



# ATLANTIC FUTURE

## ATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES INTERVIEWS REPORT

17

Perspectives from International Organizations in Geneva

**Paula de Castro**  
Project Manager, CIDOB

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to take the pulse of what international organisation representatives in Geneva perceived about the Atlantic, while providing evidence to answer the Atlantic Future project research question on whether a new pan-Atlantic system of relations is emerging in the Atlantic beyond the traditional North Atlantic alliance and the North-South dependency. With this objective in mind regional trends and dynamics have been presented and analysed in this paper. However, interviewees not only had particular difficulty thinking about the Atlantic in terms of a unified geopolitical space but also agreed that, for the time being at least, we could not speak of the emergence of this geopolitical space. Because, despite the common ground that exists among the regions of the Atlantic, the context of international reconfiguration being experienced today, and the prevalence of national and regional dynamics still have direct impact on the social and political mindset of the Atlantic sub-regions. For the interviewees, the notion of the Atlantic space is simply not in the quintessence of the region and lacks the political leadership that is needed for this.

*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

# 17

### Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. The Atlantic: from the past to the future .....	3
3. Atlantic trends.....	5
3.1. Economy and finance .....	5
3.2. Security.....	6
3.3. People and institutions.....	7
3.4. The environment and resources.....	7
4. Convergence and divergence of norms and values .....	8
5. Cooperation and interests in the Atlantic.....	10
6. Regionalism and interregionalism in the Atlantic.....	11
7. The role of the EU .....	12
8. Conclusion: perceptions of the Atlantic space.....	13



## 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to provide an analysis of the interview process carried out for the Atlantic Future project in the city of Geneva between October 2014 and March 2015. The main purpose of this fieldwork was to interview representatives of international organisations in order to take the pulse of what world leaders perceive about the possible emergence of a new pan-Atlantic system of relations beyond the traditional North Atlantic Alliance and the North-South divide.

With this purpose in mind, twenty interviews were made of official representatives of the United Nations in Geneva and other international organisations working in the areas the Atlantic Future project is studying: economics, security, the environment and political and social issues relating to the Atlantic. The interviewees were selected taking into account their professional experience in these fields as well as their commitment to and work on the Atlantic sub-regions and their capacity to sway the decision-making processes of political and civil society international organisations.

The interviews were made following a standardised questionnaire designed by the Atlantic Future project, structured in three sections. The first section is dedicated to the evolution of the sub-regions of the Atlantic (Africa, Europe, Latin America, Central America and North America). The second section is devoted to the challenges and changes that are setting the trends in the economic, security, governance and environmental fields in the region. A third section focusses on the convergence and divergence of norms, values and interests, cooperative or competitive relations, regionalist and interregionalist tendencies, perceptions of the role of the EU in the Atlantic region and, finally, the possible emergence of an Atlantic space.

It is worth noting that though the sample gathered for the interviews is small and no general conclusions can be extracted about the Atlantic, it does give us insights into the particular trends that are taking place in the region and their impact on the possible political integration of the region.

## 2. The Atlantic: from the past to the future

When asked which regions have become the most and least important over the past twenty years, interviewees' opinions varied according to the issues at stake. In general terms, when looking at the last twenty years all the experts agreed that North America and Europe had declined in their level of importance while South America and Africa have become the most important regions. However, when looking forward to the next fifteen years, interviewees agreed that the US and the EU would probably continue to perform as they had with a slight improvement on the US side, while Latin America and Africa will continue to be important either for positive and negative reasons.

For respondents the US has been and continues to be the regional and global actor most capable of addressing security challenges in different parts of the world. However, when it comes to economic and social issues the US importance has reduced its importance as a result of the 2008 economic crisis. In terms of political and social issues, and specifically with reference to the defence of human rights, the US was considered the least important region due to the preservation of the death penalty in some of the states and the counter-terrorism policies that the Bush administration put in place which, according to a social and political expert, blocked the international system defending human rights in Geneva. For the next fifteen years, economic and energy experts said that the US will probably continue to be a regional power, but added that this will depend on its capacity to develop structural transformations, boost

its energy self-sufficiency and forge relations with Europe and the Pacific through the Transatlantic Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP).

Regarding Europe, interviewees considered that the EU has declined in importance in the last twenty years and this trend will probably continue if it does not manage to reassert itself and find a coherent, common voice on international affairs. A security expert mentioned that although the EU has been important to the US through its partnership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its joint participation in conflict scenarios in Africa, the Middle East and the European neighbourhood, this relationship has been hindered due to the uncertain times US-EU relations have gone through regarding data protection, surveillance programmes and accusations of espionage made by the EU against the US. Furthermore, political and social experts considered that the internal intricacies of the EU and the burden of the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis have eroded the EU's role as an integration model, a perception that will also be determined over the next years by the possible withdrawal of the UK, Greece and other countries from the EU.

Moving on to the subjects of the defence of human rights and environmental issues, the EU was considered the least important and the most important, respectively. On the defence of human rights, one representative of a civil society international organisation mentioned that the *“EU is often paralysed by the fact that they have to have a common view on issues, and it is really hard to achieve it when there are so many states involved”*. However, with regard to environmental issues, the EU was perceived as significant thanks to the effort and investment that has been made in environmental policies and renewable energy.

When looking to the south of the Atlantic, there was consensus among all the interviewees about the importance that Latin America and Africa have gained in the Atlantic over the past years, for both negative and positive reasons. The respondents considered it undeniable that Africa and South America have been a source of instability because of the spread of illicit trafficking of drugs, humans and guns, transnational terrorism, political instability and, more recently, the Ebola outbreak in Africa. Nevertheless, they also pointed out the economic improvement that these regions have experienced: *“while Mozambique, Malawi and South Africa have become important hubs of investment, in Latin America, countries like Paraguay or Colombia have increased their economies by a range of 4% and 6% - 7%, respectively”*.

Again, in regard to the defence of human rights and migration issues both regions were considered important to the interviewees for positive and negative reasons. A representative of a civil society organisation argued that when it comes to the defence of human rights, South American countries have shown considerable improvement: *“countries like Chile, Costa Rica, Argentina and Uruguay have become quite strong when fighting human rights abuses in counterterrorism measures”*; an attitude that, according to the same respondent, should be noted when this implies taking a stand against the US. But when considering migration, social and political experts argued that illegal immigration patterns from Africa to Europe have become more complex as a result of the outbreaks of conflict, the presence and terrorist activities of radical groups in the Sahel area and conditions of poverty in the whole continent.

Finally, when looking towards the next fifteen years, interviewees converged on the economic potential that Latin America and especially Africa have in fostering their economic growth and integration into global markets. However, as an economics expert mentioned, these regions still need to implement certain policies and infrastructure in order to secure sustainable development.

### 3. Atlantic trends

For this section, interviewees were asked about the main challenges that the Atlantic Future project has identified in the following areas of study: economy and finance; security; people and institutions (political and social issues); and the environment and resources. Specifically, interviewees were asked to rate these trends by their relevance, specifying whether these issues feature on their professional agendas and to name any forum where these issues are being discussed.

#### 3.1. Economy and finance

Interviewees were asked about the relevance of: growth in trade and investment flows, negotiation of new free trade agreements, new transport routes and construction of new infrastructure. All the interviewees mentioned that these changes are important and that they feature on their organisation's agendas. Nonetheless, when they were asked to rate them by their level of relevance certain specificities were discovered.

At a general level, economics experts converged on the idea that for the southern Atlantic the construction of new infrastructure is the most important issue, followed by growth in trade and investment flows, new transport routes and finally the negotiation of free trade agreements; whereas for the northern Atlantic the negotiation of new free trade agreements is becoming more relevant to the transformation of the region, followed by the growth in trade and investment, new transport routes and the construction of new infrastructure.

When looking into the specificities of each of the sub-regions of the Atlantic, economics experts mentioned that the big challenge for Latin America and Africa is the construction of new infrastructure and transport routes. According to one economics expert, Latin America and Africa will only become more competitive if they reach a level of industrialisation that allows them to move away from an economy based on commodities dependence: *"Latin America and Africa have failed to industrialise properly [...] Latin America had a period of industrialisation but it has been moving backwards in the last 20 years. So they need to regain the momentum and reach again a certain level of industrialisation that allows the region to work on other areas where they have also failed to do so"*.

A telecommunications expert added that infrastructure is a key element for the development of these regions. According to the interviewee, the *"north of the Atlantic – with its hubs of connectivity – has a huge advantage with respect to the south; a situation that is seen from a geopolitical point of view as not necessarily fair"*. Specifically, the interviewee supported this argument by saying that *"While in the telecom days the revenue flows were coming from the developed world into the developing world, now there are more revenues coming from the developing world to the developed world. One example of this is that most of the communication producers (like Facebook, Google, etc.) are in the north of the Atlantic but most of the consumption is increasingly located in the developing world (Kenya, India, China etc.)"*.

When moving on to the northern part of the Atlantic, all the interviewees agreed on the importance that the negotiation of free trade agreements such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) has for the relations between the United States and the European Union. Yet some of the interviewees diverged on the positive or negative impact that each of these changes could have on the southern Atlantic. To begin with, one economics expert mentioned that this kind of agreement is very important in terms of growth of trade and investment but added that we should be cautious since *"trade agreements do not open spectrums for new tendencies, they*

*rather lock the tendencies that are happening in the region”* this could therefore mean negative consequences for the countries that remain outside the treaty.

Finally, some of the interviewees suggested that investment in technology and innovation should be included in the list of challenges, since they have a direct impact on the productivity of the countries. As far as forums in which these economic issues are addressed are concerned, interviewees mentioned the role of international organisations such as: United Nations Regional Commissions, the World Trade Organization, the African Union, the EU-LAC project, the OECD, the European Commission, MERCOSUR, UNASUR, the European Union, the European Economic Area, National Development Banks, and NAFTA.

### 3.2. Security

In the area of security, interviewees were asked about the following main security challenges in the Atlantic region: the illicit trafficking of drugs, weapons and humans; terrorism; maritime security; and fragile states. According to all the interviewees the mentioned challenges feature on their organisations’ agendas and are the cornerstone of the international security debates. However, because of the nature of the challenges and the correlations that exist between them, interviewees considered them very difficult to rate in order of relevance.

Firstly, security experts considered that fragile states are the most relevant issue at stake because the factors that characterise the fragility of states such as bad governance, social and economic inequality, lack of justice and underdevelopment, are the main causes of state vulnerability and at the root of most of the security challenges at local and transnational levels. Secondly, and closely related with the first challenge, most security experts agreed on the importance and impact of the illicit trafficking of drugs, weapons and humans on the stability of the Atlantic region and particularly on Latin America and Africa. Respondents made reference to the challenge that drug flows from South America into Europe via Africa and from South America to North America present but also to the traffickers’ degree of adaptability. As one of the security experts mentioned: *“it is interesting to see how drug traffickers are able to change their strategy when they encounter obstacles to the trafficking. They adapt much more quickly than the international community does”*.

By the same token, security experts made special mention of the increasing problem of illegal immigration flows and their impact on the security of the four sub-Atlantic regions. Some of the experts mentioned the importance of human trafficking with special regard to sex tourism using children, women and young men. One expert explicitly mentioned that the most problematic nodes of illegal immigration move from: *“the MENA region to southern Europe, from Libya to Lampedusa, and the flows that arrive in the Canary Islands”*. Finally, a security expert added that the increasing concern about the counterfeiting of goods, especially medications, is, according to the interviewee, a huge market with enormous health consequences.

Regarding terrorism, most of the interviewees recognised the relevance that this issue has gained since the September 11th attacks in the US, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and the phenomenon of transnational fighters moving to conflict areas. However, two security experts claimed that the international community should consider taking a cautious approach when it comes to the definition of terrorism. As a representative of one international organisation stated: *“terrorism as a concept is one thing and terrorism as a producer of security threats is another”*. For the respondent the concept of terrorism is defined very differently according to the region where we are located and this has security implications. In the interviewee’s opinion *“the designation of terrorist groups has been happening very easily over the past years. It is too easy to put a label*

*that brings other kinds of nuances and problems". Furthermore, the interviewee added that "the way in which we have been dealing with it [the concept of terrorism] and the way we have been applying this concept is creating more of the so-called terrorism".*

Some of the interviewees found very interesting the mention of maritime security as a challenge. Particularly, when considering the piracy in the West of Africa because, for the interviewee's considered maritime security as a security strategy or a tool developed to face this challenge. . Other respondents added a special mention of the potential security consequences of climate change and cybersecurity issues. According to one telecommunications expert, *"when cyber security issues are raised some countries do not want to discuss these matters because they are afraid that it would impact their national security and, consequently, they block other countries from catching up on basic forms of protecting their people. We have to understand that another person's security would not diminish our security".*

In regard to the forums concerned with these issues, interviewees mentioned the role of international organisations such as: United Nations agencies – like UNODC for the fight against Illicit trafficking of weapons and humans, the African Union, the OECD, NATO, Interpol and Europol. Regarding maritime security, some security experts mentioned the role of FORTEX and the EU. Finally, regarding the issue of fragile states a security expert considered the UNDP to be one of the main organisations facing this challenge.

### **3.3. People and institutions**

In the area of people and institutions the Atlantic Future project studies the dynamics in the fields of cultural, social and political relations. For this section interviewees were asked their opinions about: the state of democracy, respect for human rights, diplomatic exchanges and migration trends. All the respondents interviewed for this thematic area agreed on the difficulty of rating these challenges since all of them were considered to be of the utmost importance and to be interdependent and they recognised these issues as a priority for international organisations.

Although no rating exercise was made, the state of democracy, immigration and respect for human rights were pointed out as more important than diplomatic exchanges. In regard to the last point, only one of the three political and social experts interviewed mentioned this last issue as relevant given the importance diplomatic relations have gained at city level for some international organisations.

The issue of the participation of civil society in decision-making processes at local and national level was mentioned when referring to measures to strengthen the state of democracy. Again, immigration was also considered important by all the respondents because of the dramatic increase in legal and illegal immigration flows to the US and the EU. According to another expert, this has become a political, social and security problem that has continuously been rooted in: the security impact of climate change, population growth, human rights abuses, governance instability, conflicts, terrorism and the spread of trafficking networks in Africa and Latin America in particular.

### **3.4. The environment and resources**

In the area of the environment and resources respondents were asked about their perceptions of the transformation of the energy sector, the impacts of climate change and resource depletion. Despite the fact that for this section only four experts were interviewed, all of them agreed that the above-mentioned issues are paramount in the agendas of their organisations. When asked to rate these issues by level of relevance all interviewees converged on the fact that the impact of climate change should be



considered primary, followed by the transformation of the energy sector and resource depletion. Yet most of them also pointed out that these three challenges are interrelated.

An environmental expert and representative of a civil society organisation mentioned that *“climate change is already extremely acute and is about to reach a peak in the coming century [...] The impacts in terms of global warming have a direct impact on the level of the oceans and offshore environment. These changes will become very brutal in the coming century”*. In the same line, a representative of an international organisation mentioned that the effects of climate change are countless, varying from the impact of physical systems (glaciers, rivers and coastal erosion), biological systems terrestrial ecosystems, wildlife, marine ecosystems and human systems (food production, livelihood, etc.) and ecosystem impacts in general.

When considering the relationship between the need for energy resources and climate change, a former director of an international organisation mentioned that there is still a lot to be done to rely less on fossils while securing the supply of energy resources. For this interviewee, *“we find ourselves in a complex context in which “the energy demand is continuously increasing, there is a shortage of energy supply and climate change is a real challenge; all of this with the complexity of translating these concerns into public policies at national and regional levels”*.

Another representative of a civil society organisation showed more optimism regarding the use of renewable energies. The interviewee mentioned that studies by IRENA (The International Renewable Energy Agency) show a positive tendency in the use and defence of renewable energies. According to the respondent, *“there seems to be more consciousness about the climate change impact and developed countries are investing more in renewable energies”*. As a matter of fact, the interviewee mentioned that Europe has been showing the political will to secure sustainable energy markets but recognised that *“this is still a very sensitive issue because it implies diverting investment from one energy sector to another”*.

Regarding resource depletion, interviewees considered this to be a major global challenge. To give an example, a former representative of an international organisation pointed out that the depletion of fisheries and fresh water are two issues of major concern. On the subject of fisheries, the interviewee stated that *“at the beginning of the year 2000 scientists told us that between 74% and 80% of fishery stocks in the world were either in a critical condition or about to disappear. Two or three years ago this amount rose to 85%”*.

Finally, as far as forums are concerned, environmental experts mentioned IRENA, the United Nations institutions such as the IPCC, international NGOs and think tanks and recognised the progress that Europe has made on its environmental legislation.

## 4. Convergence and divergence of norms and values

One of the main purposes of the Atlantic Future project is to identify whether the Atlantic region shares common cultural values and norms. Despite most of the interviewees varying in the scope of their answers, the idea inherent in all their answers was that at a general level all the Atlantic countries subscribe to certain universal norms and values, but when focussing on the specifics a different conceptualisation of these universal values is revealed.

For most of the interviewees the Atlantic shares universal values such as the defence of human rights, democracy, individual liberties, security, the rule of law, the market economy, political participation and basic workers' rights. However, most of the



interviewees felt more comfortable when analysing the existence of this common ground on a region-by-region base.

To begin with, all the interviewees considered that the convergence between the US and the EU is the strongest link in the Atlantic built since WWII. Regardless of some of the differences and the contention that has been felt recently by both continents – especially regarding the Ukraine crisis and the surveillance programmes – the historical links that unite these regions have materialised in the military collaboration between the regions in conflict zones and their collaboration in NATO.

For the interviewees, strong links based on the colonial past and historical immigration patterns exist between Europe and Latin America. The construction of the state, the promotion of democracy, the languages and the Judeo-Christian European influence in Latin America were mentioned among the common norms and values that have been perceived in the DNA of the link that joins the two regions. As a matter of fact, interviewees mentioned that sometimes Europe agrees more on a common basis with Latin American countries than with the US, for instance.

The same was mentioned with reference to Europe and Africa. However, most of the interviewees agreed that the differences are more substantial than with Latin America due to the different levels of development and cultural and religious differences. In point of fact, security and economics experts argued that while in the north of the Atlantic we can speak of shared values in the south we should speak of common basic needs such as education, health, poverty and security.

These kinds of arguments lead us to the divergences considered to exist in the Atlantic region. On a general level, three different dynamics should be taken into consideration: the substantial differences in how the so-called common values are upheld, the disaffection of newly emerging economies and the international crisis.

Regarding the first point, interestingly, those values considered to be shared in the Atlantic are also the ones that were seen as most controversial in some cases. So, for instance, economics experts argued that despite most countries in the Atlantic sharing market economies they differ in the role that governments should have in this market-based system. They added that while the US would be prompt to reduce government involvement the EU is more inclined to promote market regulation, as has been discussed in the current TTIP negotiations. Likewise, one expert added that in the case of Latin America not all the countries are convinced that the market economy is the way to go: *“look at Venezuela and its Bolivarian Revolution or Argentina and its measures against the free market; and like this also Bolivia and Ecuador”*.

By the same token, for one security expert even if most of the countries subscribe to the principles promoted by UN organisations, each country and each region have different levels of development and, therefore, different needs. As security experts argued, *“to try to establish common values and norms is very difficult when you are considering regions with different economic levels and degrees of development, because the interpretation of what are the common norms and values varies depending on the context that you consider”*.

In addition, the disjuncture between some traditional and emerging powers in the Atlantic – such as the US, Brazil and the EU among others – diverge on the recent application of the “Responsibility to Protect” principle and the concept of humanitarian intervention. Especially if we consider the impact that the Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya interventions have had on the mindsets of developing countries. As a humanitarian professional pointed out *“the concept of a humanitarian action is more often lumped*

*within greater political considerations and is at risk of becoming a political tool to either reward or punish, which is in direct contradiction to the international bodies of law and humanitarian principles”.*

## 5. Cooperation and interests in the Atlantic

In order to analyse the possible emergence of an Atlantic space interviewees were asked about the existence of shared interests and their perceptions of collaborative or competitive relations and obstacles that could possibly prevent the development of the emergence of an Atlantic space.

Half of the interviewees considered that there are common interests that could shape the region and half considered that there are not. As in the previous section, the interviewees seemed to agree that at a general level the Atlantic shares certain interests but when looking to the specifics the differences become clear at a regional and particularly a bilateral level. The reasons behind this are, as an economic expert mentioned: *“the main actors in the Atlantic still share similar concerns but have at times divergent interests as national priorities and considerations are given priority over international ones”.*

Interviewees considered that the Atlantic countries shared, above all, economic interests. They considered trade to be one of the main pillars of the bilateral relations between the northern Atlantic but also considered the interest in more economic integration and industry promotion in Latin America and Africa. In addition, security experts considered that there is a convergent interest among the regions of the Atlantic to face security risks that threaten both international and regional security, especially in Latin America and Africa, namely the trafficking of drugs, weapons and humans as well as the struggle to battle the organised crime that is related to it or not. Finally, moving forward to environmental issues, experts argued that energy sustainability and the fight against climate change have gained increased interest in the region.

The interviewees who argued that the Atlantic regions do not share common interests and that this divergence has widened over the past years claimed the responsibility lay with the impact of the international crisis and regional dynamics on the region. From the point of view of a security expert the US and Europe are passing through a period of reassessment as a consequence of the economic crisis of 2008 that has had a direct impact on their capacity to leverage any regional integration initiative. On the contrary *“countries in Latin America and Africa are being more aggressive and looking further forward than other countries of the Atlantic region. They are gaining confidence and beginning to impose their priorities and interests”.* In line with this argument, two security experts and one economics expert added that the main reason why the Atlantic does not have convergent interests is because of the wide gap between the different levels of development among the countries of the region. As the economic expert claimed: *“If the needs of the sub-regions are different the priorities are also different and therefore the interests are also different”.*

The evidence of these convergences and divergences among representatives of international organisations show us that although trade, security and environmental interests could be drivers of more cooperative relations in the region, there are other political and economic challenges that have hinder the leadership that is needed for the strengthening of interregional initiatives in the Atlantic. At a local level, respondents pointed out the impact of national interest, especially in Latin America and Africa, where the security establishment is not likely to cede parts of their power for the sake of promoting regional or even sub-regional integration. In addition, security experts

considered that even if the Atlantic area is not a region prone to conflict, the security instability of certain failed states could become a driver for both collaborative and conflictive situations. At a regional level, experts mentioned that the reinforcement of South-South horizontal cooperation could have the potential to diminish integration initiatives. Finally, at the international level, interviewees mentioned the destabilising effect that issues such as energy, illegal immigration, the rise of more protective and nationalistic political parties – in Europe, in particular – and the possible emergence of a new “Cold War” logic could have on transatlantic relations.

## 6. Regionalism and interregionalism in the Atlantic

The changing environment of the international system has proved that the traditional governance frameworks that we have in place are becoming obsolete. The emergence of new powers, the proliferation of multiple transnational challenges and the emergence of new actors capable of playing a role in the Atlantic challenge the idea of regionalism that arose during the nineties. Moreover, the development of new technologies demands new inclusive political spaces.

Interviewees considered that the actors capable of playing a role are primarily states, especially in Latin America and Africa, firstly because they are still the only actors that ultimately take the decisions when it comes to economic and hard security issues, and secondly because of the weight that certain regional actors are gaining such as Brazil, South Africa, Nigeria, the US and the EU. For one economics expert *“In South America you have this political trap where everything is dominated by what Brazil does, very much as any imperialistic power would behave towards weaker states. So, whatever is done will be in line with what Brazil wants”*.

Nevertheless, interviewees also considered that the primacy of the states has been diminished by the role that other non-state actors such as multinationals, cities, individuals, criminal and terrorist organisations, customs unions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), research institutions and particular individuals have in policy development. What resounded in most of the interviews was the relevance that cities and citizens are gaining since *“we are moving to a situation where the basic need of the citizens will have to be addressed at city level”*.

Regarding international organisations, a political and social expert mentioned that the *“international institutions like the UN will continue to play an important role when dealing with cross-cutting issues”*. However, divergences of opinions become clear between economics experts on the one hand and security experts on the other. According to an expert on economic issues, rather than regional integration, what the Atlantic region should be pursuing is reinforcement at the multilateral level. Whereas a security expert added that the role of international organisations is somehow overvalued: *“you can see how this role collapses when a country like Russia just decides to not play by the rules”*.

When asked about the existence of an agenda from these actors towards the Atlantic, all the interviewees reiterated their particular difficulty in thinking in terms of an Atlantic geopolitical space. They could not think about any particular regional framework or institution with Atlantic scope. On the contrary, most of them agreed that a plethora of institutional organisations and frameworks have been created since the nineties in the region, though their functionality has been challenged due to the divergence of ideologies, interests or because they do not count on the necessary political will. As an example of these, experts mentioned a long list that included: the EU, MERCOSUR, UNASUR, ECOWAS, the Indian Community and the Africa Union, interregional



frameworks such as NATO, EU-CELAC, cybersecurity forums, inter-governmental debates on telecommunications and regional dialogues on migration issues, among others.

Finally, as in the section on interests, interviewees pointed to North-North relations and North-South divides as blockages for the promotion of regional integration. For the interviewees, the north of the Atlantic has demonstrated its interest in strengthening transatlantic bridges with the current negotiation of the TTIP, an initiative that was seen by most of the interviewees as a positive step as long as it does not reinforce the sense of unfairness and mistrust that is still at the heart of North-South transatlantic relations. Because of this, one economics expert considered that the countries of the South should have a more proactive stand in relation to the TTIP negotiations: *“we need to be proactive and not wait. Otherwise we will end up with a situation similar to the one that we came to with the Banana preference agreement: dividing the South between those who benefit from the Banana trade preference and those who are looking for better treatment”*.

## 7. The role of the EU

In general, interviewees agreed that the EU plays a relevant role when it comes to economic issues and efforts to forge environmental policies, but was considered to become irrelevant or only remotely relevant when it comes to security and social issues.

In terms of trade, the EU was considered by economics and security experts as relevant for the negotiation of numerous enormous trade arrangements. Moreover, they pointed out the fact that the EU works as a bloc with the WTO. Likewise, when speaking about EU relations with the southern Atlantic, experts on social and political issues recurrently pointed out the relevance of the EU and Latin America or Africa because of its colonial past and development collaboration. On the historical bonds, economics experts clarified that for new generations of Africans this bond is non-existent in Africa and has been eroded in Latin America. This is principally because of the little political effort invested in these regions and in Latin America in particular. As a security expert added, there is *“the impression that Latin America is the backyard of the US, so the EU does not bother with it”*. Now, as far as development cooperation by the EU in these regions stands, a security expert mentioned that: *“nobody is [providing] funding more than the European Union on economic, social and security issues with a cross-border perspective. Whether they pick the right projects and they do it in a good way –that is a different conversation”*.

On another order of issues, interviewees considered the EU to be important as a model of integration since it is *“one of the most successful arrangements that we have on the planet in terms of the impact on the citizens that form part of it”*. Despite interviewees recognising the EU's functional deficiencies, they also agreed on the fact that the EU can be relevant because *“if something works in Europe – where various countries could come together and agree – it would likely work in other countries”*. Hopefully, as an environmental expert mentioned, the effort that the EU is putting into environmental protection laws could be spread to the Atlantic region.

Regarding security issues respondents mentioned that the EU has invested in the fight against the trafficking of drugs and weapons, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and has supported its allies in crisis management, peacekeeping operations, monitoring electoral processes and providing training programmes for the police in unstable states. However, security experts agreed that the impacts that they have achieved are quite limited and that the EU security strategy based on trying to change some

countries' behaviour with the prospect of receiving either EU membership or some kind of action plan or partnership has proven misguided.

Regarding the issues of the defence of human and labour rights, a representative of a non-profit international organisation argued that the EU is losing its relevance because *"the last time that the EU proposed to deal with a country's situation and to put a Special Rapporteur in a country was with Belarus in 2011. So, in the past three years the EU has not taken the lead on anything"*. Furthermore, a representative of an international organisation mentioned that due to the economic crisis and austerity measures, the EU has eroded its role model labour rights.

The reasons interviewees used to explain the lack of efficacy and efficiency perceived in the EU's role respond to its own configuration. According to a political expert the EU seems to function at two different levels: *"one, as a union, and the other one, as each of the member states"*. Therefore, achieving a common position with all the member states and the agreement of a common foreign policy is quite a challenge.

Thus, as a security expert suggested, the EU needs to reassert and to avoid *"losing time thinking who should take a decision instead of what decisions should be taken"*. Moreover, social and political experts added that the EU should consider integrating the following leitmotif: *partnership not lecturing*. Concretely, economic and political experts exhort the EU to base its foreign policy on sustainable cooperative relations and to rule out its conditionality approach because: *"If the EU wants to be a player that is trusted it has to be coherent with its assistance policies and not build its relations on political bargains with political powers [...] the EU should not confuse a development challenge with an index based on successful development experience. Good governance is good, but good governance is an outcome of a successful development experience"*.

## 8. Conclusion: perceptions of the Atlantic space

As mentioned in the introduction, the purpose of this paper was to take the pulse of what international organisation representatives in Geneva perceived about the Atlantic and with it provide the evidence that could help us answer the Atlantic Future project research question about the possible emergence of a new pan-Atlantic system of relations beyond the traditional North Atlantic alliance and the North-South divide. With this objective in mind general trends and dynamics have been presented and analysed throughout this paper. However, when we addressed our research question to the interviewees two particular reactions were made evident.

First, interviewees had particular difficulty thinking about the Atlantic in terms of a unified geopolitical space. Some of them felt curious about the idea and actually confessed to us that they had agreed to participate in the interviews because of the novelty of it, while others considered that we are missing the scope of what it is really happening on the international arena by continuing to think in terms of regionalism.

Secondly, interviewees agreed that they do not see the emergence of an Atlantic space either along the lines of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation or the East Asia Summit, or an autonomous geopolitical entity. For the interviewees this idea is simply not in the quintessence of the region and the political leadership needed for this is lacking for the moment at least.

Along the lines of this paper, we have seen that the Atlantic shares certain norms, values and strong economic and security interests that could be potential drivers for cooperation in the region. However, in the search for the balance of local, regional and international interests, regional dynamics change at such a pace that even when

transnational challenges ask us to solidify regional and multilateral frameworks, the weight of historical, political and social challenges have the potential to hinder the integration that globalisation processes require.

It is, therefore, in this context that the interviewees helped us to show on the preceding pages that for them the emergence of an Atlantic space does not seem plausible in the short run at least. Particularly because, as some experts mentioned, there are not enough priorities in the Atlantic space that could override other groupings that already exist, because the region still needs to solidify the plethora of institutional frameworks that exist and, above all, because projects like this require a change of mindset.

Therefore, if what we are looking for is to help in paving the way to forge this idea of the Atlantic, respondents suggested that the region will need to overcome the paternalistic view that the north of the Atlantic has of the south of the Atlantic as a way to surmount the massive mistrust that some Latin American and African countries have of the US and Europe and to involve the main regional players in forging the necessary leadership for this endeavour (Brazil, South Africa, the US and the EU). Although, ultimately, as one economic expert mentioned, the possible emergence of the Atlantic space will depend on how ambitious the effort turns out to be.