



Extracted from *Democracy in Development. Global consultations on the EU's role in democracy building*

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Cooperation on democracy building with the European Union: the perceptions of Latin America and the Caribbean

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Executive summary

This chapter examines the main challenges for democracy building in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) states, and the manner in which the present role of the European Union (EU) is perceived. Policy proposals and recommendations for consideration by the EU are presented with a view to addressing the gap between policy intentions and LAC perceptions of the EU's ambitions in promoting democracy building. The chapter is based on consultations and research on the EU's role in democracy building in the LAC states conducted by International IDEA during 2008 and 2009.

The differences between Latin America and the Caribbean go beyond the linguistic, historical and cultural aspects and extend to the system of government and the inception of democracy. Countries in the region are also divided according to their stage of development, their style of leadership and their priorities in the democratic field.

In spite of the unprecedented extension of democracy, all the LAC regional institutions exhibit some form of fragility and progress seems not unlikely to be reversed. Governments are not delivering the results expected in many areas of concern and priority for citizens, and 'personality-based' leadership overshadows the institutional veneer in many countries. Integration processes are stalled or threatened by conflicts between member states.

Latin Americans are legitimately proud of the gains made in recent years in the recovery and consolidation of representative democracy, but admit that the intrinsic shortcomings and fragilities are as real as the electoral progress and that their persistence may undermine the genuine foundations of the new systems. Disenchantment and disillusion among the citizens are linked to the inability of governments to demonstrate that democracy is resolving the economic, social and security issues that affect the vast majority of the population.

A dilemma arises: how to preserve and consolidate electoral democracy while at the

same time moving towards a better democracy in the material sense. It is a legitimate concern in the region, and it should also influence the design and implementation of the EU's cooperation on democracy building. Latin Americans perceive such cooperation as conceptually compatible with the doctrines established at the inter-American level, although more elaboration is needed to make better use of the relations between democracy, governance and human rights, particularly their translation into tools to measure and assess results in plans for democracy building. The EU's intervention is welcomed and well received, being considered relatively respectful of the region's priorities and at least partially founded on dialogue.

In assessing EU-LAC cooperation and planning for the future, there is a need to find new ideas and approaches that, while ensuring such cooperation remains important, relevant and mutually respectful, find ways to improve their sense of timing and its comprehensiveness and diversity, and provide real guidance based on consistency and geared to exchange and feedback with both recipients and other cooperation agencies.

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the contributions made in the context of the regional dialogue with the LAC states, which formed part of International IDEA's global consultations on the role of the EU in democracy building. The chapter draws on the background papers commissioned in preparation for the Consultation with the LAC states, held at the offices of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington DC in March 2009, as well as the discussions of the consultation conference.

When considering how to assess the support provided for democracy building in the LAC states, it is necessary to keep in mind that the region is far from homogeneous, and to avoid the risks of oversimplification. Even a regional approach must acknowledge differences if it is to affect the diverse realities.

First of all, Latin America and the Caribbean differ significantly, in spite of their geographical proximity. Latin America, which culturally and politically includes countries located in the Caribbean Basin such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic and, to some extent, Puerto Rico, is defined by its heritage of Iberian conquest and colonization, and the Spanish and Portuguese languages prevail even if indigenous tongues are spoken by a considerable percentage of the population. Democracy in Latin America is based on a presidential system and has a past plagued with episodes of electoral fraud and manipulation, dictatorship and authoritarian regimes – often in the hands of the armed forces. This has built a general atmosphere of mistrust and a lack of confidence. In the past 25 years, a process of democratic recovery has taken place and currently the region is almost entirely democratic, with the exception of Cuba. Ethnically, Latin America is a mix, sometimes described as a 'Creole' culture – a general expression that tends to oversimplify the diversity that exists in this part of the world.

The Caribbean, or more accurately the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), an organization of 15 states including Belize in Central America and Surinam which is geographically part of South America, was under the influence of and colonized by the United Kingdom and, to a lesser extent, France and the Netherlands. Its political system is predominantly parliamentary and, even though countries such as Grenada and Surinam have had their share of authoritarianism, the Caribbean remained

basically within the boundaries of democracy during the period when Latin America was dominated by dictatorships. People of African origin dominate the population, but again this hides the cultural and ethnic diversity in these countries.

The differences between Latin America and the Caribbean therefore go beyond the linguistic, historical and cultural and extend to the system of government and the inception of democracy. Countries in the region can also be divided according to their stage of development, their style of leadership and their priorities in the democratic field. In the case of Brazil, Mexico and, to a lesser extent, Chile and Argentina, even with the disparities in their democratic institutions, their size and their relative weight in determining or influencing the regional agenda put them in a category of their own, and even present a vision of their potential as world powers.

Costa Rica and Uruguay, and also Chile in this respect, have consolidated their democratic institutions and the related values among their population. This often classifies them as examples of good practice – and therefore as potential sources for cooperation in democracy building rather than as recipients of programmes designed to strengthen democracy.

There is currently an ideologically oriented alignment between Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia – with the addition of Nicaragua and Honduras in most cases – even though their national realities differ considerably. This group makes aggressive attempts to reshape the regional agenda, contesting the traditional influence of the United States over the LAC states and pushing political reconfiguration through constitutional reform and strong personal leadership. Their priorities and their redefining of basic democratic institutions pose additional challenges to planning democracy building in the region.

Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Paraguay are more often the traditional recipients of programmes aimed at strengthening democracy. All face particular national challenges and are not exempt from internal tensions that might undermine democratic stability.

Finally, three countries defy any attempt at classification, considering their current particular realities. Haiti, which is by far the poorest and most vulnerable country in the hemisphere, is in an extremely precarious position in its democratic development. Any approach from the EU with plans to support democracy must be comprehensive and based on a clear understanding of the magnitude and extent of the problems facing this nation.

Colombia, which is unique in many ways, is a contradictory country and a continuously evolving puzzle that requires individual attention, including when planning for democracy building. The presence of armed conflict and the existence of several centres of power coexist with relative normalcy in the functioning of democratic institutions. Challenges related to large numbers of displaced people and the effect of organized crime on the life of citizens distort the practice of representative democracy and eliminate the competitive nature of the electoral processes in some territories (Salamanca 2009).

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Cuba is an island in more than one way. The notable exception in the dominance of representative democracy in the region, it is currently going through a 'soft transition', and awaiting its possible reincorporation into the OAS, while still defending a political system based on an exceptional model. Issues are posed by the exercise of power in the island, which is admittedly not compatible with representative democracy. A transition is likely to take place, but only time will tell if and when democratic rule will be established in Cuba (Erikson 2009). In the meantime, democracy building plans must consider the uniqueness of the Cuban case, weighing different scenarios as reform evolves or stalls. Cuba requires more than a democracy promotion approach and therefore exceeds the framework used by the EU to promote and measure democracy building in the LAC states. The approach taken by the EU to Cuba, although less than consistent and homogeneous, has been visibly different from that taken by the USA.

Warnings have been issued about the fragility of democracy in the region, in spite of the gains offered by recent electoral history. The events that took place in Honduras in June to July 2009, and the disruption of the constitutional order, regrettably demonstrate the validity of these assertions. At the time of writing, the future road for democracy in that country remains uncertain. One can only hope that this constitutes an isolated and passing event in Latin America.

From concept to action: the basis for a common language

Any consideration of the objectives and effectiveness of and the potential for democracy building in the LAC countries by the EU must start by acknowledging the challenges posed – and exploring the opportunities presented – by the conceptual and operational implications of the interrelations between democracy and human rights.

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Landman and Larizza note that there is a well-defined platform for these interrelations in the international instruments and, at the level of the EU, in different policy resolutions and guidelines for international cooperation. However, the ambiguity of terms such as democracy and

governance, and the difficulty of using them to implement and assess development policies and projects, limit their effective use.

On the other hand, human rights has achieved more clarity as a concept and a doctrine, thanks to the definition and refinement provided by universal and regional international instruments, and the case law developed by international tribunals. Landman, among others, writes that the interdependence, integrity and indivisibility of human rights are widely recognized and underlined by the 1993 Vienna World Declaration on Human Rights. This presents an opportunity to establish a matrix that combines civil, political, economic and social components in a more coherent way, thereby providing routes for international cooperation to explore, and provide an initial approach to the understanding of, the relations with and between democracy and governance (Landman 2009).

The governance angle, no matter how undefined, is essential for observing and analysing the current state of democracy development in the region. Most problems in the region, when evaluating the health of democracy, are connected not to the legitimacy of origin,

since successive electoral processes have regularly been held in states across the region, but to the ‘legitimate exercise of power’, which is equally important and refers to the correct and effective use of power to address the most pressing issues that affect the everyday lives of citizens.

The resolutions and regulations that serve as a basis for EU support to democracy building focus on the enforcement or expansion of specific rights, starting with the category of political rights, but also including so-called good governance which democratic governments should practise. This understanding of democracy as a combination of the political/human rights and democratic governance dimensions provides a conceptual platform for assessing democracy building within the EU’s development cooperation.

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The philosophical and conceptual framework that this platform is supposed to provide, no matter how vague, is mirrored on the LAC side, as evidenced by the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights, other regional instruments and declarations and especially by the Inter-American Democratic Charter, article 2 of which, in the same vein, prescribes that ‘Essential elements of representative democracy include, inter alia, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, access to and the exercise of power in accordance with the rule of law, the holding of periodic, free, and fair elections based on secret balloting and universal suffrage as an expression of the sovereignty of the people, the pluralistic system of political parties and organizations, and the separation of powers and independence of the branches of government’, which is complemented by the work of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

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LAC experts defend the importance and relevance of such a framework when planning or rethinking plans and projects for cooperation on democracy building and when contemplating the means of dealing with the complexities and paradoxes of democracy building in the region. At the moment, the coincidence between the guiding principles of the LAC states and the EU sets a positive tone for the initial debate and for the development of more precise common language. It is widely accepted that this is a two-way street, where mutual understanding and learning can enrich all perspectives and raise awareness of potential threats along the way. Differences in context add to the diversity of possible solutions.

When it comes to this line of cooperation and comparing the intentions of the EU with perceptions on the other side of the Atlantic, it is important to take into consideration the significant differences between the two regions regarding the model and practice of democracy and its fundamental institutions. The prevalence of parliamentary regimes, the soundness of its institutions and the real connections to civil society, as well as the relevance of social investment and a progressive consensus on ‘political clauses’ as elements necessary for the integration process to advance, are all components that characterize the reality of democracy in the EU and among its member states.

There is a basic understanding between the EU and the LAC states that democratic rule and its components, both political and social, are relevant and that their strengthening is a crucial factor to an integral approach to development. In addition to this 'common language' there are historical, cultural, economic and linguistic affinities between the EU and the LAC states that form a basis for dialogue on democracy.

In contrast, and in spite of the unprecedented extension of democracy, all the LAC regional institutions exhibit some form of fragility and progress seems not unlikely to be reversed. Governments are not delivering the results expected in many areas of concern and priority for citizens, and 'personality-based' (*caudillista*) leadership overshadows the institutional veneer in many countries (Carrillo-Flores and Petri 2009). Integration processes are stalled or threatened by conflicts between member states.

Nonetheless, there is a basic understanding between the EU and the LAC states that democratic rule and its components, both political and social, are relevant and that their strengthening is a crucial factor to an integral approach to development. In addition to this 'common language' there are historical, cultural, economic and linguistic affinities between the EU and the LAC states that form a basis and open the field for dialogue to take place on democracy and other related matters (Diez and Garcia 2009).

Challenges for democracy building in Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin Americans are legitimately proud of the gains made in recent years in the recovery and consolidation of representative democracy, but admit that the intrinsic shortcomings and fragilities are as real as the electoral progress and that their persistence may undermine the genuine foundations of the new systems. Disenchantment and disillusion among the citizens are linked to the inability of governments to demonstrate that democracy is resolving the economic, social and security issues that affect the vast majority of the population. While the field for strengthening democracy remains open and valid efforts are being made aimed at improving electoral aspects and institution building, (Avila and Orozco-Henriquez 2009) the major threats to democratic stability seem to stem from the failure of democratically elected governments to deal with issues of economic performance, citizen security and the reduction of inequality and exclusion. Latin America is by far the most unequal region in the world, and the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. The failure of governments to translate economic growth into an increase in the living standards of the majority of the population is certainly more than a shortcoming. There is a connection between this underperformance and the extension of social exclusion, which exists in most rural areas and affects the majority of the indigenous populations and a significant percentage of the African Americans in the region.

While the field for strengthening democracy remains open, and valid efforts are being made aimed at improving electoral aspects and institution building, the major threats to democratic stability seem to stem from the failure of democratically elected governments to deal with issues of economic performance, citizen security and the reduction of inequality and exclusion.

Even the most enthusiastic supporters of democracy as it is evolving have to admit that not all the conditions traditionally required for a regime to qualify as a democracy are present when observing the current political and institutional scenarios in the region. Nonetheless, dozens of electoral processes are regularly conducted, national or political crises are in general dealt with within the democratic framework and no one is calling for the armed forces to remedy political

disputes or to directly control the exercise of power. This is a genuine success story compared to the picture in the region just 25 years ago, when dictatorships flourished and multiplied.

However, questions are raised by incumbents seeking second, or even three or more, terms of office and by the use of public resources to affect the equity of electoral campaigns. The use of ‘street democracy’ – or the mobilization of supporters and social organizations to pressure for or against an initiative – also raises questions, as do pushing ahead with constitutional reforms, extreme concentration of power in the hands of the executive, particularly in the case of new *caudillo* leaders, as well as the obscure connections between organized crime and high-level politicians and the endemic weakness of control mechanisms, the extended notion that majority rule means suppressing or at best minimizing the rights of minorities, and the emphasis on ‘participatory democracy’ as opposed to representative democracy. These are all worrying features that, although the situation varies from country to country,¹ reveal a democracy that has been consolidated more in the realm of the electoral rites and in the construction of a general institutional machinery than in the sense of a system for peaceful coexistence with special mechanisms for collective decision-making.

The call for a ‘strong hand’ on crime or to improve decision-making is frequently heard in the region and is in line with a tradition of white or ‘Creole’, male, metropolitan, Catholic-supporting values that gave shape to a representative democracy with the armed forces more ready to control internal disruption than to ensure external security. More than two decades of democracy have gone by, but the remnants of this mentality are very much alive, to the point that, according to surveys, many would easily sacrifice democracy in the region in exchange for a solution to their economic problems and their security concerns.

There is also an extremely low level of confidence across the region and the traumas left by the regular and widespread electoral fraud and abuses of power of several decades ago have not healed entirely. This explains the lack of credibility that citizens give to political parties and public institutions and the easy resurrection of the ghost of electoral fraud every time there is a close election.

These factors combine to erode the legitimacy of democracy in most countries, especially when linked with a sense of injustice that is intrinsic to the system. The low quality of and limited access to the administration of justice as well as widespread corruption and de facto impunity for those involved means, among other things, that political representation seldom mirrors the diversity of the population.

An important conclusion derived from the International IDEA consultation process held in the LAC region is that these material deficiencies in democratic governance in the region must become the centre of action to promote

An important conclusion derived from the process of consultation held in the LAC region is that these material deficiencies in democratic governance in the region must become the centre of action to promote democracy building, although this does not mean abandoning support to the improvement of electoral democracy.

¹ Many of these aspects apply only partially to the Caribbean and their incidence depends on the level of democratic institutionalization which, as is described above, is far from even across the region.

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Even within the restrictions on the electoral aspects of democracy, it is important to understand that an emerging agenda is being consolidated across the region, making maximum use of the existence and nature of electoral management bodies (EMBs) in the Latin American model, that is, a permanent, specialized, relatively autonomous body dealing with electoral issues (Avila and Orozco-Henriquez, and Thompson 2009). More and more functions are being assigned to EMBs, including new fields such as:

- Control of political financing
- The structure of and internal democracy within political parties
- Specific mechanisms for representation and inclusion, such as quotas or reserved seats for women and indigenous populations, among others
- Regulation of electoral publicity and of how the media covers the campaign
- E-voting and other technological applications
- The standards of equity to be preserved during the campaign

Thus, a dilemma arises: how to preserve and consolidate electoral democracy while at the same time moving towards a better democracy in the material sense. It is a legitimate concern in the region, and it should also influence the design and implementation of the EU's cooperation on democracy building.

This combination of topics poses significant challenges to future planning of inter-national cooperation on democracy, calling for new tools and new approaches.

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Perceptions of the European Union in Latin America and the Caribbean

In all the background papers and the individual interventions during the consultation process, the EU's cooperation on democracy building worldwide and particularly in the LAC states is recognized as important and significant. There were no voices asking for a reduction in or an end to such activity. The EU remains the largest donor when it comes to promoting democracy, even if the LAC region has not been its first priority when designing its plans for cooperation (Landman and Larizza 2009). The variety of potential threats to democracy in the region – from the low level of legitimacy of many

regimes to the increasing effects of the global crisis on LAC states, particularly in those countries sensitive to changes in the flow of remittances – and the general impression, among Latin Americans, that democracy remains fragile in the region mean that cooperation on democracy building is still highly relevant.

Throughout the consultation process, the EU's cooperation on democracy building worldwide and particularly in the LAC states is recognized as important and significant.

This is especially true because LAC states see cooperation with the EU as different from cooperation with other sources, especially the USA. Cooperation with the EU is perceived as based more on shared values and dialogue than on political unilateralism, even if their agendas, the priorities and the intervention mechanisms often coincide and sometimes overlap. The region's geographic proximity to and commercial dependence on the USA make it all the more important to have an alternative view of democratic structures and functioning, and this is provided by the EU and, to a lesser extent, Canada.

Cooperation with the EU is perceived as based more on shared values and dialogue than on political unilateralism.

A tendency for oversimplification

There is a perception among the LAC states that most democracy building cooperation programmes – not only those of the EU – tend to disregard or minimize the differences between countries, which, in turn, negatively affects their long-term impact. Moreover, most lines of cooperation are criticized for forgetting that changing values, attitudes and behaviour often takes a generation or more. Many regional experts perceive that the contradictory picture offered by the current state of democracy in the region is not clearly understood in Europe, and that the situation tends to be simplified, ignoring differences, when planning and assessing cooperation on democracy building.

An incomplete approach to partnership

There is a dominant perception that the EU has prioritized working with the civil society organizations (CSOs). This bottom-up strategy has been a characteristic of the EU's model of cooperation on democracy building. If the intention is to empower civil society and provide it with a voice in their respective countries, the results have been rather limited. In addition, there has been little space for interaction between the state and CSOs or debate on how to deal with the issues that matter in democracy development (Murillo 2009). A weak state, to a tragic extent in cases such as Guatemala, unable to control its own territory, incapable of investing adequately in infrastructure and social development and dependent on scarce resources due to fiscal policies that are soft on big capital constitutes an additional crack in democracy in the region.

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A lack of consistency

The current negotiations between the EU and several blocs in the region, with the obvious intention of including more than just the trade pillar, offer an opportunity to explore more integral approaches to promoting development in the region, including a major role for democracy building. The perception is often that when trade issues are on the table, considerations in other areas are minimized. This gives the impression that the EU uses different language depending on the interests at stake. This should be avoided if the EU seeks coherence in the form and substance of its dialogue with the region.

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This is more than just a matter of style. LAC audiences recognize the efforts on the part of the EU to include in its definition of its plans for cooperation on democracy spaces

for participatory research and for consultation with potential partners and experts, taking the relationship well beyond the traditional donor-recipient nexus. Even if the dialogue were to include more opportunities for exchange, conceptual and practical difficulties remain as obstacles to assessing democracy building, its methodology and its relative success. LAC experts and institutions admit this cooperation is more respectful of locally defined priorities, although it is still far from being a collective construction process. Progress in that direction is encouraged, even if it is expensive and time-consuming.

Fluent dialogue and potential agreements between the EU and the LAC states become more difficult when dealing with particular issues – migration, trade and the use of subsidies in agriculture being the most salient ones. Political pressures from within make it harder for the EU to reach internal consensus and moreover to engage in free dialogue when sitting at the table with its counterparts from the LAC region, for which internal pressures work mostly in the opposite direction. Evading the issues, however, is not an option since they transcend their specific areas and have an effect on any space in which the EU and the LAC states meet.

The absence of an integrated approach

Often mentioned as a key element in planning and designing projects to promote development in any area, effective utilization of the conclusions from previous interventions and the respective determination of lessons learned are extremely important in the case of democracy building in the region. In the eyes of many people from the region, valuable experiences and lessons learned from the past are hardly used when planning most democracy building projects, and the EU is no exception (Thompson 2009).

In particular, a more integral assessment of how the different lines of cooperation have worked on previous occasions is missing, which in turn squanders part of the potential offered by expensive activities and programmes. This is most notable when reading the evaluations of technical assistance projects or the findings of the observation missions' reports, both of which are valuable resources for determining institutional and structural weaknesses and identifying grounds for political or electoral reform.

The same applies when taking into consideration informed opinions, evaluation processes and lessons learned by recipient institutions and organizations as well as other sources of international cooperation active in democracy building in the region. Important findings can be reinforced when compared with other relevant initiatives. Again, the use of mechanisms such as consultations is of particular interest to Latin America and is valued as an indicator of commitment to dialogue by the EU.

Form and substance

There is a general perception across the LAC states that cooperation on development and in particular on democracy building with the EU is the product of lengthy, complicated and sometimes redundant procedures, which is a problem in itself given the energy and resources consumed in completing all the requirements. This system also affects the timeliness of the cooperation and the compatibility between the expected results as originally planned and those realized at the conclusion of the projects and activities.

The LAC region is undergoing political changes that can take place at a rapid pace, and some trends develop – and sometimes collapse – in a matter of months, which is much less time than it takes for a specific initiative to go through all the steps, approvals and modifications necessary in the internal procedures prescribed by the EU.

Beyond the electoral aspect of democracy

Poverty and exclusion are crucial when considering the state of democracy in the region. The EU has recently moved to make social cohesion a fundamental goal, the achievement of which will require conceptual, economic and practical efforts consciously oriented in that direction (Regional Programme 2007–2013). Poverty reduction and the genuine incorporation of those traditionally excluded become a matter of legitimacy and the sustainability of the system, and also a path to the construction of a sense of belonging and real citizenship. This also touches on integral issues of human rights and is linked to the search for an effective rights-based approach to development, which is often talked about but seldom implemented by most cooperation agencies.

The EU has recently moved to make social cohesion a fundamental goal, the achievement of which will require conceptual, economic and practical efforts consciously oriented in that direction. Poverty reduction and the genuine incorporation of those traditionally excluded become a matter of legitimacy and the sustainability of the system.

At least from a Latin American perspective, when the EU's cooperation policies are put into practice, there is disequilibrium between their components. Electoral observation missions are most prominent, followed by technical assistance and institution building in the context of a specific electoral process, and only then are there other initiatives and projects aimed at democracy building (Thompson 2009).

Policy proposals for a renewed approach by the European Union

The EU invests considerable resources in research to update its lines and modalities of cooperation so that, in general, the agenda remains relevant. In the case of democracy in the LAC states, however, there seems to be significant room for expanding knowledge and undertaking research to better understand the current state and perceptions of democracy, using the analytical talents that exist in the region.

Although privileging CSOs as partners is a valid choice, there is a relatively wide consensus that more effort could and should be made to implement work with national and local institutional structures and to make better use of regional, subregional and even national institutions. A cursory look at the diversity of regional, subregional and integration-prone institutions reveals quite a complex picture – one that could seem overwhelming to those planning support for democracy building from the other side of the Atlantic (Emmerich 2009). However, the EU should explore more ways of channelling initiatives through the Inter-American system and other organizations with a similar scope.

Working with parliaments and political parties, however difficult and potentially frustrating (Carrillo-Flores and Petri 2009), is important if functional democracy is to emerge as the guiding principle in the region. Mutual trust is fundamental to most attempts to measure credibility (Diez and Garcia 2009). One experience that stands out

in this respect is the substantial investment made in Central America in the 1980s to supporting an integration process from different angles that, due to its own dynamics or lack of them, has only progressed sluggishly at best. The lessons learned from this case, however, can provide useful ideas for future plans in democracy building.

Flexibility is of the essence when it comes to affecting reality in a sensitive area such as political and public institutions, especially in a region that is experiencing mutations in many aspects of its search for a democracy that is closer to the respective national identities – some of which are still under construction. More speedy processes are required as well as the availability of funding to be allocated when new or unforeseen situations and challenges arise, possibly expanding the space for autonomous decisions at the level of the EU's local missions in the region.

The EU's policy instruments clearly state that complementarity and coherence must play a key role in all plans for supporting development and are central to evaluating external relations, acknowledging that democracy is multi-faceted and cautioning against the over dimensioning of a particular line of action (EC Regulation 1889/2006, European Parliament and Council). It is not that observation missions and technical assistance are not relevant or play only a minor role in promoting democracy in the LAC region, (Avila and Orozco-Henriquez 2009) especially in adding to the legitimacy of electoral processes which is often required by sceptical societies. However, a balance has yet to be found in terms of resource allocation and the relative weight given to the different lines of action. The coherence requirement must be examined closely and in-depth and a real diversity of modes of intervention achieved, somehow equivalent to the complexity of democracy itself, particularly at its current stage of development in the region.

It is important to recall that the extent and complexity of the contradictions and paradoxes of democracy in the LAC region, especially in Latin America, require a more integrated approach to democratic theory and practice when assessing democracy building in the cooperation policies of the EU. This is not to disregard its electoral facet, but to include its material aspect, in which the shortcomings are most evident in the region and are potentially capable of endangering the legitimacy and stability of the system.

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Strengthening democracy in the LAC states means more than investing in its institutional structure and functioning, and must include society and its values. One important task is to explore more in-depth approaches to the interrelations

among human rights, democracy and governance, in a search for tools that could be more instrumental in helping to design and evaluate development plans.

Conclusions

The EU's contribution to the development of democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean is undoubtedly important. The region has somehow become a 'success story' in more ways than one when it comes to restoring and institutionalizing democracy. In general, this cooperation, in the current perception of Latin Americans, is relevant, in that it addresses the issues that matter, and increases the basis for and extent of a common language between the region and the EU, which is important in itself but especially in view of current negotiations between the EU and the LAC states.

Latin Americans perceive such cooperation as conceptually compatible with the doctrines established at the inter-American level, although more elaboration is needed to make better use of the relations between democracy, governance and human rights, particularly their translation into tools to measure and assess results in plans for democracy building. It is a contributory factor to the legitimacy of basic democratic institutions, especially relevant in the region given prevailing values, in particular the low rate of inter-individual confidence which extends to a lack of faith in public institutions and politics in general. The EU's intervention is welcomed and well received, being considered relatively respectful of the region's priorities and at least partially founded on dialogue.

To a much lesser extent is the EU's support to democracy building seen as timely, since situations and political and institutional issues change very rapidly in Latin America and there is little flexibility for the EU to react outside of the formal, structured procedures in place to determine lines of cooperation. It often takes a viewpoint that isolates democratic institutions from their context, especially on exclusion, insecurity and corruption, which affect citizens' faith in the system. The EU's support is also seen as diverse, by attempting to find, although not always achieving, a balance between public and non-governmental actors as partners, although in practice it has prioritized work with civil society organizations and should consider the use of institutions, most of which are fragile in generally weak states, to channel new initiatives.

Cooperation is less consistent and coherent today than should be the case. This problem is exacerbated by the minimal use made of valuable information and lessons learned. For example, the bridge between observation missions and their conclusions, and technical assistance or institutional building initiatives is lost when planning new projects, giving the impression that each is conceived as a world of its own. Compatible information is not effectively shared with other international cooperation actors that are also active in promoting democracy in the region. A productive exchange is often missing, in spite of the successful experiences achieved in Colombia in 2005–2006 and Paraguay in 2008 as a result of observation missions.

In assessing EU-LAC cooperation and planning for the future, there is a need to find new ideas and approaches that, while ensuring such cooperation remains important, relevant and mutually respectful, find ways to improve its sense of timing and its comprehensiveness and diversity, and provide real guidance based on consistency and geared to exchange and feedback with both recipients and other cooperation agencies. Of course, the difficulty with such an approach is to point out not only the 'whats' but also the 'hows' in order to optimize cooperation on democracy with the EU in the region. In so doing, it is necessary to keep in mind that democracy cannot exist without the electoral facet, its procedural aspects, but that it also includes a more integral, material aspect, without which democratic systems and elections become nothing but a rite.

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Democracy cannot exist without the electoral facet and its procedural aspects, but it also includes a more integral, material aspect, without which democratic systems and elections become nothing but a rite.

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