

Amid Disagreements, EU-CELAC Summit Shows Latin America Growing in Importance

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Latin America's influence in global politics is on the rise. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the European Union (EU) met for the first time in eight years at the EU-CELAC Summit 2023 in Brussels on July 17 and 18. The summit's [Declaration](#) proclaims their commitment to strengthening their "long-standing bi-regional partnership", which is said to be "founded on shared values and interests and strong economic, social and cultural ties." Tensions permeated the dialogue, however.

Despite the emphasis on shared values, the document does state that the friendly relations should take into consideration the "differences" in "economic and social or development levels", and also the differences in "political systems", which is interesting. Paragraph 10 implicitly acknowledges and regrets the historic European role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, described as a "crime against humanity", and mentions CARICOM ten point Plan for Reparatory Justice. The Declaration also states that the EU "took note" of CELAC's historical position on the "sovereignty over the Islas Malvinas / Falkland Islands" (based on "the importance of dialogue"). Paragraph 11 in turn calls for the US to lift unilateral sanctions on Cuba, namely the embargo.

From a Latin-American/Caribbean perspective, all of that shows how the region's influence and importance has increased. It also marks some progress on Europe-Latin American relations. In any case, one should keep in mind, however, that the last EU-CELAC summit took place no less than eight years ago, a fact that shows a lack of European regard for the region. As recently as October 2022, top EU diplomat Josep Borrell stated that "[Europe is a garden](#)" while most of the rest of the world, in his words, "is a jungle". One could say, to put it somewhat cynically, that upon realizing their need to import raw material from the Latin America and the Caribbean "jungle", European powers seem to have finally remembered the bloc's existence.

The summit's final document declares a willingness to promote dialogue and cooperation to address current global challenges pertaining to supply chain disruptions, inflation, and food insecurity. Paragraph 28 of the summit's declaration mentions the EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda, and "investment gaps in line with the common priorities" regarding "infrastructures, energy production, environmental perspectives, raw materials and local value chains." While this joint document addressed Latin American needs and interests, for Europe, this is about competing with China in the region and seeking the raw materials it needs to [re-industrialize](#) itself.

The [long](#) ongoing energy crisis in post-[Nord Stream](#) Europe has come to stay: the continent will face winter in 2024 without any Russian natural gas pipeline supply for the very first time. Recent developments in Niger have removed a key European ally from power, and Brussels is certainly concerned about uranium supplies that fuel European nuclear power stations. While geoenvironmental interests remain one of the driving forces of the 21st century, the Western own "Green Agenda" has been hampering Africa's energy security and also even Europe's own, as I [wrote](#). Moreover, the aspirations of key North African states, such as Algeria, to become key energy providers to Europe [are hampered by local conflicts](#). In this context, for the energy-starved continent, Latin America and the Caribbean, rich in natural resources as they are, offer diversification opportunities. Green hydrogen has been on the rise in the region.

From a Latin American perspective, however, the fact is that Russia and Belarus dominate the supply of nitrogen, potassium and phosphates (the three main fertilizers). And these states clearly are not willing to sacrifice their own economies [as Europe has shown itself to be](#). Latin America and Caribbean leaders have often resisted Western pressures for alignment – they have not joined Western sanctions campaign.

At the summit, European representatives were quite aligned in proposing a formal condemnation of Russia for the final declaration. Significantly, however, the [document](#) issued does not condemn Moscow. In fact, it only mentions the ongoing conflict in Ukraine once (in paragraph 15), with no mention of the Russian Federation whatsoever. This is in stark contrast with the European emphasis on the issue.

Moreover, rather than being just a diplomatic win for Moscow, this was in fact a Latin American win. While the EU stance on Russia is still relatively unified, with the exception of [Hungary](#) (so far, Paris and Berlin's [strategy autonomy](#) only goes as far as [European-Chinese relations](#)), Latin America, on the other hand, is a vast and enormously heterogeneous region – the 33 Caribbean and Latin American states represented in Brussels each have their own interests in maintaining bilateral relations with the Western bloc and Moscow. This region, just like much of the Global South, is growing increasingly tired of "[alignmentism](#)".

A Latin-America non-aligned/multi-aligned stance was exemplified by Brazilian president **Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's** recent remarks. Commenting some harsh criticism he faced in France, over his take on the Russian-Ukraine confrontation (Libération newspapers called him a "disappointment" and a "false friend"), Lula da Silva gave some perspective, stating that Europeans "are at the heart of the war", while Brazil is "14,000 km away". Thus, he added, "it's very normal for them (Europeans) to be a lot more nervous." Lula 2022 election itself might indeed have been proven to be a "disappointment" for the US as well.

Similarly, at the CELAC-EU summit's final press conference, CELAC president **Ralph Gonsalves**, prime minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines said: "We cannot make this

summit between the European Union and CELAC a summit about Ukraine.”

To sum it up, the recent Brussels summit marks not only the Latin American and Caribbean rise in influence and importance, but also reminds us, once more, that a new age of non-alignment and multi-alignment has come to stay.

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