

INSTITUTIONS, INTERACTION AND IDEA FLOW IN THE ATLANTIC SPACE

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In seeking to determine whether or not a pan-Atlantic space is a viable political, social and cultural concept many factors must be examined. Certainly trends and history exist that point toward the potential for greater convergence or divergence, as well as phenomena that could push in either direction depending on how they are acted upon. The question could also be posed in terms of whether or not there are interlinkages and affinities present around the Atlantic Space that point toward greater cooperation within the space, even if a pan-Atlantic concept per se does not gain traction. In political terms, the creation of pan-Atlantic international institutions or forums for dialogue are not beyond the realms of possibility. However, it seems unlikely that the societies of the four Atlantic continents will identify as “Atlantic peoples” or part of an “Atlantic world” in social and cultural terms, just as the creation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum has not created a self-identifying group of “Pacific peoples”.

It is important to note that the modern era of communications and transportation is less constrained by geography and distance than ever before. As Emiliano Alessandri argues, “there are no physical borders today that make the Atlantic a truly separate entity, let alone a self-centred space” (Alessandri 2015). However, other factors are relevant, particularly historical ones. The path dependencies of interaction, common languages, intellectual heritage and other factors that are the result of the historical importance of geography and distance in determining patterns of trade, colonisation and human mobility could provide the basis for greater cooperation today (Ridout et al. 2015). There are, of course, many obstacles as well.

Primary actors: states and institutions

As in most parts of the world, states remain the primary political actors in the Atlantic Space. Some of the most influential are Canada, the United States, Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria, Spain, Portugal, France and the United Kingdom, due to their current political and economic power, but also because of their historical linkages to other Atlantic players, which are often reflected in linguistic, social and cultural ties. Major cities

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could continue to increase their roles in regional and global governance, especially in specific issue areas such as climate change, technology and innovation, which could alter patterns of interaction in the Atlantic Space. But states continue to be the dominant actors.

The regions of the Atlantic are amongst the world's most highly integrated, as many supranational and regional institutions play important roles, with the European Union being the most relevant, especially as it continues to make efforts to unify its external actions under the EU banner. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is primarily a defensive military alliance, but it is also a political organisation that generates dense cooperation among North Atlantic countries. NATO's closest southern counterpart would be the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS), but this is more of a forum to discuss the management of the South Atlantic space than a military or political entity. Many regional organisations with political importance are first and foremost designed to be trading blocs, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the South African Development Community (SADC). The African Union (AU), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Union of South American Nations (Unasur), and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are among the most important regional political institutions aside from the EU. Furthermore, the Organization of American States (OAS) brings the countries of the Americas together. Whether primarily economic or political, these regional organisations are durable mechanisms for dialogue between countries. A number of these also pursue interregional goals. The EU is particularly adept at following regional strategies and has tended to interact directly with the African Union or Mercosur, for instance.

In addition to regional organisations and integration projects, a number of political, cultural and economic organisations link countries of the Atlantic. These can be loose constellations of countries which choose to cooperate on specific issues where interests align, such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and the IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) groupings. While the BRICS aims at redressing the current status quo with regard to global governance and pursues specific economic interests, the IBSA forum is framed as an alliance of developing democracies. Although the concept is not new, sustained economic growth in emerging economies and the subsequent increased reach of their development cooperation, at a time when North-South flows have slowed, has revived interest in South-South cooperation. Indeed, both the BRICS grouping and the IBSA forum are clear expressions of a renewed South-South cooperation to which South Atlantic countries contribute. These platforms have added to the web of relations linking Atlantic countries to one another and have contributed to the diversification of foreign relations for many countries of the global South.

North-South groupings also link countries in the Atlantic. The language-based communities, whose member (and observer) states mainly belonged, formerly, to the Portuguese, British and French empires, serve a number of political, cultural and economic goals. The Commonwealth, the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF), and the Community of Portuguese Language Speaking Countries (CPLP) remain important forums for cooperation among Atlantic countries. According to

Edalina Sanches, “the overwhelming majority of states in the Atlantic Basin (70%) belong to one of these three organizations. Some even belong to more than one organization; for instance, Ghana, Saint Lucia, and Dominica are members of the OIF and the Commonwealth. Others may only have loose linguistic or historical linkages (to say the least) to the organization to which they belong; for instance, Hungary, Latvia, and Romania are members of the OIF” (Sanches 2014). These organisations can serve as diplomatic and political tools, especially for countries that are less present on the global stage, whether because of size, historical context or economic weight. North-South political dialogue also takes the form of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly, the CARIFORUM-EU Parliamentary Committee, or more cyclical high-level meetings such as the Ibero-American Summit, the US-Africa Leaders Summit, the Summit of the Americas, or the EU-Africa and the EU-CELAC summits. There are also civil society networks, cultural institutions, student exchanges and other structures linking countries of the Atlantic.

Structured interactions through states and institutions as well as less formal people-to-people contacts among open societies in the Atlantic Space could lead to mutual learning and adaptation. Those political, cultural or social practices that people find most appealing in other societies could draw them closer together through the power of attraction (or soft power). If people around the Atlantic Space approach interactions with open minds and the desire to understand each other, certain best practices and cultural norms could “rise to the top” while sub-optimal ones are voluntarily discarded as knowledge of better ideas spreads. It would be impossible to control or predict how these multi-directional idea flows might play out, but they could drive change.

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The role of networks, mobility and language

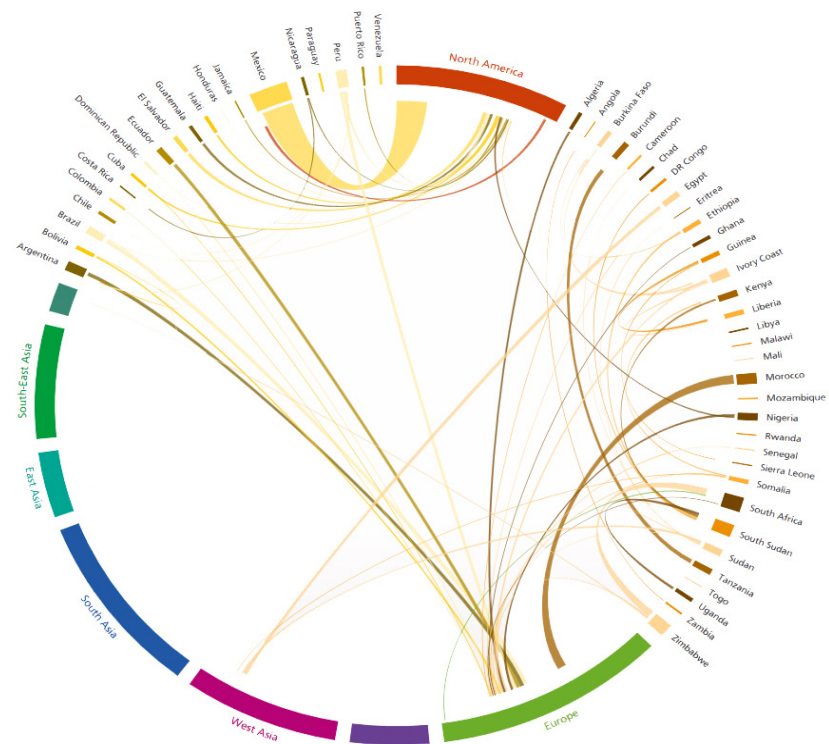
Among the necessary conditions for idea transfer are interaction and verbal communication. In order for there to be a convergence of political, social or cultural norms and values, people have to be able to physically engage with each other in some way and to be able to talk to each other. Thus, the existence of transnational networks, trade routes, international summits, migration and common languages are crucial for convergence to occur. Though these factors can sometimes lead to friction and conflict if there is disagreement about deeply held beliefs or competition for resources, they also facilitate cooperation as people get to know each other, understand other perspectives and learn from each other.

The Atlantic Space benefits from a core of common languages that facilitates communication among its peoples: English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. Other languages are present, but these four dominate. In addition to facilitating socialisation, business and political engagement, the presence of a common language can often mean a shared history and culture. Though the shared history may be a painful one of colonisation, there is nonetheless a history of engagement that creates a link. Indeed, strong societal and political links endure between countries like Brazil and Portugal or France and Senegal. Moreover, the literature and intellectual heritage associated with that language can also mean that there is a set of common reference points that generates affinity and mutual understanding.

Edalina Sanches argues in her study of the CPLP that, “organizations based upon a shared language and history are relevant and have potential to create soft power through language and beyond. In the linguistically-diverse Atlantic Basin, the existence of these organizations has provided a new opportunity not only for the management of the most spoken languages in the world – English, French, and Portuguese – but also to propagate political ideals that are valued in this space, namely democracy, peace, and human rights” (Sanches 2014). Of course, language is merely the vehicle through which these values are transferred, and they could just as easily spread hatred and violence. But a general belief in these ideals among the most powerful countries that speak these languages could help spread them to others who speak the same languages. Thus, the small group of common languages in the Atlantic Space could drive norm convergence in this space over time.

Human mobility also tends to spread idea transfer. People from one country bring their culture with them to their new country and teach it to the citizens of the destination country while also teaching friends and relatives in their origin country about the culture in their new home. Remittances and investment flows from diaspora communities to their origin countries also bring ideas with them for new business models based on what migrants have learned in their destination countries. Within the Atlantic Space, migration flows tend to be from the South Atlantic to the North Atlantic, with the United States and western Europe being the main destinations, but there has also been a spike in migration into South Africa in recent years (Pastor 2014).

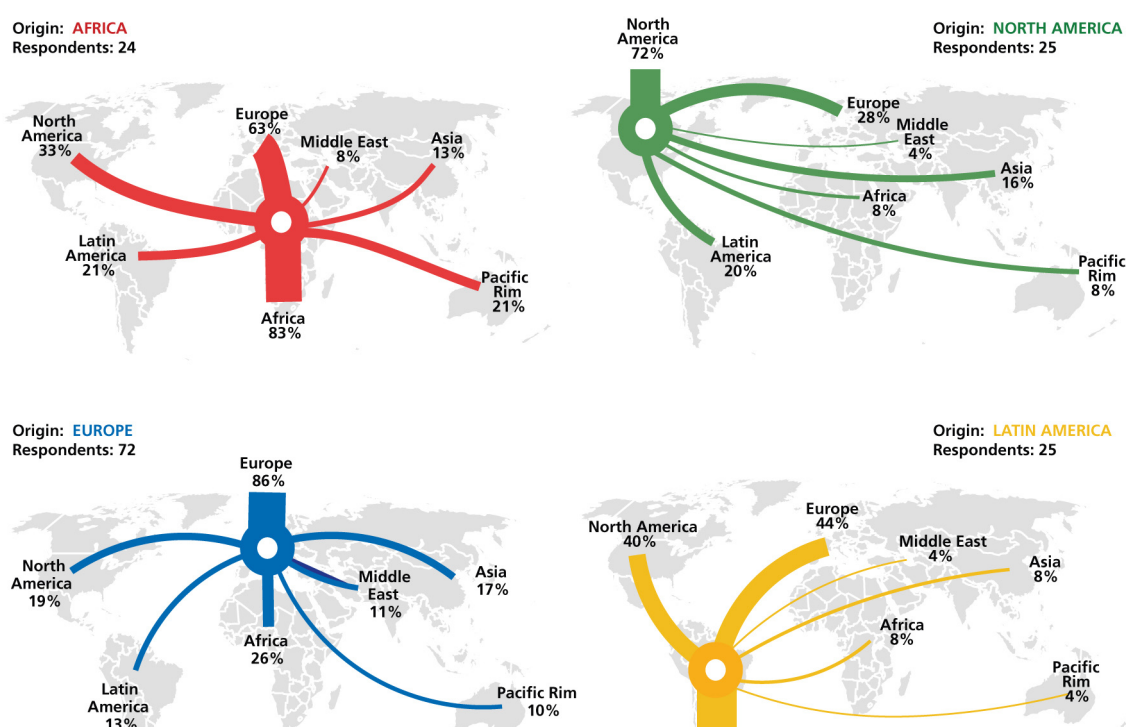
Figure 1. Migratory flows between the South and North Atlantic (2005-2010)*



* The line is always closer to the origin of the flow. The original source offers an interactive visualization of this graph than can be navigated and provides access to the numbers behind these flows. Source: Recreated by CIDOB from the original Sander et al. 2014.

Camila Pastor de Maria y Campos makes an important observation that “investment in the home country and in social networks there is indicative of a trend increasingly recognized by migration scholarship – the creation and cultivation of transnational social fields. What is crucial to the transnational analytic is the fact that migration has ceased to be a one-way trip, as often happened before the 1960s, and is increasingly characterized by the circulation of subjects rather than their settlement and incorporation in destination polities” (Pastor 2014). This circular flow of people, remittances, culture and ideas can help to reinforce existing linkages and create new networks.

Figure 2. The geographical scope of general NGO contacts*



* Entries are percentages of NGO that have "regular" contact with similar organisations in the rest of the world. Multiple responses were allowed. Source: Created by CIDOB using data from Adelle et al. 2014.

Of course, issue areas can generate networks too. In their examination of transnational environmental networks, Adelle et al. found that “NGOs inside the Atlantic Space had significantly more interaction with other NGOs inside of this area than outside” (Adelle et al. 2014). This could be the result of a greater emphasis on environmental concerns within the Atlantic Space, the ease of communicating with environmental NGO that speak the same language, mere coincidence, or other factors. Whatever the reason for this denser interaction, “the presence of transnational networks concentrated in the Atlantic Space offers one possible causal mechanism for the soft transfer (and ultimately convergence) of ideas, norms, and principles” (ibid.). Yet even if the conditions necessary for transfer are present, history and current events can push toward convergence or divergence.

Political values and modes of engagement

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One of the main areas of divergence is related to sovereignty and foreign intervention, which is largely due to historical memories of colonialism, exploitative commercial relationships and support for coups by actors from the North Atlantic. These historical realities have generated mistrust in many South Atlantic countries toward North Atlantic countries. There is also a sense among many people in South Atlantic countries that development aid conditionalities from North Atlantic countries are overly prescriptive and are often not aligned with national priorities (Goerg 2014). This limits sovereign authority in recipient countries. Thus, the emphasis on the principles of non-intervention and self-determination is stronger in South Atlantic countries.

For example, though there is broad support for human rights in the Atlantic Space, disagreement about the appropriateness of military intervention in order to enforce the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is contentious. As Susanne Gratius notes, “some governments see humanitarian interventions under R2P as a pretext for imposing Western human rights and democratic norms” (Gratius 2014). Although more authoritarian countries in the Atlantic Space that abuse human rights oppose R2P for obvious reasons, the reticence to support interventions on the part of democratic countries such as Brazil and South Africa reflects scepticism of the utility of forcible regime change as well as potential ulterior motives behind humanitarian intervention. These views are partially conditioned by recent historical memories of significant interference in their domestic affairs by countries from the North Atlantic. This has led to divergent voting patterns at the UN as well as a focus on South-South cooperation, but Gratius still sees “great potential for conflict resolution in non-strategic, small countries inside the Atlantic that do not pose security threats to the basin” (ibid.). One potential area of convergence is around a greater emphasis at the UN Security Council on mediation of conflicts rather than immediately resorting to force, which is a priority for Brazil.

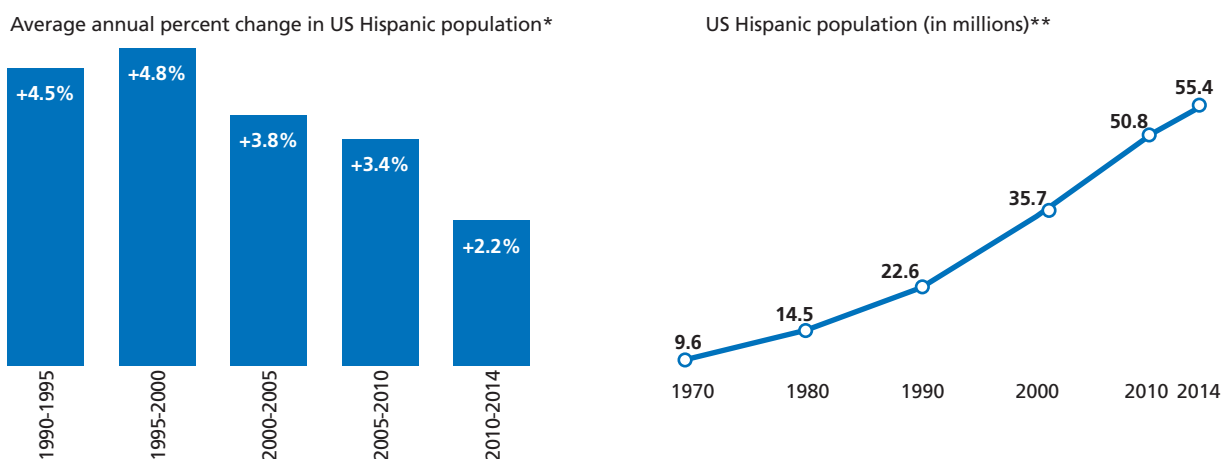
In the area of development cooperation, contradictions, hierarchies and the complexities of North-South and South-South cooperation come to light. The OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which brings together the world’s largest traditional aid donors, remains a central piece of the international aid architecture. Donor countries outside the DAC are becoming increasingly central to delivering aid to and forging partnerships with developing countries but have yet to upend the existing architecture. While certain Atlantic Space countries such as Brazil, South Africa and Venezuela, which feature among the re-emerging development partners, aim to alter the development cooperation status quo, the Atlantic Space also boasts a number of status quo developing countries. Indeed, a set of broad “peer groups” appear within the global South, ranging from rising powers and middle-income countries that are less reluctant to work within the framework of the DAC such as Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Indonesia and Turkey, through to poorer and smaller countries (Goerg 2014). For recipient countries, greater coordination is generally viewed as beneficial but many are wary of increased cooperation

between traditional donors and southern providers, such as Brazil and South Africa, because it could lead to reduced room to manoeuvre if competition among aid providers diminishes. Coordination among donors – as opposed to cooperation – does not entail planning and delivering aid jointly to achieve a common goal, but rather organising activities in a way that will not impede efforts by other actors and will lower the cost of the multiplicity of donors – such as duplication, waste and overwhelming local capacity. By sharing information on who is doing what, where, and when, efficiency gains through coordination could benefit all actors by transforming zero-sum dynamics into win-win situations. The Atlantic Space provides a particularly interesting arena within which to look at changes in development cooperation given the diversity of actors it brings together. While the line is often drawn between North and South, the Atlantic points to the need for more nuanced approaches, especially in light of an increasingly diverse global South within which interests do not always align. The gap in development between North and South as well as gaps within Atlantic Space countries could, however, present obstacles to alignment of interests.

The Atlantic Space showcases a number of historically fraught relations between countries and societies. Though these differences and lack of trust currently represent an obstacle to deeper cooperation, the proliferation of democracies in the South Atlantic since the late 1980s and the end of intense Cold War competition over spheres of influence present new opportunities as younger generations replace those with memories of outside domination. Indeed, Atlantic Future authors have identified the potential for convergence around democracy as a shared political system in the Atlantic (Gratius 2015; Alessandri 2015). Moreover, a shift in thinking by leaders in North Atlantic countries towards a more respectful mode of engagement with South Atlantic countries, seeking to understand different perspectives rather than to lecture and dictate predetermined preferences could help boost pan-Atlantic trust over time. Recent evidence of such a shift can be seen in the Americas, with US Secretary of State John Kerry's declaration in November 2013 that "the era of the Monroe Doctrine is over" reflecting a desire in the United States to make a break with the past and focus on cooperating with Latin American countries as partners on a host of issues, rather than historical patterns of US interventionism that treated Latin America as its "backyard" (Kerry 2013). This same impetus can be seen in the reestablishment of diplomatic ties between the United States and Cuba in July 2015. The increasing "Latin Americanization" of US culture, ethnicity and politics through immigration and idea transfer could further shift the way the United States interacts with Latin America and vice versa. It remains to be seen if these shifts foreshadow greater trust and convergence within the Americas. While, as Kaye Whiteman argues, "Africa and Europe seem still not to have fully escaped from the burden of history" (Whiteman 2012), EU-Africa relations are changing fast and could be heading toward normalisation. EU member states like Germany, the United Kingdom and France have also started developing national strategies for engagement and cooperation with re-emerging development partners, ranging from high-level political dialogue to local projects.

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Figure 3. Latin American population growth in the United States

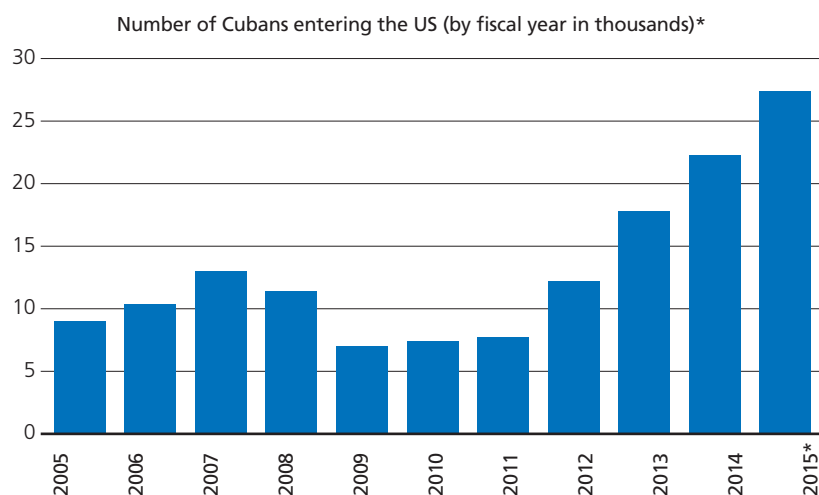


*Population estimates are for July 1.

**1990-2014 estimates are for July 1.

Source: Krogstad and Lopez 2015. Original source: Pew Research Center.

Figure 4. Cuban population entering the United States



*Fiscal years start in October. Time period for 2015 is the first nine months of the fiscal year through June 30.

Source: Krogstad 2015. Original source: Pew Research Center.

Additionally, a new opportunity for convergence can be found in shifting views in the United States toward marijuana policy and drug eradication efforts. The handling of the “war on drugs” has long been a point of contention between the United States and Latin America, with much drug trafficking violence afflicting Latin America even though the United States is the primary consumption market. As eradication efforts become less intense and countries around the region – from Chile and Uruguay to the United States – experiment with normalising marijuana usage, the divergence of views on how to manage drug problems could give way to greater convergence and cooperation in the Americas (Neuman and Romero 2015). This would also bring their drug policies into closer alignment with the EU, which views drug use

less as a criminal issue and more as a health issue, with a greater focus on helping rather than punishing users.

Conclusion

The Atlantic Space demonstrates significant potential for convergence in the political, social and cultural realms. It has the potential to drive development norms and practices and global discussions on development cooperation as well as breaking down the North-South and South-South dichotomies. At the policy level, the Atlantic Space brings together a wealth of expertise which, building on linguistic links, could be leveraged through more systematic dialogue and consultation. The oft-touted historical and cultural links across the space present both opportunities and challenges, which should be taken into account when engaging in cooperation. In addition to shared languages, the history of colonisation has, among other factors, impacted the development of institutions across the space, often leading to some degree of similarity in the formal set-up of these institutions. While existing links can facilitate cooperation, these often come with assumptions of a degree of closeness and a false sense of naturally aligned interests, methods and ways of communicating. Hierarchies, often linked to the space's history, also remain present in the minds of policymakers, private sector actors and publics alike (Goerg 2014). Indeed, "a sustainable Atlantic Basin would require rebuilding Atlantic relations so that historical hierarchies and current economic gaps are transformed into economic ties that are satisfactory to all partners" (Pastor 2014). Convergence in the Atlantic Space is possible, and trust-building through repeated positive interactions could help foster alignment of interests. However, convergence is not a given and should not be mistaken for homogeneity. The Atlantic Space will continue to remain a diverse space.

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