



# EU-CELAC: partners in crisis management?

by José Luengo-Cabrera, José Antonio Sanahuja and Francisco Verdes-Montenegro Escáñez

Cooperation in crisis management remains a relatively unexplored topic in the bi-regional relationship between the EU and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean states (CELAC). However, with UN peacekeeping operations currently overstretched, Washington's increasing proclivity to 'lead from behind' and the growing need to address transnational security threats multilaterally, there is a rising demand for regional actors to act in concert.

While the EU has assumed an increasingly prominent role as an international security provider, CELAC continues to look inwards as a result of the regionalised character of its security agenda. Moreover, recent developments have prompted the EU to refocus on its southern and eastern neighbours, thereby temporarily diverting its attention from external partners.

Nevertheless, crisis management cooperation (CMC) has begun to flourish at bilateral level between the EU and individual CELAC countries. The 2015 signature of Framework Participation Agreements (FPAs) with Chile and Colombia – which establish the legal foundation for their involvement in CSDP missions and operations – as well as the ongoing negotiation over an FPA with Brazil mark the inception of the progressive involvement of CELAC countries in EU-led crisis management activities.

At a time when trade cooperation between these transatlantic partners has acquired an ever greater

regional dimension, it remains to be seen whether a similar impetus can be transferred to the crisis management sphere. Given the difficulties emanating from the protracted negotiations on the EU-MERCOSUR Association Agreement, a bi-regional FPA is unlikely to materialise in the near future.

But just as CELAC has evolved to become the primary interlocutor for comprehensive bi-regional relations with the EU, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) has emerged as a body potentially capable of giving a regional dimension to CMC with the EU. In light of the limitations of bilateral FPAs, this could bolster the pooling of resources and help further the partners' joint endeavours to respond to multiplying global security challenges through collective action.

## The state of bi-regional cooperation

If the EU is to develop CMC at a regional level with CELAC countries, taking stock of the common security challenges is essential. While cooperation on maritime security, arms trafficking and drug-related crime has a considerable track-record at a regional level, CMC continues to follow a bilateral logic, arguably conditioned by the absence of a CELAC equivalent of the EU's CSDP. Moreover, ongoing developments in both regions point to a centrifugal trend whereby their respective security strategies become increasingly local(ised), driven as they are by more immediate regional security concerns.

This does not mean that this channel of cooperation is completely absent from inter-regional relations as it has garnered significant attention via multi-sectoral initiatives. The Cooperation Programme on Drugs Policies (COPOLAD), the High-Level Specialised Dialogue on Drugs with the Andean community or the EU Strategy on Citizen Security in Central America and the Caribbean indicate a substantial level of inter-regional collaboration. All this, however, is based on a subset of *ad hoc* programmes lacking an encompassing institutionalised framework. As a result, CMC has taken root at bilateral level.

## FPAs and bilateralism

Participation of third states in CSDP missions and operations has been taking place for more than a decade, with the first FPAs signed in 2004. To date, the most frequent contributors have been EU candidates and non-EU NATO members (47%), with CELAC countries being the least frequent contributors alongside African nations (14%).

Beyond and behind the legal framework that underpins them, FPAs serve a primarily political and symbolic function. The perception is that third countries join the FPA bandwagon to further their existing ties with an important economic partner like the EU, while their material and financial contributions remain limited.

For the EU, it represents a potential means to share operational costs through the voluntary contributions of individual FPA signatories. For their part, CELAC countries with growing international presence like Chile, Colombia and Brazil view bilateral FPAs as avenues to acquire operational experience and bolster their reputation as contributors to international security. Although they imply a bilateral prerogative that can undermine the intra-regional security framework of third countries, FPAs also serve as important building blocks by creating a procedural template for the way in which their bilateral format can be transformed into a bi-regional one.

## The limits of CELAC

While the EU's CSDP has enabled it to design and implement a common approach to crisis management, CELAC is unlikely to do so in the near future. Given that it is not a treaty-based organisation (nor does it have a permanent secretariat) CELAC is far from the EU's level of institutional integration. Moreover, CELAC's mandate does not include security and defence as primary objectives while its members continue to have diverging perspectives on how to liaise with external partners in this domain. Nevertheless, as the primary interlocutor with

the EU through the biennial summits, CELAC provides a high-level forum for dialogue within which new proposals for cooperation can be explored – not least through another regional organism that has an evident comparative advantage in security and defence matters: UNASUR.

## The UNASUR option

Through UNASUR, the region sets the promotion of regional cooperation in security and defence as one of its core objectives. The South American Defence Council (SADC) is its institutional mechanism for consultation, cooperation and coordination in this domain and has conducted 15 humanitarian and peacekeeping operations since 2009. These include the elaboration of cross-border risk mapping, as well as the definition of common mechanisms for crisis response.

In parallel, annual joint military exercises have been carried out by its constituent member states, with a view to reinforcing interoperability and capacity for action inside the region, as well as within UN peacekeeping operations. Through political and diplomatic channels, UNASUR has been decisive in addressing the Pando crisis in Bolivia (2008), the national police revolt in Ecuador (2010) and the current political and economic crisis in Venezuela. It also plays a stabilising role – one that was previously performed by the Organisation of American States (OAS), which includes the US and Canada.

With this in mind, UNASUR can be considered a suitable partner in the area of crisis management with which the EU could work more closely. Both could profit from the sharing of best practices and technical know-how at a regional level, resulting in a significant expansion of resources and subsequent lowering of operational costs through potential joint crisis management ventures. Ultimately, this could help in consolidating the fledging security and defence architecture embodied in UNASUR – which would, in turn, benefit the EU as a result of strengthening the security outreach capacity of a strategically important regional partner.

***José Luengo-Cabrera is Associate Analyst at the EUISS.***

***José Antonio Sanahuja is Robert Schuman Fellow at the European University Institute, Florence.***

***Francisco Verdes-Montenegro Escáñez is Associate Researcher at the Complutense Institute of International Studies, Madrid.***

