

A stylized map of Latin America is shown in a light blue color against a dark blue background. Several yellow stars, similar to the European Union flag, are scattered across the map and to its right.

**POLICY PAPER**

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# EU-LATIN AMERICA RELATIONS

ANALYZING COOPERATION FROM A  
UKRAINIAN PERSPECTIVE

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## **EU-LATIN AMERICA RELATIONS: ANALYZING COOPERATION FROM A UKRAINIAN PERSPECTIVE**

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# Introduction

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in the early 2022 has created challenges for both the European Union and Latin America. This policy paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the key areas of cooperation and the activation of collaboration between the European Union (EU), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and Ukraine, particularly focusing on the period following February 24, 2022.

The relevance of this study is also due to the transition to a greater multi-vector nature of the Ukrainian foreign policy. In 2022, the Strategy of new horizons was adopted, which provided for the intensification of dialogue with the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. During 2023-2024, Ukraine has significantly intensified political dialogue with a number of countries of the region - Argentina, Brazil, Guatemala, Ecuador, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru, Paraguay, Uruguay, Suriname, Guyana, the Caribbean island states - Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. The key event of 2023 in relations between Ukraine and Latin America was the visit of the President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Argentina for the inauguration of the President Javier Milei, where he also met with the leaders of Ecuador, Paraguay, and Uruguay. This visit received wide coverage in both Ukrainian and Latin American media. Along with that, President Zelenskyy held meetings with the leaders of Brazil and Chile on the sidelines of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly, and during this year's 79th session - the meeting with the newly elected leader of Panama. This intensification of contacts between Ukraine and Latin America & the Caribbean has also extended to the level of cooperation with regional associations with the speech of the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba (2020-2024) at the Summit of the Association of the Caribbean States in May 2023.

The next steps by the Ukrainian side were taken in 2024, when the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs adopted the first strategic documents in history of Ukraine towards the LAC region - Political Strategy for the development of Ukraine's relations with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean for a five-year period, and Communication Strategy "Ukraine - the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean" for a three-year term.

Nevertheless, the priority of the Ukrainian foreign policy remains the country's European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Therefore, understanding the interaction between the EU and LAC is important for building an effective multi-vector policy. Conducting the research allows the Ukrainian side to form a better understanding of how Ukraine, as a state aspiring to become a full member of the European community, can strengthen not only its own cooperation with the LAC region but also the Latin American direction in the EU's foreign policy and be aligned with it.

The paper begins with a retrospective examination of pre-2022 cooperation to establish a baseline for understanding the subsequent shifts in the dynamics. It then delves into the challenges Europe faced post-Russian invasion into Ukraine and ongoing war, exploring new cooperation formats and analyzing the presidencies of the EU Council countries in the past couple of years.

Special attention is given to the role of Spain's presidency in the Council of the EU in strengthening the dialogue between Europe and LAC, the main results of the EU-CELAC 2023 Summit along with the negotiation of the Trade Agreement with MERCOSUR. The study separately analyzes the presidencies of Belgium and Hungary and the results of the 2024 elections to the European Parliament, and their impact on the Latin American direction in the EU foreign policy. Additionally, it examines Ukraine's potential role in the evolving EU-Latin America relations.

Finally, the paper provides a set of recommendations for Ukrainian authorities, the European Union, and interested Latin American partners to enhance cooperation across the regions for common benefits.

# Key features of the development of cooperation between the EU and LAC up to 2022

Since the 1990s, as the EU was forming in its present shape and many Latin American countries re-establishing on the democratic path, the steps towards cooperation between the two regions have been focusing on the topics of economic cooperation, democracy development and the rule of law. Some of those steps proved to be successful to a various degree, while showcasing the trends of bilateral relations taking centre stage rather than regional strategy in some instances.

The foundations of cooperation between the EU and LAC were laid even before the Maastricht Treaty. In 1990, the European Communities and Latin American countries of the Rio Group<sup>1</sup> signed the Rome Declaration, which became the basis for institutional dialogue between the two parties. According to the document, the parties agreed to hold annual ministerial conferences alternately in both regions. From 1991 to 2003, there were eleven such meetings between the EU and the countries of the Rio Group.

Since the end of the 1990s, regular biennial meetings have been taking place between the EU and the countries of Latin America. The first summit between the heads of state of several Latin American countries and the EU was held on June 28-29, 1999 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), where the parties agreed to develop a strategic partnership focused on strengthening democracy, the rule of law, international peace and political stability. Then the Presidents of Brazil, Mexico and the European Council co-chaired the meeting. From 1999 to 2010, six such summits were held. According to the results of the last summit in Madrid (May 2010), it was decided to create the EU-LAC fund, which was designed to strengthen the bi-regional partnership.

After the establishment of CELAC during the Latin American and Caribbean Unity Summit in February 2010 in Playa del Carmen (Mexico), which included all 33 countries of the region, institutional cooperation with the EU was delegated to this organization. The first CELAC-EU Summit was held on January 26-27, 2013 in Santiago (Chile). The II EU-CELAC Summit held in Brussels in 2015 was the last high-level meeting attended by a large number of leaders of both regions for the next eight years. For a long time, relations between the EU and Latin America have been characterized by a low level of political dialogue on the inter-regional level. The EU-CELAC summit, which was supposed to take place in El Salvador in 2017, was postponed<sup>2</sup> due to the appeal of a number of Latin American countries in view of the extremely difficult political and socio-economic situation in Venezuela. The divergence of views of CELAC member countries on the solution of the "Venezuelan issue" led to the internal split of the integration association into two factions: on the one hand, the ALBA countries<sup>3</sup>, which, despite sanctions and criticism from the international community,

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<sup>1</sup> Rio Group - was a permanent association of political consultation of Latin America and Caribbean countries, created in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on December 18, 1986. It was succeeded in 2011 by the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.

<sup>2</sup> Message of the Co-Presidents of the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly to the EU and CELAC Foreign Ministers / Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly. - Brussels, 16 and 17 July 2018.

<sup>3</sup> the organization includes 10 member countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Bolivia, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Nicaragua, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenadines, Venezuela.

supported the Venezuelan government, on the other - members of the Lima Group<sup>4</sup>, who criticized the breakdown of the democratic order in the country under Nicolas Maduro and called for a return to free democratic elections. Another event that further weakened CELAC was the termination of Brazil's membership in the period from 2020 to early 2023.

On the other hand, for many EU countries, Latin America has not been an important direction in their foreign policy, except for Spain and Portugal. The latter have always given priority to the ties with the region, given the strong cultural and historical features and investments in various sectors of the economy of the Latin American countries. In addition, the migration crisis of 2016 further diverted the attention of the European leaders from the Latin American region, and the key attention of the EU's foreign policy was given to the Middle East. In particular, in the EU's security strategy<sup>5</sup> (*A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy*), which was adopted in 2016, Latin America was given a secondary place. But despite this, in the paragraph devoted to cooperation with Latin America, it was noted that efforts should be directed to the conclusion of a free trade agreement with MERCOSUR, which was eventually signed in 2019 (still not ratified).

The Covid-19 pandemic pushed the European side to step up in restoring interregional dialogue. In March 2020, the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly, in a joint declaration, called for an urgent meeting of the EU-LAC ministers via a video conference to establish enhanced cooperation to combat Covid-19. The same year, two important meetings at the ministerial level took place. On July 10, a conference was held at the initiative of Spain, France and the EU, which was attended by representatives of foreign policy departments from 18 countries (Germany, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Ecuador, Slovenia, Spain, France, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, Peru, Portugal, the Dominican Republic, Sweden). In a joint statement<sup>6</sup>, the parties underscored their shared "*commitment to address shortages of critical medical supplies by facilitating the timely circulation of equipment and products needed to prevent and treat disease, and view future access to future vaccines as a global public good. To this end, we support the "Access to Covid-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator" initiative...*". Another ministerial meeting was organized by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany, Heiko Maas, who then headed the German Presidency of the Council of the EU, and the High Representative of the EU, Josep Borrell, on December 14 via a video conference. The joint communiqué<sup>7</sup> highlighted that as of December 2020, Team Europe has allocated more than €2.4 billion to Latin America for the emergency response to Covid-19, strengthening the health, water and sanitation systems and addressing socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. In addition, it was noted that the European Commission launched the AL-INVEST VERDE program worth 33 million euros, which was aimed at supporting small and medium-sized enterprises in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean region on their way to a more sustainable, green and circular economy.

In the autumn of the following year, Josep Borrell visited Peru and Brazil with the aim of giving new impetus to the cooperation between the EU and Latin America. Then a memorandum of understanding on international cooperation was signed<sup>8</sup> in Brazil, which allowed the parties to join forces in projects with other partner countries.

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<sup>4</sup> the organization was created in 2017 with the aim of solving the crisis in Venezuela. Includes 12 member countries: Argentina (left the organization in 2021), Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa-Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru.

<sup>5</sup> A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy 2016, (P.37).

<sup>6</sup> Declaración de los ministros de Asuntos Exteriores de dieciocho países de Europa, América Latina y el Caribe, y el Alto Representante de la Unión Europea para Asuntos Exteriores y Política de Seguridad – COVID-19, 10 de julio de 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Joint Communiqué: EU27 - Latin America and Caribbean Informal Ministerial Meeting, Berlin, December 14.

<sup>8</sup> Borrell visita América Latina: es hora de reactivar la cooperación / The Diplomatic Service of the European Union, 7 November 2021.

# Changes in cooperation between the EU and LAC since 2022

Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the brutal war Russia has been carrying out with its allies and supporters for the past almost 3 years, have dramatically influenced the geopolitical situation and the relationships around the world on many levels. The reactions to the situation unfolding by various actors have influenced the relationship and cooperation not only with Ukraine and Russia, but also among different parties directly. Thus, the overall support of Ukraine by the EU, imposed sanctions against the Russian Federation and diversification of the economic flow put a different perspective on the EU-LAC cooperation as well. Along with that, the topics of defense, security and further alliances in various sectors came to the forefront of the EU's strategic approach. The perspective from the Latin American side on the Russian aggression and the further steps was less unified and in many occasions left a divide between the countries in some instances. Partly due to the influence and connections with Russia, partly due to the distance, partly due to anti-US approaches, and partly due to the underlying forces and entangled arrangements with the other parties, such as China.

The process of re-shaping the international (legal) order and identifying the common values by the EU and LAC are also influenced by the outside developments. Added into the mix is also the position and voice of Ukraine itself that has risen on the international arena, its agenda-setting for the peace process, as well as the EU-candidate status and own acceleration of the direct engagement with LAC region.

One of the clear consequences of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is serious economic changes and losses in various regions of the world. The European Union faced, first of all, an unprecedented increase in energy prices. This was due to the fact that the Russian Federation took the place of the key supplier of gas, oil and coal to Europe and instrumentalized this fact accordingly. The European leadership sees the reduction of its dependence on Russian energy imports as a means of diversifying supplies, enhancing energy efficiency and accelerating the use of renewable sources. The President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen said that "*the quicker we switch to renewables and hydrogen, combined with more energy efficiency, the quicker we will be truly independent and master our energy system*".<sup>9</sup> In view of this, the strengthening of cooperation with Latin America appears very promising as the region is extremely rich in copper, lithium, zinc, nickel, iron, manganese, gold, silver and rare earth metals – resources that are essential for the energy transition.

The intensification of the economic relations from the EU side has also intensified the political agenda between the regions. In particular, the topic of respecting international order, rule of law and sovereignty. These two also feed into the social agenda that is of a high importance to Latin America due to its legacy with socially divided societies.

The outlook on the state of affairs from this perspective led to some changes in 2023.

In early June 2023, the European Union adopted a new program<sup>10</sup> to strengthen the EU's partnership with Latin America and the Caribbean. Its key points are the following:

- a renewal of the political partnership;
- strengthening of the common trade agenda;

<sup>9</sup> REPowerEU: Joint European action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy / European Commission, 8 March 2022.

<sup>10</sup> New Agenda to strengthen EU's partnership with Latin America and the Caribbean / European Commission, 7 June 2023

- rolling out Global Gateway investment strategy to accelerate a fair green and digital transition and tackle inequalities;
- joining forces for justice, citizen security and the fight against transnational organized crime;
- working together to promote peace and security, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and humanitarian aid;
- building a vibrant people-to-people partnership.

The implementation of this program began with the Latin American tour of Ursula von der Leyen to the key partners of the EU in the region - Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Mexico. During her visit to Brazil on June 12, 2023, Ursula von der Leyen announced<sup>11</sup> that the EU would invest 10 billion euros in Latin America as part of the Global Gateway program. Among the other outcomes of this visit was the signing of a memorandum of understanding on critical raw materials with Argentina.

It is also worth noting the place of the Latin American vector in the program documents of the presiding countries in the EU Council from the beginning of 2022. In the joint program<sup>12</sup> of the presiding trio of France - Czech Republic - Sweden (January 1, 2022-June 30, 2023), it was noted that the dialogue at the highest level with Latin America would be supported. However, if we compare the presidency programs of each of these countries, we can trace the gradual increase in attention to the Latin American vector. In the program created by France<sup>13</sup>, which presided over the EU Council from January 1 to June 30, 2022, Latin America is not mentioned at all, instead Africa and the Indo-Pacific region are present among other regions of the Global South. In the program of the Czech Republic (July 1 - December 31, 2022)<sup>14</sup>, it was emphasized that in Latin America, the EU "*will work to develop reciprocal trade, protect human rights and strengthen democracy and the rule of law*". Sweden, which presided from January 1 to June 30, 2023, noted in its program<sup>15</sup> that it would develop and strengthen transatlantic cooperation, including with Latin America. In addition, the Swedes emphasized that in order to strengthen the competitiveness of the EU, they would continue negotiations on free trade agreements with MERCOSUR, Chile and México.

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<sup>11</sup> Statement by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with Brazilian President Lula da Silva / European Commission, 12 June 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Taking forward the Strategic Agenda 18-month Programme of the Council (1 January 2022 - 30 June 2023) / Council of the European Union, Brussels, 10 December 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Recovery, Strength and a Sense of Belonging. Programme for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 1 January to 30 June 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Europe as a Task: Rethink, Rebuild, Repower. Programme of the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 1 July to 31 December 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 1 January to 30 June 2023.

# The role of the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council in strengthening the cooperation

From July 1 to December 31, 2023, Spain held the presidency of the EU Council, which became the most favorable opportunity for the European Union to strengthen its cooperation with Latin American countries. The intensification of cooperation with Latin America became one of the priority directions of the Spanish presidency. In its program<sup>16</sup>, the Spanish side noted that it would increase the presence of the European Union in the Latin American region through the Global Gateway initiative, fostering the participation of the private sector and supporting the just, green and digital transitions in the region. Spain would pay special attention to the Investment Agenda with the region, and continue the EU-LAC Digital Alliance.

A year before its presidency, Spain already paved the way for topics related to Latin America. Thus, during the meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council on July 18, 2022, it was agreed<sup>17</sup> to strengthen transatlantic relations and *"bring about a qualitative leap in the relations between the EU and LAC countries"*. Further on, the meeting of the EU-CELAC foreign ministers took place in Buenos Aires on October 27, 2022, renewing the political dialogue between the two regions and marking the beginning of preparations for the EU-CELAC summit in 2023. The achievement of this meeting was the adoption of the so-called road map, which outlined the bi-regional agenda. At the XXVIII Ibero-American Conference held in March 2023, Pedro Sánchez stated<sup>18</sup> that the *"EU-CELAC summit to be held in Brussels will not be a declarative summit, but will start a regular and intensified political dialogue between the region and European institutions aimed at common solving all global challenges"*.

In addition, Spain, which in its priorities of the presidency declared support for Ukraine against Russian aggression, tried to promote the strengthening of support for the Ukrainian side from Latin American countries. With this in mind, on July 1, on the first day of Spain's presidency, Pedro Sanchez paid a visit to Ukraine, during which he invited Volodymyr Zelenskyy to speak at the EU-CELAC Summit. But due to the resistance of a number of Latin American countries, this initiative could not be implemented.

Hence, the stakes for the steps in 2023 towards bringing the two regions closer were high enough.

## ***Assessments of achievements and failures at the Brussels EU-CELAC Summit***

On July 17-18, 2023, after an eight-year break, the III EU-CELAC summit took place in Brussels. A number of leaders of Latin American countries arrived to participate in the summit: Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, etc. Mexico was represented at the summit by the Minister of Foreign Affairs - Alicia Barcena. Representatives from Cuba (President Miguel Díaz-Canel), Nicaragua (Minister of Foreign Affairs Denis Moncada) and Venezuela (Vice President Delsey Rodriguez) also took part in the Summit. The meeting in

<sup>16</sup> Programme Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 1 July to 31 December 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Foreign Affairs Council, 18 July 2022. Main results / Council of the European Union.

<sup>18</sup> Pedro Sánchez: "La Cumbre UE-CELAC será una oportunidad histórica para continuar fomentando y perfeccionando nuestra relación multilateral" / La Moncloa, 26 de Marzo 2023.

Brussels was co-chaired by the President of the European Council - Charles Michel and the President of St. Vincent and the Grenadines - Ralph E. Gonsalves, who acted as the interim head of CELAC.

The main topics of the Brussels EU-CELAC summit were: European investments in the LAC, development of trade and economic cooperation, Russian war against Ukraine, climate change issues, digital transition, political crisis in Venezuela, the issue of the Falkland (Malvinas) Islands, the situation on Haiti, as well as ending the US trade and economic embargo against Cuba. During the meeting, the EU announced the launch of the Global Gateway investment program for Latin America and the Caribbean and promised to invest 45 billion euros in a number of projects in the region until 2027, which will be directed in four main directions: a just green transition, inclusive digital transformation, human development and resistance to health and vaccines. In particular, in Costa Rica the EU invests in the electrification of public transport, in Colombia - the construction of a metro line, in Brazil - into the expansion of telecommunications networks in the Amazon region. In the case of Chile, the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on Green Hydrogen (GH2) was developed for promoting investment opportunities.

The main results of the EU-CELAC Summit in Brussels were as following:

- Adoption of the roadmap<sup>19</sup> between the EU and CELAC for 2023-2025, where it was noted that the next IV EU-CELAC summit should be held in Latin America.
- Conclusion of an agreement in the field of clean and renewable energy with Argentina (Memorandum on Energy Cooperation) and Uruguay (Memorandum of Understanding, which lays the foundations for future investments in renewable energy and hydrogen energy in particular).
- Signing of memorandum of understanding with Ecuador, El Salvador and Honduras, which lay the foundations for bilateral political dialogue through "periodic consultations".
- Signing with Chile a memorandum of understanding to deepen cooperation in the field of supply chains of raw materials necessary for clean energy and the digital transition of both partners.
- Releasing €10 million to tackle the unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Haiti.
- EIB lent €300 million to Banco Santander Brazil for investments in solar energy.
- EIB will finance climate actions projects in Chile worth more than 300 million euros.

The issue of the Russian war in Ukraine has become one of the most difficult political points for reaching a consensus between European and Latin American leaders. Ralph E. Gonsalves said<sup>20</sup> that "*they could not allow the summit of the two continents to be exclusively about Ukraine.*" In the joint declaration<sup>21</sup> signed by 59 out of 60 leaders (the paragraph on the war in Ukraine refused to be approved by Nicaragua), in paragraph 15, the participants of the summit expressed "deep concern on the ongoing war against Ukraine... and supported the need for a just and lasting peace." However, this paragraph does not mention Russia as an aggressor in this war. Such a relatively neutral wording of this provision of the declaration, which was the subject of long discussions between representatives of the EU and CELAC, testifies to the diplomatic success of the Latin American side, which sought to reduce the role of the issue of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

<sup>19</sup> EU-CELAC roadmap 2023 to 2025. Brussels, 17 July 2023.

<sup>20</sup> EU-CELAC Summit: Press conference by Ursula von der Leyen, Charles Michel, R.Gonsalves & A.Fernández / European Commission, 18 July 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Declaration of the EU-CELAC Summit 2023/ European Commission, 18 July 2023.

## Trade cooperation

The European Union has well-established trade and economic ties with the Latin American region: the EU is one of the top investors in the region, its third largest trading partner and the leading contributor to the development cooperation.<sup>22</sup>

Since the 1990s, the European Communities and after 1993 the EU, has paid particular attention to economic cooperation with the island countries of the Caribbean. CARIFORUM, which was created in 1992, became the basis for supporting the economic dialogue. It includes 15 CARICOM states and the Dominican Republic. In 2008, an economic agreement was signed between CARIFORUM countries and the EU, according to which a free trade zone was established between the island countries of the Caribbean and the EU.

In addition, CARIFORUM is a subgroup of the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), which was created in 1975. In 2000, the so-called Cotonou<sup>23</sup> Agreement was concluded between the European Union and OACPS. Among the Caribbean countries, only Cuba has not signed the Agreement. The agreement is aimed at reducing poverty in the OACPS countries and their integration into the world economy.

The European Union has concluded a number of trade agreements at the level of sub-regions of Latin America. In 2012, an Agreement was signed between the EU countries on the one hand and the countries of the Andean region - Colombia and Peru on the other. On January 1, 2017, Ecuador joined this Agreement. However, the Agreement entered into force only on November 1, 2024, due to the lengthy ratification process at the level of the parliaments of each signatory country.<sup>24</sup> In particular, Belgium was the last of the signatory countries to approve the Agreement. It is seen that the full ratification of this agreement will create more favorable conditions for trade between the two regions by reducing non-tariff barriers, increasing competition and market transparency.

The key document regulating cooperation, including economic cooperation, between the EU and Central American countries (with the exception of Belize) is the EU-Central America Association Agreement, which was concluded in 2012 in Tegucigalpa. The document is based on three main "pillars": political dialogue, cooperation and trade. As in the case of the Andean countries, ratification of the Agreement at the level of each of the signatory countries has turned into a protracted process, which is why it only entered into full force on 1 May 2024. For both parties, this will mean expanding cooperation, including combating the effects of climate change. In the context of trade relations, the EU undertakes to abolish 73% of tariffs on agricultural products from Central American countries, while the Central American countries undertake to abolish 62% of tariffs on European agricultural products, as well as whiskey.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Evaluation of the negotiation of Trade Agreement with MERCOSUR***

One of South America's largest and strongest integration associations is the MERCOSUR economic bloc (as of 2023, the GDP was \$5.7 trillion, making it the 5th largest economy in

<sup>22</sup> Latin America and the Caribbean / European Parliament, April 4, 2024. URL: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/176/latin-america-and-the-caribbean>

<sup>23</sup> the city in Benin, where the signing took place.

<sup>24</sup> Trade Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Colombia and Peru, of the other part

<sup>25</sup> Acuerdo de Asociación entre Centroamérica y la Unión Europea. Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana (SICA), 7.05.2024. [https://www.sica.int/documentos/acuerdo-de-asociacion-entre-centroamerica-y-la-union-europea\\_1\\_133936.html](https://www.sica.int/documentos/acuerdo-de-asociacion-entre-centroamerica-y-la-union-europea_1_133936.html)

the world). The bloc currently includes Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, while Bolivia is currently in the process of accession. Negotiations on the conclusion of a trade agreement between the EU and MERCOSUR began back in 1999, and in 2019, a preliminary political agreement was reached, initiating the current stage of agreement preparation. The purpose of this agreement is to eliminate tariffs, various restrictions, and regulations to achieve free trade between the organizations. The plan is to liberalize 90% of the intra-bloc trade.

The negotiation process is proceeding very slowly due to points of contention on both sides. The Green Pact introduced by the EU in 2019 caused concern on the part of Latin American partners. On the European side, the most resistant is France (and, to a lesser extent, Ireland and the Netherlands) due to the agrarian lobby, which fears competition from cheaper South American suppliers. Therefore, Paris demands the application of the same environmental and sanitary requirements to farmers as those existing in the EU, and the banning of meat with hormones. Subsequently, the EU hesitated to ratify the agreement due to the lack of commitments by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro to protect the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest (for example, this was one of the reasons why the Dutch parliament passed a resolution against ratifying the EU-MERCOSUR trade agreement in 2020).

From the side of Latin America, the decision mainly depends on the major economies of the MERCOSUR - Brazil and Argentina. The primary driver in this process is President Lula, who nevertheless hopes to modernize the bloc to overcome its paralysis and successfully conclude negotiations on an agreement with the EU.

Brazil held the presidency of the bloc from July to December 2023, and during that time, Lula engaged in extensive diplomatic efforts, participating in numerous meetings with EU leaders. Although few practical results were achieved, there was an indication that this deal could be concluded, particularly considering Spain's significant support as the holder of the presidency of the Council of the European Union at that time.

An attempt to sign the agreement was made at the last LXIII Summit of Presidents, which took place on December 4-5, 2023. Despite all hopes, it failed due to the position of Argentina's outgoing president, Alberto Fernández, who believed that this agreement put the country's producers in a negative position by providing access to the internal market for European products and fostering competition with Europeans on the markets of other MERCOSUR countries.

Therefore, Argentina put forward several proposals to amend the agreement, including the recognition of MERCOSUR national certificates, the creation of a fund for small and medium-sized enterprises, etc. This position of Argentina did not come as a complete surprise, because back in the summer, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Santiago Cafiero, had already voiced the necessity of updating the agreement to narrow the gap between the blocs.<sup>26</sup> He pointed out that the situation had evolved since 2019, when the basic agreement was reached, with MERCOSUR's trade now surpassing previous levels.

Despite everything, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, Mauro Vieira, told reporters that the agreement between the EU and MERCOSUR could be signed next year<sup>27</sup>. Notwithstanding the statements of politicians following the summit in Rio, the situation has reached a deadlock.

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<sup>26</sup> Alberto Fernández at MERCOSUR summit: 'No one can condemn us to be just raw material providers'. Buenos Aires Herald <https://buenosairesherald.com/business/alberto-fernandez-at-MERCOSUR-summit-no-one-can-condemn-us-to-be-just-raw-material-providers>

<sup>27</sup> Brazil's Vieira sees possible MERCOSUR-EU deal agreement by mid-February. Finance Yahoo. <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/brazils-vieira-sees-possible-MERCOSUR-220231313.html>

On the other hand, agrarian circles and environmental organizations in the EU opposed the agreement, especially during the lead-up to the European Parliament elections in June 2024. The unpopularity of the issue with voters at the time effectively stalled the process. Large-scale protests by farmers, which began in January 2024, further dampened optimism about the agreement's prospects. The newly elected parliament, with its more right-leaning and protectionist stance, is unlikely to approve the agreement if it reaches the voting stage.

In November 2024, another wave of farmer protests erupted across Europe over concerns that the agreement might be finalized during the G20 summit in Brazil, even partially. Farmers primarily oppose the duty-free import of beef, poultry products, and sugar<sup>28</sup>. The French government, similarly critical of the deal, reiterated its concerns about deforestation risks and health issues linked to hormone-treated meat. Although the agreement could technically be approved without unanimous consent through the European Commission, it is evident that the Commission is unwilling to bypass France on this matter.

During his visit to Argentina on November 17, 2024, French President Emmanuel Macron reiterated that France would not sign the agreement in its current form<sup>29</sup>. Notably, France's opposition was a key reason the agreement was not signed back in July 2023. Macron continues to advocate for renegotiations modeled after those with Chile and New Zealand, emphasizing the importance of establishing a European control force for overseeing product imports.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the internal links between the South American countries and their approach to the deal has their own tendencies and thus influence on the process. The relationship between President Javier Milei and President Lula remains tense, hindering dialogue on key issues and negatively impacting coordination within MERCOSUR due to significant ideological differences. Concerns arose due to Milei's skepticism towards MERCOSUR, which he voiced during his election campaign. He criticized the bloc's functioning, describing it as having "failed brutally" because "no arrangement works if the government is involved," and emphasized that it must be reformed, stating that "it is useless in its current state."<sup>30</sup> Despite these concerns, it was anticipated that Milei's libertarian and pro-Western stance could contribute to a more constructive role in advancing the EU-MERCOSUR agreement. While Argentine Foreign Minister-designate Diana Mondino called for modernizing MERCOSUR and expressed the new Argentine government's intention to sign the agreement, effective collaboration between Lula and Milei is crucial to overcoming these obstacles<sup>31</sup>.

During Paraguay's presidency of MERCOSUR (December 2023–July 2024), President Santiago Peña expressed pessimism about the EU deal, citing strict environmental demands from Europe and signaling a focus on alternative markets. Meanwhile, Uruguay continues to

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<sup>28</sup> French farmers escalate protests against an EU-MERCOSUR. Bluefield Daily Telegraph. [https://www.bdtonline.com/news/nation\\_world/french-farmers-escalate-protests-against-an-eu-MERCOSUR-trade-deal-and-fear-unfair-competition/article\\_cdad98c2-3dda-58e5-977a-4800973a1b09.html](https://www.bdtonline.com/news/nation_world/french-farmers-escalate-protests-against-an-eu-MERCOSUR-trade-deal-and-fear-unfair-competition/article_cdad98c2-3dda-58e5-977a-4800973a1b09.html)

<sup>29</sup> Desde Argentina Macron descarta firmar acuerdo UE-MERCOSUR "tal como está". America Economía. <https://www.americaeconomia.com/economia-y-mercados/desde-argentina-macron-descarta-firmar-acuerdo-ue-MERCOSUR-tal-como-esta>

<sup>30</sup> Ante empresarios, Milei volvió a criticar la obra pública y al MERCOSUR. Diario Jornada. <https://www.diariojornada.com.ar/358151/economia/ante-empresarios-milei-olvio-a-criticar-la-obra-publica-y-al-MERCOSUR>

<sup>31</sup> La canciller de Milei dijo que la intención del futuro gobierno es que el Acuerdo MERCOSUR-UE se firme. Ámbito Financiero. <https://www.ambito.com/uruguay/la-canciller-milei-dijo-que-la-intencion-del-futuro-gobierno-es-que-el-acuerdo-MERCOSUR-ue-se-firme-n5888415>

advocate for the agreement with the EU but is also pursuing a free trade deal with China, which could signify an eventual withdrawal from the customs union. Nonetheless, Javier Milei has confirmed his participation in the MERCOSUR summit in Montevideo in December 2024, which could serve as a platform for addressing these challenges and exploring opportunities to chart a path forward. According to French President Emmanuel Macron, following his meeting with Milei, the Argentine leader stated that he was "not satisfied" with either the agreement or "the current functioning of MERCOSUR"<sup>32</sup>.

At the 64th Summit of Presidents, the leaders emphasized their commitment to advancing negotiations with the European Union, reaffirming their willingness to address outstanding issues in the second half of 2024 and to finalize a balanced and mutually beneficial agreement. Simultaneously, MERCOSUR remains actively engaged in pursuing trade agreements with EFTA and ASEAN<sup>33</sup>.

For the EU, this agreement will strengthen its position in competition with the USA and China. It also has a significant economic impact because 40% of the products sold by the EU to the LAC region go directly to MERCOSUR countries. Additionally, the agreement opens opportunities for the EU's struggling automotive industry, offering a new market to counter current challenges. Similarly, European footwear and leather industries have expressed strong support for ratifying the EU-MERCOSUR agreement, as it would provide critical opportunities for growth and competitiveness in these sectors.

However, EU leaders face challenges in convincing France to concede, as well as overcoming opposition in the European Parliament, where right-wing and left-wing forces argue that the MERCOSUR treaty threatens the national agricultural and mining sectors. This resistance may necessitate further revisions to the agreement, delaying its adoption. Failure to finalize the agreement after 30 years of negotiations risks widening the geopolitical divide between the EU and Latin America and forfeiting valuable trade and cooperation opportunities. Given the protectionist stance of the future Trump administration in the US, it is crucial for the EU to seek alternative markets and expand trade possibilities, particularly in Latin America.

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<sup>32</sup> Macron en Argentina: rechazo al acuerdo UE-MERCOSUR y foco en litio, tecnología y defensa. Swizz info. <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/macron-en-argentina%3A-rechazo-al-acuerdo-ue-MERCOSUR-y-foco-en-litio%2C-tecnolog%C3%ADa-y-defensa/88198343>

<sup>33</sup> 64° CUMBRE: Comunicado conjunto de los Presidentes de los Estados Partes del MERCOSUR y Bolivia. MERCOSUR. <https://www.MERCOSUR.int/64-cumbre-comunicado/>

# The 2024 political dynamics and their influence on the EU-Latin America relations

2024 will be remembered as the largest election year in history, encompassing elections in 40 countries representing 41% of the world's population and 42% of the global GDP. By the end of the year, these electoral outcomes have already begun to shape global dynamics. In the context of the EU-LAC relations, the most significant elections have been those to the European Parliament, alongside presidential elections in México, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Venezuela, and Uruguay. These electoral processes have significant implications for the development of relations between Europe and Latin America, influencing the political and economic dynamics that shape their partnership. The outcomes offer opportunities to reassess priorities and explore new avenues for collaboration, reflecting the evolving contexts in both regions.

The presidential elections in México concluded with the victory of Claudia Sheinbaum, the candidate from the ruling party MORENA. She began her term on October 1, 2024. While her domestic policies are expected to largely continue the course set by Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), her approach to foreign policy indicates a shift toward greater international engagement. This was exemplified by her participation in the G20 Summit in Brazil shortly after taking office, signaling México's intent to strengthen its position on international platforms and address shared economic and social challenges with the world's largest economies.

One potential area for advancing relations with the EU is cooperation on climate change and the green transition. The modernized Global Agreement between México and the EU, negotiated in 2019, remains unsigned and unratified due to México's hesitations regarding its energy provisions and the European bureaucratic hurdles<sup>34</sup>. This agreement could become a focal point for collaboration under Sheinbaum's administration, reflecting her intent to foster stronger ties with Europe while addressing critical global issues.

Without a doubt, Nayib Bukele, who enjoys great popularity among the population thanks to his successful fight against crime, has secured a second term as President of El Salvador. The EU has recognized the elections as “peaceful, orderly, and yielding a clear result<sup>35</sup>.” His administration continues to support cooperation with the EU, particularly in improving security, despite ongoing criticism of his crime-fighting methods and accusations of authoritarian tendencies.

The presidential elections in Venezuela, held on July 28, 2024, definitely were the most problematic in the region. Despite prior Barbados agreements for free elections, the process violated all international standards, with widespread fraud and Maduro being declared the winner despite exit polls suggesting otherwise. The Venezuelan authorities barred EU observers from monitoring the election. The EU issued a statement condemning the election,

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<sup>34</sup> After a landslide victory, global engagement is a necessity and an opportunity for Mexico's next president. Chatham House. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/06/after-landslide-victory-global-engagement-necessity-and-opportunity-mexicos-next-president>

<sup>35</sup> El Salvador: Statement by the Spokesperson on the elections. The Diplomatic Service of the European Union. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/el-salvador-statement-spokesperson-elections\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/el-salvador-statement-spokesperson-elections_en)

declaring it did not meet international standards<sup>36</sup>, and joined the Joint Statement on Venezuela Election on August 16, 2024, condemning violence against opposition candidates and demanding the publication of all original voting records<sup>37</sup>.

The EU awarded the 2024 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought prize to the Venezuelan opposition leaders María Corina Machado and Edmundo González. González, recognized by several countries as the elected president, fled to Spain after facing an arrest warrant. The EU's coordinated response, along with Latin American countries, highlights the importance of maintaining a strong and unified position to address the Venezuelan crisis and work toward restoring democracy in the country.

In addition, elections were also held in the Dominican Republic, Panama, and Uruguay, which, however, did not have a particularly significant impact on the dynamics of the EU-LAC relations. Overall, with the exception of Venezuela, all elections were conducted fairly and peacefully, which positively contributes to strengthening relations with the EU.

*The European Parliament*, as the world's only multinational parliamentary assembly and the sole directly elected institution of the European Union, holds a significant position on the international stage. The 2024 elections marked a turning point for Europe's political future, influencing the composition and leadership of the key EU institutions. Recent elections across EU member states have shown a surge in the popularity of far-right parties, which are generally less inclined toward large investments in Latin America. Furthermore, as noted earlier, the elections to the European Parliament may complicate the conclusion of an agreement between the EU and MERCOSUR.

The results of the elections have led to a more conservative European Parliament. The center-right alliance retained its majority, while far-right and ultranationalist parties made significant gains. These outcomes create opportunities for Argentina's President Javier Milei, a prominent figure in the global right-wing movement, to strengthen ties with his ideological allies in Europe. In contrast, Brazil's leftist president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, expressed concern over the election results, calling them a "risk to democracy"<sup>38</sup>.

Overall, these results present challenges for advancing the EU-MERCOSUR agreement due to the more protectionist stance of right-wing parties. However, the winning European People's Party (EPP) has traditionally advocated for closer ties with Latin America, leaving room for optimism in the relationship's future development.

### ***The Rotating Presidencies of the Council of the European Union and prospects for 2025.***

After Spain's presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2023, the presidency in 2024 transitioned to Belgium (January 1 - June 30) and Hungary (July 1 - December 31). These two countries, compared to Spain, have relatively less experience and fewer active ties with the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. Nevertheless, their presidencies have demonstrated a commitment to advancing EU-LAC relations within the broader geopolitical and economic challenges of the time.

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<sup>36</sup> Venezuela: Statement by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on post-election developments. Council of the EU. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/08/04/venezuela-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu/>

<sup>37</sup> Joint Statement on Venezuela Election. U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-venezuela-election/>

<sup>38</sup> Brazil's Lula says democracy at risk after far-right surge in EU vote. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/brazils-lula-says-democracy-risk-after-far-right-surge-eu-vote-2024-06-13/>

During its presidency, Belgium emphasized the interconnectedness of the modern world and the necessity of global solutions to contemporary challenges. Additionally, Belgium prioritized combating organized crime and drug trafficking, issues particularly relevant due to the challenges of drug supply from the LAC region.

Belgium's presidency also underscored unwavering support for Ukraine, integrating it into broader EU-LAC cooperation strategies. Notably, Belgium aimed to develop a new Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029. This agenda builds on the continuity established by the 2023 trio program with Spain and Hungary, which emphasized strengthening international partnerships, multilateral cooperation, and comprehensive security measures. Hungary, following Belgium, continued to address the priorities outlined in the trio program. However, Hungary's engagement with LAC remained limited compared to the other EU member states with stronger historical and economic ties to the region. The presidency focused on maintaining the commitments made during the EU-CELAC summit in July 2023 and ensuring their effective implementation.

On January 1, 2025, Poland will take over the EU Presidency, followed by Denmark and Cyprus. The new Trio Presidency will coincide with the start of the new European Commission's term. It is critical for the trio to integrate the LAC region into their joint program for the next 18 months, considering geopolitical challenges, growing global competition, and the need to find new trade and political partners amidst rising protectionism and ongoing tensions, such as Russia's war against Ukraine and China's increasing influence.

The key EU-LAC Event in 2025 will be the CELAC-EU Summit in Colombia, which will be a highlight in the relationship path of the two regions. Colombian President Gustavo Petro has emphasized a fair green transition as a guiding principle for the summit's agenda, aligning with Colombia's broader sustainable development goals. The EU, through its Global Gateway program, continues to invest in LAC to promote an equitable and inclusive transition to green and digital technologies, particularly in urban areas.

However, the summit faces potential challenges, including diverging positions among LAC countries, such as tensions between México and Ecuador, internal dynamics within the EU with potential shifts in leadership and policy, and the unpredictable stance of Argentina's President Javier Milei, who has expressed controversial views on international cooperation. Despite these challenges, the EU leaders aim to preserve the level of agreements achieved during the 2023 Brussels Summit, ensuring continuity and progress in the EU-LAC relations.

# Recommendations

As we have seen throughout this overview of the context, history and recent developments of the relationship dynamics between the EU and LAC region from the high-level perspective, the main dimensions of this interaction remain to be focused on the economic and political aspects. The former is predominantly being shaped by the overall EU policy agenda and the internal /individual approach of different Latin American countries, as well as some of the European countries' position. The latter, the political side, has been influenced by the overall geopolitical dispositions and developments related to the Russian aggression on Ukraine. There is a clear thread that for the EU the security topic and cooperation with Ukraine is a leading factor, whereas on the Latin America side, this is a less important element and there is quite some division in the views on how to deal with this. Yet, there is a clear ambition on both sides to expand the cooperation and have it in a more structural, and even formalized way.

Considering the above and the aim of Ukraine to have closer cooperation with the EU and connect better with the Latin American countries, especially in the light of Ukraine's objective to preserve and gain support for its sovereignty on the global level, we would advise to consider the following recommendation for the three parties involved.

## Overall

1. Keep on the trajectory of strengthening the cooperation between the three parties on different levels - either as a group/all together or via bilateral relations - on the diplomatic level, civil society, and a cross-functional level. Find the way to simplify the collaboration and pave the way to include business into this group.
2. Identify and prioritize the main topics/areas of collaboration for the EU, Ukraine and Latin America to work on together - something that is valuable for all three in today's global situation. For instance, those could be:
  - a. human rights
  - b. rule of law
  - c. diversification of the economic ties
  - d. food & energy security
  - e. technology transfer and new developments
  - f. combat (Russian) disinformation
3. Identify the values that are equally important / are shared by Ukraine, EU and Latin American countries (at least some of them).
4. Potentially create a recurring meeting between the parties where one of the areas of cooperation is being led by one of the sides - e.g. one country taking the lead on the topic of human rights and acts to bring the parties together for collaboration and exchange experience.
5. Further hold discussions on the UN Charter implementation and UN Security Council reform.

## For Ukrainian authorities

1. Lobby G20 countries to invite Ukraine to the next summit(s) or include Ukraine as part of the agenda.

2. Create a working group for the reconstruction of Ukraine involving three parties - Ukraine, the EU, and LAC countries—to attract Latin American producers capable of participating in and supplying the necessary products for the process.
3. Hold the Ukraine-Latin America Summit in a Latin American country in 2025 or 2026, with active participation of the EU representatives.
4. Increase initiatives to organize joint conferences, seminars, and round tables aimed at deepening mutual understanding among representatives of Ukraine, the EU, and Latin American countries. Launch a tripartite format of expert discussions.
5. Joint development programs: European investments alongside Ukrainian digital technologies.
6. Learn more about the values and way of thinking in different Latin American countries to better align Ukraine's practical steps on the Peace formula with the values prioritized in the LAC region.
7. Increase awareness and understanding of Ukraine in Latin America via more extensive media coverage, by engaging further with the local civil society, academia, journalists, intellectuals, and potentially business.
8. Invite LAC politicians and high officials to visit Ukraine to boost their foreign policy credentials, focusing visits on human rights violations.
9. Organize (with the support of the EU) field trips for various business/trade groups both to and from Ukraine to discuss challenges and share solutions with the Latin American partners.

### ***For the European Union***

1. Restructure approaches in the EU's foreign policy strategy regarding Latin America: change the homogeneous vision of the region to the formation of policies taking into account the characteristics of individual countries.
2. As part of the reform of the UN Security Council, lobby for the inclusion of a representative or representatives of Latin America in the renewed version of it.
3. Explore opportunities for expanding cultural and educational exchanges among Ukraine, the European Union, and Latin America to enhance mutual understanding and strengthen bilateral relations.
4. Promote the participation of Latin American partners in both the Ukraine-Latin America Summit and the Second Global Peace Formula Summit is crucial.
5. Invite Ukrainian delegation to the CELAC summit 2025 in Colombia given the fact Ukraine has the EU candidate status and is willing to deepen the cooperation.

### ***For interested Latin American Partners***

1. Align within a few Latin American countries the approach for the cooperation with the EU as a regional partner (where possible).
2. Collaborate with EU representatives to promote fair elections and development of the inclusive stable institutions that ensure rule of law in different countries.
3. Enhance cooperation with the EU and potentially Ukraine in the security sector. In this context, the experience of the Ukrainian authorities and society to maintain relative security in the country despite the war, is of great importance.

4. Coordinate with Ukraine and the EU to promote reforms in international organizations such as the UN, with an emphasis on the implementation of the United Nations Charter and issues of peace and security.
5. Intensify collaboration in tripartite academic and cultural projects (Ukraine-EU-LAC) to foster mutual understanding and strengthen public diplomacy.
6. Collaborate with Ukraine and the EU in integrating digital technologies into sectors such as agribusiness, trade, and education, positioning LAC as a key partner in the global digital economy, taking into account Ukraine's successes in digitalization.
7. Engage civil society and academia to lobby government to increase cooperation with Ukraine and adopt policy stances in the top-priority areas (e.g. Ukraine's territorial integrity, supporting actions condemning Russia's aggression, calling for aggression against civilian targets and infrastructure to cease, etc.).
8. Be open to learn more about Ukraine and change the perception of Russia, as well as Russian politics globally.
9. Consider Ukraine becoming a direct partner on many levels based on shared values and similar paths in terms of colonial/imperial past and transition to democracy.
10. Share Latin American knowledge and experience on transformative justice practices and enhancing human rights via the 'truth seeking / truth commissions' mechanisms.

# Ukrainian Prism

RENAISSANCE  
FOUNDATION



The Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” is a Kyiv-based nongovernmental think-tank with robust expertise on the foreign policy of Ukraine and international security.

Prism UA consists of 10 study programs, covering all functional and geographical directions of Ukrainian foreign policy. Annually, the expert team produces a comprehensive assessment of the activity of Ukrainian foreign service under the authentic methodology.

Experts of the organization take part in the intersectoral task forces, working on the strategic framework of Ukraine in the foreign policy and security domain. The team’s members contributed to the Foreign policy strategy of Ukraine, Maritime Strategy, Publicly Diplomacy Strategy, MFA’s strategy for Asia and Asia.

From the start of 2023 there has launched an office of the “Ukrainian Prism” in Brussels to extend outreach for in-house expertise to European governments and EU institutions.

The Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” implements several projects to increase the level of foreign policy expertise in Ukraine, consolidate international support for Ukraine and raise awareness of foreign experts, politicians, and journalists about the events in Ukraine.

Prism UA cooperates with many international donors and partners: OSF, NED, EU, Ebert Stiftung, Adenauer Stftung, IVF, BST, GMF etc.

“Ukrainian Prism” is one of the leaders in the implementation of innovative practices of expert diplomacy. In particular, jointly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it promotes the concept of bilateral expert forums with partner EU states to discuss potentially sensitive issues.



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