

Latin American Integration: Creation of CELAC, Trend Toward Multipolar Global Governance?

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BEIJING: Creation of CELAC reflects the region's growing influence in the trend toward multi-polarization of world governance.

The official creation of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) at the third Latin American and Caribbean Summit on Dec 2 is a landmark event for the region.

With a number of emerging economies and a growing influence in the global governance process, it is no longer a traditionally marginalized peripheral region and CELAC reflects the region's efforts to push for deeper Latin American integration and its growing influence as an important force in the trend toward multi-polarization of the international political and economic landscape.

Thanks to the region's rich resources, huge development potential and rising international status, major powers have been re-evaluating the strategic position of Latin America since the outbreak of the global financial crisis. Their main goal is to seize strategically scarce resources and markets, and to try and secure the support of Latin American countries on global challenges, such as climate change and reform of the international financial system.

The founding of CELAC is a major breakthrough in regional integration and will help members resolve misunderstandings, differences and tensions and will strengthen their ability to prevent external interference in the region.

CELAC will take on the role as "regional spokesman" at ministerial talks at key international forums, according to The Caracas Declaration, a key document signed at the new bloc's founding summit.

By establishing their own communication and coordination mechanism, Latin American and Caribbean countries will be able to strengthen regional dialogue and cooperation and improve their voice and influence in global governance; and they will be able to explore new paths of development, resolve differences and frictions within the region, and respond to new challenges brought about by the rapid transformation of the international landscape.

As a regional body that excludes the United States, CELAC can become an alternative to the Organization of American States that is dominated by Washington. Most Latin American countries want to escape or at least weaken the overwhelming influence of the US.

Especially since the rise of Latin American leftists, a wave of "removing Americanization" is growing in all fields from ideology to economy, finance, trade, security and diplomacy. The

US-advocated “Free Trade Area of the Americas”, after all, ended in failure and the Obama administration’s efforts to adjust its Latin American policy have achieved little progress.

Cooperation within the region can help the group cope with the international economic crisis collectively, and promote complementary cooperation in trade, energy, agriculture, social development, finance, infrastructure construction, climate change and other areas.

However, the operation and development of CELAC still faces many challenges.

The members have not yet reached a complete consensus over the positioning of function and the operating framework is also under discussion, including the direction of mechanization, the source of funding, and how to coordinate with other sub-regional organizations.

The interference of external forces, trade protectionism within Latin America and territorial disputes are also potential obstacles for the future development of CELAC.

In addition, the big regional countries have different priorities in regional integration. Brazil regards the Mercosur and the Union of South American Nations as important, while Mexico, which is under the framework of North American Free Trade Agreement, is highly dependent on its trade with the US.

Nevertheless, the creation of CELAC is in line with the overall interests of Latin America.

China has been actively developing its relationship with Latin America, and is willing to strengthen dialogue, consultation and cooperation with relevant organizations in various fields. China has established a ministerial-level dialogue mechanism with the Rio Group, and has become an observer of the Latin American Parliament, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, and Latin American Integration Association.

The relations between China and Latin America are constantly moving from the bilateral to global level, and mutual contact and cooperation is continually being enhanced.

China expects steady and sound development of CELAC, and hopes it can become a major platform for China-Latin American regional dialogue and cooperation in the future.

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