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## **The European Union's International Political Capacity into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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# The European Union's International Political Capacity into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Aimee Kanner Arias ♦

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### Introduction

During more than 50 years the European Union (EU) has made great progress in many areas, developing from a small community of coal and steel to a robust economic and political union. Part of this growth has come in the form of the EU's external relations despite the fact that the EU has relatively minimal military capabilities. Rather than using military force to achieve its international goals, the EU has relied on trade pacts; economic, political and humanitarian agreements; and institutionalized diplomatic relations. Although the threat of force is not an option for the EU, it has attained significant international influence and compliance with its international agreements. This is a testament to the international political capacity of the European Union.

### The European Union's International Political Capacity

The state has been the unit of analysis in much of the existing literature on political capacity. This does not mean, however, that the concept of political capacity is not a useful tool for understanding certain aspects of the European Union, a regional organization having characteristics of both a state and an international organization.

In one of the most developed works on the subject, Robert Jackman considers political capacity a matter of degree dependent upon a credible political infrastructure involving the "creation of *institutions* that are surrounded with some aura of *legitimacy*" (Jackman, 1993: 38). He bases legitimacy on positive compliance with institutional authorities and on the ability of regimes "to resolve conflict (a) without employing physical force on their opponents (actual or potential), and (b) without mobilizing physical opposition or resistance by those opponents" (Jackman, 1993: 108). In his conceptualization of political capacity, Jackman emphasizes the distinction between power and force:<sup>1</sup> "Unlike power, force does not induce compliance: the exercise of force is instead an admission that compliance cannot be induced by other noncoercive means" (Jackman, 1993: 29). He claims, "Since all states possess the instruments for physical coercion, the less they actually employ those instruments, the greater their *political capacity*" (Jackman, 1993: 110-111). While Jackman considers the credible threat of the use of force decisive in terms of the state's ability to wield its power, I would argue that the lack of a strong offensive military capability yet still being able to maintain significant influence and compliance is even more powerful and therefore signifies one of the greatest levels of political capacity.

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<sup>1</sup> Here Jackman extensively draws on the analysis of Bachrach and Baratz in Chapter 2 of *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice* (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970).

I also believe that political capacity is not limited to the ability to induce compliance within a state but also, and at times, more importantly, to the ability to induce compliance in the state's or organization's external relations. The external element of a state's or organization's political capacity refers to its engagement in foreign affairs based on an established diplomatic infrastructure supported by institutionalized relations recognized as legitimate by all involved parties. The less states or organizations rely on the use of force to meet their international objectives, the greater their political capacity at the international level.

## **European Union-Latin America Relations: A Case Study**

### **The European Union's External Relations**

The EU maintains an intricate network of foreign affairs with third countries, groups of countries, and other international organizations. The EU's external relations take on many different forms including development, enlargement, the European Neighborhood Policy, external assistance, trade, foreign policy, and humanitarian aid.

The European Commission's External Service has 130 offices and delegations throughout the world that control and monitor the EU's external policies and programs and serve as a liaison between the EU and foreign governments. Additionally, the EU holds institutionalized high-level meetings with several individual countries such as the United States and Russia, and on a multilateral basis with, for example, Latin America and Caribbean countries in the form of summits of heads of state and government. Candidate countries to the EU are given high priority on the EU foreign affairs agenda and comprehensive agreements are designed to guide relations between the EU and these countries towards eventual membership.

The EU and its member states together contribute more to development assistance than any other individual country or organization in the world, representing approximately half of the total yearly international disbursements in this area. With the EU more integrated in economic competences, its external relations have traditionally focused on trade, aid, and other international financial transactions with third countries. However, with the creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the EU has expanded its third country relations into the political area, especially in terms of promoting peace and stability and cooperatively addressing cross-border concerns. As the EU's foreign-related political decision and policymaking is essentially intergovernmental, this aspect of its foreign affairs remains in a developmental yet progressing stage. The EU has been successful in requiring that all of its trade and cooperation agreements include a human rights clause, effectively combining elements of both political and economic policies in its conduct of foreign affairs.

### **The European Union and Latin America: Diplomatically Institutionalized Relations**

EU relations with Latin America are developed on three different levels: regional, sub-regional, and bilateral, and focus on economic cooperation, political dialogue, and trade. On the regional level, the EU has institutionalized relations with the Rio Group which includes all of the Latin American countries and is the basis of the bi-regional political dialogue between the EU and Latin America. Since 1999, Summits of the Heads of State and Government of the EU, Latin American, and Caribbean countries have been convened every few years to strengthen and provide direction to the bi-regional relations. Sub-regionally, the EU believes in the possible benefits of regional integration in Latin America, and attempts to support these projects through economic cooperation and dialogue with MERCOSUR, the Andean Community, and the Central American Common Market. In addition to these regional frameworks, the EU has developed bilateral relations with each of the individual Latin American countries. The most advanced and institutionalized of these relations are with Chile and Mexico with whom the EU has Economic

and Political Association Agreements (Mexico, 1997 and Chile, 2002). These association agreements contain a democratic clause and establish the framework for institutionalized political dialogue, cooperation, and the eventual creation of a free trade area.

The EU is Latin America's greatest source of foreign direct investment, and its second largest trading partner. Development cooperation, economic cooperation, and humanitarian aid are some of the ways in which the EU provides financial and technical assistance to Latin America and contributes to the strengthening of the bi-regional relations.

#### The European Union's Involvement in Latin American Peace Processes: Central America and Colombia

In the 1980s, Central America was a veritable crisis zone characterized by violent internal conflict. In 1984, the European Union and Central America launched the San José Dialogue, a formal medium through which all actors engaged in dialogue and negotiation in order to achieve peace in the region. The San José Dialogue still plays a significant role, in addition to the cooperation program, in the relations between the European Union and Central America. "Assessments of the effectiveness of the E.U.'s ongoing San José framework in Central America differ, but generally concur that since the 1980s, it has constituted a distinctive and innovative effort to facilitate inclusive and institutionalized dialogue on political change" (Youngs, 2002: 115). Central America has been relatively stable and free from violent conflict for more than a decade.

Colombia has experienced more than forty years of internal conflict, during which irregular armed groups (guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers) have regularly resorted to violence as a means of action creating an environment in which deaths of innocent people, property destruction, kidnapping, and corruption are everyday occurrences. The consequences of this instability are felt economically, politically, and humanitarily. There have been several internal and external attempts to arrive at a peaceful resolution to this situation, all of which have been developed based on differing perspectives regarding the root causes of the continuous violence.

The main focus of the EU's Country Strategy Paper (CSP) for Colombia (2002-2006) is a contribution to the peace process and an offer of humanitarian assistance for those who have been victims of the violence. An innovative experiment in peace-building – peace laboratories – is the subject of much support from the European Union. The first program of this nature, begun in March 2002, is conducted in the Magdalena Medio. The key components of this program are: 1) peace culture and integral rights; 2) productive activities; 3) productive and social infrastructures; and, 4) institutional reinforcement. The EU's financial contribution to this program is €34.8 million over eight years. The EU's technical and financial cooperation with Colombia for this period is based on this and projected future peace laboratories, administrative and judicial reform, and the removal of land mines. The protection of human rights and humanitarian assistance are the other principle aspects of the CSP and the EU's cooperation with Colombia (European Commission, 2002). Until peace is established and consolidated, other internal and external goals for Colombia, such as sustainable development, will be unattainable.

#### Negotiated Agreements between the EU and Latin American Countries Involving Political Cooperation

Relations between the EU and Mexico are structured by the Economic Partnership, Political Cooperation and Cooperation Agreement, which was signed on 8 December 1997 and came into effect on 1 October 2000. This agreement consists of three main areas of cooperation: trade relations, political relations, and cooperation. Here, the concern is with the political aspect of this agreement, which is based on "democratic principles" and the "respect for human rights", and

contains a framework for institutionalized political dialogue through Summits of Heads of State or Government and Joint Councils at the ministerial level. This political dialogue covers all issues of mutual interest to the European Union and Mexico (European Commission, 2002a).

The EU and Chile signed an Association Agreement on 18 November 2002. Similar to the EU's agreement with Mexico, the main components of the EU-Chile agreement are political relations, trade relations, and cooperation. Like so many of the EU's agreements with third countries, it is based on democratic principles, human rights and the rule of law. The EU-Chile Association Agreement has an entire chapter dedicated to political relations which provides for strengthening institutionalized political relations between the European Union and Chile, coordinating positions in international organizations, and cooperating in the fight against terrorism (European Commission, 2002b).

## **Conclusion**

The European Union has already established a degree of international political capacity in its relations with Latin America. The EU's ability (or lack thereof) to strengthen and consolidate this capacity in the region will be indicative of the EU's potential leadership role in global governance. As Richard Youngs suggests: "From a European perspective, the scope and effectiveness of E.U. policy in Latin America provides a good test of the organization's of establishing a global presence beyond the influence it has exerted over political change on its immediate periphery" (Youngs, 2002: 111-112). This is a particularly interesting case given the seemingly distinct perceptions of the United States (US) and the EU with respect to institutionalized rule-based global governance and Latin America's strategic location in the US backyard.

Over the past fifty years, the EU has developed an extensive institutionalized external relations network which has reinforced the EU's economic, political and strategic interests in different parts of the world. In addition, according to Javier Solana, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the EU is being called upon to play a significant international role and is "rising to the challenge of meeting the diffuse expectations of a more influential EU role in world affairs" (Solana, 2002: 3). Higher degrees of international political capacity will facilitate the European Union's legitimate leadership in the development of good global governance.

Legitimacy has long been a critical aspect of the internal affairs of sovereign states, not only as a means of perpetuating political systems but also for recognition and respect in the international community. Political capacity is dependent upon legitimacy and institutionalization. As sovereignty and governance move beyond the previously rigid borders of states, the concept of political capacity provides a framework not just for analyzing states but also regional organizations. International political capacity is also dependent upon legitimacy and institutionalization. Legitimacy is a critical aspect of the foreign affairs of states and regional organizations, and it needs to receive more attention in international studies and practice. As the European Union continues to emphasize open negotiations, cooperation and partnership in its external relations, it moves towards achieving this legitimacy, thereby strengthening its international political capacity.

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