



ATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES INTERVIEWS REPORT

11

Perspectives from Belgium (Brussels)

Elisa Lledó

Junior Researcher, Fundación Para Las Relaciones Internacionales Y El Diálogo Exterior (FRIDE)

Danielle Piatkiewicz

Program Assistant, Wider Atlantic Program, German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF)

ABSTRACT

Is a new pan-Atlantic system of relations emerging in the Atlantic space beyond the traditional North Atlantic alliance and the North-South dependency? Although there was no unanimous opinion, many interviewees from various sectors in Brussels appeared to be sceptical about this potential scenario (there was a strong EU-US transatlantic space but weak relations with the South), while others claimed that the Atlantic Basin could be more interconnected, mainly in economic terms. GMF and FRIDE, with their respective offices used their networks to interview the relevant actors based on their professional and academic expertise. The main concerns regarding the current state and future of the Atlantic region included, amongst others: the future of the TTIP trade negotiation between the US and the EU, the lack of a cohesive "Atlantic" security approach, the struggle for a united and common energy and climate and environmental policy within the Atlantic space.

The preliminary results of the interviews were presented at the ATLANTIC FUTURE Seminar in Lisbon, April 2015

ATLANTIC FUTURE – Towards an Atlantic area? Mapping trends, perspectives and interregional dynamics between Europe, Africa and the Americas, is a project financed by the European Union under the 7th Framework Programme. European Commission Project Number: 320091.



ATLANTIC FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

11

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. The Developing Regions in the Atlantic	3
3. Section on Questions on Thematic Areas	4
4. Section on Norms and Values, Cooperation and Regionalism	7
5. Conclusions	12

1. Introduction

The Atlantic Future project aims to provide new evidence from a regional perspective on whether a new pan-Atlantic system of relations is emerging in the Atlantic space beyond the traditional North Atlantic alliance and the North-South dependency. GMF and FRIDE with their respective Brussels based offices used their networks to interview representatives from the public sector, namely the European Commission and the European Parliament, the European External Action Service, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and various country missions to the EU. The private sector was represented by international and regional companies, business associations, chambers of commerce, and investment companies. The research sector included universities, think tanks and public policy institutions. Brussels media sector was represented by a variety of leading international and regional newspapers, radio stations and magazines. Lastly, Brussels civil society was included through interviews at foundations, advocacy and non-governmental organizations.

All sectors focused on thematic areas such as Economy and Finance, Security, People and Institutions and Resources and Environment which was selected based on the interviewees professional and academic expertise. The interviews were then conducted in person and interviewees were asked a series of standardized questions based on their thematic backgrounds.

2. The Developing Regions in the Atlantic

Some of the main concerns regarding the future of the Atlantic from the Brussels perspective, were the future of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) trade negotiation between the US and the EU and how TTIP could affect the transatlantic relationship and beyond. “TTIP is very important and will bring consequences for the whole Atlantic.” The question of whether or not these “consequences” would be positive or negative was still up for debate. Some respondents stated that “TTIP has good implications for the Atlantic space” and could bring “trade liberalization” and “increase South to South trade.” Others viewed the bilateral negotiation as “less pan-Atlanticist” and possibly exclusionary to the South Atlantic region. Overall, opinion was divided over how relevant the eventual TTIP will be for the construction of the Atlantic space. Many respondents commented that the TTIP negotiations should be more open and comprehensive. Finally, many raised doubts about the prospects for the harmonisation of regulations governing food security, environmental protection. Indeed, one of the key challenges of the TTIP would be harmonising regulations to reduce bureaucracy (so-called “red-tape”) to promote a cheaper way of doing business for both the EU and the US.

Economists viewed North America as having maintained its economic strength and its importance over the last 20 years. The US’s relationship with the EU continued to be of special relevance within the Atlantic Space. Prospects for Europe’s economy were considered of critical importance, in particular due to its internal fiscal issues as well as growing concerns for the future of the Euro. Africa was viewed as growing in economic importance in the last 20 years, but having started from a relatively low level of development. Latin America has also potential growth, as seen with Brazil’s economic boost in the last decade, but was less important in the Atlantic space as an economic player especially due to its relatively closed economies.

In regards to the next decade, respondents viewed that North America would continue and maintain its economic edge within the region especially if TTIP is signed and the transatlantic link would continue to drive the market. It was speculated that Europe would benefit from this agreement, but would decline in its global importance if Europe did not reconstruct its internal economic platform – especially regarding the future of the Euro. Latin America had potential growth, but the region was still faced with internal and intra-regional issues such as high levels of crime and corruption. Latin America was not fully integrated into the global market but if they diversified their trade they could be a main player in the Atlantic space in the future. The fear for Africa was that if they remain politically unstable and the source of social unrest, there is the risk that the region would continue to be considered a “developmental aid project” rather than a source of investment and growth.

3. Section on Questions on Thematic Areas

3.1 Economy and Finance

Based on the main economic changes and continuities in the region, Brussels respondents indicated that growth of trade and investment flows and the negotiation of new free trade agreements served as the main changes to the area. The negotiation of new free trade agreements, for example TTIP, according to economist, will increase investments and push the U.S. and EU relations closer, but will take away from investments in the South regions – creating a shift in the trade and investment flows that will have global impact. The construction of new infrastructures and the development of new transport routes ranked as the next important factors that could affect the region positively. The construction of new infrastructures, for example, in terms of digital constructs, experts found that the U.S. and EU are falling behind and is non-existent in the South Atlantic regions but as China is making strides in developing new infrastructures and transport routes, they may be a bigger player in the future and can prompt the Atlantic to take a stronger approach.

According to the interviewees, the main actors capable of playing a leading role in the Atlantic space were large economic players such as the US and Europe, specifically Germany, France and the UK. Economic players in other regions such as Brazil, South Africa and Nigeria were also seen as potentially taking on a regional leadership role. Organizations like the World Trade Organisation, World Bank and IMF and Think tanks, universities and businesses were also seen as playing a role and representing “new models” for change in the region.

3.2 Security

According to the interviewees, the main security concern was the lack of a cohesive security approach to the region. While the transatlantic security link was mentioned as being “more central now than ever,” in short, a joint Atlantic security agenda was missing. Migration-related security challenges to Europe featured high on the agenda of respondents.

Brussels security experts felt that in the last 20 years, North America’s security importance has declined in various aspects such as its capacity, perception and political clout. The U.S. specifically was noted for their military campaigns and was described as overreach (in particular in the Middle East), which has tarnished its

international profile. However, they have remained strong in political and economic regards, especially with a view to the envisaged US-EU trade agreement (TTIP). Europe's importance initially declined in security terms, but has resurged with the recent issues within its neighbourhood (Ukrainian crisis). While it was perceived that Latin America has taken strides to become more secure, it was still facing internal issues such as corruption, drug trafficking and crime. Africa has become more relevant in security terms, mainly due to the growing security challenges in North Africa and health security issues in West Africa.

As US shifted more towards the Asia-Pacific, a gap in the Atlantic space could stimulate European security growth and possibly a more active external role in other regions within the Atlantic space. Latin America would continue to grow economically but may continue to face internal and regional security threats. Africa would grow in importance, but due to its internal social challenges, they may continue to be the "source of security issues."

The main security challenges in the Atlantic region, according to Brussels respondents, varied among the different regions. North America and Europe both view terrorism and illicit trafficking of drugs, weapons and humans as the most prevalent challenges to a secure region. Respondents expanded by stating that terrorism has expanded in Europe and has 'become a reality.' South America and Africa faced primarily issues associated with fragile states and illicit trafficking of drugs, weapons and humans. It was also mentioned that these two challenges are interlinked to instability in the regions where crime has the opportunity to take advantage of the state of a nation and exploit its people. Maritime security was generally agreed to be of greater concern for most of the Atlantic coastal areas (Atlantic Basin), especially for Africa. This is connected to the movement of crime as the coastal areas serve often as the port of entry for criminals.

The main actors capable of playing a security role in the Atlantic region were regarded as being the main security players, the US, Germany, UK, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa and Nigeria. However, from the Brussels perspective, "the US has a tarnished reputation and EU needs to take the initiative more." The EU was noted as lacking a concise security approach to the Atlantic region but was closely interlinked with the U.S.'s security—especially through organizations like NATO. Respondents commented that international non-government organizations could "play a role, even though a minor one" in the Atlantic space.

3.3 People and institutions

In the last 20 years, Brussels based policymakers viewed that North America had remained a key player "remained strategically key" as they "drive the global agenda," but their importance globally had diminished because of new global players and the emergence of a more multilateral international system. Europe's regional importance has grown but mainly due to its transatlantic link, not independently. Latin America had become 'increasingly important' as they increased their institutional framework by broadening and deepening dialogue and cooperation with the EU and its neighbours. Africa had also grown in importance due to growing availability of resources, economic growth as well as the "raise of the post-colonial identities."

The next decade may see that North America's importance diminished as global shifts continue to occur, primarily with the rise of China as a major global power. However it was noted that North America had the "ability and structural advantages" to support the

Atlantic space, therefore increasing their importance in the region. Europe was seen as having stepped up” its international outreach and grown in importance specifically in Africa as long as key players like Germany, France and the UK continued to drive these relations. However, a lack of political linkages between Latin America and Europe would remain. Latin America would continue to grow in influence, especially due to Brazil while the rest of the continent needed to face issues and need strengthen the rule of law. Africa may continue to grow in importance as it continues to develop due to a “new generation of rulers” and a growing middle class. However, because of a high level of governmental corruption in the past, there is a lot of speculation on whether or not a new generation of leaders could foster positive or negative growth.

The main political and social changes or challenges such as the state of democracy, respect for human rights, diplomatic exchanges and migration trends varied among the respondent’s relative sectors. Those who worked in civil society listed the state of democracy and respect for human rights as issues that are featured on their agenda. In comparison, the Public sector ranked diplomatic exchanges and state of democracy as their main concerns within the Atlantic space. The EU and U.S.’s political commitment for democracy represents an opportunity to improve migration and economics with the Atlantic partners. Migration was considered an important issue with reference to some Atlantic regions. For example, the interviewees focusing on North African issues ranked migration trends as important – especially as the issues of mass migration and the political, social and security issues that are linked with mass migration especially from instable regions in Africa.

The main actors capable of playing a political role in the Atlantic were organizations such as NATO, OSCE and the United Nations. However, NGO’s and the “scientific and civil society have important roles in the Atlantic” as well. While the US and the EU and the transatlantic link were the main political players in the Atlantic, the EU was criticised by Brussels interviewees for not taking a common stance on issues. It was felt that the “EU needs to have convergent interests and talk with one voice” and “reinforce its internal links.” The EU relied too much on bilateral relations and historical ties with Africa and Latin America and it was recommended that the EU should “increase trade with Latin America and Africa” which could in turn increase its political presence.

3.4 Resources and Environment

Concerns on the Atlantic region’s environment and resources focused on the struggle for a united and common energy, climate and environmental policy within the Atlantic space. From the Brussels perspective, in the last 20 years, North America had grown in importance in the energy sector especially with the shale gas revolution while Europe developed ambitious environmental goals but still lacked a unified energy approach. Latin America was noted for not only growing economically, but has grown in the global market and have become a large exporter of energy and other commodities, increasingly to Asia. Africa had been noted for growing gradually economically, but not drastically. This effected their potential as they have untapped energy resources and a strong potential financial and industry perspective. Interviewees argued that North America would maintain a competitive edge in the next decade as energy prices would remain low. Europe’s environmental aims should continue to be ambitious as they have in the past, but as they enter a “new model and phase in integration”, a common energy approach should be shaped. Latin America would grow in importance due to further “modernization and Brazil's growth” but continued to look inward rather than outward -limiting their external growth. Africa would remain an area of untapped resources with potential investments, but due to governance issues would take a long time to further develop.

The perceived environmental challenges to the Atlantic region such as the transformation of the energy sector, impacts of climate change and resource depletion varied among the respondents. The transformation of the energy sector was perceived as being the largest challenge to the Atlantic region as it is linked directly with sustainable development and energy security of a region. However, resource depletion and the impacts of climate change received mixed views. Resource depletion was noted as being a growing challenge to the Atlantic space especially in areas like Africa where natural resources such as water are becoming more and scarcer. Climate change was also seen as a main challenge for North America and Europe whereas Latin America and Africa in particular saw the transformation of their energy sector, the development and diversification of their energy systems as being more important.

Interviewees argued that the main actors capable of influencing the Atlantic space in resource and environmental issues were the United Nations, G7 and major states; the US and EU. However, it was said “governmental authorities need to create the right framework, or a common project, for the Atlantic.” In the EU, “the European Commission should come together with member states to create a stronger voice so as not to lose impact by not pooling the member states' power.” Equally, external organizations, associations of private interests and NGOs needed to build tighter links.

4. Section on Norms and Values, Cooperation and Regionalism

4.1 Convergence or divergence in norms and values

Most interviewees felt that the four Atlantic sub-regions (Africa, Europe, North America and South America) have some values and norms in common. These include democracy, human rights, pluralism, freedom and the rule of law. They had for the most part a common history and cultural heritage, including common languages and religions.

Broadly speaking, all the interviewees noted that although there are important differences in the perception and implementation of values and norms within the Atlantic basin, there is a greater degree of convergence within this region than with other regions such as the Asia-Pacific. One of the Brussels respondents argued that cultural differences prevail in Asia and there was a weaker historical link to enhance further cooperation apart from commercial and economic interdependence. The lack of common values and norms within the Asian continent was regarded as one of the factors leading to confrontations such as the territorial disputes between China and Japan and between India and Pakistan. Even within the economic regional fora in Asia, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) or the Asia-Pacific Economic cooperation (APEC), there is little progress towards developing any cooperation agreement (for instance arrangements on international security cooperation) apart from the ones related to trade and economics.

Many interviewees enumerated the following as being the “most shared” or common values in the Atlantic space: democracy, the rule of law, freedom, non-interventionism and human rights. Many also mentioned universal values such as multilateralism and the primacy of international law.

According to them, there was, however, a much greater degree of homogeneity and shared values in the Northern Atlantic (North to North) than in the Southern Atlantic (South to South) region. Many of these values are based on similar normative and rule-

based structures; rule of law, sovereignty, and an established respected electoral system and democracy.

Economic and financial relations seem to be the driving force behind cooperation among the four sub-regions. Many of the economists interviewed posited that trade liberalisation and economic integration were common to both the Northern and Southern Atlantic regions.

The US, EU and Latin America “triangle” was increasing its economic ties through various trade agreements (Association Agreements, Trade Agreements, Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreements, FTAs, etc.) while obviously having a shared history, culture and languages. For its part, Africa was seen as a continent with considerable economic potential. Consequently, Brussels interviewees mentioned that there were also growing economic ties between the EU and Africa with some free trade commitments such as the Trade, Development and Co-operation Agreement with South Africa and the Economic Partnership Agreement with 16 West African states.

Interviewees saw the Southern Atlantic - Africa and Latin America –as having common values and norms due to their shared historical and cultural past including the experience of colonisation. However, the implementation of these shared norms was often complex and “pushes them” to seek further “allies” in the Asian neighbourhood (BRICS, IBSA, etc.)

While security challenges were shared in the region, their impact and perceptions changed from region to region. For instance, drug trafficking and corruptions seemed to be the common challenges in Latin America, while migration, social development, humanitarian issues and terrorism were the common challenges in Africa. In the field of security cooperation, the N-N appeared to be stronger and had deeper cooperation than the S-S. The urgent need to respond to the current crisis in Eastern Europe between Ukraine and Russia had breathed new life into NATO and strengthened its role as the foremost joint defence organisation. Nonetheless, as many interviewees stated, it was not a question of shared values when it came to security but how the countries and sub-regions identify and react to security threats and problems.

Interviewees saw the US and the EU leading the way in issues related to good governance, democracy and rule of law. Some interviewees felt that the two regions aim to promote these norms and values in the Southern Atlantic to facilitate political dialogue and promote cooperation. In addition, the interviewees mentioned, the EU sought to instil these rather abstract values and principles in recipient countries through humanitarian aid and development cooperation. Relations with Africa were more complicated due to its weak institutions and cultural differences (religion, family issues). It was mentioned that the South Atlantic often criticises the EU and the US’ “paternalistic approach towards them”. All the experts on Africa interviewed highlighted that “as long as the Northern Atlantic failed to see Africa as an equal or to talk about politics rather than aid donor/recipient relations, nothing would change in the wider Atlantic”.

Despite much common ground, there were also considerable divergences in norms and values within the Atlantic basin particularly over trade, good governance and social development. This last category covered matters such as family issues, personal freedoms, religion, tolerance of inequality and individual rights particularly in the Southern Atlantic.

With regards to Latin America, although there has been considerable progress towards establishing democratic societies during the different waves of democratisation, there was a discrepancy between civil and political rights and social and economic rights.

Some interviewees highlighted that 'the EU and the US neglect social and economic rights in Latin America'.

In Africa, issues related to democracy, gender equality, individual rights, religion (often hindering equality and the freedom of sexual orientation) and sustainable development were common challenges. Africa's weak democratic institutions along with what in the Northern Atlantic were perceived as "controversial family values" (for example family size) are significant differences. Some felt that Africa's ever-growing population posed a serious challenge to the EU as one of the factors fuelling illegal immigration into Europe. Furthermore, there are also vast differences both within Africa and between Africa and the rest of the Atlantic space over social issues such as gender equality in education, poverty, ethnic problems, women's rights and Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) rights.

Differences were perceived not only between the North and the South, but also between the US and Europe. For example, the two regions had very different attitudes to the death penalty, the International Criminal Court (ICC), social cohesion and welfare. They also differed on their approach to economics. For instance, some interviewees indicated that the US was less bureaucratic and more liberal than Europe. On the other hand, the EU was perceived as being more aware of welfare challenges and the need for wealth redistribution compared to the US.

4.2 Interest in and incentives for cooperation

Shared values and mutual concerns provided a solid base and incentives for cooperation. Trade and investment were the common denominator and driving force for cooperation between the four regions. Brussels respondents highlighted the current TTIP negotiations as a clear example of the potential for cooperation between two key sub-regions of the Atlantic space. Furthermore, the EU has several Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with Latin America. However, many of the interviewees underlined the growing concerns related to the TTIP and its consequences for Southern Atlantic competitiveness.

Security challenges (such as international terrorism and migration) were significant concerns that could increase cooperation in the Atlantic basin. Respondents highlighted that there is no organism at the Atlantic level that focused on security issues in a broad sense except NATO. On a different note, if the US and the EU manage to sign the TTIP many interviewees claimed that could bring "economic growth" in the North and South Atlantic. Therefore the consequences from a security point of view could also be beneficial. Indeed, respondent claimed that economic growth in developing countries could help to reduce inequality in education and poverty and thereby help to reduce security threats.

As far as politics are concerned, the EU had established ten different Strategic Partnerships, five of these within the Atlantic space– Brazil, Canada, Mexico, South Africa and the US. Moreover, the European Parliament is engaged in sharing good practices and political dialogue with regional parliaments in the Southern Atlantic. As many Brussels interviewees remarked, there were shared political and economic concerns and a mutual dialogue on migration issues between the EU and the African continent.

As for resources and environment, many of the experts interviewed did not seem to perceive any progress towards an "Atlantic energy union". Moreover, many respondents highlighted both the lack of an energy union at the European level, and the large differences and approaches towards climate change within the Atlantic Basin. In addition, one of the interviewees suggested that in 20 years there could be a "game

changer” that could affect geopolitics. Indeed, he indicated that in two decades, energy might be produced locally and therefore, geopolitics might follow the same path.

However, according to the respondents, many obstacles such as the lack of trust, corruption, as well as legal, political and bureaucratic impediments limit a deeper cooperation. Economic and social inequality (in the South), and the inability of the EU to lead economically also held back a deeper cooperation, according to the interviewees. A few respondents underlined the lack of common values and norms within the broader Atlantic as an obstacle for cooperation.

In general, all of the Brussels interviewees stressed that bilateral cooperation in the Atlantic seemed to function better than multilateral cooperation.

4.3 Regional and interregional cooperation

When it came to the large main regional actors that could foster cooperation in the Atlantic, the EU (and its large member states such as France, the UK and Germany), the US, the private sector (energy), civil society, lobbies, multinationals (agro-alimentary sector, infrastructure firms) and banks were considered the most relevant. Countries such as South Africa, Nigeria, Senegal, Brazil and regional organisations such as the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the African Union (AU) or the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) were the leading actors in the Southern Atlantic. Furthermore, as one of the interviewees highlighted, it is important to foster North-South and South-South relations by drawing on the experience of successful transitions to democracy in Northern countries (Spain) and in the Southern countries (Chile) and apply it to some countries of the African continent (Egypt, Tunisia, etc.).

Despite on-going criticism, the EU's role in the Atlantic space was relevant due to its financial (aid and investment) support and political engagement. As mentioned above, the EU had several strategic partnerships with pivotal countries in both the Northern and Southern Atlantic. The phrase often mentioned by respondents regarding the EU-US relations are that “they are doomed to be together” (NATO, TTIP). Regarding Africa, the EU was mainly involved in humanitarian aid and development cooperation. Nevertheless, as the Brussels commentators highlighted throughout the interviews, the EU lacks a clear strategy towards the Atlantic basin. Moreover, the EU needed to speak with one voice (further integration) and assume a stronger role over defence matters, as well as in crisis management.

As for the future of the EU engagement in the Atlantic some of the respondents pointed out that this would be an important dimension of its foreign policy while others indicated that the EU should concern itself more with the conflicts in its immediate Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods. Some interviewees also suggested that perhaps the EU should change its strategy and further connect with the Pacific Ocean where economic growth and innovation seem to be more dynamic.

Finally, Brussels interviewees mentioned that the new US’ “pivot to Asia” strategy resulted in a security vacuum and in a “leading from behind” policy in the current crises such as Libya and Syria. Some of them held that this created more scope for the EU to play a bigger role in neighbouring regions. However, other respondents thought that the pivot to Asia narrative was just a matter of propaganda due to the fact that the US remained “on the crest of the wave” and was present in all conflicts (in Europe, in East Asia and in the Middle East).

4.4 The role of the EU in the Atlantic

From a Brussels perspective, the EU's role within the four sub-regions is relevant. A common stance amongst many of the respondents was that the EU could become a larger economic player and a security provider in the Atlantic in the next 20 years if it acts as a single bloc. However, many of them pointed out the lack of coordination and willingness amongst member states.

Economists pointed out that the EU is the largest “trader and investor” with “large historical relevance and migration flows within the Atlantic basin. Regarding the different sub-regions, as many interviewees argued, the EU has strong ties with Africa and North America due to historical ties, immigration, and “high levels of political, economic and commercial cooperation.” However, while Europe stands as one of the larger economic partners with Latin America, some respondents felt that the EU had loose links with this region. The perception of the EU's economic role in the next 20 years in the Atlantic region received a consensus that the “EU needs to be more aggressive” and needs to “take stronger role in military, trade and international structure.”

The EU's normative security power in the Atlantic region remained strongest with North America, specifically with the help of The North Atlantic treaty Organization (NATO) but some Brussels representatives perceived that Europe was relying on this security network too much instead of formulating their own. The EU's role in Africa was relevant especially in dealing with immigration flows between Africa and Europe but also given the EU's work on anti-piracy operations, humanitarian crises and military cooperation. The future of the EU's role as a security provider or player according to Brussels' security sector depended on the EU's security capabilities and the political will of the EU member states. –The “EU needs to revive its role within NATO, or develop a system itself to become more active in the Atlantic space.”

Interviewees saw the EU as having some degree of political power in the Atlantic space. The EU's role in Africa was seen as very relevant due to common security challenges also stemming from geographical proximity. Europe has played an important role in development policy but some believe that its overall role in Africa could be even larger. Europe's role in Central and South America was seen as less relevant. The EU's relevance in North America remained strong due to the TTIP but also due to historical links and partnership based on “common norms and values.” The political perception of the EU's future role in the Atlantic region was that they “could serve as either a bridge or a buffer for democracy and stability”. The EU's role in Africa could remain strong as they are close neighbours and their relations are based on “shared values, aims and promoting common interests.” The EU's influence on North America could “return to the old transatlantic relations” referring to the classic North Atlantic relationship that has dominated this space, especially with the conclusion of the TTIP, but may experience a bit of fatigue in political and security matters.

Last but not least, the EU's influence in resource and environmental matters in the Atlantic was perceived as relatively relevant. While links were strong between the EU and Africa, there was little collaboration in regards to environmental issues. In Central and South America, the EU's role was described as being “relevant but not visible enough”. The EU's role in North America was relevant but “could do much better” and “could be more equal.” The concept of a transatlantic and equal approach to environmental, energy and resource issues has the potential of having a large impact in the region. Brussels' respondents saw the role of the EU in the next decade as relevant in both Africa and Latin America as they continued to work on development

cooperation. However, a common European approach to energy and environmental issues would ensure their influence in the region.

5. Conclusions

After all the interviews conducted in Brussels, the main ideas/recommendations that can be drawn about the perception of a “pan-Atlantic space” are as follows: Firstly, many of those interviewed stressed that the world is interdependent and interconnected and there was no need to divide the world into more blocs. Secondly, many felt that the EU should stick to its nearest neighbourhood and concentrate on resolving the disorder in Eastern and Southern Europe rather than trying to be present in the entire world. Thirdly, all of the respondents indicated that the Atlantic region was currently dominated by bilateral relations (FTAs, Strategic Partnerships, etc.) and it would be difficult to create a common unified multilateral political and economic space.

In conclusion, taking into account all of the above, there was no unanimous opinion on the emergence of an ‘Atlantic space’. Many interviewees appeared to be sceptical about the prospect (there is a strong EU-US transatlantic space but weak relations with the South), while others thought that links would deepen across the Atlantic (mainly in economic terms).