



ATLANTIC
FUTURE

POLICY PAPER POLICY REPORT

16

Perspectives from Italy

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ABSTRACT

On the whole sceptical about the notion of an emerging pan-Atlantic space, Italian stakeholders converged around the necessity of strengthening the transatlantic relationship as the primary means to ensure a continued relevance on the world stage and greater conformity to EU-US norms and standards among Atlantic countries. While impossible to ignore the rising influence of Asia and China in the Atlantic, Europe and the US maintain certain margins of influence and leverage within this space. Supportive of the TTIP, stakeholders emphasised Europe's internal divisions, a lack of trust and the persistence of paternalism in North-South relations as the primary obstacles for the emergence of closer cooperation among Atlantic countries.

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ATLANTIC FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

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1. Introduction

Twenty interviews were conducted in Italy between September 2014 and February 2015 by the *Istituto Affari Internazionali* (IAI). Each interview lasted 45-90 minutes and the analysis below is drawn from the results of these as conveyed in the interview reports. While an effort was made to prioritize face-to-face interviews, in a minority of cases these were conducted over the phone or skype due to geographic distance and/or the experts' unavailability to meet with the interviewer. Contacted experts were supplied with the relevant materials relating to the Atlantic Future project ahead of time in order to familiarize themselves with the objectives and conceptual framework of the project. Before each interview, the underlining objectives of AF were again outlined by the interviewer, who then allowed time for experts to engage and enquire about any aspect of the research and/or overall methodology. While on the whole sceptical about certain components of the project, and in particular about the notion of an emerging pan-Atlantic space that is separate from the traditional EU-US relationship, interviewed stakeholders engaged openly in discussion on the various dimensions of the questionnaire and a majority expressed a sincere interest in reviewing the final deliverables of the project. The specific contents of the questionnaire was not shared with the interviewees ahead of time in order ensure spontaneous answers.

All interviewed stakeholders are of Italian nationality and chosen on the basis of their expertise and levels of exposure to developments in the Atlantic space. Contacted experts were divided according to the four categories of the project; 'security' (5 interviews), 'economics and finance' (5), 'resources and environment' (5) and 'people and institutions' (5). An effort towards age and gender balance was also made, with 5 female experts from different fields interviewed and a number of more junior experts contacted throughout (unfortunately a number of female experts were unable to participate, thereby diminishing IAI's gender balance targets). Stakeholders were drawn from a mix of professional fields, including legislators (1), Foreign Ministry officials (3), representatives from academia and think tanks (4), civil society and NGOs (2), the media (including bloggers) (3), local government (2), the private sector (3), chambers of commerce (1) and supra-national organizations (1).

Each stakeholder was asked a series of 9 mandatory questions complemented by a selection of other secondary questions tailored to their respective profile. On balance each interview was composed of 15 questions with stakeholders approaching the questionnaire from their individual professional field and geographic expertise, supplying a good cross-section of Italian/European views displaying various levels of regional focus.

2. Temporal Lens

When asked to describe how the global relevance of each Atlantic region has changed over the past twenty years, a clear majority of stakeholders agreed on the stable leadership role of the **United States (US)**. Where a loss of relevance was identified this was always expressed in a nuanced manner in relation to the increased influence of other rising powers in a multipolar global order (the 'rise of the rest', in particular but not limited to China). Since 1992 the US was described as having maintained and even increased its global role, influence and normative value in terms of setting international agendas, fostering global governance and promoting the forces of globalization. While the US can no longer be described as a hegemonic power in the global system, its normative influence as a "policy making actor" still confirms the US's relevance on the world stage. Over the next ten years, stakeholders were almost unanimous in

predicting that this US role will be maintained. Among the most cited rationales were the US's economic recovery, the Shale gas revolution, a gradual rebound of the US's manufacturing sector, positive trends of demographic growth and the implementation of Obama Care. Other indicators were the vitality of the US's service industry, telecommunications sector and broad military margin.

Turning to the relevance of the **European Union (EU)** over the past twenty years, opinions were necessarily impacted by the current financial crisis. In this respect, a majority of stakeholders expressed their opinion that the EU had gained relevance since 1992, but that in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, the European Union had experienced a certain erosion of its international role. While stakeholders noted that the EU maintains its relevance on the world stage due to its size, normative value, economic resources and skilled labour force, some expressed a view that the economic crisis has led the EU to become more inward-looking while exacerbating internal divisions between northern and southern Eurozone countries. One foreign ministry official noted that "Europe has reached its lowest point, and while the EU is still at this low-point in terms of economics, in political terms trends are slowly becoming more positive" especially as the Arab uprisings and developments in Ukraine have "forced Europe out of its shell". Overall, the EU's regulatory example, normative influence, welfare state and emphasis on the rule of law, diversity and democracy still hold important normative appeal and global impact.

On Europe's future relevance answers were almost evenly distributed between feelings of moderate pessimism and moderate optimism. One interviewee noted how it is hard to separate "wishful thinking from reality" in predicting the future of the EU as a whole. Much will naturally depend on Europe's ability to exit the crisis. Positive considerations were given with regards to the EU's size, human capital and technological expertise in the service and telecommunications sectors. Ultimately, a majority of interviewed stakeholders expressed their opinion that increased economic and political integration among Eurozone countries, combined with a renewed effort to solidify the transatlantic partnership with the United States should be considered the primary means for the EU to remain relevant on the world stage.

With regards to **Africa** a majority of stakeholders identified an increased relevance for the continent over the past twenty years, a rise that was predicted to continue in the future. Many conditioned these statements by saying that it is hard to generalize across all of Africa. There are "many Africa's" and in many respects the continent represents "the weakest link in the Atlantic" given the pervasive threat of conflict, pandemics, instability and unequal levels of development. "Africa has grown economically and in terms of security issues, but regarding its specific role on the global stage, I do not see much growth" noted a Foreign Ministry official. The most cited African countries where positive developments were highlighted were Nigeria, South Africa and Angola. Looking into the future, over the next ten years, two stakeholders mentioned that a slowdown in growth for Asia could in turn impact African trajectories of growth by diminishing investment flows into the continent as Chinese firms increase their strategic prioritization in certain sectors or geographical areas. Others pointed to the continued threat of pandemics, conflict, food security and unequal levels of development as possible sources of diminished relevance. On balance, however, such views were decidedly in the minority compared to predictions of Africa's continued rise.

Interviewees concurred that **Latin America's** relevance has increased over the past twenty years as the continent has made significant strides in the security, development and institutional realms, particularly since the 1980s. Interviewees also expressed their view that Latin American countries, with the exception of Brazil and less so Mexico, remain predominantly concerned with their domestic or regional settings while lacking

an international projection and vision. “Latin America lacks a vision of its own relevance at the international level”, noted one Italian legislator in the ‘economy and finance’ category. Latin America has “closed itself off” from the world, “its internal narrative has developed positively but its international relevance and external projection has receded”. Brazil was singled out as the one state actor which has assumed a greater international role and projection having the potential to become an “aggregating actor” in Latin America, “as its relationships with other global actors have evolved not only quantitatively but also qualitatively” according to a private sector official. An academic expert expressed his view that within Latin America, Brazil was playing a “leading role” in fostering South-South cooperation mechanisms, particularly by “promoting itself as a bridge between Latin America and Africa and also between Latin America, Europe and Africa” on issues of global governance, development practices, trade and resource extraction. A minority of interviewees did highlight serious domestic challenges, from socio-economic crises to inequality, as potentially harming Brazil’s future trajectory.

Other state actors mentioned by the respondents, were Mexico, Chile, and Venezuela. While the latter was singled out in terms of severe domestic troubles – further accentuated by the declining price of oil and the dwindling appeal of the ALBA alliance –, Chile was twice mentioned as an important Latin American state actor which however tends to “look towards Asia” rather than the Atlantic. Mexico, which one civil society stakeholder described as a “semi-vassal” of the United States, was also described as a potentially influential regional actor but less so at an Atlantic level. “Mexico is trying to promote a Mesoamerican vision for the continent” noted one think tank researcher in environmental affairs, but such a vision is not gaining much traction among other Latin American countries, which appear more interested in fostering closer ties with Europe and the United States.

When asked to predict how the relevance of Latin America will change over the course of the next ten years, interviewed stakeholders were almost equally divided between those who predicted an increase in relevance and those who believed that Latin American “had reached its peak” and that future trends would lead to a slowdown or at most the maintenance of a stable relevance on the world stage. One Foreign Ministry official noted how the high expectations for Latin America’s rise, which began over 25 years ago, have not been fulfilled in terms of political vision and international relevance. Those who predicted a relative slowdown pointed to domestic political and socio-economic challenges. More optimistic perspectives emphasised Latin America’s potential in the realm of rising living standards, domestic markets and the growing independence among States in the region in fostering their own economic and trade relationships. One interviewed stakeholder explicitly noted how Latin America’s global relevance is destined to increase as a result of certain countries such as Chile, Panama and perhaps Nicaragua positioning themselves as a “stepping stones” between the Atlantic and Asia, emphasising the important role of the Panama Canal in this regard.

3. Thematic Issues

Interviewed stakeholders were asked to identify and rank in order of importance the main trends, priorities and challenges they are experiencing in their respective fields of expertise.

3.1 Economy and Finance

A striking interest and priority for the issue of ‘growth of trade and investment flows’ was expressed, followed one step behind by the ‘negotiation of new free trade agreements’. With respect to these issues, stakeholders emphasised the importance of

trade and investment flows as a means to boost the EU's economic recovery, attract foreign direct investments and thereby also foster job creation and growth within the Eurozone. One interviewed legislator noted how "regarding trade and investment trends, those focussing on energy security are surely a priority". Turning to the issue of the negotiation of new free trade agreements, interviewed stakeholders explicitly noted the importance of the TTIP for both Europe and the United States, identifying it as a priority in their respective agendas. "The TTIP has been the answer to the emergence of the Asia-Pacific", noted one stakeholder from a regional Chamber of commerce. One stakeholder also mentioned the Fiat-Chrysler deal as an example of cooperation among private actors which should be replicated. "Transatlantic relations may become a phenomenon again depending on the markets, on the US manufacturing sector and new FTAs, specifically the TTIP" noted one representative from the private sector. On a more cautious note, two interviewed stakeholders did express concerns about the general public "mistrust" of large FTA deals, pointing to the lack of transparency in the negotiation process as a source of controversy in public opinion.

With regards to the remaining two issues, stakeholders noted a slight preference for the issue of 'new transport routes' over that of the 'construction of new infrastructures'. While two stakeholders explicitly noted that the two issues are closely interrelated, the issue of new transport routes was identified as a priority due to its closer relevance to the theme of an emerging pan-Atlantic space. In fact, new transport routes – in particular the Panama Canal and potentially the Nicaragua Gran Canal, but also airport hubs – were identified as highly relevant for all actors involved in the Atlantic (including China). One interviewed expert from the private sector noted how "transport routes are very strategic, but rarely identified as such" in international agendas. On the topic of new transport routes, one academic interviewed under the section of 'resources and the environment' noted how Latin America looks to the "EU as a model for the interconnectedness of transport routes" (particularly in terms of railways) while citing the Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America (IIRSA). The 'construction of new infrastructures' was therefore identified as holding only marginal relevance according to interviewed stakeholders, who however refrained from expressing a clear rationale for their answer. By speculating on the reasoning for this perspective, one may point to the tight budgetary constraints affecting most European countries and ultimately to the fact that big infrastructure investments in Africa and Latin America have mostly been conducted with Asian and particularly Chinese funds.

3.2 Security

Security experts displayed an overwhelming preference for identifying the threat of 'failed and fragile States' as the number one priority in their respective agendas. Stakeholders repeatedly noted their opinion that the threat of failed States represents an underlying problematic which produced symptoms that included terrorism, illicit trafficking and, albeit in a more circumscribed manner, maritime security threats. "Failed states is the most pressing problem as the other issues are many times a consequence of failed states" noted one academic expert, adding that countries in the Atlantic have "thus far failed to find a solution" to this challenge. "Crisis management through long term engagements and the building up of preventive instruments and benchmarks for progress must be pursued" noted a second interviewed stakeholder from the Italian Foreign Ministry. "The fragility of certain States goes way beyond the specific fragilities of that State" and are influenced by other issues according to a second Foreign Ministry official, who then pointed to "energy policies and fluctuations in energy prices" as one example. Other issues highlighted as being closely connected to the issue of failed States were "socio-economic inequality", the failure of State building and the transformations of society brought about by the advent of "neoliberal policies" in post-colonial States.

In particular, the threat of failed States was closely associated with the issue of terrorism and illicit trafficking as these tend to occur within a “vacuum of state authority” and consequently affect neighbouring countries due to the “transnational nature” of these threats. Stakeholders ranked terrorism in second place after failed States. One Foreign Ministry official noted that “talking about terrorism as an isolated phenomenon does not make much sense” and that security must be addressed and understood “in its wider sense and not through narrow definitions”, again pointing to the interconnectedness of the four highlighted issues in the questionnaire. In a similar fashion, illicit trafficking was identified as a third priority (albeit often ranked in second place together with terrorism and/or failed States as stakeholders appeared reluctant to separate the issues and rank them independently). The issue of maritime security was also highlighted as having a close relation to the question of failed States, but given that such issues generally are circumscribed to coast-line countries, interviewed stakeholders tended to give this issue a lower priority.

3.3 People and Institutions

The greatest consensus was gathered around the notion of ‘human rights’, which stakeholders identified as occupying a central priority “as a result of the sheer impact” these issues have on political agendas, the media and public opinion. A second rationale for the preference given to ‘human rights’, according to an interviewed academic, was the fact that a multitude of factors have a direct bearing on the issue of human rights and these include not only state and non-state actors, but also wider phenomenon such as conflict, socio-economic indicators, corruption, national resource predation, climate change and food security. A number of stakeholders identified a link between the ‘state of democracy’ in a country with the issue of ‘human rights’, but again once interviewees were asked to rank a preference, ‘human rights’ emerged as the most cited priority, followed closely by the ‘state of democracy’ and ‘migration trends’, which tended to be described as more of a “consequence” of the other issues. The rationales for this ranking largely rested on a perception that linked respect of human rights to the state of democracy in a given country, which in turn also affect migration trends. One civil society activist noted how the state of “democracy was a central factor impacting the respect of human rights and migration trends” On the issue of migration trends one interviewed Cabinet member underlined that the issue of migration was somewhat overblown (“there is more talk of migration, than migration itself”) a view that appeared to converge with the ranking given by the one interviewed journalist included in this section, the only stakeholder to accord the issue of migration a top priority (followed by human rights, state of democracy and lastly diplomatic relations).

The issue of ‘diplomatic relations’ emerged as the least prioritized issue, perhaps reflecting the fact that such relations are not precluded by any of the above issues. One interviewed Cabinet member stated that such relations are influenced by “economic trade relationships”, hinting to the fact that countries will maintain diplomatic relations independently from the state of democracy, human rights or migration trends.

3.4 Resources and Environment

Compared to the above thematic sections, questions in the field of ‘resources and environment’ did not result in clear-cut ranking preferences for any of the three issues highlighted in the questionnaire. This was largely because two out of the five interviewed stakeholders (an NGO worker and an official working in a large UN-affiliated intergovernmental institution) pointed to the interconnectedness of the issues of ‘climate change’, ‘resource depletion’ and ‘transformations of the energy sector’.

While declining to express a more precise ranking preference, these stakeholders preferred to talk in general terms of the interconnected “relevance” of these issues and their relation to other factors such as “demographic trends”, “economic inequality” and “energy demands”.

When more precise answers were given, these resulted in perspectives that closely matched the individual professional field of the remaining three interviewed stakeholders (in this case a manager from a major Italian oil company, an academic and an official affiliated with the 2015 Expo in Milan). Thus, while the manager and academic expressed a priority for the issue of ‘the transformation of the energy sector’, followed by ‘climate change’ and lastly ‘resource depletion’, the official affiliated with the Milan Expo, which focusses on food security and sustainability, expressed a clear and direct priority for the issue of ‘resource depletion’. In the latter case, the stakeholder explicitly noted the importance of “depletion, because of the food sector, which is largely able to produce enough food but is unable to distribute this food to all,” adding that “overproduction” and “waste” are also “crucial themes”. The same stakeholder then ranked “climate change” as an important issue in as much as it directly affects food security and the environment, while according transformations of the energy sector the lowest priority noting that this issue has not yet had a “huge impact on the economy, environmental and food sectors”.

Returning to the interviewed stakeholders’ from academia and from the private oil company, both explained their preference for the ‘energy sector’ issue on the basis of new technological advances (fracking, bio combustibles, hydro, wind power, solar power) and the benefits these can bring in terms of economic returns, investment opportunities (particularly for Italian and European businesses) and the environment. The Shale gas revolution in the United States and new advances in technologies were also cited as reasons for not giving a high priority to the issue of ‘resource depletion’, given that “new energy sources are continuously being discovered”. On the issue of ‘climate change’, the academic explicitly noted the importance of this in his work focussing on Latin America, where he described “climate change as severely impacting food security in Central America”. Also noted with regards to ‘climate change’ and best practices, was the fact that Europe is arguably the best placed to take the lead on these issues, which was described as having the potential to create new positive “stimuli for change” at a global level by the representative of the supranational institution.

Other issues raised by the interviewed stakeholders in this section focussed on the importance of urban planning and transport routes, factors raised by the academic who noted their relevance to the Latin American continent and the fact that Europe and the EU are in many respects looked at as “models” in these areas (particularly relating to the building of rail networks but also in terms of urban planning).

4. Norms and Values

Roughly half of the respondents claimed that shared norms or values were absent, especially if attempting to identify values that are shared in the Atlantic but not necessarily elsewhere, or not to the same degree. Any answer “would require stretching reality” one security expert claimed; “none, not socially, not politically” claimed the director of an international affairs newspaper; “we are attempting to create them” stated one think tank analyst, “at the Italian-Latin American conference we speak of shared values but I have my doubts as to whether they exist at all”.

Those respondents who were able to provide an answer and identify shared values and norms still cared to underline that these remain “aleatory”, indeed the values

identified ended up being for the most part universally recognized, albeit to different extents. “There are basic common values [...] overall those most shared are certainly democracy and the rule of law [...] although these are articulated in different ways, reflecting different visions”. Indeed the values identified most clearly as being shared and common to a certain extent to the Atlantic are those tied to democracy, the rule of law and human rights, with the latter being the most cited overall. One interviewee from the private sector noted that “ideally, we are all working towards the aim of greater respect for human rights [...] it could be said that this role is shared across the Atlantic and to a lesser degree in Asia”. A total of six respondents mentioned the relevance of human rights with some emphasising that there remain certain areas – women’s rights for example – where deep differences persist.

There was therefore a marked difficulty in identifying more specific values and norms common to the Atlantic space, but this tendency diminished somewhat when talk focused on the bilateral relationship between regions and/or countries where a greater degree of commonality was identifiable.

4.1 Regional Perspectives

A majority of stakeholders identified North America as the region with which most norms and values are shared as Italians and Europeans. These were identified as first and foremost democracy, followed by market economy, human rights and individualism, the latter, expressed one respondent from the NGO sector, “perhaps at odds with other regions favouring collectivism” (Latin America and Africa).

Nevertheless, those same values were identified by others – albeit a smaller number – as divisive or controversial in the relations between Italians/Europeans and the United States. Indeed, whilst the most controversial value in absolute terms remained the notion of the welfare State, a number of respondents identified this division as the manifestation of a different understanding of the interaction between State, society and the individual. “The US guarantees the potential of the individual, while the EU redistributes and protects the individual” noted one representative from a regional Chamber of commerce. The same stakeholder further noted how “up until a few years ago the US model was predominant, but now changes are occurring which could create room for new institutional connections between Latin America and Europe”, given that both share more of a similar focus on the responsibilities of the State vis-à-vis the individual and society at large. “The EU has a strong emphasis on funding social security and healthcare, elements that are largely missing in the US context” noted a NGO worker whose expertise placed him in the ‘resources and environment’ category.

Another element of controversy was the US’s retention of the controversial practice of capital punishment, which many stakeholders emphasised as alien to European ideals. “How can we say we share values with a country that still implements the death penalty” exclaimed one academic in the ‘resources and environment’ category. Other salient issues were different conceptions about the use of force in international affairs, which stakeholders noted are a source of tensions and controversy between the US and Europe and even more so between the US, Latin America and Africa. “Clearly there is a divide between the EU and US on this issue and this is to some extent present within the EU as well”, noted another academic expert in security matters. “To an extent there is also some perplexity towards the US’s perceived role as the world’s policeman” especially “when the US is seen to breach international law”.

Turning to Latin America, numerous interviewed stakeholders in different categories emphasised their opinion that Europe and in particular Southern European countries share many commonalities with Latin America, while Northern European States are in

many respects closer to the North American conception of State-society relations, political activism and economic policies. Europe “has exported values to both North and South America, but the reality is that we share more with Latin America than we think” noted one Foreign Ministry official working on security matters. In this respect, one stakeholder pointed to a certain “relational culture that links Southern Europe with Africa and Latin America”, “for good and for bad we have a different approach to human relationships”. “The positive side is a closeness between individuals within our society, the negative is a predominance of decision-making based on relationships, notably recommendations and personal or family contacts, which contrasts somewhat with the logic-based, transparent decision making process” based on meritocracy which is dominant in Northern Europe and the United States and Canada. Also highlighted as a source of controversy between Europe and Latin America was the notion of democracy and political representation, with one stakeholder noting that it is hard to speak of shared values with Latin America given that up until recently this had been “a continent dominated by dictatorships”.

Within Europe itself an overwhelming number of stakeholders expressed their opinion that the interests of European Member States remain inexorably linked to the European project, creating a trend of relative homogeneity across the Old Continent. In this respect, the welfare State was again highlighted as a “common denominator” across Europe, joined by such elements as the rule of law, secularism and the respect for individual freedoms and diversity. Within the European context, however, a closer focus reveals a greater trend of convergence between Southern European States compared to Northern European States, which remain closer to the United States and Canada. Between Southern and Northern European States, fiscal policies, social spending, migration issues and the use of military force in international affairs were highlighted as areas of contention while however not undermining above mentioned trend of adherence to the EU’s general principles, norms and values.

Within the African continent, interviewed stakeholders also emphasised the vast differences that exist between individual African States’. With regards to norms and values, a series of stakeholders noted how Northern African States share certain closer commonalities (i.e. Islam, stronger State institutions and closer historical and colonial links to Europe), while countries in sub-Saharan Africa retain greater diversity in terms of development levels, State cohesion and security. That said a majority of interviewees emphasised how some “remainder of a historical link” exists between Europe and Africa, albeit pointing out that this link has not necessarily translated into shared norms or values. Indeed the presence of a “colonial legacy” was repeatedly highlighted as an obstacle to closer cooperation between Europe and Africa. Moreover, other areas of contention remain, especially in the realm of migration issues, the use of force in international affairs and trends of North-South economic and political exploitation. Energy cooperation – particularly relating to Southern European energy demand from North Africa – was highlighted as one area where higher levels of cooperation exist.

With regards to Asia, one security expert explicitly noted how there is a pronounced absence of shared values and norms. “With Asia I see no connection if not purely casual based on the fact that we are all human beings”. Another interviewed stakeholder in the economy and finance category wished to highlight how Italians share certain values with Japan, yet not with Asia as a whole.

5. Local, Regional and International Actors

Interviewees agreed that state actors remain the major players in the Atlantic. “The main regional actors have been big national entities in their respective regional areas such as the US in North America, Brazil in Latin America. In Africa due to their

economic rise Angola, South Africa, Nigeria have turned into great potential regional actors”, noted one NGO official in the resources and environment section. Within the EU, France, the UK and less so Germany were mentioned as influential state actors. The United States was undoubtedly the most cited actor having the capacity to shape and characterize the Atlantic space and its relationship with the EU was also highlighted retaining considerable influence over this space (in terms of normative value, regulatory frameworks, economic and political weight).

By assuming a sectorial focus, multinationals and lobby groups – particularly in the energy, service industry, agricultural and financial sectors – were highlighted as exerting significant influence within the Atlantic. Large investment funds (e.g. Soros Foundation) were also highlighted as important actors in the Atlantic, as were the sovereign wealth funds of different state actors (particularly China’s) and the various state-owned companies that still maintain a degree of influence, particularly over the energy sector. Experts also cited the G7 and G20 groupings as maintaining relevance within the Atlantic (and beyond) notwithstanding their flaws and failures to reach a consensus on important global trends. Mention was also made of existing international organizations, with stakeholders highlighting the role of the UN and its agencies, the WTO, NATO, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as retaining a certain level of visibility within the Atlantic and potentially capable of promoting new solutions on a number of shared challenges. On balance, as was the case with regional cooperation mechanisms such as the African Union, Arab League, MERCOSUR and ALBA, stakeholders mostly leaned towards negative characterizations of their effectiveness in promoting closer cooperation among Atlantic countries. Overall the perceptions collected in this section demonstrated a marked convergence of opinions among stakeholders which pointed to the continued importance state actors maintain over multilateral institutions.

5.1 Interests, Incentives and Obstacles for Cooperation

On balance, Atlantic actors were deemed to share a general trend towards greater cooperation, helped along by the forces of “globalization and greater interconnectedness”. When asked to clarify such perspectives, stakeholders appeared reluctant to specify more precise interests, instead pointing in general terms to the shared goals of economic growth, trade and greater security.

The transatlantic relationship again emerged as the most cited relationship when addressing the issue of shared interests in the Atlantic. The relationship was described as the “foundational link” in the Atlantic, with both sides described as sharing common concerns and interests in maintaining the present international order and promoting convergence to its norms and principles. To what extent these interests and priorities were genuinely shared or are a product of US dominance over the Atlantic was contested. “There are generally shared values but interests converge to a certain degree because as Europe we cannot afford to have them diverge” noted one journalist interviewed in the people and institutions section. While the persistence of an unequal relationship between the EU and the US was repeatedly highlighted, this perspective was generally complemented with a more vast appreciation that both sides have come to recognize that only through closer cooperation can their influence and interests be preserved. If the EU and the US were to compete in the Atlantic they would only “further complicate their global positioning”, “there is a strong interest in nurturing US-EU synergies”. A series of stakeholders emphasised how the rise of China, and in more general terms Asia, could represent a common concern among North Atlantic countries, particularly as this relates to the increased rise of Asia in the Southern Atlantic.

How the North Atlantic positioned itself vis-à-vis the Southern Atlantic in terms of interests and cooperation was not clear-cut. Observations were made about the potential role the EU and US could have in Africa and in terms of helping to keep the continent on a “positive path of development” but in more specific terms stakeholders noted the persistence of a series of obstacles for the emergence of shared interests. The identification of common interests and concerns varied to a large degree according to the professional field of the interviewed stakeholders.

Stakeholders interviewed under the category of people and institutions displayed a marked interest in the issue of **migration**, describing it as a highly relevant theme for Atlantic countries and one in which a series of shared concerns and interests were detectable. “There is in a way a certain parallel between North America-Latin America and EU-Africa [when it comes to migration], so there could be some potential for an exchange of lessons” noted one civil society stakeholder, while also acknowledging that the “two Northern continents have very different models with regards to migration”. In this respect the stakeholder noted how Europe’s vicinity to conflict zones in the south and east means the EU has had to assume more precautions on immigration compared to the US. Europe would however be best placed to share its experience and institutional approach to migration issues, as Europe enjoys better mechanisms and experience for fostering cooperation and enjoys higher levels of trust, particularly among Latin American countries compared to US-Latin American dialogue on these matters.

Overall, migration tended to be highlighted as an area of contention and disagreement among Atlantic countries. “Can migration spur cooperation?” asked one interviewed stakeholder, “I doubt it, there are different sensitivities regarding migration. Perhaps on a micro level: bigger and better intellectual exchange – through sharing of statistics or best practice in urban planning and integration – and at a macro level – maybe cooperation for political and conflict refugees, but doubts remain.” An increased “focus on the IOM and UNHCR” would perhaps be a better avenue he continued. While accepting that Europe remained highly relevant in the realm of migration – describing the EU itself as probably “the biggest migration measure of all times” – numerous stakeholders noted that strong internal cleavages persist among EU Member States.

Security experts noted how the use of force remained particularly contentious within the Atlantic. Military interventions were highlighted as the primary area of discord, particularly in terms of North-South dynamics. Within the EU, stakeholders noted how Europe has not fulfilled its responsibilities in increased burden sharing in the security field, a trend that is likely to accentuate tensions with the US. The reluctance of European States to devolve elements of their national sovereignty was again highlighted in this respect as an obstacle to increased cooperation in security matters. “The holding on to specific national interests, due not so much to contrasting interests but to the necessity of justifying policies at a national level” represents an obstacle in this domain. Different priorities between Southern and Eastern European Member States were noted as an example of potentially contrasting interests in the context of Europe’s southern and eastern neighbourhoods.

In the **economics and finance** sector, stakeholders noted that in general terms increased growth represented a shared interest for Atlantic countries and in this respect big multinationals and lobby groups are promoting greater convergence in maintaining and expanding the free trade paradigm. Some stakeholders noted that an area of contention remained given the persistence of an unequal relationship between the US and the EU and a tendency to view Europe as little more than “a market” for the export of US goods. “The transatlantic relationship is only mutually interesting if done between equals”, noted one Italian civil society official. The same stakeholder also noted how “Atlantic interests are today divergent with regards to popular opinion and

interests, but instead are largely convergent in terms of the interests and priorities of big holding companies and multinationals which, by their very nature, have an interest towards greater transatlantic convergence.”

Much of the above also held true with regards to the **resources and environment** category, with stakeholders pointing to the important role multinationals, state-owned companies and big lobby groups play in promoting greater convergence in regulations and standards. In this respect, Europe was singled out as one reality which has successfully stood up to these private-sector forces, particularly in the realm of the environment and support for clean and renewable energy. Three stakeholders noted how Europe has emerged as an important actor promoting concern for the environment, a role that has gradually attracted the interest and support of other Atlantic countries. The primary obstacles to cooperation highlighted by stakeholders again revolved around the reluctance to sacrifice national prerogatives, continued trends of North-South paternalism and in more general terms different levels of development affecting Atlantic countries.

6. Conclusions: The Pan-Atlantic and the Transatlantic Relationship

The results of the interview phase revealed a marked trend of scepticism and perplexity regarding the notion of an emerging pan-Atlantic space. Stakeholders consistently linked the idea of an Atlantic space to the transatlantic relationship, with experts noting how the EU-US relationship represents the “foundational link” in the Atlantic, with levels of dialogue and cooperation that are not matched among southern regions. “The Atlantic is a de facto EU-US axis”, noted one academic professor expert in security issues.

There was also a clear tendency among interviewed stakeholders to question the notion of an emerging pan-Atlantic on the basis that such a space represents too much of a generalized categorization and cannot be conceptualized as separate from other regions, given the advances of globalization and the growing importance of Asia. One interviewed legislator noted her opinion that an “Atlantic space does not exist” adding that perhaps in historical terms it might be possible to talk of such a space – citing the slave trade and trends of Northern dominance over the South – but that it is “very hard to modernise” such a concept in light of current international developments tied to globalization. Another interviewed expert from academia further noted how even if such a space were to come about as a result of a revitalized EU-US partnership or a growing propensity for cooperation among Atlantic countries, the North Atlantic would not necessarily hold a leadership role within this space, that the transatlantic powers would be not be able to “manage” actors within this space or that such a space would effectively be separate from other parallel relationships that are developing between Atlantic countries and other regions.

Also detectable in a number of interviews, was a sense that such a pan-Atlantic space would represent a divergent trend compared to wider global dynamics and debates, which have increasingly focussed on the intertwined, globalized and multipolar global system. “We are now in a multipolar reality” noted one think tank specialist, expressing his view that Asian interests and “lobbies” are already well established within the Atlantic and that both the EU and US cannot but contend with this reality. “An Atlantic force that disregards the Pacific cannot exist” he further added, noting that “the idea itself of an Atlantic space escapes me”. Such views were shared by other interviewed stakeholders, and particularly those whose focus area related to Africa or Latin America. These considerations were not limited to Asian interests or the rise of China, albeit the rise of the Asia-Pacific region was undoubtedly the most cited example. “The Atlantic was the past, the Pacific the future”, noted one NGO official. “The Atlantic

space as a whole at the global level is diminishing in importance and this trend is bound to continue”.

One interviewed expert from a major Italian energy company expressed his opinion that talking of a pan-Atlantic in such general terms risked creating confusion. In this respect, the stakeholder cautioned against what in his opinion risked becoming a purely “theoretical exercise” in talking about a pan-Atlantic space (the interviewed expert explicitly drew a parallel with the BRICS grouping, which he contended was largely ineffectual due to the vast diversity of its members). By grouping together countries and continents with considerable disparities in socio-economic development and institutional maturity, there is little hope of making headway and reaching a consensus on cooperation into the future. The interviewed stakeholder expressed his opinion that it is preferable to focus on bilateral ties between regions and/or state actors (e.g. EU-US, Brazil-EU, EU-Arab League, EU-Mercosur, the EU-CELAC meeting) or chose to concentrate on sectorial issues which hold a more focussed agenda (EU-Africa on immigration issues for example). In this context, however, stakeholders also repeatedly noted how North-South relations still suffer from an excessive paternalism on the side of Europe and the United States which is particularly pronounced in the relationships each have fostered towards their southern regions, while less so in the context of Europe-Latin American relations.

A marked trend of convergence emerged with regards to the necessity of deepening the transatlantic relationship, repeatedly cited as a means for both the EU and US to maintain influence within the Atlantic. “A common response” both in terms of EU-US policies and among EU Member States “is the only way to succeed” noted one security academic. Within this context, negotiations for a TTIP were repeatedly cited as a positive development, “a priority”, which should be pursued in order to reinvigorate the transatlantic relationship. While some stakeholders expressed concern on the lack of transparency and general public mistrust on the TTIP, a general trend emerged in support of the effort. The TTIP could become something similar to APEC for the Atlantic noted one stakeholder from a supra-national institution, “the TTIP could help” but talking about its role in creating a “pan-Atlantic space seems exaggerated”, he continued. Even in the context of the transatlantic relationship, a successful conclusion of the TTIP could spur trust and facilitate economic and trade harmonization, but its effects in the realm of foreign and security policy would be marginal noted one representative from a regional Chamber of commerce.

A major aspect highlighted with regards to the TTIP was its lack of a “southern dimension”, with numerous stakeholders expressing scepticism about the potential to extend such an agreement to also include the southern regions of the Atlantic. “Of course if the TTIP works it could provide an incentive” for southern Atlantic countries to conform to its regulations, but given the institutional, development and business disparities between Northern and Southern Atlantic countries it could be easier to extend the TTIP to countries which already share certain similarities with Europe and the US, “Australia for example”. Other stakeholders emphasised that a successful TTIP could spur further bilateral US-Latin America or EU-Africa FTAs, but such an expansion “is not automatic” and will be very hard to implement. A representative of the private sector further noted that the TTIP could strengthen the EU and the US’s role globally, but “if and only if their single market is compatible with their respective trade relations with external partners”, “the importance of free trade agreements is only relative to its benefits vis-à-vis other trade agreements”.

Looking to the future, a consensus gathered around the notion that both the EU and the US have a vested interest in further deepening transatlantic cooperation, with most predictions pointing the likelihood of a closer and more integrated EU-US relationship. Areas of contention remain, particularly in the realm of burden sharing and smart

defence. Europe's normative value and appeal were highlighted as strengths which are likely to preserve the EU's role on the world stage and notwithstanding Europe's internal difficulties, stakeholders emphasised Europe's important normative role in such domains as climate change, migration and experience in fostering multilateral negotiations and cooperation mechanisms. On balance therefore a trend of moderate optimism emerged regarding Europe's future role in the Atlantic. External challenges in Europe's southern and eastern neighbourhoods were cited as impetuses for deepening cooperation in the political domain as Europe is forced to assume a greater external role. Ultimately there is a desperate need for the EU to increase its ability to speak with one voice as in many respects the EU "is not yet a global actor". A Foreign Ministry official further noted how "internal divisions" within and among EU Member States, "while destined to diminish in the future", still represent significant obstacles for the EU's global role. The official noted how "there is a contrast between the short-sighted political cycle [in EU Member States] and the long-sighted European vision" and this, combined with the reluctance of States to devolve elements of national sovereignty has complicated the task of reaching a full political union in Europe. A "politically solid Europe" is just as important as an "economically strong Europe" and given current demographic and economic trends within the old continent, looking into the future "Europe must become a strong voice politically" if it wishes to remain relevant on the global stage.

Finally, a trend of convergence was also detectable in terms of identifying the African sub-continent as a "priority" area for Europe's role on the international scene, both as a source of opportunity and a potential challenge. Stakeholders emphasised that Africa should be a focal area for European and transatlantic engagements and that much will depend on the ability of these actors to coordinate their policies effectively in order to promote common norms and values and thereby enhance transatlantic influence in the area. While Chinese and Asian interests are already well established in Africa (as in Latin America) the transatlantic powers, and particularly Europe due to its geographical vicinity and historical links, should redouble its efforts to promote a common European policy in such areas as immigration, development, energy security and support for local institutions. With the US focussed on security matters, aided in smaller part by France and Great Britain, and China involved in massive infrastructure projects across the continent, Europe should focus on the promotion of best practices in the realm of state capacity, institutional knowhow and regional mechanisms for cooperation. The service and telecommunications sectors also provide Europe with opportunities, as Chinese investments in this area have so far failed to meet expectations (Chinese projects in Ethiopia were cited as an example). While the colonial legacy and Europe's internal divisions on matters of foreign and security policy were cited as obstacles to a more focussed European engagement in Africa, global trends tied to the redistribution of power and the relative erosion of Western influence and leverage worldwide should spur the EU to redouble its efforts to deepen the Union in order to effectively promote its interests and preserve its role on the global stage.