

# EU–CELAC relations ahead of the 2025 summit

## SUMMARY

After a political lull of almost a decade, the European Union (EU) and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) relaunched their strategic partnership in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 27 October 2022. The 2022–2023 bi-regional roadmap, together with the EU's joint communication of 7 June 2023 on a new agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), prepared the ground for the successful third EU–CELAC summit that took place in Brussels on 17 and 18 July 2023 under the Spanish Presidency of the Council.

Two years later, the partners are preparing for the next EU–CELAC summit, due to take place in Santa Marta, Colombia, on 9 and 10 November 2025. This leaders' meeting is deemed crucial for the EU to deepen its commitment to LAC and advance the strategic partnership.

From the EU's perspective, the Latin American region is key – not only politically, given the recent geopolitical challenges, and economically, because of its great potential as a market for industrial products, but also as a stable supplier of renewable energy sources and critical minerals such as lithium and copper that are crucial for the transformation of the global economy.

Geopolitical developments have made it all the more urgent to intensify relations between the EU and CELAC: China has become a dominant player in LAC and is today a strong competitor for the EU and the United States (US). The US policy approach towards LAC under President Donald Trump is strained; this could be an opportunity for the EU to present itself as a reliable partner to the region. The promotion of inclusive and, in particular, mutually beneficial agreements on trade and on raw materials could be an advantage for the EU over its competitors.

The summit in Santa Marta provides a chance to elevate the EU–CELAC relationship to the next level. The main tasks will include deepening and concretising the bi-regional relations on issues such as trade and investment and the green and digital transitions, and further strengthening cooperation on other issues such as the fight against organised crime.

A litmus test for the strategic partnership will also be whether the partners manage to finalise the two key pending international agreements with Mexico and Mercosur respectively.



## IN THIS BRIEFING

- Strategic partners
- 2023 EU–CELAC summit
- Geopolitical trends: A push factor for strengthening EU–CELAC ties
- EU–LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda and trade relations
- Outlook: The 2025 EU–CELAC summit and persisting challenges



## Strategic partners

A **strategic partnership** has linked the EU and Latin America since their first summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1999. In 2010, 33 Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) countries decided to merge the Rio Group and the Summit of Latin America and the Caribbean on Development and Cooperation (CALC) into one forum: the **Community of Latin American and Caribbean States** (CELAC). Since then, CELAC has been the EU's counterpart in the bi-regional partnership process. EU and CELAC consider themselves natural partners, linked by strong historical, cultural and economic ties. With over 1 billion people, CELAC and the EU together represent 14 % of the world's population, 21 % of global gross domestic product (GDP), and one-third of United Nations (UN) membership. The partnership is a political process that has evolved over the years, promoting political dialogue, cooperation, trade and investment. **Recent examples** of EU–CELAC cooperation are the [EU–CELAC Digital Alliance](#) (14 March 2023), the increased [cooperation on narcotic drugs](#) (22 February 2024) and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on [integrated disaster risk management](#) (15 May 2024).

The principal forums for dialogue and cooperation are the **EU–CELAC summits**. The summits strengthen links between the two regions at the highest level, and address issues on the bi-regional and international agendas. Debates have focused on topics such as **democracy and human rights; fighting poverty; promoting social cohesion, innovation and technology; trade and investment; and the environment and climate change**. Overall, [nine summits](#) between the EU and Latin America took place from 1999 to 2023. However, [experts](#) point out that, particularly in the last decade, relations between the EU and the LAC countries have lost intensity and relevance.

In addition to the region-to-region dimension, political dialogue, cooperation and particularly trade between the EU and LAC countries take place at the **sub-regional level**, for instance in the Andean Community of Nations (CAN), Mercosur, CARIFORUM, and the Central American Integration System (SICA). In its approach towards the region, the EU has pursued a [strategy](#) of promoting sub-regional integration initiatives, particularly through the conclusion of trade agreements (e.g. the free trade association with the Andean countries Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, or the EU–Central America Association Agreement).

The EU's **bilateral relations** with LAC countries are equally important: **Mexico and Brazil**, for example, are strategic EU partners. Both countries are G20 members, and Mexico is additionally a member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Brazil, which holds the [BRICS](#) presidency in 2025, [announced](#) it would also host the EU–Brazil summit in 2025. On the bilateral level, association agreements (Chile and Mexico) and many framework agreements, MoUs, initiatives and programmes are in place through which the EU tries to deepen its relations with LAC countries, such as the recent **EU partnerships on sustainable raw materials value chains** with [Argentina](#) and [Chile](#) (2023).

## 2023 EU–CELAC summit

After a political lull of almost 10 years, the EU–CELAC foreign ministers [relaunched](#) the high-level political dialogue between the two regions and the **2022–2023 roadmap for reviving the bi-regional partnership** in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on 27 October 2022. The roadmap, together with the EU's [joint communication](#) of 7 June 2023 on a **new agenda for LAC**, prepared the ground for the third EU–CELAC summit. The meeting of heads of state and government from the two regions took place in Brussels on 17 and 18 July 2023 under the **Spanish Presidency of the Council**. The fact that it was the **first summit in eight years** led former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP) Josep Borrell to the [conclusion](#) that the partnership has been 'taken for granted, or even neglected'.

During the [2023 EU–CELAC summit](#), leaders addressed a series of topics, including enhanced cooperation in multilateral forums, global peace and stability, trade and investment, economic recovery, efforts to combat climate change, research and innovation, and justice and security for

citizens. As positions differed prior to the summit, particularly with regard to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and Europe's colonial responsibility in Latin America, intense diplomatic negotiations were necessary in order for all countries (except Nicaragua) to endorse the **final declaration**, with [41 paragraphs](#) touching on a series of issues on which the two regions agreed to cooperate. One of the most significant results at the regional level was the [launch](#) of the **Global Gateway Investment Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean (GGIA)**. The EU pledged to invest €45 billion in projects in the region until 2027 (see next section). The summit also provided an opportunity to advance the EU's bilateral relations with some LAC countries – for instance, the signature of MoUs with Ecuador, El Salvador and Honduras on climate change and the digital agenda, and with Argentina and Uruguay on clean and renewable energy cooperation. Conversely, the summit did not provide decisive impetus for the envisaged trade agreements, in particular with Mercosur. Leaders underlined their desire for greater ongoing collaboration, with the pledge to hold an EU–CELAC summit every two years. The **EU–CELAC Roadmap 2023–2025**, which was adopted during the summit, [comprises](#) several events between the two regions that should pave the way for the **fourth EU–CELAC summit** scheduled to take place in **Santa Marta, Colombia**, on 9 and 10 November 2025. Before the summit, the Euro–Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat) will hold its 16th meeting in Lima, Peru, from 1 to 3 June 2025 (see Box 1).

#### Box 1 – Euro–Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat)

EuroLat is the parliamentary dimension of the EU–CELAC strategic partnership, where Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and Latin American parliamentarians engage in open dialogue on the challenges facing both regions.

The most recent plenary session took place in Madrid, Spain, from 24 to 27 July, following the 2023 EU–CELAC summit. Some of the topics discussed included the fight against hate speech, the regulation of digital platforms, the education and health challenges posed by COVID-19, access to water, and the fight against organised crime.

The 16th EuroLat meeting in Lima, Peru, from 1 to 3 June 2025 will provide an opportunity to further strengthen the parliamentary dimension of bi-regional relations. As the meeting is taking place a couple of months ahead of the 2025 EU–CELAC Summit, the assembly may have the chance to address important topics in a timely manner and have them fed into the forthcoming leaders' meeting.

Source: European Parliament, [EuroLat](#), web portal.

As a follow-up to the 2023 summit and in preparation of the 2025 summit, an [informal meeting](#) of the **foreign ministers of the EU and CELAC** took place **on the sidelines of the 79th UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New York** on 26 September 2024. The meeting was co-chaired by the then HR/VP, Josep Borrell, and Honduras's Secretary of State, Eduardo Enrique Reina García, acting as pro tempore chair of CELAC. Participants included members of the enlarged CELAC troika – Colombia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Grenada – along with foreign ministers and representatives from CELAC countries and EU Member States. According to the European External Action Service (EEAS), ministers welcomed the implementation of initiatives from the EU–CELAC Roadmap 2023–2025, including the [launch](#) of a permanent consultation mechanism on the EU–CELAC partnership in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, in May 2025. The CELAC troika is composed by the past, current and forthcoming pro tempore presidencies of CELAC, and includes a member state of the Caribbean Community

(CARICOM), represented by the country exercising its pro tempore presidency. In addition, ministers discussed the strengthening of trade and investment ties and the implementation of the EU–LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda.

## Geopolitical trends: A push factor for strengthening EU–CELAC ties

The EU is facing major political and economic challenges, stemming from what has been described as the biggest **transformation of the geopolitical landscape** since the end of the Cold War. Russia's

war of aggression against Ukraine has unhinged Europe's security architecture; divergences in several areas have led to doubts about the durability of EU-US transatlantic relations; and democratic and authoritarian powers actively challenge the international rules-based order, multilateral organisations and democratic institutions. Moreover, increasing protectionism and trade wars are hampering both trade and investment, and economic growth. In his second presidency, US President Trump is creating further uncertainty, among Western democracies in particular. In addition, the global climate crisis and its implications are looming over all of the above, which seems to make a transformation of the global economy inevitable. If the EU wants to address these challenges successfully, observers agree that the EU needs to **foster relations with existing and new like-minded partners**. Against this backdrop, the LAC region is becoming increasingly important for the EU.

## Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine

One of the reasons for the EU's renewed interest in Latin America is **Russia's war against Ukraine**. In its attempt to foster alliances in order to isolate Russia on the global scene, relations with Latin America have moved up on the EU's external agenda since 2022. However, Russia has also been seeking – with some success – to foster relations with countries in the Global South, placing a greater emphasis on LAC (and Africa). In 2023, Russia updated its **2016 Foreign Policy Concept**, stressing Moscow's [increased focus on LAC](#). From an economic perspective, Russia's footprint in the region is limited: Russia's trade in goods with LAC countries accounts for a mere 2 % of its global trade. Nevertheless, Russia has gained political leverage through its economic ties, particularly owing to key LAC countries' reliance on Russian fertilisers and diesel. In addition to political and economic relations, Russia has signed several military cooperation agreements with Latin American countries over the past two decades. Russia's traditional allies in LAC are three authoritarian regimes: **Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela**. Ultimately, Russia is also trying to strengthen relations with other countries beyond its traditional allies, particularly with **Bolivia, Brazil and El Salvador**. Alongside political, economic and military ties, Russia employs disinformation campaigns to undermine liberal democracies and promote Russian propaganda narratives.

**UNGA** has adopted several resolutions relating to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. In this context, the LAC region has proven to be a reliable partner for the West, with LAC states voting by a clear majority in favour of the UN resolutions on Ukraine. By way of comparison, the majority (52 %) of African states either abstained from voting, or effectively abstained by not attending – despite the fact that the EU is one of the largest donors in Africa. However, many LAC countries ultimately prefer to adopt a **neutral position** on Russia. This has been reflected, for instance, in the outcome of the 2023 EU–CELAC summit. The final declaration had been watered down regarding Russia's war against Ukraine. Indeed, the text did not even mention Russia. [Experts](#) explain this increasingly neutral position with reference to the **principle of non-intervention** in the affairs of another country, which has deep roots in Latin America. Key LAC countries – such as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico – but also important members of BRICS (to which Brazil belongs) – such as China and India – neither apply sanctions against Russia nor respond positively to the Western alliance's call to provide weapons to Ukraine.

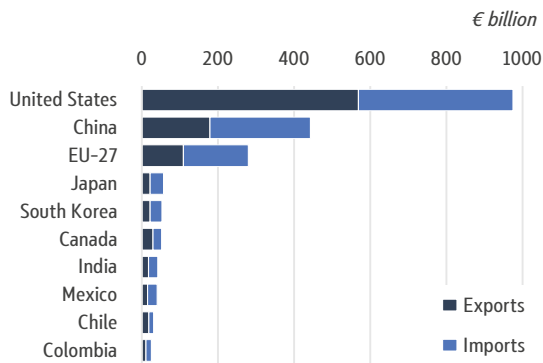
## China's growing role in Latin America

Another factor underpinning the EU's need to deepen its relations with LAC further is [China's increasing presence](#) in the region. Within just two decades, China has transformed from an insignificant player to a **dominant economic force in Latin America**, alongside the US and the EU (see Figure 1 below). According to the World Economic Forum, Latin America's bilateral trade in goods with China grew 26-fold, from US\$12 billion in 2000 to US\$315 billion in 2020, and is expected to more than double by 2035, to over US\$700 billion. According to China, the trade volume with the region in 2024 equalled \$518.4 billion. By way of comparison, the EU's total trade (goods and services) is worth €395 billion. China is already South America's top trading partner, and predictions suggest that, by 2035, China may even overtake the US as the most important trading partner in the



entire LAC region. China currently has four bilateral free trade agreements in place (with Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Peru), and aims to strengthen its trade network further. In 2016, China [published](#) an update of its **policy paper on LAC**, highlighting the Chinese trade and economic strategy for the region.

Figure 1 – Latin America's main trade partners in 2023 (€ billion)



Data source: [International Monetary Fund](#); graphic by Györgyi Mácsai, EPRS.

The country's economic engagement in Latin America is based on four pillars: (i) foreign direct investment (FDI); (ii) official lending; (iii) trade; and (iv) infrastructure. In 2018, China extended its vast global infrastructure development strategy – the **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)** – to Latin America; 22 LAC states have signed on to it. A recent [example](#) of Chinese **strategic investment in the region** is the Chancay megaport in Peru, which could be a game-changer in Latin American logistics, as it will **reroute trade between Latin America and Asia**, bypassing the Atlantic and the Panama Canal. In its investment strategy towards LAC, China has recently been focusing more strongly on industries it describes as 'new infrastructure'. This term encompasses,

among other aspects, telecommunications, critical raw material production and the energy transition. Consequently, China has become a **strong competitor for the EU in the race for the raw materials** that are crucial for the transformation of the global economy. It is estimated that, since 2018, Chinese companies have [invested](#) over US\$16 billion in South American lithium projects.

In parallel to maintaining economic ties with LAC, China is also **enhancing its political relationship** with the region, primarily through the **China–CELAC forum**. Analysts point out that China's outreach towards the region also supports its broader geopolitical strategic objectives, particularly the **annexation of Taiwan**. By deepening economic dependencies and investments, China has reshaped the region's political orientation. Considering the LAC countries' level of recognition of the one-China policy, China's political rapprochement with the region may be regarded as rather successful. While, in 2017, 18 out of the 33 LAC countries still recognised Taiwan's sovereignty, today only seven of these countries maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan (Belize, Guatemala, Haiti, Paraguay, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines).

At the recent **China–CELAC forum that took place in Beijing on 13 May 2025**, China [committed](#) to increasing further its economic and geopolitical engagement with LAC. The presidents of three key Latin American states (the President of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva; the President of Colombia, Gustavo Petro; and the President of Chile, Gabriel Boric) participated in the forum, highlighting with their presence the importance their respective countries attach to relations with China. President Xi Jinping, in turn, by announcing a US\$9 billion yuan-denominated credit line and fresh infrastructure investments for the region, reconfirmed China's role as a development financier in LAC, and showed that he aims to position the **yuan as an alternative** to the US dollar-dominated economy. During the high-level meeting, Colombia also formally agreed to sign up to the BRI.

## The Trump administration's policy towards LAC

One result of **Donald Trump's first presidency** (2017–2021) was an [increase](#) in China's presence in LAC, as Trump's hard-line approach towards the region drove certain governments closer to China. Specifically, Mexico benefited from Trump's protectionist trade policy and trade war against China. Companies seeking to avoid tariffs by diversifying production out of China saw Mexico as a good option thanks to its affordable labour, decent infrastructure and, most importantly, its free-trade

agreement with the US. Consequently, China's FDI flows into Mexico grew significantly, from US\$38 million in 2011 to US\$386 million in 2021. Looking at the US's recent activities towards LAC, a similar scenario may possibly repeat itself. Some [experts](#) even describe President Trump's agenda towards the region as hostile. The US administration seems to see Latin America primarily as a security threat, associating it with drug trafficking, organised crime and migration.

After only a few months in office, the Trump administration **has undertaken actions that many LAC states perceive as unfriendly**. For instance, the US has halted – and threatened to eliminate – many US foreign assistance programmes; deported migrants back to their home countries, or to 'safe' third countries in the region (in some cases, such as Colombia, even under the threat of imposing tariffs); claimed that the US would take back the [Panama Canal](#); and imposed an additional 25 % tariff on imports from Mexico. Moreover, the US has been [pressing](#) Latin American nations to downgrade relations with China. [Observers](#) point out that the US is increasingly perceived as an unreliable partner, both for governments and for private and civil society actors in Latin America. Only a few heads of state – such as Nayib Bukele in El Salvador, Javier Milei in Argentina and Daniel Noboa in Ecuador – have a positive stance towards the new US administration. Apart from the US government scoring some possible short-term successes in limiting China's influence in LAC, such as Panama's withdrawal from the BRI, expectations are that, contrary to what the US administration is aiming for, the **China-LAC relationship will continue to grow**.

## Role of LAC for the EU's economic security

From the EU's perspective, the LAC region is key – not only in political terms as a like-minded partner, and economically because of its great potential as a market for industrial products, but also as a [stable supplier](#) of **renewable energy sources and critical raw materials (CRM)**.

**Economic security** has become crucial for the EU. Both the [Letta Report](#) on the future of the single market and the [Draghi Report](#) on the future of European competitiveness emphasise the need to intensify efforts in order to secure the EU's supply of CRM. Because of its high dependency on strategic raw materials from countries such as China with which it is not strategically aligned, the EU is vulnerable to both coercion and geo-economic fragmentation. Diversifying imports of strategic raw materials is key to mastering the clean transition of Europe's economy, mitigating supply chain risks and reducing the EU's strategic dependencies. In her November 2024 [speech](#) to the European Parliament's plenary, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, announced that the new Commission's first major initiative would be a [competitiveness compass](#) (published in January 2025) in order to reinforce the EU's economic security, among other things. The key objective in the EU's economic security strategy is to ensure stable and secure supply chains, notably for CRM. This goal is also reflected in the President's [mission letter](#) to the Commissioner for Trade and Economic Security, Maroš Šefčovič, which states that the EU's trade policy should focus on the core objectives of competitiveness, security and sustainability. [Clean trade and investment partnerships](#) should bolster the EU's competitiveness and diversify supply chains, also providing a template for partnerships on CRM. In line with its CRM strategy, the EU is seeking to conclude new partnerships in the context of the EU trade and Global Gateway strategies.

Latin America is expected to play a **pivotal role in the clean energy transition and the digitalisation of the world economy**. The region is home to vast reserves of CRM, primarily **lithium and copper**. According to the 2024 US Geological Survey, Argentina, Bolivia and Chile – jointly referred to as the 'lithium triangle' – hold about half of the world's measured lithium resources. In addition, Latin America has the world's largest copper reserves. Of the 34 critical raw materials on the EU's list of CRM, 25 are extracted in Latin America. Against this backdrop, the LAC region seems like an ideal partner with whom the EU could diversify and foster secure supply chains in order to reinforce its economic security.

Since 2023, a number of steps to enhance cooperation on CRM have been taken. In 2023, the EU signed **MoUs with Argentina and Chile on sustainable raw materials value chains**. In November 2024, an interim [trade agreement with Chile](#) was ratified – the first EU trade agreement comprising

a specific chapter on energy and raw materials. In December 2024, the [EU and Mercosur](#) finally reached a political agreement on the **EU–Mercosur partnership agreement**. As Mercosur countries, primarily Argentina and Brazil, are major producers of CRM, the agreement could help the EU secure an efficient, reliable and sustainable flow of the raw materials that are critical for the clean transition and for the EU's strategic autonomy more widely.

## EU–LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda and trade relations

In an effort described as a response to China's BRI, the EU's **Global Gateway** seeks to [mobilise](#) up to €300 billion of investment in partner countries between 2021 and 2027. In addition to the comparatively small budget allocated to LAC in the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)/Global Europe (€3.4 billion), the EU proposed the above-mentioned **GGIA** during the 2023 EU–CELAC summit; the objective is to mobilise up to **€45 billion by 2027, in 130 investment projects** in the digital, energy, transport, health, education and research sectors. GGIA is delivered through Team Europe initiatives: the EU, its Member States, development financing institutions including the European Investment Bank (EIB), export credit agencies and all other public sources of funding are working together in public-private partnerships with the private sector. During the EU–CELAC summit, agreements within the Global Gateway framework were signed with Argentina, Chile and Uruguay; agreements with Costa Rica and Mexico were recently sealed during the Global Gateway Forum. Three years after the launch of the Global Gateway, the European Commission [has hailed](#) it as a success, with 84 flagship projects approved in 2023 and 134 in 2024 – from vaccine production in Rwanda to the exploitation of lithium in Bolivia. While little substantive information about the flagship projects is available, a new list of [46 Global Gateway flagship projects](#) for 2025 has been published. The list includes, in particular, several energy and digital projects in Latin America, for instance in Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru.

The [trade and investment relations](#) between the EU and LAC have proved resilient to recent global crises, with the overall trade balance shifting towards the EU over the past decade (see Box 2). The relations involve one of the world's densest trade networks, with a total **bilateral trade in goods and services** of €395 billion in 2022–2023 (+45 % since 2013).

Ultimately, the EU is attempting to strengthen its network of trade agreements with the region further.

On 9 December 2022, the [EU and Chile](#) announced the conclusion of negotiations to modernise the 2002 **EU–Chile Association Agreement**. The **EU–Chile Advanced Framework Agreement** (AFA) is accompanied by an **Interim Trade Agreement** (iTA) that contains trade and investment liberalisation provisions falling within the EU's exclusive competence. On 29 February 2024, the European Parliament greenlighted the AFA and iTA, and on 18 March 2024, the Council gave its final endorsement to the iTA, which ends the iTA's EU-level ratification. Chile's Chamber of Deputies ratified both deals on 2 September 2024. Chile's Senate ratified the agreements on 13 November 2024.

### Box 2 – EU trade relations with Latin America

- The EU has concluded association, trade or political and cooperation agreements with 27 of the 33 LAC countries.
- The EU is LAC's third largest trade partner, after the US and China.
- EU–CELAC total trade in goods (2023) amounted to €285.5 billion; EU–CELAC total trade in services (2022) was €109.5 billion.
- Total trade between the EU and CELAC has increased by 45 % since 2013.
- The EU is the leading investor in LAC, with FDI stocks at about €741 billion in 2022. Total EU investment in the LAC region matches the combined EU FDI in China, India, Japan and Russia.

Source: EEAS, [EU LAC trade: A dense network of agreements and growing exchanges](#), website, 2024.

The [EU and Mexico](#) concluded their negotiations for a modernisation of the **EU–Mexico Economic Partnership, Political Coordination and Co-operation Agreement** ('Global Agreement' or 'GA'), on 28 April 2020. On 17 January 2025, the European Commission announced the conclusion of additional negotiations. Commissioner Šefčovič stated that, after legal scrubbing and translation of the text, the Commission would submit it to the European Parliament in 2025.

On 28 June 2019, an 'agreement in principle' was reached on the trade pillar of the [EU–Mercosur Partnership Agreement](#), which also includes a political dialogue and cooperation pillar. To address concerns, parties engaged in additional negotiations between March 2023 and December 2024. On 6 December 2024, the **EU and Mercosur** reached a new agreement in principle. After legal scrubbing and translation of the text, the Commission will submit this text, too, to Parliament in the course of 2025, according to Commissioner Šefčovič. However, the future of the agreement remains in question, as several Member States, including France, have positioned themselves against the agreement.

## Outlook: The 2025 EU–CELAC summit and persisting challenges

The **fourth EU–CELAC summit** will take place in **Santa Marta, Colombia**, on 9 and 10 November 2025. The summit will be co-chaired by the President of Colombia, Gustavo Petro, in his current role as CELAC pro tempore chair, and the President of the European Council, António Costa. The EU will also be represented by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. Building on the momentum of the 2023 EU–CELAC summit, this [forthcoming leaders' meeting](#) seeks to further enhance cooperation on global challenges such as global governance, international security and climate change. Leaders will also explore new avenues for collaboration to promote peace, security and prosperity in both regions, and discuss priorities such as trade and investment, the green and digital transitions, and the joint fight against organised crime, corruption, and drug and human trafficking.

While the context for advancing the bi-regional alliance is favourable, **multiple challenges** persist on both sides of the Atlantic: LAC countries' **increasingly neutral position on Russia's war of aggression** against Ukraine; concerns regarding the possible [external impact](#) of the **EU's Green Deal legislation** (Deforestation Regulation) on, for example, exports from LAC to the EU; and the **EU's sustainability and human rights approach**. Moreover, **political instability, polarisation and regional fragmentation** shape the political landscape in many parts of Latin America, particularly the Andean region. According to Human Rights Watch, Latin America (particularly Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela) is facing some of its gravest human rights challenges in decades, and the region remains among the most unequal in the world.

[Observers](#) point out that, at a time of geopolitical upheaval, the 2025 EU–CELAC summit is crucial for the EU to deepen its commitment to LAC and present itself as a reliable partner to the region: a partner that prioritises cooperation between equals in the face of the confrontation imposed by President Trump; a partner that, unlike China, promotes **inclusive and mutually beneficial agreements on trade and cooperation on raw materials**. Through its Global Gateway initiative, the EU has the means to foster green growth, economic inclusion and resilient and sustainable value chains. However, according to experts, it is high time that outstanding **projects materialise**, in particular the **EU–Mercosur Agreement**, which has often been described as a game-changer given its significant economic potential. At a time when China is steadily expanding its influence in Latin America, prolonging uncertainty about the EU's commitment to the region could result in placing the EU on the sidelines of strategic opportunities.

In addition to trade and investment, the EU and CELAC have to advance further on other issues, such as the **fight against drugs and organised crime**, which leads to a deterioration in democracy in several LAC states. The topic is of mutual interest, as [organised crime](#) knows no borders and acts on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to their devastating effects on society and security in LAC



countries, Latin America's organised crime groups and their cooperation with European organised crime networks pose a serious threat to EU internal security, as their actions are increasingly linked to a series of crimes within the EU. Estimated organised crime profits from illicit activities, including drug trafficking, have amounted to around €139 billion a year, corresponding to 1 % of EU GDP. As many as 50 % of homicides in the EU are linked to drugs and drug trafficking.

The EU–CELAC summit in Santa Marta provides an opportunity to **elevate the relationship to the next level**. The summit's main tasks will be to deepen and concretise bi-regional relations, and to consider further strengthening cooperation on other issues. Nevertheless, the **litmus test** for the EU and Latin America will be whether the partners will finally manage to bring to life the two pending key agreements: the EU–Mercosur Partnership Agreement and the EU's modernised global agreement with Mexico.

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