

REPORT AND REFLECTIONS



Introduction

In the last decade Latin America has witnessed the re-emergence of populism as a regional phenomenon. The concept of social justice was clearly misappropriated by some governments, which by implementing unsustainable economic policies and distorting the democratic rules of the game, were unable to deal with the structural societal and economic challenges of the region. Nevertheless, recent electoral results in Venezuela, Peru and Argentina, as well as the referendum on a third presidential mandate in Bolivia, are important signs of change. They show that the Latin American people are very much aware of what they expect from their rulers. They demand higher democratic standards with accountable democratic rules and institutions paving the way for sustainable economic growth and ultimately better living conditions.

Despite these positive political signals, the region faces a challenging scenario ahead. Although Chavismo is under enormous pressure, the current political, economic and humanitarian crisis keeps affecting millions of Venezuelans and is still far from being solved. Meanwhile, the new Argentinean government is challenged by a complex economic crisis and the need to implement austerity measures, while trying to maintain public support in a country where citizens are used to a highly subsidized economy and untrustworthy macroeconomic indicators. Brazil is still struggling to find a way out of a deep political and economic crisis. Nicaragua's citizens saw their president attack all the pillars of democracy by suppressing the participation of the opposition ahead of the recently held elections. Finally, Ecuador is put to the test ahead of the February 2017 elections and the decision of incumbent president Rafael Correa not to run for another term in office.

It is both a political and economic challenge. The Latin America economy entered recession in 2015 and is expected to contract further in 2016. In spite of the expected improvement in commodity prices in the second semester and a positive economic recovery forecast for 2017, most countries in the region are struggling to reduce public spending, control inflation and maintain a stable economic activity. Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador and Venezuela – which represent approximately half of Latin American GDP – are the primarily responsible for the negative numbers of the region. And even though the countries of the Pacific Alliance push up the economic indicators, Chile and Colombia are already experiencing an economic slowdown.

Recent Latin American left-wing populist experiences have contributed to the false perception that social justice can only be achieved by an inflated state and increases in public spending. In fact, sustainable economic development cannot be achieved by ignoring the concepts of solidarity and social justice. However, it is also true that labor and financial regulations, as well as poor infrastructure, and in some cases the lack of a framework to ensure legal certainty, have been creating many obstacles to attracting investments and boosting economic activity in the region. It is about time for Latin America to overcome populist narratives and the commodity trap. This requires strong democratic institutions and responsible economic planning, as well as an effort to strengthen the political dialogue and economic partnerships within the region and with external partners. In this context, the partnership with the European Union plays a central role.

On 17 November 2016, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the Group of the European People's Party organized in the European Parliament a conference entitled A turning point in EU-Latin American Relations? Challenges and opportunities. The goal of the event was to assess where Latin America currently stands and if there are concrete reasons to be optimistic

about the future of the region. In addition, the high-level panels of experts provided in-depth analysis of the current state of relations between Latin America and the EU and presented valuable insights on how to push for more synergy and ultimately strengthen the inter-regional strategic partnership between Latin America and the European Union. This report presents the key messages drawn from the speeches and discussions held during the event.

The state of Latin American Democracy: the challenge of populism

Populism has deep roots in Latin America. The political discourse used by the Kirchners in Argentina, by Morales in Peru, Correa in Ecuador, Ortega in Nicaragua, the Worker's Party in Brazil or Chavismo in Venezuela should not be oversimplified. In each one of these countries, the political processes that drove populist left-wing regimes to power need to be understood in relation to specific historical domestic developments. There are clearly some important common traces, nonetheless, and their main features are drawn from a common political history.

According to MEP Francisco Millán Mon, populism is related to disbelief with the elites and the feeling that the people are being left out of the political decision-making process. Populism in Latin America can be approached from different perspectives: as an ideology, a political style, a strategy, a technical-political way of working and certainly all of the above. In any case, it is certainly a dangerous phenomenon, which seems to be declining in Latin America whereas it is on the rise in Europe and the United States of America. For the Colombian expert Andrés Molano populism is both a symptom and an illness. According to him, we still observe a disconnection



between the elites and the people in Latin America. It is a crisis of representation not only of elected parliaments but of political parties. The political discourse has become empty. Politicians are not speaking of politics, but everybody else is speaking about politics. For him, we have to bring content back to politics.

There seems to be no consensus whether we should be optimistic or pessimistic about the future of democracy in Latin America, but it is evident that a wind of change is blowing in the region. And from a global perspective, one has to agree with the Vice President of the European Parliament, Mr. Antonio Tajani, when he says that Latin America is a continent of hope. We cannot ignore objective facts like the opening process in Cuba, the historic peace process in Colombia, the result of the last legislative elections in Venezuela and the popular movement that is developing in that country, the results of the referendum in Bolivia and of the elections in Peru and Argentina, and the process of modernization of the association agreements between the EU and Chile and Mexico. We should not forget the impeachment of Dilma Roussef in Brazil either. There are still huge challenges ahead,



but these new developments corroborate the words of MEP Luis de Grandes Pascual when he says that we need to remain vigilant, but populism can be defeated.

For Francisco Millán Mon, populism is decreasing in Latin America, but the region is still not immune to it. According to this Member of the Commission on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament, corruption has been playing a fundamental role in weakening populist governments. Significant progress has also been made in terms of consolidating a middle class in the region, making it difficult for populist discourses to resonate as strongly as they did in the past. But a return to populism is not impossible.

In the opinion of Andrés Molano we live a period of truce, but the risk remains high in the region due to a lack of consolidation of democracy. According to him, Latin American political systems as well as political party systems are still not solid enough. The expert is also worried about corruption and organized crime, especially when they are used as an excuse to distract our attention from deep cultural and political structural problems. In addition, he still sees the emerging middle class as too vulnerable because of the way it is stemming from poverty.

MEP Paulo Rangel shares these concerns. He believes that we are living a moment of calm, but populism in Latin America will be on the rise again. According to him, social inequalities will make it easier for populist politicians to come to power. He also believes the rise of populism in Europe and in the USA could have a contagion effect in Central and South America. Moreover Mr. Rangel argued that Brazil is the big elephant in the room. The regional influence of Brazil is not the same in all countries, but it cannot be ignored. According to Mr. Rangel, the Worker's Party ideological foreign policy in the region played a significant role in the emergence and spread of left-wing populism. And as the country still struggles to deal with a deep political and economic crisis, and as municipal elections show the rise of charismatic and media personalities as the new faces of Brazilian political elite, the future of the region looks cloudy.

Another major challenge for the strengthening of democratic values in the region concerns Venezuela. According to Member of the Venezuelan National Assembly Ángel Alvarado, the country is faced with a dangerous mixture of populism and Cuban-Soviet inspired "real socialism". The fact that nowadays there are political prisoners in the country is unacceptable. The opposition has chosen a democratic path to defeat Chavismo and that will be an important basis for reconstruction when the Maduro government steps down, but the Venezuelan legislator was very critical of what he called "the great indifference" shown by the international community in the face of the dramatic situation. In fact, even when we observe positive signs of change in countries like Argentina or Peru, the truth is that democracy and political stability will remain under threat in the region as long as the political, economic and humanitarian crisis is Venezuela is not solved.

Priorities for sustainable economic development in **Latin America**

Venezuela is an important case in point not only when we assess the state of Latin American democracy but also when we discuss the challenges to sustainable economic development and growth in the region. This is the case because in the words of Vice President Tajani, we are facing a dramatic situation in this country. His opinion is shared by the Venezuelan opposition. In the opinion of the Member of the Venezuelan National Assembly Ángel Alvarado it is correct to say the country is dealing with an unprecedented and unimaginable humanitarian crisis. Mr. Alvarado presented some alarming data about the current situation in the country. Inflation is expected to reach 700% by the end of 2016. Poverty is increasing dramatically. Half of Venezuelans currently live on two or less meals a day. 30% of the population does not eat any kind of animal protein. The people are malnourished. It is estimated that 5% of the population is living from waste bins from restaurants and hotels. In addition, violence is staggering. The homicide rate of 48 per 1,000 inhabitants is one of the highest in the world.

For the Member of the Venezuelan National Assembly José Guerra it is difficult to understand and explain how it is possible that a country which was once the fourth biggest economy in Latin America is now facing this alarming scenario. Mr. Guerra recalls that between 1999 and 2016 Venezuela received around 700 billion dollars in oil revenues, which corresponds approximately to six Marshall Plans. Mr. Guerra, who is also a renowned economist, argued that the situation is extremely challenging but that the country has enough resources to overcome the crisis. According to him, certain steps have to be taken to find a solution to the crisis. Firstly, there is a need to reestablish property rights. Without the rule of law the country will not be able to attract the investments needed to promote the economic recovery. Secondly, the country needs a strategy to combat inflation because with current inflation levels it is impossible to generate growth. Thirdly, Venezuela needs a transparent monetary policy. There is a need for reliable exchange rates for people to know how much the Bolivar is worth. Fourthly, it is vital to implement an industrial policy to increase productivity and move Venezuela from its dependency on oil production. All these points are fundamental but they ultimately mean that there will be no possible meaningful change in the country without political change.

The situation is critical but both the representatives of the Venezuelan opposition and the representatives of the European Institutions agree that solutions should be found through peaceful dialogue with the Venezuelan government. It is certainly a challenging endeavor taking into consideration the unwillingness of the Maduro administration to compromise. However, it is the only option if there is a real interest to avoid any sort of escalation into violence. On this topic, it is important to recall goal 16 of the Agenda 2030, which stresses that the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies is a fundamental element for the achievement of sustainable development.

In fact, the Head of Unit for Regional Affairs at the Directorate for the Americas of the European External Action Service, Mr. Manfredo Fanti, underlined the importance of the sustainable development agenda in the relations between the EU and Latin America. He pointed out that there are

ongoing negotiations with Latin American countries on how to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and that there is a real commitment on the part of the EU to support Latin America in this challenge. Mr. Fanti stressed that this is related to a personal commitment of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Mrs. Federica Mogherini, who is willing to stand by Latin America and intervene where possible to enable efficient cooperation in this area. In this context, the support provided by the EU to achieve a peace deal with FARC in Colombia and to reconstruct areas economically and socially affected by the conflict in the country is an important case in point.

The Venezuelan dramatic crisis and the Agenda 2030 clearly indicate that a political, economic and social model is needed, which might reconcile a commitment to both growth and social justice. Against this background, the social market economy model which was adopted by the European Union in the Treaty of Lisbon and which is also mentioned in the Peruvian constitution, was also an important issue in the discussion. Dr. Eugenio Yáñez, an expert on the social market economy in Latin America, stressed that 30% of the Latin American population lives in pover**ty**. In this sense, the social market economy model should be an important reference for Latin America. However, as argued by the expert, there are important obstacles for its implementation: a lack of knowledge about social market economy principles; the endemic problem of corruption in the private and public sectors; and a lack of confidence of the civil society vis-a-vis the politicians and public institutions. All Latin American countries share these challenges to some extent and should see the social market economy model as an opportunity to promote growth without creating more

imbalances in terms of socio-economic inequalities. For Dr. Eugenio Yáñez the social market economy model could be successfully implemented in Latin America. In his opinion, there is a certain degree of democratic stability in the region which is necessary for the social market economy to work. However, he argued that to be able to implement an effective social market economy it is necessary to overcome the general pessimism associated with the fragility of Latin American democracy, the precariousness of its economies, the high level of corruption and the lack of presence of the civil society in decision-making processes. For him, we certainly have to be realistic but we can also be more optimistic about our strengths. Furthermore, we have a real opportunity to develop a social market economy in Latin America and succeed in promoting sustainable growth through a change of mentality.

Trade and Investment

Some of the biggest Latin American economies are currently facing a challenging economic forecast. Important economies like Brazil and Argentina are having a hard time trying to recover and promote growth due to lack of competitiveness and an inability to attract investments in infrastructure that are needed to push growth. Accordingly the cases of both Mexico and Chile were presented at the event. The strategies adopted by these countries are relevant references for other Latin American countries.

According to the former Minister of Economy, Energy and Mining of Chile, Mr. Jorge Rodríguez Grossi, it was very important that open market principles were preserved during the transition to democracy in the country. Since 1990, the country has grown a great deal. When democracy was re-established, 45% of the population was living under the poverty line. Today 11% of the population is considered poor. In 1994, a concessions law was approved which allowed private investments to be used for public works. According to Mr. Rodríguez, 21 billion dollars were invested in infrastructure from 1994 to 2015. This is double the amount of deficit that the country had in the beginning of the 1990s. And much of this infrastructure investment was foreign. Mr. Rodríguez pointed out that since the democratic transition and the implementation of policies to open up trade Chile has received a volume of foreign investments of around 200 billion dollars, which is almost equivalent to two-thirds of the country's current GDP.

For the former Chilean minister, countries should focus on long term investments. And he stressed that the only way to attract this kind of investment is by having political stability so that the rules of the economic game are clear, and by showing institutional strength to guarantee that contracts will be respected. Mr. Rodríguez argued that populism tends to eliminate this kind of private participation in the economy because when you have populism the private sector is only interested in a quick and short-term investment in the economy. For him, it is necessary to guarantee a good distribution of risks between the investor and the state. In his view, the Chilean concessions program enabled the country to use crossed subsidies to produce investment where it would be socially beneficial to have particular infrastructures like airports and roads. It allowed investment even where the investor was

not going to make a lot of money. In addition, he stressed that the concessions law was supported by a wide range of parties, which was important because it provided more stability to the whole process.

On the Mexican case, the Sectorial Coordinator for Infrastructure at ProMéxico, Mr. Ricardo Díaz de León, stressed that the country has been focusing on a strong liberal trade policy, which is more important than ever with the imminent beginning of the Trump administration. Mexico faces an important challenge because around 78% of Mexican exports go to the United States of America. There is an urgency to find alternatives. However, according to Mr. Díaz de León the arrival of Mr. Trump to the presidency of the United States can, despite the fears it generates with regards to its impact to the global and Mexican economies, turn into something positive. It gives Mexico the opportunity to solidify its relationships with other important partners.

Mr. Díaz de León explained that the Mexican economy is no longer oil-based. In fact, there has been an effort to diversify the Mexican industry. The automotive sector, the aerospace sector and the electronics sector have been attracting a good volume of in-





vestments. The representative of ProMéxico stressed that these private investments are fundamental for the economic growth of the country and argued that a successful strategy to attract such investments is through public-private schemes. He moreover emphasized the importance of a 2012 law to help promote these initiatives. For Enrico Ponzone, a financial consultant with years of experience in Latin America, the arrival of Donald Trump can be seen as an opportunity for Mexico to diversify and intensify its partnerships in Latin America.

According to Matthias Jorgensen, Head of Unit for Latin America at the Directorate General for Trade of the European Commission, it is clear that there is a need for investments in Latin America, that a stable legal framework is needed to attract these investments, and that transparency and diversification are necessary. On the trade agenda between Latin America and the European Union, the European representative made a positive assessment, claiming that relations are in a very dynamic mode. Mr. Jorgensen called attention to the fact that there is a comprehensive agenda for modernization of the old trade agreements with Mexico and Chile, and that the implementation of the agreements with Colombia, Peru and Central America is on its way. He also highlighted that the EU and Mercosur recently re-launched their negotiations, that there was an exchange of offers in May, and that a good negotiation session was held in October. Moreover, Mr. Jorgensen mentioned that Ecuador decided to join the multiparty agreement with Colombia and Peru, which was signed in the beginning of November after a very smooth process in the European Parliament.

Mr. Jorgensen argued that the agreements between the European Union and Latin American partners will help the investment climate in these countries. That will in turn open the service sector and public procurement markets on both sides, which will be important to countries like Brazil and Argentina, allowing the implementation of infrastructure projects, for example in the energy sector. He pointed out that the European Investment Bank is already very active in Latin America and that a more open attitude towards the EU and a more open business climate are already perceptible. According to the representative of the European Commission, there are positive lessons to be drawn from the trade agreements between the EU and its Latin American partners. Since the entry into force of the trade agreement with Mexico, bilateral trade has grown from 20 to 53 billion euros per year. In the case of Chile, there was a growth from 8 to 16 billion a year. For its part, Central America has registered significant growth from 9.5 to 11 billion euros per annum in just 4 years. With regard to the agreements with Peru and Colombia, in the period from 2010 to 2015 there a growth from 16 to 22 billion euros per year. Furthermore, Mr. Jorgensen pointed out that in the cases of Peru and Colombia, the agreement also generated an impact in the services sector, with a growth in the volume of trade from 5 to 7 billion euros per year. Finally,

Mr. Jorgensen stressed that these agreements with the EU accounted for significant growth in foreign direct investment by EU Member States in Latin American countries. He cited Chile and Mexico by way of example. The EU's direct investment in Chile currently totals 41 billion euros per year, with an increase of 7.5 billion years in 2015 alone. In Mexico, EU investment currently amounts to 150 billion euros per year, with an increase of 14 billion in 2015 alone. Conversely, investment flows from the EU were very low in countries where a more unstable policy framework was implemented, like Argentina and Ecuador, according to Mr. Jorgensen.

In a more political note, Mr. Jorgensen stressed that despite the turbulence caused by Brexit, the EU will go on with its trade policy agenda. He emphasized that the clear political signs the EU receives from Latin America show that Latin American countries want to engage with the EU. Mr. Jorgensen cited the case of Argentina. For him, Argentinean discourse regarding the EU - Mercosur negotiations has increased the credibility of that country and of the process as a whole. He also expressed hope that Brazil will also provide the EU with positive signs. In any case, Mr. Jorgensen emphasized that there are some opportunities and that the political will from both sides seems promising.

On this particular topic of regional integration and inter-regional relations with the EU, Dr. Felix Peña, one of the most renowned experts on Mercosur, underlined that people are very critical of the bloc, but that the process of integration is not experiencing an existential crisis as we see in Europe. Dr. Peña emphasized that Mercosur is a twenty five year old initiative and as such needs to be adapted to a new reality. The South American bloc faces a methodological crisis, but it is something that can be solved. With regards to the future of the integration

process, he foresaw a turn back to a model of liberalization common in the 1970's: sectoral agreements guided by article 24 of GATT. Another trend expected by Dr. Peña is a more bottom up approach in the effort to achieve more flexibility and predictability regarding the rules of the bloc and to attract investments to Mercosur Member States. With regards to relations between Mercosur and the other important integration process in the South American region, i.e. the Pacific Alliance, the expert argued that there is no need for a formal inter-bloc agreement, but rather for trade agreements among members of the two blocs to create some sort of legal framework to facilitate intra-regional trade. Dr. Peña argued moreover that we can expect a free-trade agreement between Mercosur and the United States of America in the future. The same applies to other global actors. In his opinion there will be obviously a free trade agreement with China. And on the recently re-launched negotiations between Mercosur and the EU, Dr. Peña said that it is expected that there will be criticisms from the Europeans saying the Mercosur side is creating problems. The Argentinean expert agreed that it will be difficult to meet the schedule of the negotiations, but, as pointed out by Mr. Matthias Jorgensen, there seems to be genuine political will from both sides to move forward.

EU-Latin relations: where are we heading?

Some important recent developments were cited in the previous sections of this report, and certain clear challenges and opportunities for Latin America were outlined. But the question that remains is what this means for the relationship with the European

Union and what should the European approach to Latin America be. For the Vice President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani, the EU must respond positively to the changes in Latin America and should try not to be nearsighted when looking at the region. According to Mr. Tajani, the Europeans have been looking eastwards for a long time but are now looking more to Latin America and the Caribbean. He recalled that the Chinese President was about to pay his third visit to Latin America since he came to power three years ago. In November, Xi Jinping scheduled visits to Ecuador and Chile to sign agreements on infrastructure, energy and mining. Mr. Tajani stressed that the EU cannot leave Latin America to the USA and China. The EU needs to be more present and to stand by the people of Latin America.

The Vice President of the European Parliament agreed that there is already positive cooperation but that more needs to be done. He emphasized that the common values shared by EU and Latin America constitute the strength of this relationship and that the EU must keep supporting democracy. Mr. Tajani underlined the apprehension with regards to the respect of fundamental rights, pointing out that Venezuela is still a concern not only due to the political situation but also because of the

current humanitarian crisis, which is unprecedented. He furthermore claimed that the EU has the moral duty to intervene and cannot only wait because this situation will not improve without political change.

According to the Deputy Secretary General for External Relations of the European People's Party, Mr. Juan Salafranca, current relations with Cuba must be also pointed out. Mr. Salafranca recognized the importance of the recent developments in the relations between Brussels and Havana but argued that the agreement being negotiated between the parties was not the best way to achieve democracy in Cuba. He argued that although dialogue is essential, the agreement with Cuba does not meet the requirements on human rights.

On regional integration, Mr. Salafranca reiterated that it can help Latin America emerge from populism and that Europe can help its partners by offering them the certainty that integration can be a success. He emphasized that the EU invests more in Latin America than Russia, China and India combined. In this context, the renewal of the association agreements with Mexico and Chile are very positive. The Deputy Secretary General for External Relations of the European People's Party moreover underscored that the EU has a historic opportunity in the negotiations with Mercosur. He admitted that there are challenges in sectors which are strategic for the EU, but pointed out that with political change in Brazil and Argentina there is an amazing opportunity to establish a trade market of 800 million people.

Finally, it must be said that, as it was argued by Juan Salafranca, the relationship that the EU wants to build with Latin America is not restricted to trade. Free trade is important, but what the EU wants is a strategic regional association with Latin America.

Mr. Salafranca highlighted that what the EU offers to its most privileged and closest partners is more than free trade. It is free trade with a soul. The major asset that the EU can offer is political dialogue.

The Latin American experts at the conference concurred with this view. Andrés Molano emphasized that the EU and Latin America are part of a transatlantic community of values. In this context, he argued that the EU and Latin America have the potential to become the center of an international order based on Western ideas and values.

Conclusion: A turning point in EU-Latin American relations?

There are good reasons to be optimistic about the future of EU-Latin American relations, but there are evidently also reasons to be cautious. In a challenging context for democracy in the Northern and Southern hemispheres, Latin American is certainly a region of hope. However, there are still many open variables. What is certain is that both in the EU and in Latin America we are experiencing a process of change, and with political will and responsibility there are good chances for major improvements in inter-regional relations.

Recent developments show that populism can be contained and overcome and our focus in Latin America should be on strengthening democratic institutions and the trust of the people in these institutions. It is necessary to support Latin American political parties and combat corruption. But it is also paramount that we implement policies to reduce inequalities. In this context, the social market economy demonstrates its rele-

vance. Economic growth and social justice must walk in tandem.

Latin America and the European Union are entering a challenging economic phase. With the presidency of Donald Trump, the uncertainty is magnified further. It is more important than ever to diversify and intensify trade relations as well as to deepen regional integration. Genuine efforts must be made in Latin America to create a safe political and legal environment for long-term foreign investments. Public-private partnerships can be the engine for essential infrastructure projects. And the EU has an excellent opportunity to cooperate with Latin America in these endeavors and benefit from them.

It is sometimes too easy to refer to historical links and common values and assume that the EU-Latin American relations are doing fine. The truth is that the potential of this relationship has not been fully tapped. A strategic regional association between the EU and Latin America has the potential to establish an area of cooperation that includes more than a billion people, which, beyond trade, can have a globally stabilizing effect. It is a relationship which is key for global processes relating to peace and sustainable development.

How we deal with the crisis in Venezuela, how we approach Cuba, and how we negotiate bilateral and inter-regional agreements will set the tone for the years to come. Nothing is certain but the seeds for positive change are there. It is essential that from both sides of the Atlantic we recognize the obstacles and show a genuine commitment to talk to each other and move things forward. These are certainly challenging but exciting times for EU-Latin American relations.

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a German political foundation closely associated with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU). KAS programs in Germany and in more than 120 countries worldwide aim to consolidate democratic values, strengthen European integration and promote sustainable development. Since 2001 the Multinational Development Policy Dialogue of KAS has been responsible for the dialogue of the foundation with the European Union in the development policy area. The program focuses on democratization processes, human rights, international security as well as on the effects of climate change and new initiatives in the energy sector.

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