



ATLANTIC FUTURE

ATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES INTERVIEWS REPORT

14

Perspectives from Portugal

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ABSTRACT

The creation of a pan-Atlantic space, based on cooperation between the different regions of the Atlantic is fundamental for the future of the Atlantic basin, capable to deal with the emergence of new powers in the Asia-Pacific Rim and the threats that emerged with the end of the Cold War: terrorism, migration trends, illicit trafficking, fragile states, etc. The analysis of four specific areas – economy and finances, security, people and institutions, resources and environment – has shown the existence of different stages of development of the Atlantic basin countries, mainly between the North and the South, which must be overcome by cooperation in these same areas. For Portuguese stakeholders, the European Union, African Union and NATO have a fundamental role to play, but EU is mostly seen as a role model to be followed for the development of regional and interregional cooperation. The challenge is to overcome the lack of leadership of EU in the last 5 years and the traditional suspicion of the South Atlantic regarding to the North in order to deepen the relations between the shores of the Atlantic.

The first draft of this Policy Paper / Policy report was presented at the ATLANTIC FUTURE Plenary Meeting in Lisbon, April 23rd, 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.



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1. Introduction

For centuries, Portugal has viewed itself mainly as an Atlantic country. With a peripheral position in Europe, and engaged in the development of overseas trade, Portugal regarded with suspicion any involvement in the continental European matters. The end of the authoritarian regime in 1974, followed by the process of decolonization of the African empire and the democratization of the Portuguese society, effected a change in terms of the country's strategic interests. For the first time, Portugal assumed its role in the international system as an Euro-Atlantic country, concerned with being as engaged in the European integration process as in the maintenance of the traditional links with the Atlantic partners.

In this paper, relying on nineteen interviews made to stakeholders in four specific expertise areas – economy, security, people and institutions, resources and environment – we wish to figure out how the evolution of the Atlantic basin in the last twenty years is perceived by the Portuguese society. Furthermore, we wish to understand what those actors envisage as the likely future developments in the region, bearing in mind the process of globalization and increasing relevance of new emerging powers, in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

This paper is divided in three sections: the first attempts to identify the main trends in Portuguese foreign policy that frame the mindset of the stakeholders. The second discern changes and continuities in each of the thematic areas of the Atlantic Future Project. The last section aims at ascertaining whether there is convergence and divergence in norms and values in the Atlantic space and how this might influence cooperation and governance within this area.

2. PORTUGUESE FOREIGN POLICY AND METHODOLOGY

The Atlantic vector has always been fundamental in terms of Portuguese foreign policy. As a small European country with only one land border shared with a bigger power, Portugal lived in a permanently unstable geopolitical balance, “caught between the devil of continental pressure and – literally – the deep blue sea” (Teixeira 1998, 60). The balance between Europe and the Atlantic marked the Portuguese foreign policy, in order to assure an equilibrium that could guarantee Portuguese independence in the Iberian Peninsula. In this sense, relations with Spain were as vital as the development of extra-peninsular alliances, predominantly with a maritime power. For centuries, the alliance with the United Kingdom (UK) marked the Atlantic vector of the Portuguese diplomatic relations. The end of World War II and the emergence of the United States of America (USA) as the leading power of the Atlantic have shaken this relationship. After 1949, Portugal became a founding member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the USA replaced the role played until then by the UK. From this moment on, NATO have served as a framework for the bilateral relationship between Lisbon and Washington. Behind the invitation for Portugal to become a member of the Pact was the USA's strategic interest in the North Atlantic area, particularly the use of the Lajes airfield in the Azores (Marcos 2014, 336). Constrained by the Cold War environment, the Portuguese foreign policy was able to maintain its main characteristics, with the reinforcement of the Atlantic dimension. Additionally, the various colonial projects developed by Portugal in the last centuries – first in Asia during the 16th century, then in Brazil during the 18th century and finally in Africa, by the end of the 19th century and during the 20th century – also played a fundamental role as far as Portuguese foreign policy and its Atlantic vector were concerned. In a geostrategic dimension, the development of a colonial empire was vital in terms of

creating a geo-economic and geostrategic device that might help to overcome the idea of constraint caused by the position of Portugal in the Iberian Peninsula, in particular, and in Europe, in general.

The end of the authoritarian regime in 1974, and the transition to democracy, changed this perception. From this moment on and until 1986 there was a redefinition of Portuguese foreign policy. It was not a mere transition, in fact, but a major changeover that diverted Portugal from a strategic interest mainly concerned with the Atlantic dimension and towards European integration (Cravo and Freire 2006). During the authoritarian regime, two political factors limited Portugal's integration in the process of European construction: the authoritarian nature of the regime, on the one hand, and the Estado Novo's obstinate resistance to decolonization. The rupture fostered by the military coup of April 25th, 1974, fuelled the simultaneous process of decolonization of the last European colonial empire and democratization. With the Revolution occurring at the height of Cold War, Portugal went through a crisis of the state, followed by an intense social and political mobilization of the left, to which the moderate parties only manage to survive with the external assistance of the US and other European countries. The consolidation of the Portuguese democracy is characterized by a clear choice by the Portuguese government following 1976 to reaffirm the external position of Portugal as a country at once Atlantic and European (Teixeira 2012).

However, this reassertion acquired a variety of shapes. If, until 1974, externally speaking, Portugal assumed itself as an Atlantic and European country, after 1976 this order was reversed. From this moment on and until 1986, Portugal moved towards integration in the European project, a strategy with political and economic contours. Political because it symbolized Portugal's will to become a pluralistic democracy, like the majority of the countries in NATO and all member states of the European Economic Community (EEC). Economic since the membership in the EEC would entail Portuguese social and economic development and modernization (Teixeira 2012).

After the accession to the EEC in 1986, the Euro-Atlantic dimension of Portuguese foreign policy was clarified. The European option would become the major novel feature of Portuguese foreign policy, sided by the historical Atlantic dynamics. The two were no longer antagonistic. In fact, Lisbon acknowledges that being Atlantic may prove to be advantageous in Europe, insofar as being European may create conditions to foster the Portuguese strategic position in the Atlantic and, in particular, the South Atlantic, where postcolonial relations have evolved. On the other hand, the Atlantic meant, for Portugal, the maintenance of the historical features of its foreign policy, and played an important role not only in terms of external guidance until the end of Cold War, but also after, since NATO is still the most important alliance and the United States remain the most powerful country in the international system. But, in the end, the strategic priorities of Portugal were reversed. The governments in Lisbon started to perceive Portugal as a European country, whose participation in the EU is advantageous and enhances Portugal's Atlantic position in terms of post-colonial relations, within the Atlantic Basin. If we add to these two dimensions a third – the establishment of friendly relations with the former African colonies and Brazil, based on cooperation rather than conflict – we stand before the fundamental lines of Portugal's foreign policy in the democratic regime (Teixeira 2010).

The strategic perception taking shape among policy-makers and public opinion in Lisbon was encouraged by the international development of the post-Cold War. The end of the Cold War opened the way to new possibilities for the Atlantic region. Together, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the decolonization of Africa, the democratization of Latin America and of some areas of Southern Africa, and the emergence of major regional powers, paved the way to a new moment in the inter-Atlantic relations (Buzan

and Weaver 2003). The South Atlantic has emerged as an area of economic prosperity and a very important region in terms of energy production, especially countries such as Brazil, Nigeria and Angola, whose international relevance has grown. The establishment of new patterns of international alignment followed this economic development, characterized by a diversification of the South-South relations, over the traditional North-South linkages – Brazil was a pioneer in such diversification (Serfaty 2011).

In view of this, the fundamental aspects of Portugal's global strategy are closely connected to Europe and to the European Union (EU), to transatlantic relations, the United States, in particular, and to the South Atlantic, in general, and, finally, to the development of relations with the Portuguese Speaking countries, in bilateral and multilateral terms – Portugal was one of the most engaged countries in the creation of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) (CEDN 2013). In this sense, almost 200 years after the independence of Brazil and 40 years following the end of its African empire, there is a notion that Portugal might play a crucial role in articulating North and South Atlantic efforts in order to maintain and strengthen global commerce and cooperation within the Atlantic Basin. This strategy, to be implemented, would have to include Brazil as a power willing to assume its responsibilities in the South Atlantic security architecture, in the framework of a stronger cooperation with countries such as South Africa. On the other hand, for Portugal's role to grow in scope and significance, the strong cooperation of Spain will be necessary, in order to fully engage Latin American countries in this process (Moreira 2004).

The perception of the stakeholders interviewed during the preparation of this paper will, therefore, reflect the framework outlined above. Among the nineteen selected interviewees, there are former members of cabinet and several others who have worked in the public administration (as diplomats or in functions directly related with political decision-making, both in Portugal and in the European Union). A significant number of the interviewees have also developed an academic career, working on the major issues addressed by the *Atlantic Future* project. Some of them now hold, after leaving the public administration, important positions in private business, in strategic areas such as the financial, energetic and transportation sectors. The experts in the environment and security sectors belong mostly to non-governmental organizations or consulting firms.

3. THE ATLANTIC BASIN SEEN FROM DIFERENT THEMATIC AREAS PERSPECTIVES

In this chapter, we will reflect on the perceptions of the Portuguese stakeholders concerning the common values and interests within the Atlantic basin, as well as on the challenges and opportunities faced by the region in the recent past and near future. The positions of the Portuguese interviewees are convergent, regardless of their thematic area of expertise. They all reflect the Euro-Atlantic tendency of recent Portuguese foreign policy, concentrating on the transatlantic relations (Europe-United States) – and considering that one of these regions, or both, are the most relevant in the Atlantic space. However, when asked to comment on the future evolution of the Atlantic basin, they tend to focus on the South Atlantic as the main area where changes are more likely to occur. This also mirrors the concerns of Portuguese foreign policy, particularly regarding the evolution of the Portuguese Speaking countries.

3.1. Economy

All the interviewees agreed that the United States, and North America in general, is the most important actor and region in the Atlantic. There was also a consensual position that Africa is the least important actor in the region or, at least, one whose relevance in

the last 15 to 20 years has comparatively increased very little. The interviewees also agreed that Europe is the second most important element in the region, but differed as to its future evolution. In fact, some considered that the future role of the EU in the Atlantic would depend on how it manages to overcome the financial and economic crisis. Europe has suffered considerably with the crisis of the *Eurozone* – despite the significant steps that were taken with a view to strengthening the Economic and Monetary Union, which eased the failure at the political level. In this sense, the *Eurozone* continues to be interesting for most of EU's member states, and should there be a positive way out of this crisis, the future of Europe in the Atlantic will improve.

Regarding Latin America, the points of view were dissonant. One of the respondents who is a board member of a Portuguese bank considered that Latin America might gain relevance with the normalization of relations between the US and Cuba – this development may have a positive impact on the relationship between North America and South America, since it could create a broader base of confidence and foster interdependence in terms of trade and investment within the American hemisphere. Contrarily, another interviewee who was a former Head of Division in the Portuguese Ministry of Economy believed that the medium-term evolution of Latin America might be a disappointment when compared with the present expectations regarding its evolvement. The interviewee considered that this is a region in disaggregation, with countries seeking to foster their economic ties with Asia (Colombia, Peru, Chile, Panama); countries overturned by serious internal issues (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, Central American Countries) and Brazil, with a markedly continental perspective – still deeply characterized by the traditional suspicion regarding the United States and increasingly dependent on the trade with the emerging Asian powers, particularly China.

As regards future developments in the region, most of the respondents agreed that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) might be an important feature of increasing cooperation in the North Atlantic area. This is mentioned also as very important for Portugal's transatlantic relations. In fact, the interviewees' perception was that the TTIP might mark a breakthrough in the traditional strategies of regional integration: if, up until now, they were focused on continental dynamics (siding with countries belonging to the same regional area), with the approval of the TTIP this trend may extend to a coming together of coasts, even if only in the North Atlantic.

In terms of the interviewees' ideas regarding the major challenges in Economy identified by the Atlantic Future project, there was a divergence of opinions as to their relevance. All of the interviewees believed that "growth of trade and investment flows", the "development of new transport routes", the "construction of new infrastructures" and the "negotiation of new free trade agreements" were very important variables in the evolution of the Atlantic Basin. Furthermore, all of these challenges were deeply interconnected and dependent on each other. There was a common idea that reinforces the image of the Atlantic as an open ocean, increasingly penetrated by the emerging Asian economies, and becoming a very important area in terms of energetic supplies, which will undoubtedly increase the importance of transportation and construction of infrastructures. Additionally, it is still in the Atlantic that the two biggest global markets are to be found, and this is important in the sense that North America and Europe still set the major economic and financial regulations. These regulations may be furthered through the negotiation of new trade agreements, which would boost the growth of trade and investment within the Atlantic basin and between the Atlantic basin and the rest of the world.

3.2. Security

Europe and the United States have been, for the respondents in this thematic area, the most relevant regions in the Atlantic, due to their historical transatlantic partnership. Currently, these regions share the common concern of cybersecurity and information sharing exchange, besides the constant threat of terrorism.

Africa is relevant, yet not for the best reasons. The stakeholders had the perception that, in Africa, organized crime and migratory trends constitute a significant threat to Europe. Additionally, the dissemination of terrorist networks in the *Sahel* region and Nigeria strengthens the idea that Europe's security problem is dependent on the evolution of this continent. Finally, Latin America is considered to be the least relevant region in the Atlantic Basin, as far as the perception of security threats to Europe is concerned. Nonetheless, organized crime and illicit trafficking of drugs and human beings are still viewed as a threat originating in Latin America, with consequences for Europe. In other words, the idea entertained by the Portuguese stakeholders concerning the evolution of security in the Atlantic basin was that the North Atlantic area is still crucial and the South Atlantic regions continue to be somewhat "eccentric", according to a former Portuguese Naval Officer.

Prospectively, the majority of the stakeholders consider that, in the near future, Latin America and Africa will be increasingly important regions in the Atlantic basin, which translates in the fact that South Atlantic will become more relevant – due to the importance of its energetic resources and the growing importance of trade and the new maritime routes that cross that area.

Nevertheless, it remains important to point out that, for two of the five stakeholders interviewed in Portugal in the Security thematic area, the evolution of the Atlantic Basin is somehow a marginal issue for Europe, since this region – and its institutions – are particularly concerned with the evolution in their neighborhood, especially in the East. This perception is even sharper when we turn our attention to issues such as the lack of cooperation in terms of Justice and Home Affairs, cybersecurity, current events in Ukraine, and regarding Eastern Europe. Terrorism is considered a permanent threat to Europe, with radical Islamism expanding from the Middle East to Africa.

Regarding the challenges in the security area, illicit trafficking, the fragility of states and terrorism are clearly the most important features referred by the interviewees. All these issues were clearly considered as top on the agenda and are also closely interconnected. Finally, if maritime security is currently considered to be the least relevant issue, the prediction is that it will remain an increasingly important challenge, since it is vital to ensure the trade routes, which are so important in terms of energy, natural resources and global trade. As to security, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union are considered the main actors in the Atlantic basin – particularly NATO, was still considered to be the permanent forum for transatlantic consultation both in the political and military point of view. Additionally, forums such as the EU-US Dialogue are also considered relevant. In the South Atlantic, there is a growing tendency for the multiplication of forums, especially focusing on maritime security issues in Africa – Maritime Organization for West and Central Africa (MOWCA) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission. Nevertheless, the stakeholders mention a lack of cooperation or coordination between North and South Atlantic – in fact, countries such as Brazil have great reservations regarding a strengthening of their relationship with the North-Atlantic region and organizations, due to the weight of the US in the relationship with Europe.

3.3. People and institutions

All the stakeholders in this thematic area considered the United States and Europe the most important regions in the Atlantic Basin, whereas Africa and Latin America remained in a secondary position. Nevertheless, there is a clear understanding of the

challenges posed by the evolution of Africa especially in economic terms (energetic resources). In the perspective of a particular stakeholder, engaged in political decision-making of the Portuguese Government, Latin America and Africa are growing areas of interest for Portugal, mostly because of their economic development and the paramount importance of the Portuguese-speaking Countries.

In the medium term, it is expected by these stakeholders that the United States and the EU will continue to be the most important regions, despite the evolution of the other two regions. A major contribution for such transatlantic relevance is the TTIP, which is seen as being “crucial for the evolution of the Atlantic basin” by a Portuguese Member of the European Parliament. Additionally, the concerns with cybersecurity will also foster Euro-American cooperation.

Respect for human rights and the state of democracy were two fundamental challenges in the Portuguese stakeholders’ point of view. They considered that these two elements are closely interconnected and that arranging these features according to a certain order exposes the existence of a division between North and South Atlantic. For North America and Europe, issues such as diplomatic exchanges and migratory trends are central in their concerns. Nonetheless, regions such as Latin America and Africa, these features are secondary comparing to the importance of the state of democracy and respect for human rights.

From the stakeholders’ point of view, institutions such as the United Nations and its Dialogue Among Civilizations’ initiative, OECD, NATO, EU-LAC Summit, EU-Africa Summit and several African and Latin American regional organizations are aware of these challenges and have become forums for discussing and addressing these issues.

3.4. Resources and environment

The perspective of Portuguese stakeholders regarding this area of expertise showed a clear divergence between those who are specialists in the field of environment and those more focused on the energy sector. For the first ones, Europe is still the most important region in terms of work and cooperation in the environmental field. On the other hand, for the latter, Europe’s relevance has not grown if compared to regions such as Africa, Latin America and even North America in terms of its importance to the energetic sector.

It is clear that, in the coming years, North America will increase its relevance due to the discovery of shale gas deposits. This development can change the geo-economic strategy within the Atlantic, even though some stakeholders refer that it is not clear whether this will be sustainable due to a conflict between pressure for increasing exploitation and the use of water resources. However, considering the environmental area alone, Europe will remain relevant, since it is the region that defines much of the regulatory framework in this area, promoting scientific and technological cooperation. Latin America and Africa still have room to grow in terms of their relevance; and North America will lose some of theirs should it maintain its position regarding climate change, whereas India and China will replace Europe as a traditional ally of the US.

One other aspect that will increase in relevance in every region of the Atlantic Basin is the issue of the extension of continental shelves. The scarcity of land resources and the improvement of operating capabilities in the greater deep ocean will reinforce the interest of the Atlantic basin riparian states to the exploitation of resources in the Atlantic continental shelf and may increase the competition between states in this issue.

The majority of stakeholders considered that the most important challenge highlighted in this project concerned the shift in the energy sector. Energy runs through the whole economy and the evolution of North America, in terms of shale deposits, and the discovery of offshore oil and gas in Latin America and Africa can contribute heavily to change the geo-economic strategy of the Atlantic basin, which would become one of the most important areas globally. Additionally, the development of renewable energies in North America and Europe will generate a few changes in the Atlantic basin; however, these will not be far-reaching enough to put an end to oil and electricity companies' hegemonic control over energy production. Regarding the depletion of resources, most of the interviewees consider that there are not limited resources in the Atlantic basin. The question is how to manage the exploration of those resources without creating impacts on the preservation of biodiversity. Finally, climate change is an issue especially important in regions such as Latin America and Africa, particularly in coastal areas.

In terms of actors, states working within international organizations such as the United Nations still play the major role in terms of this area of expertise. In fact, the UN is responsible for setting the legal framework for the environment area in topics such as the convention of the sea, climate change, and sustainable development.

4. NORMS AND VALUES, COOPERATION AND REGIONALISM

The purpose of this section is to ascertain whether there is convergence or divergence among the Portuguese stakeholders concerning the norms and values of the Atlantic space. As we shall see, while there is a greater convergence among the interviewees regarding the norms and values within the Atlantic basin, there are some significant divergences in relation to the shared interests and challenges among the countries in this region. There is also consensus as to the role played by the European Union within the Atlantic basin, and the common notion that the EU should have a more assertive position in the region. Finally, the Portuguese experts concurred that the states still play the main role in fostering cooperation in the Atlantic, despite acknowledging the growing influence of non-state actors in this field.

4.1. Convergence or divergence in norms and values

According to the stakeholders in all thematic areas, a common base of values and principles inherited from the Judeo-Christian matrix characterizes the Atlantic Basin. In this sense, there is a significant coherence of values, which is mostly felt in the political rhetoric across the region. Universal values such as human rights and democracy are also recognized as being present in all the regions of the Atlantic. However, there is a clear divergence concerning the interpretation made of these values between North and South Atlantic. In the South Atlantic, these values are applied in different degrees of intensity, depending on the level of development and even the level of governance of Latin American and African societies. In other words, evolutions such as democratization and globalization, since the end of Cold War, have promoted an increased convergence in the Atlantic Basin.

Bearing this in mind, the stakeholders of each thematic area were able to identify specific examples within their expertise that show, nevertheless, some divergence in terms of the principles and norms that characterize the Atlantic basin. In the particular field of Economy, the stakeholders referred that the existence and development of institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) are crucial in defining

common norms worldwide, which is reflected obviously, in the Atlantic Basin. Nevertheless, some stakeholders further mentioned that the existence of such organizations is not enough to bring together the difference between the countries in North and South Atlantic areas. If, in the North, we have industrialized countries, which very much favor the establishment of free trade agreements, in the South, there are economies very dependent on the exploration of natural resources and commodities, and which are, by nature, more protectionists. Additionally, the recent presence of China in Africa and Latin America introduces a disruptive factor in terms of norms and principles, which affects the convergence of common ideas in the Atlantic basin: traditionally, North Atlantic countries used to impose political constraints to cooperation with the South; nowadays, China engages in trade with any country, without requiring political counterparts.

As to the “Security” and “People and Institutions” thematic areas, the stakeholders pointed out the different stages of development of the Atlantic Basin societies as the main reason for the different interpretations and priorities that the common values received. This is particularly important in the case of development of democratic institutions, which are usually dependent on the distinct level of maturity in terms of political development and governance, especially in Latin America and Africa. Moreover, despite the convergence of values being greater between North America and Europe, there are, nonetheless, some differences in opinions within the transatlantic relation. On the one hand, there is clearly some level of divergence regarding the use of force, with Europe still deeply attached to the idea that the investment in defense is something secondary. Death penalty also contributes to a distinct position of the United States regarding the other regions of the Atlantic basin. Finally, the religious factor is also distinctive between the United States and Europe, which has experienced a secularization of its society.

In terms of the “Environment and Resources” thematic area, there is a clear divergence between the United States and Europe, namely in their position regarding climate change and biodiversity conservation. In fact, one of the Who is a leader of a Non-Governmental Organization dedicated to environment sustained that, in this matter, the US are closer to the emerging economies than to Europe. This divergence will impact on the economy – namely in terms of the depletion of resources, energy consumption and disputes over the expansion of the exclusive economic zones and continental shelves.

4.2. Interests and incentives for cooperation

Among the Portuguese stakeholders, regardless of their thematic area of expertise, there is a common view regarding the main obstacles for cooperation within the Atlantic region. The first set of obstacles identified by the stakeholders concerned the general threats felt in the Atlantic Basin, namely terrorism, illicit trafficking, the existence of fragile states, etc. The already mentioned asymmetry in the levels of development, between the different regions of the Atlantic, leads to a constant distrust among the Southern Atlantic countries regarding the North/South cooperation and the North’s economic model, which in turn leads to an increase in the South/South cooperation. When referring to the particular position of the EU and the obstacles to the further development of its cooperation with the other shores of the Atlantic, the Portuguese stakeholders isolated three issues: first, at the governance level, there is a European inability to foster partnerships with the Southern Atlantic countries. This is an echo of the lack of understanding of the differences between the regions. The North Atlantic actors tend to use imposing strategies to address them, which causes a very strong perception that the North dictates the doctrine and the South only submits to it, albeit inefficiently. Secondly, at the financing level, as there is a high need for funding,

particularly in Africa, for the development of projects and cooperation; thirdly, at the bureaucratic level, since the execution of projects between Europe and other regions of the Atlantic basin is usually hampered by bureaucratic requirements.

In the same sense, there was also a common view regarding the shared interests and concerns within the Atlantic basin. The trade and maritime routes, the sharing of technology and environment protection were all identified as common interests among the different regions of the Atlantic. On the other hand, security issues such as terrorism, illicit trafficking, migration trends, the North/South divide and the interference of external (i.e., outside the Atlantic) powers, namely China, are seen as shared concerns. Indeed, these concerns are also identified by the interviewees as possible areas of conflict in the medium/long run. The extreme dependency of China importations on raw materials and commodities from the South Atlantic countries may deeply affect the dynamics on this area. On the other hand, the presence of Islamic radicals in North Africa and the Sahel region may increase the tensions and the terrorist threat in the Atlantic. Indeed, another area of conflict may arise as a consequence of the internal problems of the fragile states in Africa, in particular related to the increase of piracy in South Atlantic.

According to the Portuguese stakeholders, these common security concerns and threats may eventually contribute to the deepening of cooperation in the medium and long run among the different regions of the Atlantic basin. In this sense, states and regional organizations will continue to play an important role in fostering cooperation in the Atlantic. The European Union, the African Union (AU) and NATO are among the international organizations that the Portuguese stakeholders identify as of great importance within the Atlantic basin. Additionally, they also consider that the efforts to deepen regional and sub-regional integration are also important factors to the promotion of cooperation. However, non-governmental organizations and private sector institutions are also seen as relevant for the increase in cooperation among the Atlantic shores, particularly considering that economic interests boost cooperation rather than conflict.

There is one particular area, however, in which the growing of tensions and even the chance for conflict is foreseeable: the environment issues. In fact, the stakeholders of this thematic area believed that crucial issues such as energy, climate change, biodiversity, sea rights, GMO (genetically modified organisms) will result in conflicts between states, with the emerging economies trying to follow independent paths.

4.3. Regional and Interregional cooperation initiatives – the central importance of the EU's role

There are several regional institutions relevant to the development of the Atlantic basin. Among these, the most important, for Portuguese stakeholders is, undoubtedly, the European Union. In general, the Portuguese stakeholders considered that the EU is viewed as a civilizational reference across the Atlantic basin. However, they make a different assessment of the role it plays in each of the regions of the Atlantic. In this sense, the experts on the economy and finance thematic area considered that, in its relations with North America, the EU plays a relevant role, due to the interdependence between Europe, Canada and the US, despite the great weight of the bilateral relations between European countries and the two American powers. The different projects of development aid given to Africa also contribute for the understanding that the EU is seen as a relevant player in that continent. However, in Latin America this role is less important, especially when compared to that played by the United States or China.

The Common Foreign and Security Policy is acknowledged as a particularly relevant instrument for the improvement of EU's role in the Atlantic, which is seen as highly positive. Yet, it is still necessary to encourage this common policy and to overcome the paradigmatic procedure of the European Union in the Atlantic basin, particularly in the case of Africa. In fact, there is a tendency among European member-states to use EU's policies as a means of carrying out their own agendas, and this is especially felt in the relations with Africa. Despite all the efforts to implement cooperation projects in that continent, there is still an image of Africa as divided in terms of areas of influence between the EU's member-states, especially those who have a past based on colonial relationships.

The Portuguese stakeholders also believed that Portugal might play a particularly active role in the connection between Europe and Africa, as it has done in the development of the EU-Africa Summits – which bring together European and African leaders since 2000. In this sense, Portugal may contribute for the reinforcement of EU's role in the Atlantic, which in turn can be increased through a clear support to the development of the interregional cooperation and integration efforts already under way in Africa, Latin and North America – NAFTA, ALCA, ECCOWAS, ECCAS, SADC, Mercosul, etc.

These initiatives of regional integration will lead to the development of interregional cooperation among those institutions that share the same objectives (instead of having only state-state relations, there could be a greater dialogue among the different institutions). There might be, however, a less positive consequence to this: the multiplication of multilateral actors in the region, working on the same objectives and agendas. Still, this problem can be overcome if the EU adopts a clear and straightforward strategy towards this goal. In other words, it is essential that the EU define its strategy for the Atlantic, find the right partners and then foster those relations. Furthermore, the Portuguese stakeholders identified other areas that can work as catalysts capable of generating understandings within the Atlantic basin: energetic issues, maritime security and development are clearly shared interests that might stimulate interregional cooperation among the different continents. In this matter, a perfect example of cooperation is the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP). What started as having as its binding element among the members a common history and language, is evolving through the accession of other member-states with a clear energetic and economic interest (one cannot ignore that around 50% of hydrocarbons reserves recently discovered are located in Portuguese-speaking countries). These efforts may contribute to the creation of forums of consultation, which would bring together different states of the Atlantic region, but also some Asian countries. This, in turn, would contribute to the development of dialogue structures and the deepening of cooperation.

5. Conclusions

Since the end of the Cold War the world has changed, from a political, economic and social point of view, and even in terms of environment and resources. The emergence of new powers in the Asia-Pacific Rim has shifted the world's center from a mainly Atlantic to an Indo-Asian perspective (Medcalf, 2013). Nevertheless, the outlooks of the Portuguese stakeholders reinforce the idea that, if a pan-Atlantic space is not emerging already, it is time to develop cooperation in order to achieve it. This idea is based on the traditional overall perception that frames the mindset of the interviewees in terms of the traditional strategic position of Portugal within the Atlantic, but also in their analysis of the recent evolution in the regions that compose the Atlantic basin.

There was, among Portuguese stakeholders, a contradictory reading of the Atlantic basin. On the one hand, there is a common historical background that unites the different regions of the Atlantic. This common past contributes to the rhetorical sharing of norms and values, such as human rights and democracy, and to a lower level of security threats (which leads to a greater tendency towards cooperation rather than conflict). On the other hand, however, the Atlantic is also characterized as a very heterogeneous region. This heterogeneity, at the political, economic and social levels, is mostly a consequence of the different stages of development within the Atlantic and also due to the recent globalization impact that reinforced the importance of new Asian powers with interests within this area. Governance issues, traditional historical resentments, different structures and models of development contribute to the idea that the construction of a pan-Atlantic space is still far from coming into being a long way ahead.

The Portuguese stakeholders identified the European Union as a singular actor in the Atlantic, able of implementing initiatives of regional cooperation and of constituting itself as a role model in some areas. However, it is also acknowledged by them that, in the last five years, the EU's role as a unifying element for the construction of a pan-Atlantic space has been a negative one. In this sense, one of the major problems isolated by the Portuguese interviewees, regardless of their thematic area of expertise, is the lack of a strong leadership in the Atlantic basin. Even if allowing for its state dynamics, Brazil in the South could emerge as a unifying element and promoter of a pan-Atlantic space. Nonetheless, there is still another problem in this reasoning: Brazil shows great reluctance in furthering its relationship with the North Atlantic, which might compromise the leadership of such Pan-Atlantic space. In this sense, if cooperation is seen as vital to deepen the connection between the various shores of the Atlantic, leadership is essential to implement this endeavor.

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