

## Artigo Original

# The development of relationships in science, technology, research and innovation in health between the EU and LAC countries: a promising future

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## Abstract

This paper presents the evolution of the dialogue between European Union and Latin American and Caribbean countries with regard to Science and Technology cooperation, especially in health. We begin with a historical overview and a periodization of the history of relations between these two regions referred by a system of Summits that strengthened and supported the political dialogue. Then, we identify existing instruments for EU-LAC relations in science and technology and the main areas of cooperation and – from this perspective – we analyzed the state of cooperation between the regions. Finally, we discuss the perspectives and next steps toward future relations between EU and LAC countries in science, technology, research and innovation in health. In the end of the paper we present the projections for the forthcoming EU-LAC cooperation in science and technology in health that are being worked in the EU-LAC Health initiative. Today the bi-regional relationship calls for mutual benefits and it is expected that the strategic partnership will add value to both regions.

**Key words:** Health research; Science and technology in health; International cooperation in S&T; EU-LAC relations; EULAC Health, Policies and Cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation; Science and Technology Cooperation Agreements; Latin America; European Union; Bilateral Cooperation Programs; International Cooperation.

## Introduction

Over the last centuries of shared history strong ties were built between European and Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries, with strong economic, social and cultural bonds. The long history that has united both continents has had important consequences in many areas that affect their own reality and identity, values, and interests, as actors in the international community. Initially, these relationships were built mainly on strengthening bilateral strategic ties between countries of the two regions. However, with the creation of the European Union (EU) and the various and relatively new sub-regional organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean, such as the South American Nations Union (Unasur), the Caribbean Community (Caricom), and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)<sup>i</sup>, these relationships are becoming increasingly bi- or multiregional.

The proliferation of regional organizations and the increasing institutionalization of interregional relations can be understood as an effect of globalization on international relations. According to Peña<sup>1</sup>, institutionalization is a consequence of the multiple options of international insertion and reflects the prevailing belief among countries on the mutual benefits that can derive from a common vision of the future. Often, the joint action through networks of different kinds, governmental and nongovernmental, can better mitigate risks and seize opportunities globally. Therefore, any strategic partnership should be understood as a mechanism to improve domestic governance of globalization, in an increasingly interdependent world, where the risks and threats have a global character.

Over the past 14 years, the bi-regional dialogue between Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean was built under a system of EU-LAC Summits<sup>1</sup>. These summits have enhanced and supported cooperation and political dialogue between the regions. According to Peña<sup>1</sup> this system is based on three pillars: the first is that the belonging criteria goes beyond geographical issue, instead, what really matters is the weight of a shared history of more than five centuries. The second is the deep connectivity existing in multiple planes as a result of this shared history, and the third, the political will to institutionalize a strategic bi-regional association to promote development and full exploitation that this association can bring.

In this sense, summits of the highest political level have been held - Summit of Heads of State – every 2 years since 1999. The agenda of the EU-LAC summits have always been characterized by specific topics: trade, sub-regional integration, sustainable development, social cohesion and combating poverty versus development/cooperation. Eventually, other areas of cooperation are introduced according to the international political situation, and can be related to immigration, terrorism, climate change etc.

The Summit of Heads of State, the highest level in decision-making, is usually preceded by a Senior Officials Meeting (SOM). These are high-level meetings aimed at improving the quality and quantity of bi-regional political dialogue; sometimes they have a ministerial nature. The SOM are groundwork to the Summit of Heads of State and are held according to the different thematic priority areas.

In this paper, we present the development of the dialogue between the two regions with regard to Science and Technology (S&T), and, more specifically to S&T in Health. We start with a historical perspective, move to current events and the issues involved and discuss the next steps that are being developed. We end this paper presenting prospects for the future EU-LAC relationship in S&T in Health that are being worked in the EU-LAC Health initiative.

This article was written mostly from primary sources published on the internet, given the actuality and specificity of the subject, which is being developed *pari passu* to the writing of this paper. We use mainly documents with the outcomes from the EU-LAC summits and documents published by the European Commission on the subject. It is one of the outcomes of the project EU-LAC Health : *Defining a Roadmap for Cooperative Health Research between the EU and Latin America-Caribbean Countries: a Policy Oriented Approach* that was set up in 2011, co-funded by the European Commission under the FP7 and developed by European and Latin American partners<sup>ii</sup>.

## Historical overview of the EU-LAC relationship in S&T and S&T in Health

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<sup>i</sup>The CELAC was established in February 2010, during the Latin America and the Caribbean Unity Summit, held in Riviera Maya (Mexico). The CELAC is a new mechanism of political organization and integration covering the 33 countries in the continental America and the Caribbean, excluding the United States, Canada and the European territories in the Americas. The agency contributes to the enhancement of political dialogue and cooperation projects in Latin America and the Caribbean, facilitating the development of a regional identity and positions of Latin American and Caribbean integration and development on common issues.

To understand the current S&T policy framework and mechanisms for coordination and collaboration between EU, Latin America and the Caribbean countries, it is necessary to look back to the recent history of the relationship these two regions have had. To that end we present a timeline in order to make this complex relationship more didactic. This information is also important to prognosticate the EU-LAC cooperation in research and innovation in health.



Under European Economic Community (EEC)	Since the joining of Spain and Portugal to the EU until Lisbon Treaty	From Treaty of Lisbon to EU LAC Summit Madrid	Until First EU-CELAC Summit in Chile
Dialogue focused preferably on a sub-regional level. The objectives pursued improve trade cooperation. Caribbean countries under Lomé Convention enjoyed a greater bilateral cooperation	The Rome Declaration in 1990 institutionalized EU-LAC Ministerial Meetings. First Summit in Rio de Janeiro 1999 where is agreed the Bi-regional Strategic Partnership. It was agreed to create a specific space for science, technology and innovation dialogue. It was accepted the concept of EU-LAC Knowledge Area. It was agreed on including Latin America and the Caribbean as a target region in the EU Framework Programme.	S&T should be approached having in mind the knowledge triangle concept: where research policy-higher education and innovation policies have maximum synergies. EU-LAC Joint Initiative for Research and Innovation was endorsed. A Joint Cooperation Fund as a working instrument was proposed under the JIRI. To establish permanent Senior Officers Meeting (SOM) with LAC and EU representatives.	EU-LAC Foundation was announced. It will contribute to the strengthening of the EU-LAC bi-regional partnership. First SOM Brussels 2011 under JIRI: three thematic working groups, addressing priority areas of cooperation. First EU-CELAC Summit in Chile in January 2013: Roadmap for the implementation of the JIRI to contribute to building and speeding up EU-CELAC Knowledge Area. Next EU-CELAC Summit in Brussels 2015

### *From 1970's to 1985: Under the European Economic Community (EEC)*

The objectives in the first years of the bilateral cooperation pursued to improve mainly trade cooperation between Europe and Latin America as a whole. Europe also supported the sub-regional integration, social cohesion and development aid. The Caribbean countries enjoyed a greater bilateral cooperation under the Lomé Convention (1976)<sup>iii2</sup>.

<sup>ii</sup> Project partners: Instituto de Salud Carlos III (Spain), Red Iberoamericana Ministerial de Aprendizaje e Investigación en Salud (RIMAIS, The Ministry of Health of Costa Rica), Sociedad para el Fomento de la Innovación Tecnológica (INNOVATEC, Spain), Council on Health Research for Development (COHRED, Switzerland), Project Management Agency of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (DLR, Germany), Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ, Brazil), Ministerio de Ciencia y Tecnología de Argentina (MINCYT, Argentina), Agenzia per la Promozione della Ricerca Europea (APRE, Italy).

<sup>iii</sup> The first Lomé Convention entered into force in April 1976. The agreement was designed to provide a new framework for cooperation between the then EEC and ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States) countries. Two of his main features were (i) allow free of duty entrance to minerals and agricultural exporters from ACP and (ii) preferential access based on a quota system for products such as sugar and beef, competing with EEC agriculture. EEC has also committed to invest financially in ACP countries.

## *From 1986 to 2007: Since the joining of Spain and Portugal to the EU until the Lisbon Treaty.*

When Spain and Portugal joined the European Economic Community in 1986, for historical reasons, a boost in cooperation between both regions took place.

One of the main priorities of the Spanish foreign policy in the frame of the EU was LAC countries. As a result, Spain promoted the creation of the Ibero-American Community of Nations. So, in 1986, the Council of Ministers in The Hague, taking into account a Spanish initiative, entrusted the EC with a proposal about the European Community's relations with Latin America. As a result, the Council of Foreign Ministers of the European Community, held in June 1987, approved a draft document entitled "New Trends in the European Community for relations with Latin America".

Since the 1st Summit of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, held in 1990 in Rome, bilateral ministerial meetings as well as Sc&T bilateral cooperation became institutionalized as a priority area to work on. But it was in the Rio de Janeiro Summit in 1999 where the Heads of State and Government of both regions first met. It was decided to create a bi-regional strategic partnership with a definition of priorities in order to act in a coordinated manner in political, social, scientific, cultural and economic areas. "*From the beginning, cooperation on knowledge and innovation were introduced into the agenda of political dialogue between the two regions at the highest level*"<sup>3</sup>.

Two relevant SOM in the field of S&T were organized following the Rio Summit and as groundwork to the next Heads of State Summit scheduled to take place in Madrid in 2002 - the first one took place in Lisbon on June 2000 and the second in Bruges on December 2001. Their objective was to establish a political dialogue in S&T and to promote joint research and technological development to benefit the sustainable and equitable development of both regions. There was recognition of the need to develop a common vision for bi-regional cooperation. Six priority areas of cooperation were agreed: promoting healthy societies and life quality; information society; competitive growth in the global environment; sustainable development and urbanization; cultural, crosscutting issues – including human resource development, intellectual property rights, and ethical issues<sup>2</sup>.

During the S&T Ministerial Summit on March 2002 in Brasilia, participants agreed on a shared vision for bi-regional S&T cooperation as well as to move forward a specific space for EU LAC S&T Cooperation: the EU LAC Knowledge Area<sup>2</sup>. The design and implementation of this concept was further developed during the following Head of States Summits, held in Madrid (2002) and Guadalajara (2004): the importance of cooperation across the entire knowledge spectrum, from education and science to technology and innovation, was confirmed; and LAC became a target region for European R&D financing programmes. The fourth Head of States Summit, held in 2006, in Vienna, Austria recommended to widen S&T dialogue from a predominantly bilateral to a bi-regional context.

In 2006, this structure was reinforced by the creation of a Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EUROLAT), a forum for consultation, control and monitoring. It approves the commitments reached at the Summit of Heads of State and proposes subjects of mutual interest. In this inter-regional parliamentary institution, there are several thematic standing committees. It is composed of 150 Members, 75 for each region, and gathers for annual meetings.

## *From the Treaty of Lisbon to the Summit of Madrid: 2007- 2010.*

The Treaty of Lisbon was signed by representatives of all member states of the EU on 13th December 2007, replacing the European Constitution after the failed constitutional treaty of 2004. The Lisbon Treaty established that the EU would support, coordinate and provide the actions of the Member States, after the confirmation that research policy of the Member States and the EU were moving in parallel without constituting a coherent whole. With this treaty, the EU also acquires legal personality to sign international agreements at community level, providing the legal basis for community as well as third parties partnerships.

No doubt the sixth Summit in 2010, in Madrid, within the EU Presidency of Spain meant an important step forward in the promotion of the social and economic dimensions of the S&T programmes. Its central theme was "Towards a new phase of the bi-regional association: innovation and technology for sustainable development and social inclusion".

The role of science in working for social cohesion and combating poverty and exclusion was debated. The concept of Research on Science and Technology moves towards a wider Research, Technology, Development and Innovation concept (RTD&I). Two important points were raised in this meeting: S&T should be approached having in mind the knowledge triangle concept where research policy should have the maximum synergy with higher education and innovation policies, promoting at the same time a closer relationship with other sectorial policies; and it should incorporate the private sector to the bi-regional programmes and consequently must incorporate objectives of innovation as a major driving force.

One of the highlights of the Summit was the approval of the EU-LAC Joint Initiative for Research and Innovation (JIRI), presented by the S&T SOM that had taken place months before in Buenos Aires. The JIRI was designed to advance on the path to the EU-LAC Knowledge Area. This initiative should be pursued through: *“i) improving cooperation in research and innovation; ii) strengthening scientific and technological capacities, and infrastructures; iii) enabling sustainable research, innovation and knowledge sharing taking into account the contribution of ancestral and traditional knowledge; iv) boosting the use of new technologies and technology transfer underpinning sustainable socio-economic development and v) fostering cooperation between both regions as regards the digital economy and the reduction of the digital divide for improving competitiveness while making social inclusion a cross-cutting issue”*<sup>4</sup>. Also, the high-level dialogue was expected to be a permanent feature of the relationship. It was stated so in order to ease the implementation process and to secure the continuity of the approved agreements.

In the Madrid Declaration the creation of the European Union-Latin America and Caribbean (EU-LAC) Foundation was announced. The EU-LAC Foundation’s aim is to encourage further mutual knowledge, understanding and visibility between both regions. Launching activities and fostering new networking opportunities among civil society actors are the basis of the Foundation’s tasks. This new institution will be financially supported by EU-LAC countries and the European Commission. The European Commission is contributing to the Foundation with €3 million euros up to 2013<sup>5</sup>.

### *From the Madrid Summit onwards: 2010 -*

In March 2011, senior officials met in Brussels for the first time under the auspices of the EU-LAC JIRI. The meeting focused on ways to enhance cooperation in pilot activities that reflect the key challenges for Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. Working groups were established to deal with these challenges: a) developing bio-economy to ensure food security; b) confronting climate change and biodiversity, energy, and c) exploring the rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICT), and d) to cross analyse the financing and to identify best collaborative practices based on past experience<sup>6</sup>.

The first EU-CELAC Head of States Summit, held in Santiago, Chile, in 2013 welcomed the common objectives and joint activities identified by the JIRI but stressed the importance of building the EU-CELAC Knowledge Area.

## **The existing instruments for EU-LAC S&T relationship and main areas of cooperation**

Considering the above mentioned scenario and in order to put into practice the cooperation between the two regions, especially following the precepts of building an EU-LAC Knowledge Area under the umbrella of the EU-LAC JIRI, the 7th Framework Programme (7FP) of the EU emerges as a key instrument in achieving this goal.

Shortly, the Framework Programme (FP) is a funding programme created by the EU with the purpose of supporting and boosting research and knowledge in the region. Its specific objectives and actions vary between funding periods. The first FP was implemented in September 1984 and covered the period from 1984 to 1987. Currently the seventh edition is in force and covers the period 2007 to 2013.

Some substantial changes and enhancements have occurred in the approach to international cooperation from the Sixth to the Seventh Framework Programme. The latest edition incorporates international research cooperation throughout the FP, comprising both geographical and thematic focus. International cooperation is an essential strategy in each of the specific programmes (Cooperation, Ideas, People and Capacities) giving the possibility of joint initiatives among European institutions and third countries<sup>7</sup>.

The FP7 Capacities Programme is intended to increase research and innovation capacities throughout Europe and to guarantee the necessary tools to maximise the competitiveness and quality of European research and innovation. Furthermore, this specific programme aims at complementing the Cooperation Programme. In this sense, the main activities of international cooperation within the Capacities Programme are:

(i) The INCONET Projects that are designed to support bi-regional dialogues in order to promote and structure the participation of third countries in the activities of FP7. Also, these projects aim to promote regional integration as well as identification and prioritization of common research areas of mutual interest. Finally, but not less important, the INCONET projects ease the use of common identified research areas and the monitoring of performance and impacts of S&T international cooperation in all specific programmes of FP7<sup>8</sup>. Table 1 lists the existing INCONET projects in 2013.

Table 1

**Latin America and Caribbean countries involved in INCONET Projects**

IncoNet in LAC countries	Starting date	Duration (months)	Coordinating country	Number of countries involved	
				LAC	Europe
EULARINET*	March 2008	48	Spain	7	8
EUCARINET**	April 2010	48	Italy	6	5
ENLACE***	November 2009	48	Italy	7	6
ALCUENET****	December 2012	48	Argentina	10	8

**Source:** EU-LAC Health State of Play Analysis, internal document. Data from November 2010

\*European Union - Latin American Research and Innovation NETWORKS

\*\*Fostering European Union - Caribbean Research and Innovation NETWORKS

\*\*\*Enhancing Scientific Cooperation between the European Union and Central America

\*\*\*\*Latin America, Caribbean and European Union Network on Research and Innovation

(ii) Bilateral projects that encourage coordination for the enhancement and development of S&T partnerships and concentrate on improving the process of providing information on programmes and funding designed to promote cooperation of third countries in the FP7. They also aim to improve the identification and demonstration of reciprocal interest and profit in S&T cooperation between the EU and third countries. Ultimately, to share best practices through joint forums, featuring state of the art and potential scenarios for cooperation in certain fields<sup>9</sup>.

In order to broaden and deepen the cooperation between the two regions, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Mexico established research liaison offices<sup>iv</sup> with the European Commission Research Programmes. Their specific goals are aimed to facilitating S&T cooperation between the two regions through the promotion of the participation of LAC countries especially in the FP7. Also by establishing an enduring dialogue between researchers from both regions. The offices collaborate to ease the EU-LAC S&T cooperation – by promoting LAC participation in European research programmes, to increase awareness among European researchers on the interest to cooperate with Latin American researchers and, also, to inform European researchers about the existence of new high-qualified research opportunities in the LAC region.

It is noteworthy that besides internal issues regarding the level of research development in S&T of the four countries mentioned above, the efforts also referred resulted in a strong concentration of bilateral cooperation agreements in S&T in these countries (Table 2). The main scopes covered by these agreements are health, environment, ICT and nanotechnology.

Table 2

**Bilateral S&T cooperation agreements between EU and LAC countries – all types of scientific and technical cooperation (2010)**

LAC countries with EU countries		EU countries with LAC countries	
Brazil	23	France	29
Mexico	22	Germany	17
Argentina	13	Spain	10
Chile	13	Belgium	6
Colombia	7	Italy	5
Peru	3	Finland	3
Ecuador	2	Hungary	3
Costa Rica	1	Switzerland	3
Dominican Republic	1	Czech Republic	2
		Portugal	2
		Slovenia	2
		UK	1
		Bulgaria	1
		Poland	1

**Source:** EU-LAC Health State of Play Analysis, internal document. Data from November 2010

<sup>iv</sup> The liaison offices are as follows: ABEST II: Oficina Enlace Argentina Unión Europea en Ciencia Tecnología e Innovación; B.Bice: Bureau Brasileiro para Ampliação da Cooperação Internacional com a União Europeia; CHIEP: Chilean European Portal and UEMEXCYT: Oficina de Cooperación México y Unión Europea en Ciencia.

The specific programme on Cooperation in FP7 supports research activities conducted jointly by different research institutions through transnational cooperation. The programme wants to achieve or consolidate European leadership in scientific and technological fields. FP7 allocates €32.4 billion (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2008f) for the Cooperation Programme, of which €6.1 billion are available to the Health Theme<sup>10</sup>.

ERA-NET structures are an implementation instrument to be used mostly in the context of the Cooperation Programme, but also the Capacities Programme<sup>11</sup>. ERA-Net and ERA-Net Plus projects that aim to strengthen cooperation and coordination of research programmes developed at national or regional level in the Member States or Associated States by networking of research programmes, through their mutual opening and the development and implementation of joint activities. These projects potentially lead to a better understanding of R&D procedures in countries outside the EU, new opportunities for cooperative research and new procedures. The release of joint calls for proposals co-financed by national funds increase synergies and the impact of ongoing bilateral S&T cooperation between EU Member States and third countries. For its part, the ERA-NET Plus enables the EC to offer an incentive to the organization of joint calls between national or regional research programs by complementing joint transnational funds with EC resources<sup>12</sup>.

In this sense, as mentioned before, international cooperation is a significant characteristic of FP7 and a vital part of the Health Theme. Projects consortia in all areas related to this theme are encouraged to embrace organizations from International Cooperation Partner Countries (ICPC) and countries with scientific and technological cooperation agreements with the EU<sup>10</sup>.

Regarding the participation of LAC countries in the health theme in the FP7, the European Commission contributed more than € 14 million in 2012, as shown in Table 3.

*Table 3*

**LAC countries' participation in the Health Theme in the FP7 (2012)**

Country	Number of Grant Holders	of Grant	EC Contribution (EUR Million)
Brazil	20		4,30
Argentina	11		2,37
Colombia	9		1,96
Peru	4		1,10
Mexico	5		0,85
Bolivia	4		0,79
Ecuador	3		0,73
Nicaragua	2		0,57
Uruguay	3		0,44
Chile	4		0,41
Other countries	6	7	1,06
<b>Total LAC</b>	<b>72</b>		<b>14,58</b>

**Source:** EU-LAC Health State of Play Analysis, internal document. Data from November 2010

In another sense and generally speaking, to get an idea of the importance of FP7 for research cooperation between the EU and LAC countries, Table 4 shows the number of grants agreements signed with LAC and the amount of the European Commission's contribution to these grants holders. Again, it is interesting that the same four countries with the liaison offices are those that have the largest number of grants signed.

Table 4

**EC Contribution to FP7 Grant Holders in LAC Countries**

Country	EC Contribution to FP7 Grant Holders in Million EUR	Nb. Signed Grants	% LAC Countries*
Brazil	23,41	125	33,87
Argentina	10,32	76	14,93
Mexico	8,04	59	11,63
Chile	4,64	40	6,71
Colombia	4,1	32	5,93
Costa Rica	3,41	18	4,93
Peru	2,7	16	3,91
Uruguay	2,65	24	3,83
Ecuador	2,3	14	3,33
Bolivia	2	11	2,89
Other countries			8,04
<b>LAC</b>	<b>69,12</b>		<b>100,00</b>

\* % of EC Contribution to FP7 Grant Holders in Million EUR

Source: EU-LAC Health State of Play Analysis, internal document. Data from November 2010

## Future relations between EU and LAC in science, technology, research and innovation in health

From 2014 on, Europe will have a new framework towards the promotion of research and innovation – the Horizon 2020 Programme<sup>13</sup>. It brings together three existing programs: the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Development (FP7), the Framework Programme for Competitiveness and Innovation (CIP) and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). The Programme has three main objectives: scientific excellence, industry leadership and the development of European international cooperation to help solving societal global challenges. One of the challenges targeted is “*Societal Challenges in Health, Demographic Change and Wellbeing*” where the Programme aims to improve the lifelong health and wellbeing of all, acknowledging demographic change, maintaining an economically sustainable healthcare system and creating the potential for growth<sup>14</sup>.

The EU aims to improve its attractiveness, to support foreign policy and sustainable development, to strength synergies in S&T by facilitating the appropriation of methods, techniques, procedures and knowledge by the countries and finally articulate intelligently all measures from the local-regional to European level. For achieving more efficiency, Horizon 2020 will be open to all forms of cooperation, which will enhance cooperation projects and create synergies between the global framework and the local context.

In this context, the JIRI is expected to provide a better framework that should increase the EU-LAC cooperation in health research. Taking into account the significant differences existing in this field among LAC countries, this cooperation will have to consider variable geometry schemes – where countries will participate according to their interests and capacities.

The thematic priorities selected - which include health - will be implemented based on a set of pre-existing and new actions that will combine targeted and horizontal instruments. The main strategy expected to be used is the creation of a Joint Cooperation Fund which would permit the launching of variable geometry-based actions within the thematic priorities agreed by countries of both regions. Regarding funding commitments, it has been agreed that shared costs taking into account mutual interests and capacities between LAC and EU countries should be the basis for launching new actions under variable geometry schemes<sup>15</sup> in addition to the EU support. The use of the new financial instrument, the Latin America Investment Facility<sup>v</sup> (LAIF), has been considered particularly attractive for that purpose. Multilateral financial institutions active in the region, such as the World Bank (WB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), have also included S&T in their credit lines.

<sup>v</sup> The Latin America Investment Facility (LAIF) is a financing mechanism aiming at mixing grants (non refundable financial contributions from the European Commission and other donors) with loans of multilateral or bilateral public European Development Finance Institutions and Regional Latin American Banks([http://ec.europa.eu/eupeaid/where/latin-america/regional-cooperation/laif/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/eupeaid/where/latin-america/regional-cooperation/laif/index_en.htm))



In that sense, *the First Latin America and the Caribbean and European Union Academic Summit* held last 22 and 23 of January 2013 expressed the strong will of universities, cooperation networks, and academics from both regions to enhance their work through convergence and coordination. In the summit the development of a "Euro-Latin American space for higher education, science, technology and innovation" was considered a priority including promoting integration of scientific research and innovation systems<sup>16</sup>.

There are as well other initiatives which intend to promote the discussion and analysis on how to best coordinate health research policies and funding between EU and LAC; a clear example is the project EU-LAC Health (*"Defining a Roadmap for Cooperative Health Research between the EU and Latin America-Caribbean Countries: a Policy Oriented Approach"*) that was set up in 2011, co-funded by the European Commission under the FP7 and developed by European and Latin American partners. *"The EU-LAC bi-regional collaboration in the field of health research stands as a very broad and complex issue that involves many stakeholders from different political and socio-economic contexts, including the EU as a whole, each Member State and the variety of LAC countries, and touches different political agendas such as research, but sometimes also development cooperation and external relations"*<sup>17</sup>. The roadmap will provide policy-makers and R&D funding bodies with new insights on how to best coordinate and fund cooperative health research between the two regions.

Health has been included as a priority area by the JIRI and a new SOM working group has been created for Health Research, chaired by Spain and Brazil. During the last EU-LAC S&T SOM<sup>18</sup> it was established that EU-LAC Health, as a platform project involving partners from both regions, could serve as a potential precursor for an additional thematic bi-regional working group. In order to do that, mechanisms will be explored to open participation to new partners. A Concept Note for EU-LAC S&T SOM was presented by EU-LAC Health as a proposal and generally supported. The proposal focused on health as an area of *"great potential for EU-LAC cooperation"*. This potential is determined by the presence in both regions of capacities to address diseases of common interest, and the likelihood of multiplying their performance by collaborating with each other and coordinating their initiatives.

The EU-LAC Health Project will support the work of the future EU-LAC S&T SOM Health Working Group through the project's framework in order to achieve a greater coherence and coordination between different funding programmes and – hopefully – policies on S&T and development from the EU Member States and LAC countries. Furthermore, it is expected to explore the possibility for creating a Body that coordinates national and international health R&D funding in the region and with the EU.

## Final Comments

The EU-LAC relationship has changed substantially over the last 20 years. Since the first Head of States Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1999, the political context has stabilized and the institutional ground has been set for dialog and cooperation between the regions.

Nevertheless, LAC partners became relatively more important from the scientific and economic point of view. Today more than ever, the bi-regional relationship requires translating, in concrete terms, the concept of mutual interest, and it is expected that the strategic partnership will add value to both regions.

Science, technology and innovation have played an increasingly important place in this dialogue, several instances have been created for joint action, especially the EU-LAC Knowledge Area and the JIRI. So far the funding and the definition of what will be funded have come primarily from Europe, but the understandings are towards the development of a fund formed from the contribution of several partners that will ballast a definition of joint priorities.

The new recently working group on Health will bring a new vision and opportunities for development and cooperation in this area. This new working group will be co-chaired by Spain and Brazil with the support of the EU-LAC-Health coordination action. Health research is an ongoing and relevant topic for both regions<sup>19</sup>. EULAC HEALTH will continue to work in supporting the activities that derive from this group, and the synergy will for sure, have positive developments for our peoples.

Finally, it is important to draw attention to the role and pro-activity of the European Union in order to promote the bi-regional cooperation in science and technology. As seen in this article, all steps toward a consolidation of relations between the two regions have been given by the European Union. LAC countries have shown interest in this dialogue as it is leveraged by the EU. Although LAC and EU countries do not move through a similar path of integration and organization, undoubtedly there would be room for a more consistent performance from LAC countries to enhance the ties of S&T cooperation, especially in health, in areas they consider priorities. Therefore, at the end of this article, we highlight the need for improving the LAC internal dialogue to strengthen and coordinate cooperation in science and technology with the European Union.

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