditions established by the developed economies in order to be taken seriously as a business partner, but the affluence remains in the elites and the wealth does not trickle down to the rest of the society. And it will never do if the structures of power and domination remain. Just in Mexico, the poverty line has increased in the last ten years (liberal times) to 50% of the population in conservative terms and in Chile to 42%. It is perhaps useful to take a look at the Scandinavian example – their economies have managed to become fully global but at the same time emphasize wide social concerns. Most of them show exemplar outcomes when measured in human development terms, social satisfaction and ecological concerns. Bo Rothstein mentions that the point of the social democratic welfare state in the Nordic region is the focus on the creation of social capital, seen as a *prima facie* of any well-functioning democratic development (2001). In other words, Latin America cannot aspire to become a truly democratic region if there is no investment in the social capital of education, health and community participation.

A concrete comparative example of the lack of social capital in the form of democratic values can be seen through the Latin-barometer's and the Euro-barometer's results. In the years 1999–2000 people from the regions were asked about their support for and their satisfaction with democracy. The Latin-barometer, comprising 17 countries in the region showed that 56% of the populations of these nations supported democracy as the best form of government and 32% of the population was actually satisfied with the results democracy had brought to them in their everyday business. When compared to Europe (EU members 2000), the figures went for 78% and 53% respectively. Now, when these figures were compared with what was known as the "New democracies barometer", or a comprise of nine nations associated with the former USSR, the numbers showed 53% and 29% respectively, much closer to those of the Latin-barometer (*Opinión Pública Latinoamericana 1996–2000*). What is this sign of? I am suggesting here that in some respects, countries associated with the USSR in the Cold-war seem to be much closer in their beliefs to democracy to the Latin-American states than the whole EU, in part because the promises of the new emerging democratic governments have found it very difficult to overcome the historic burdens encountered along the road, but also because the EU and other advanced nations (such as Japan, Australia and the USA) have failed to meet their cooperation promises to facilitate realistic democratic transitions to take place.

Taking into consideration the disturbing social and economic differences worldwide, yet the global times get us closer than ever, and now it is potentially easier to find out basic facts about each other. Or it should be the case. In this scenario it is possible to testify that in many ways people from Latin America and the New Europe have participated in similar global roles until recently: as economic emigrants, as financial debtors, and traditional cultural producers. This may be a point of reference for the New Europe into the whole EU. As Edward Said reminds us "The worldly context remains both perplexingly stirred-up and ideologically fraught, volatile, tense, changeable, and even murderous. Even though the Soviet Union has been dismembered and the East European countries have attained political independence, patterns of power and dominance remain unsettlingly in evidence. The global South – once referred to romantically and even emotionally as the Third World – is enmeshed in a debt trap, broken into dozens of fractured or incoherent entities, beset with problems of poverty, disease and underdevelopment that have increased in the past ten or fifteen years" (Said 1978: 128). These are the issues left aside in the Summit of Guadalajara agenda. Issues that will have an impact on how we can change the future for good in the next few years.

We have to acknowledge that Latin America has been in the interest of the EU, but only marginally. And in fact, during the recent years the EU integration with some of the Eastern European countries has made it complicated for the two colossal regions to see themselves face to face. It is clear the circumstances have shifted. Now EU is no longer a union of fifteen members but 25 – with Bulgaria, Rumania, Turkey and another few more expecting an opportunity for a membership in the near future. And the challenges to integration are great already as for the Whole EU to be concerned with expanding their interests to the region. It is clear that Spain, England and Germany will keep their strong ties with the Latin American region and to a lesser extent Portugal, France and Italy. But it is very unlikely that other EU countries, specially the incoming ones, will have any incentive in expanding their interests to Latin America in the short run.

CONCLUSIONS: REGIONAL DILEMMAS AND PARADOXES

This fast overview of the dilemmas of cooperation between Latin America and the EU in relation to Enlargement can be summarized in three basic arguments: the institutional channels and the discursive practices among the two regions, the real shifting of priorities for the EU and the “too little too conservative” political and normative approach. The good news is that between the EU and Latin America there is a good and functional institutional dialogue in the form of institutions, ministerial meetings, common agendas and commercial exchanges. The bad news for Latin America is that in the last twenty years the connections between the two regions have not increased in the socio-political side as much as in the commercial and economic planes, filling the in-between with an assortment of declarative and unsubstantial diplomatic discourses. This is in part due to the much more conservative political view of the EU when it comes to getting closer to an area of interest traditionally left to the USA, but it is also a sign of a more neo-liberal economic agenda set inside the EU the last few years. The other bad news for Latin America is that there is indication on the side of the EU that their main efforts to spark realistic democratic arrangements and economic development are going to be focused inside the EU within the new family members (*vis a vis* Enlargement). In this way, the “Latin American agenda” is likely to be re-placed by urgencies of the new EU members, not to let alone the internal EU contradictions of the multilevel-mega-organization itself, evident in its own constitution or the common currency. In sum, the forecast for the political and social cooperation between the two regions is likely to be rhetorical and thin, but the commercial side can continue to be “normal”, i.e. irrelevant in global terms.

To wrap up my conclusion I suggest there are two regional paradoxes in the cooperation between the Enlarged-EU and Latin America: the first one is political and the second one is socio-cultural. The European Union seems to be enjoying a clear conservative and dogmatic view of politics, where most of the current governments inside the Union belong to niche center-right ideologies, driven by their inclination to cut on social programs, use the nationalist and anti-immigration card when necessary, and see politics “as market functions”. At the same time, Latin America comes from a twenty year neo-liberal fatigue, which has forced the dismantling of the minimal welfare arrangements existing in most of the countries, thus increasing the social tensions. The result in the last five years has been a shift in the vote of these fragmented and underdeveloped democratic electors, from a traditional view of politics to a pioneering exploration of the social and left-democratic parties. You can see the shift in Brazil, Uruguay, Venezuela, Peru, Argentina, Chile, and soon perhaps even Mexico. The new center-left governments are going against fundamentalist economic orthodoxy and increasing social spending, nationalizing some industries back again and creating programs for vulnerable sectors of society. Good luck. A regional political paradox.

The second paradox is much more cultural and has to do with real visions of the two societies. It is hardly believable the minimal understanding that the two regions have of each other in cultural terms. When it comes to their societies, the two regions know each other very little. Both the EU and Latin American societies have many stereotypes and social mythologies which do not allow them to be more interconnected, both at levels of high politics and trade as well as that of the “common people”. As we know in academia, the mechanisms to get a closer understanding of “the other” pass through a series of norms and ideas, such as democracy, human rights and fair trade, but also support for higher levels of education, health and income distribution. After all, we are occidental nations with a diversity of values, but occidental anyways. I suggest that perhaps we can try to concentrate less on unsubstantial rhetoric and focus on the realistic issues and problems that concern people and their communities. The regions must negotiate for a common future. Latin America and Europe share common traditions that should be an advantage to grow and achieve greater global welfare. If we manage to do so, the Europeans will realize their dream of being an unparalleled community of 25 firm democracies living in peace, prosperity, social understanding and freedom, and the Latin Americans may bring their own understanding of the same objectives, adding up to a global prosperous common future. Hard to realize, but not impossible.

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