



Food security

Challenges and opportunities for European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean relations

Pamela Aróstica and Anna Ayuso Pozo (eds.)

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EULAC Foundation was established by the Heads of State and Government of the European Union (EU) and the Community of Latin American States and Caribbean States (CELAC) in 2010. Its members are the countries of the EU, CELAC and the EU itself. The Foundation is a tool of the EU-CELAC partnership and its activities nurture intergovernmental dialogue, in line with the bi-regional action plan.

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The new food security scenario after the pandemic: implications for the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean

Detlef Nolte

This chapter compares food security (and the differences in the meaning of the concept) in the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean and examines the impacts of the war in Ukraine on food security. It also analyses the contribution of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean to global agri-food production and trade and explores the possibilities for cooperation between the two regions.

Food security asymmetries in Latin America and the Caribbean: keys to cooperation with the European Union

Pamela Aróstica

Food security is a global challenge. Despite its natural and agricultural riches, the Latin America and the Caribbean region is not immune to this problem. In order to address it, cooperation with the European Union is crucial. This chapter analyses the food security asymmetries and challenges facing the region and how cooperation with the EU is helping to strengthen it, providing examples of this cooperation, its benefits and projections.

Food security in Latin America and Australia: China's impact and insights for the European Union

Adrian Hearn

Latin America and Australia have enjoyed economic growth arising from China's unprecedented demand for commodities, but they have also experienced challenges to local food security as commodity plantations expand. This chapter examines the impacts of Chinese agricultural demand in South America, Australia, Cuba, and within China. It concludes by considering the relevance of these experiences for the European Union.

Food security from a geopolitical perspective: past, present and the challenges of “grain wars”

María del Pilar Ostos

This analysis examines food security challenges from a geopolitical perspective, taking as its starting point the historical context of the principal “grain wars”, the existence of which can be traced to Imperial Rome with its control of Egyptian wheat; the emergence of the Silk Road; the rise of China’s agricultural trade, and the trade flows between the Old and New Worlds in the wake of Columbus’s voyages. These events speak to the strategic value that “productive land” acquires in the exchange of food, as we are seeing in the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which can be considered a grain war. Its impacts pose challenges to food security and presage a new geopolitical order based on the control of agricultural pan-regions, as is the case in Latin America in the 21st century.

Food (in)security: Mercosur responses against a backdrop of greater global demand

Sergio M. Cesarin

Food security has become a dominant issue on the global political and economic agenda. Climate disruptions, interstate conflicts, food price increases, environmental degradation and rural migration are interrelated variables that, in different combinations, are having an adverse effect and jeopardising the principle of food security. In the face of this situation, the Mercosur 4 bloc comprises a competitive production ecosystem, capable of covering global food shortages and building bridges of cooperation with the European Union.

The European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean: food security projections for bi-regional relations

Ignacio Bartesaghi

Against a complex international backdrop, the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean have an opportunity to relaunch their relations. In this era, food security has an important place on the bi-regional agenda, testament to which is the series of policies approved by the European countries. The evolution of trade in food points to certain lost spaces, but it still holds enormous potential, for which it will be necessary to make progress on certain pending trade agreements. The success of this new era will depend on the severity of the legislation the EU adopts on trade.

FOREWORD

Jordi Bacaria Colom

*Emeritus professor at the UAB
and editor of the magazine Foreign Affairs Latinoameric*

Josep Maria de Dios Marcer

*Director of the Institute of European Studies at the UAB
and editor of the magazine Quaderns IEE*

This publication addresses the longstanding but always highly topical issue of food security from different perspectives. A distinctive feature of the work is its approach, which looks at relations between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). It affords a means of assessment and a framework of cooperation, one which is neither improvised nor new, as it is based on the bi-regional strategic partnership, a shared goal since 1999, the year the first summit was held between the two blocs.

Because it provides a means of livelihood, food security is an essential part of human security. As United Nations General Assembly resolution 66/290 notes, “human security is an approach to assist Member States in identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people”. Thus, efforts to safeguard livelihoods through government policies and the collaboration of the private sector and civil society acquire even greater significance when the problem of food security is a global problem, aggravated by climate change, and which therefore requires cooperation and a multilateral approach.

The EU has given special priority to food security since its inception, initially approaching the issue from the point of view of guaranteeing supply (although it also provides for regulation from a public health and consumer protection perspective – see Articles 168 and 169 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, TFEU). From the Treaty of Rome (1957) establishing the European Economic Community to the Treaty of Lisbon (2007), it has stated that one of the objectives of the common agricultural policy shall be “ensuring the availability of supplies” (Article 39, paragraph 1(d), TFEU). The currency of this goal, which forms part of the Treaty of Rome and has lasted to this day, may come as a surprise. No doubt it originally sprang from the food shortage situation in Europe after the Second World War, but it has remained even in times of abundance and surplus of agricultural products in Europe. And while the common agricultural policy has been changed and adapted to the times and new situations, it has always taken account of food security. One might think it is a genuinely European

concern, and yet that is not the case. The Farm to Fork Strategy 2020 (COM 2020, 381 final) not only emphasises ensuring food security, but also takes a geopolitical and global approach, stating: “The EU will support the global transition to sustainable agri-food systems, in line with the objectives of this strategy and the SDGs. Through its external policies, including international cooperation and trade policy, the EU will pursue the development of green alliances on sustainable food systems with all its partners in bilateral, regional and multilateral fora”.

And this is the approach the EU can bring, through alliances with its partners and in the multilateral sphere. While the proposal is heavily influenced by the consequences of the pandemic, sustainability, the preservation of the environment and food quality, the stark dilemma now is this: can there be effective cooperation when there is fierce competition for food owing to conflicts and production shortfalls because of drought?

The invasion of Ukraine and Russia’s naval blockade had an impact in the first year of hostilities because Moscow used food as a weapon to limit Ukraine’s grain exports and to forge alliances, with dramatic effects in the shape of food shortages in the countries most in need and price increases. The restrictions on Russia’s fertiliser exports have also reduced production capacity worldwide.

In the face of shortage, unilateral solutions prevail. States aim to ensure the food security of their populations and place restrictions on exports. India, the world’s second biggest rice producer with 40% of the global market, has banned exports of some rice, stoking fears of inflation and food shortage. It is worth noting that rice is the staple food of over 3 billion people in the world. But it is not just India; Indonesia banned palm oil exports; Argentina blocked exports of beef; and Turkey and Kyrgyzstan forbid overseas sales of various cereals.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) report *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023* says that between 691 and 783 million people in the world faced hunger in 2022, 122 million more than in 2019, before the Covid pandemic. While progress was made towards reducing hunger in Asia and Latin America, it was still on the rise in western Asia, the Caribbean and all the subregions of Africa.

The situations described by way of example are not scenarios. They are fact. They are realities that require a solution. They are not the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: war, famine, pestilence and death. And if they are, the solution lies with the rider of the white horse of cooperation, the one representing conquest. The goal of this publication is to analyse the challenges and identify the opportunities facing EU-LAC relations.

In part one, the authors examine the new post-pandemic context for the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean; in part two, they study the main food security challenges, opportunities and projections with regard to EU-LAC relations. On the European side, we have already mentioned its long experience of prioritising the security of agricultural supplies; and Ukraine, which in all likelihood will become a member of

the EU, can be part of the solution rather than the problem. Mercosur, for its part, remains a major global food producer and is meeting the strong demand from China.

It has been the EU's goal since 1999 to create and promote a strategic bi-regional partnership between the European bloc and Latin America and the Caribbean. The narrative has always been that the two regions are natural allies bound by strong historical, cultural and economic ties which cooperate closely on the international stage and engage in intense political dialogue at all levels: regional, subregional and, increasingly, bilaterally. This cooperation, which in terms of trade and on a bilateral level has worked relatively well (free trade deals with Mexico, Chile, the Andean Community, Central America, CARICOM), has been marred by estrangement for various reasons, despite the EU's sometimes inconsistent efforts to maintain bi-regional relations. China, with its increase in trade and investments in Latin America, has been one of the reasons for estrangement on the LAC side. Another is that the EU has failed to forge stronger ties. Brexit distracted the EU for a long time and the invasion of Ukraine has changed the geopolitical landscape. It is a crucial and opportune moment to consolidate these ties, extrapolating to these relations and food security what Robert Schuman identified for Europe in his declaration of May 9th, 1950: "through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity".

This publication is to be presented at an international conference in Barcelona in November 2023. Its overall goals are: to contribute to strengthening bi-regional ties and improving mutual understanding between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean; to promote dialogue and cooperation on food security between them; and to study the food security challenges, opportunities and projections with regard to their relations. Its specific goals are: to examine the implications of the new post-pandemic scenario for the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean; make a comparative analysis of the food security challenges and asymmetries; investigate the impact of Chinese demand on food security in Latin America and the Caribbean; examine food security from a geopolitical perspective and the opportunities for relations between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean; analyse food (in)security and Mercosur responses in a context of greater global demand; and determine food security projections and possible scenarios for bi-regional relations. They are ambitious goals, and we believe they can be reached.

We would like to thank the EU-LAC Foundation, its president, Leire Pajín, and its executive director, Adrián Bonilla, for its support for the project in the framework of the 6th EU-LAC Call for the co-organisation of events on topics relevant to the bi-regional partnership between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean. We would also like Dr Pamela Aróstica for coordinating the project, as well as the associated institutions, the Tres de Febrero National University (UNTREF), the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB) and the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). Last but by no means least, we thank the authors of the various chapters, without whom this publication would not have been possible.

Barcelona, September 2023

A WORD FROM THE EU-LAC FOUNDATION

The EU-LAC Foundation is delighted to offer the publication Food security: challenges and opportunities for European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean relations. It is a product of the collaboration between the EU-LAC Foundation, the Centre for Asia-Pacific and India Studies (CEAPI) at the Tres de Febrero National University (UNTREF) in Argentina, the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB) and the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) in the framework of our organisation's sixth annual call for EU-LAC co-organised events on topics relevant to the strategic partnership between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The events co-organised by the EU-LAC Foundation have taken place every year since 2018. They seek to create spaces of reflection, debate and exchange on global and/or sectoral issues that are relevant to the strategic partnership between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean. Through the call, the EU-LAC Foundation teams up with bi-regional consortiums comprising civil society organisations, academic institutions, business partnerships and networks relevant to the organisation of these events.

The project of which this publication forms part was chosen for its capacity to promote dialogue and cooperation on the subject of food security, its challenges on a global level and, consequently, the opportunities and projections regarding relations between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean on the matter. There are three stages to the project: the first is this publication, followed by the presentation of its main conclusions at an international conference in Barcelona with the participation of the authors of the various chapters. The third stage consists of a digital publication to catalogue the chief developments and recommendations of the conference.

The subject chosen for the project addresses the repercussions of the crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and, more recently, the conflict in Ukraine, which highlight the need to tackle the challenges related to food security stemming from the fall in the supply of agricultural products and a rise in global prices. Low-income countries have borne the brunt of this crisis, and it has also affected the most vulnerable populations of Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe.

Against this backdrop, at a summit held in Brussels in June 2023 the heads of state and government of the European Union and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States agreed to step up dialogue to tackle the multiple crises of our times together, including food security, poverty, inequalities, supply chain disruptions and rising

inflation. Moreover, the authorities at bi-regional level have pledged to jointly promote global agendas in multilateral institutions. These agendas include food and energy security to bolster the role of the multilateral system in the search for an inclusive global governance that is respectful of international law. We hope this publication will be useful.

EU-LAC Foundation

INTRODUCTION

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This publication addresses the critical issue of food security, which is still one of the greatest challenges facing humanity. In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, establishing “end hunger” in the world as the second of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet far from moving forwards since then, food insecurity has actually increased. The 2022 edition of *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*, a report drawn up by the United Nations Organization for Food and Agriculture (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO), found that the number of people who faced hunger in the world increased to 828 million in 2021, a rise of 46 million compared to 2020, and 150 million more than in 2019. The number of people affected by hunger in 2021 reached 9.8% of the world population, compared to 9.3% in 2020 and 8% in 2019. If we include the moderately food insecure along with those facing serious shortages, in 2021 the figure hit 2.3 billion people (29.3% of the world’s population), which is 350 million more people than before the outbreak of COVID-19.

The pandemic had devastating effects, but it is not the only cause of the food crisis we are facing today. The 2023 report on food security (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, 2023) says that while global hunger did not grow in 2022, it continues to severely affect some regions of the planet and is still far above pre-pandemic levels. The nascent recovery after COVID-19 has been hampered by a rise in food prices and the effects of the Ukraine war on agricultural markets, with inflation impacting the high cost of these products and contributing to growing inequalities. Rising energy costs too have contributed to a spike in both farm gate prices and distribution costs. According to the FAO, food prices reached a peak in the first half of 2022 (FAO, 2023), depriving people on the lowest incomes of access to a healthy diet.

People living in conflict zones face constant problems to access to food. These conflicts generate forced displacement, hamper the practice of farming and livestock breeding, and hinder the arrival of

food to markets (ICRC, 2022). Along with the health crisis and global conflicts, however, climate change poses the greatest threat to food security. Severe drought and flooding jeopardise crops in every region of the planet. The Horn of Africa has suffered its worst drought of the last 40 years and is in an emergency situation (UNHCR, 2023). South America is facing a third year of severe drought due to the Niña phenomenon (IICA, 2023). The accumulation of factors that contribute to the food crisis make it a multidimensional phenomenon that is not only caused by circumstantial factors but is also linked to production structures and the sustainability of production in general and food in particular.

The goal of this digital publication, entitled *Food security: challenges and opportunities for European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean relations*, is to help strengthen bi-regional ties and improve mutual understanding between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) by fostering dialogue and cooperation on food security. The study has its roots in a previous experience with the journal *Foreign Affairs Latin America (FAL)* in which several authors who form part of this online publication took different approaches to analysing the context and scope of the global food crisis and its effects and projections in Latin America (*FAL*, October-December 2022). The key question is this: what are the challenges and opportunities facing relations between the EU and LAC in the framework of food security? In order to answer this, several authors from institutions in Latin America, Europe and Australia examine the opportunities, challenges and projections regarding bi-regional relations from a food security standpoint.

The publication is divided into two parts: the first, called “Food security and the new post-pandemic context for the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean”, begins with the chapter “The new food security scenario after the pandemic: implications for the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean”. Its author, Detlef Nolte, compares the food security situation in the EU and LAC and the differences in the meaning of the concept as it is used in the two regions. It also examines the various effects of the war in Ukraine on food security, as well as the contribution that the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean make to global agri-food production and trade. Lastly, it analyses the possibilities for cooperation between the two regions, considering their international responsibility as major food producers.

In the second chapter, “Food security asymmetries in Latin America and the Caribbean: keys to cooperation with the European Union”, Pamela Aróstica looks at the challenges facing Latin America and the Caribbean in terms of food security and how cooperation with the European Union is helping to improve it. It is based on a review of the academic literature and reports by international bodies, as well as on concrete examples of bi-regional cooperation programmes and projects. It ends by listing the main obstacles the EU and LAC must overcome to tackle pending food security challenges from a multidimensional perspective.

In the following chapter, “Food security in Latin America and Australia: China’s impact and insights for the European Union”, Adrian Hearn

examines the impacts of Chinese agricultural demand in South America, Australia, Cuba and within China's own borders, reflecting on the significance of these experiences for the European Union. The comparative study seeks to highlight the need for food security approaches that take account of local peculiarities and how they affect the interaction between different regions.

The second part of the publication is entitled "European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean relations: food security challenges, opportunities and projections". In the fourth chapter, "Food security from a geopolitical perspective: past, present and the challenges of 'grain wars'", María del Pilar Ostos examines food security challenges from a geopolitical perspective, starting with the historical context of the principal "grain wars" before arriving at the Russia-Ukraine conflict and its impact on the new geopolitical order. She ends by analysing the challenges posed by the geopolitical model of "agricultural pan-regions" like Latin America in the 21st century and the redrawing of the world map conditioned by the main competitors in the food security field.

In the fifth chapter, "Food (in)security: Mercosur responses in a context of greater global demand", Sergio Cesarin looks at how in a complex situation that is having a negative impact on the principle of food security the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) 4 (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) constitute a competitive production ecosystem, capable of covering global food shortages and building bridges of cooperation with the European Union.

In the sixth and final chapter, entitled "The European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean: food security projections for bi-regional relations", Ignacio Bartesaghi examines the variables that give us a better understanding of the food security projections and scenarios with regard to bilateral relations. He notes that while in recent years the EU has become less important to LAC as a destination of the region's agricultural products, its place being taken by China, there have been signs of a certain recovery since 2020. He finds that there is a favourable international context for relaunching relations in which food security would gain greater weight, although the severity of EU legislation on environmental sustainability could stymie the process, as can be seen with the difficulties in closing the agreement between the EU and Mercosur.

The results of this publication were debated at the international conference of the same name – "Food security: challenges and opportunities for European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean relations" – on Thursday November 9th, 2023, at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB). This publication has been possible thanks to the support of the EU-LAC Foundation and the combined efforts of the Centre for Asia-Pacific and India Studies (CEAPI) at the Tres de Febrero National University (UNTREF) in Argentina, CIDOB, and the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). There is open access to this publication, which seeks to contribute to the bi-regional debate. It is available on the platforms of the above institutions for all those interested in the current debate on this issue.

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FOOD SECURITY AND THE NEW POST-PANDEMIC CONTEXT FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION AND LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

- THE NEW FOOD SECURITY SCENARIO AFTER THE PANDEMIC: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION AND LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Detlef Nolte

- FOOD SECURITY ASYMMETRIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: KEYS TO COOPERATION WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

Pamela Aróstica

- FOOD SECURITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND AUSTRALIA: CHINA'S IMPACT AND INSIGHTS FOR THE EU

Adrian Hearn

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1. Introduction

The war in Ukraine has exacerbated the global food crisis, especially in poor countries, and it poses major challenges to the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), both within the regions and as political and trading partners. The declaration of the EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) Summit of July 2023 refers to food (in)security three times: (1) it is mentioned as one of the multiple challenges of our times; (2) the declaration's signatories express their deep concern about the ongoing war against Ukraine, which heightens food insecurity, and (3) they pledge to enhance cooperation and coordination in the relevant multilateral fora on issues of common interest, including food security.

Before that, the communication "A new agenda for relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean" from the European Commission and the high representative of the union for foreign affairs and security policy, of June 7th, 2023, also referred to food (in)security (again, three times). It said: "People on both sides of the Atlantic aspire to live in inclusive and prosperous societies, leaving no one behind", explaining that: "The COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine have exacerbated existing structural challenges and inequalities, leading to increasing levels of poverty, debt, and food insecurity" (European Commission *et al.*, 2023: 12).

According to the definition established at the 1996 World Food Summit, food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. It is calculated that 9.2% of the world population (6.2% in LAC), that is to say, 735 million people (43 million in LAC), faced undernourishment in 2022. Nearly 30% of the world's population (2,356,900,000 people) lived in a state of moderate or severe food insecurity (FAO *et al.*, 2023: 19).

The concept of “food security” has acquired new significance in terms of reducing dependence and boosting food supply autonomy.

2. Repercussions of the war in Ukraine

One of the side effects of the war in Ukraine is how it has impacted global food security, a situation aggravated in July 2023 by Russia halting its participation in a deal allowing Ukraine to export grain. Both the Russian Federation and Ukraine are major contributors to global supplies of staple foods (FAO, 2022; Rabbi *et al.*, 2023). Before the war, Russia and Ukraine accounted for around 12% of total calories traded in the world (Glauber and Laborde, 2022). In 2021, exports from Ukraine and Russia amounted to over 34% of the global trade in wheat (Ukraine, 10%), 17% of maize (Ukraine, 15%), 27% of barley (Ukraine, 13%) and over 80% (Ukraine, 61%) and 55% (Ukraine 31%) of the global trade in sunflower oil cake and oil, respectively (Rabbi *et al.*, 2023: 7). The war has triggered a rise in food prices, possibly more because of speculation and profit maximisation on the part of the big grain trading companies than shortage (Ghosh, 2023), with negative impacts on the rest of the world, especially in poor countries.

The Russian Federation is also a key exporter of fertilisers. In the years 2018 to 2020, Russia accounted for 15% of global trade in nitrogenous fertilisers and 17% of global potash fertiliser exports. Belarus, meanwhile, accounted for another 16% of the global potash market. Some countries’ dependence on supplies from these two states is extremely high (up to 60% or more) (Glauber and Laborde, 2022).

In its attacks on Ukraine, Russia has destroyed food on a massive scale and is trying to block exports to achieve geopolitical goals in its neighbourhood and across the world. As a result, ensuring food security is an increasingly important policy issue for many countries. The concept of “food security” has acquired new significance in terms of reducing dependence and boosting food supply autonomy.

The Versailles Declaration, approved at an informal meeting of EU heads of state or government in Versailles on March 10th and 11th, 2022, states that: “We will improve our food security by reducing our dependencies on key imported agricultural products and inputs, in particular by increasing the EU production of plant-based proteins”. According to a European Parliament resolution of 2023, “reducing dependency on imports of critical goods such as plant-based protein sources and feed” forms part of the EU’s “open strategic autonomy” (European Parliament, 2023).

3. Food security in Latin America

Food insecurity in LAC deteriorated during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the figures from the Americas Barometer survey, in 2021 it impacted one in three households in Latin America and most that faced food insecurity in 2021 blamed the COVID-19 pandemic (Lupu, Rodriguez & Zechmeister, 2021: 32-33). As the Latin American economies were beginning to recover slowly, in February 2022 Russia invaded Ukraine. Although the proportion of the population facing severe or moderate food insecurity fell slightly from 40.3% in 2021 to 37.5% in 2022, it remains well above pre-pandemic levels (31.5% in 2019) (FAO *et al.*, 2023: 19). According to the *Agricultural Outlook 2023-2032* by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation

and Development (OECD) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) (OECD/FAO, 2023: 132), some of the main food security challenges in Latin America “emanate from affordability constraints, rather than availability, and are underpinned by a combination of income distributional issues and current high prices”.

While LAC is a net exporter of agricultural products, several countries in the region are also net importers. Twenty-six countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are highly dependent on wheat imports and 13 are highly reliant on imports of maize (ECLAC/FAO/WFP, 2022: 6-7). Yet unlike other regions of the world, they do not rely on the Russian Federation and Ukraine for wheat, maize and vegetable oil imports. Latin American food imports are, however, impacted by the rise in international prices owing to the war in Ukraine, although food price increases have exceeded headline inflation since late 2018, prior to the conflict (ECLAC/FAO/WFP, 2022: 10).

Where there certainly is dependence on the Russian Federation is for fertiliser imports. The LAC states import around 85% of the fertilisers they use and Russia provides a fifth of them (and a quarter of the nitrogen fertilisers). Brazil is the main market for Russian fertiliser exports worldwide (ECLAC/FAO/WFP, 2022: 8). According to a joint report by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), FAO and the World Food Programme (WFP) (*idem*, 2022), there is a risk that many small farmers who produce for local consumption will be obliged to reduce the use of fertilisers because of the increase in prices. This would cause a drop in yields and production and would impact the region’s food security. Therefore, “unequal access to agricultural inputs amplifies the structural heterogeneity of agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean” (*idem*, 2022: 3).

The rise in prices of agricultural inputs, particularly fertilisers and energy, has triggered a significant increase in food prices in Europe and contributed to the general growth of inflation.

4. Food security in the EU

In Europe, food supply is not in jeopardy. Most EU countries benefit from a well-developed agricultural sector. Broadly speaking, the bloc is self-sufficient in staple crops like wheat, barley, maize and sugar; in various animal products, such as dairy and meat products; as well as in fruit and vegetables. However, the EU must import tropical produce (fruit, coffee and tea), oilseeds (soybeans, above all) and natural fats and oils (including palm oil) (Rabbi *et al.*, 2023: 8).

The European agriculture industry relies on imports of certain essential products like animal feed and fertilisers. Before the war, the Russian Federation accounted for approximately one-fifth of the EU’s inorganic fertiliser imports, while Ukraine was a major supplier of maize (accounting for 29% of EU grain imports in 2021) and vegetable fats and oils (24% of the EU’s imports between 2019 and 2021) (Rabbi *et al.*, 2023).

The rise in prices of agricultural inputs, particularly fertilisers and energy, has triggered a significant increase in food prices in Europe and contributed to the general growth of inflation. This has impacted food availability and the access of the most vulnerable sectors of the population to food. But relative to other regions of the world, on average Europeans face less hunger and food insecurity. The prevalence of moderate or serious food insecurity in Europe, then, increased slightly from 7.8% to 8.2% in 2022 over 2021

The agri-food trade between the EU and Latin America has the same structure and same bias as the EU's overall agri-food trade, with one difference: the trade balance is negative for the EU.

(in western Europe it rose from 4.9% to 5.7%; in northern Europe, from 4.5% to 6.6%; in southern Europe it fell from 8.6% to 7.5%). In 2019, before the pandemic, it stood at 6.9% (FAO *et al.*, 2023: 10).

In November 2021, three months before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the European Commission (2021a, 2021b) presented its contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security in times of crisis in response to the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also undertook the creation of a European food security crisis preparedness and response mechanism (EFSCM), which entered into operation on March 9th, 2022. Similarly, the European Commission communication (2022) entitled "Safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems", from March 2022, released after the Russian invasion, states that an especially important objective is to reduce reliance on mineral fertilisers produced with fossil fuel. Another objective is "reducing dependence on feed imports".

Meanwhile, a European Parliament resolution from June 2023 "highlights the need for the EU to strengthen its food security, strategic autonomy and the resilience of its farming sector and entire supply chain by reducing dependence on imports from outside the EU" and "stresses that short and regional supply chains should be improved in a sustainable manner". This stance from the European Parliament, but also from the European Commission, could impact the trade in agricultural products between the EU and Latin America in the medium and long term (see next section).

5. The EU and Latin America in agricultural production and trade

The European Commission's new agenda for relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean says: "As major food producers, both regions share a responsibility for global food security" (European Commission, 2023: 14).

From an economic point of view, the EU is the world's biggest exporter of agri-food products. The EU accounts for 28% of global exports of dairy products and around 40% of livestock products (OECD and FAO, 2023: 118). In 2022, the EU's agri-food exports came to €229.8bn, while imports from the same sector amounted to €172bn. This gave the EU a trade surplus of €58.04bn, although it falls to €33.86bn if we include fish and fish products, where the EU imports quite a lot more than what it exports (EC, 2023a).

But, as the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) (2022) condemns, the trade surplus reflects a model of importing low-value raw products and exporting high-value ones. As a result, "we import cocoa and export chocolate, import soy for feed and export dairy products" (WWF, 2022: 8). Rather than feeding the world, the EU imports many more calories than what it exports. According to the WWF (2022: 8), the EU relies on imports for the equivalent of 11% of the calories and 26% of the proteins consumed in Europe.

Food production in the EU, then, largely depends on imports of fertilisers, cereals and oilseed flour (especially soy) as feed. Yet soy is

the imported agricultural product that causes most deforestation in the world. In 2022, oilseeds and protein crops topped the list of the EU's agri-food imports (15%), ahead of fruit and nuts (13%), and coffee, tea, cocoa and spices (13%) (EC, 2023a).

Cereals and cereal preparations and milling products were the EU's main agri-food exports (17%), followed by dairy products (9%) and wine and wine based products (8%) (EC, 2023a). Thus, "rather than the world's granary, the EU is the world's high-end grocery store, selling products aimed primarily at wealthier consumers" (WWF, 2022: 9). This limits the EU's role in the global supply of food. The five main recipients of agri-food products (the United Kingdom, United States, China, Japan and Switzerland) accounted for around 50% of the EU's exports in 2022.

There is not a single Latin American country among the 15 main recipients of the EU's agri-food exports, while the situation is very different in the case of imports. Here, Brazil was in first place in 2022 (with a quota of 12%); Argentina came sixth (4%); and Peru was fifteenth (with 2%) (EC, 2023a). Agri-food sector imports account for over a third (34.4%) of the EU's total imports from Latin America (39.3% for South America and 44.7% in the case of the Southern Common Market, Mercosur) and more than a quarter (27.7%) of the EU's overall agri-food imports (EC, 2023b).

The agri-food trade between the EU and Latin America has the same structure and same bias as the EU's overall agri-food trade, with one difference: the trade balance is negative for the EU. In 2022 the agri-food trade between the two regions had a value of €55.93bn (exports to the value of €9.99bn and imports of €45.94bn), with a balance of €35.95bn in favour of Latin America. In the EU's agri-food imports from Latin America, oilseeds and protein crops accounted for 26.7% (31.7% for South America and 43.1% in the case of Mercosur); vegetable oils (oilseeds and palm), for 4.1%; fruit and nuts, for 19.3%; coffee, tea, cocoa and spices, for 17.7%; cereals, for 5.9%; and preparations of fruits, nuts and vegetables, for 4.4% (EC, 2023b).

Latin America is not only a major exporter of agricultural products to Europe, it is also one of the main contributors to agriculture, accounting for 14% of the net value of agriculture and fish production globally in the period 2020-2022, with a share of agricultural exports of 17% (OECD and FAO, 2023: 132). But its endowment of natural resources related to agriculture is much greater: Latin America has 16% of the world's agricultural land and 33% of the land suitable for agriculture but not used (ECLAC, 2023a: 22). Currently, Latin America is responsible for a little over half of the world's soybean production, 16% of global livestock production and in 2032 it could produce 19% of its maize (OECD and FAO, 2023: 132).

Like the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean is a net agricultural exporter on average. Between 2018 and 2020, LAC had an average annual agricultural surplus of over \$127bn (109.26bn excluding fish) (ECLAC, FAO and WFP, 2023: 5). The share of exports in Latin America's total agricultural production has increased consistently and could reach 50% by 2032, with a share of global exports by then of almost 18% (OECD and FAO, 2023: 134).

There is no shortage of food there, but many Latin Americans lack the financial means to buy it, or it is exported to other regions of the world.

There are no proposals on how Europe and Latin America could work together to bolster food security in other regions of the world.

Latin America is among the world's biggest exporters of several foods. There is a clear predominance of soy derivatives: in the last decade, soy, soybean cake and soybean oil accounted for 26% of the value and 38% of the volume of agricultural exports (ECLAC, 2023a: 22). Similarly, by 2032 Latin America is expected to sustain a global export share of more than 30%, at least, for maize, soybeans, sugar, beef and veal, poultry and fishmeal. It is also conceivable that maize, soybean, beef, sugar and poultry hit global market shares of 44%, 64%, 43%, 55% and 31%, respectively (OECD and FAO, 2023: 135).

6. Different perspectives and limited cooperation

Food security has different connotations in Latin America and Europe. For Europe, it is basically about ensuring access to certain agricultural inputs or products by diversifying its trading partners and reducing dependence (security of the access to food and inputs). At the same time, the EU promotes the transformation of agriculture with a view to greater sustainability and healthier food (food safety). A European Commission communication (2022: 10) says: "Food sustainability is fundamental for food security". In addition, the EU provides funds to ensure food security in other regions of the world in accordance with the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the World Conference on Hunger. According to the European Commission (2022: 3-4), "for the period 2021-2024, the EU is pledging at least €2.5bn (€1.4bn for development and €1.1bn for humanitarian aid) for international cooperation with a nutrition objective. In the 2021-27 international cooperation programme the EU will support food systems in about 70 partner countries".

In Latin America, food insecurity is closer to the traditional notion, as nearly one in four people face it to a moderate or severe degree. That insecurity is a reflection of Latin America's structural problems as the region with greatest social inequality and a high proportion of poor among the population. There is no shortage of food there, but many Latin Americans lack the financial means to buy it, or it is exported to other regions of the world (like Europe, for example).

When it comes to addressing food security both regionally and globally, the differences between the two regions are clear. With the EU, Europe has a regional organisation in which the Common Agricultural Policy plays a central role. The various aspects of food security are debated in the European Commission and Parliament with a view to developing and implementing a common European strategy. In Latin America, meanwhile, the policy to ensure food security is simply the sum of all the national policies; the regional organisations play no part.

This hampers coordination of food security policies between the two regions. In addition, the agricultural sector has been a repeated source of problems in EU-Latin America trade relations. Agricultural protectionism is one of the main reasons why the free trade agreement between the EU and Mercosur, Latin America's agricultural powerhouse, is still unsigned after nearly 25 years of negotiations. The EU's eagerness to increase its own food security as part of its quest for strategic autonomy, as well as

the planned transformation of its agriculture in the framework of the European Green Deal, could put trade in agricultural products between the EU and Latin America under even further strain. Given the history described above, it is no surprise that the references to food (in)security in the joint declaration from the EU-CELAC Summit are very vague. Likewise, there are no proposals on how Europe and Latin America could work together to bolster food security in other regions of the world.

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FOOD SECURITY ASYMMETRIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: KEYS TO COOPERATION WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION

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1. Introduction

The declaration of the Leaders' Summit on Global Food Security of 2022 said: "Food systems and global food security are at a critical moment. The compounded impacts from a global pandemic, growing pressures from the climate crisis, high energy and fertiliser prices, and protracted conflicts, including Russia's latest invasion of Ukraine have disrupted production and supply chains and dramatically increased global food insecurity, especially for the most vulnerable." (US Department of State, 2022).

These words reflect the global concern over food security, and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is no exception. While the region is rich in natural and agricultural resources, it faces significant challenges to guarantee all its inhabitants have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food (FAO, IFAD, PAHO, UNICEF and WFP, 2023: 106-108). Thanks to its diversity of geography and climate, it has a wealth of natural resources and biodiversity, as well as a broad range of agricultural products that, in theory, could support a robust food security. In fact: "The region accounts for 16% of the world's agricultural soils and 33% of unused agricultural land, which means it has the largest reserve of soils with agricultural potential in the world" (ECLAC, 2019). The agricultural sector is crucial for the region's food security and is a source of food for the rest of the world. "In 2021, the region's agricultural exports totalled US\$257bn, while imports amounted to US\$109bn" (ECLAC, 2023: 65).

The reality, however, is more complex given that LAC "is the region with the highest average level of income inequality in the world. In highly unequal countries, economic slowdowns and downturns disproportionately affect the food security and nutrition of low-income groups" (FAO, IFAD, PAHO, UNICEF and WFP, 2023: 2). And inside the region each country faces different realities with varying levels of asymmetries relative to poverty, income levels, inequality, agricultural production, exports and dependence on imports of certain food groups, inputs or fertilisers (*idem*).

Despite an abundance of natural resources, the unequal distribution of wealth and the lack of equitable access to agricultural land and resources has generated deep disparities, meaning that some communities face difficulties in accessing nutritious food.

Thus, despite an abundance of natural resources, the unequal distribution of wealth and the lack of equitable access to agricultural land and resources has generated deep disparities, meaning that some communities face difficulties in accessing nutritious food. In such a setting, international cooperation plays a fundamental role in the search for effective solutions to LAC's food security challenges. And a key player in this cooperation is the European Union (EU), which has forged strategic ties with the region to tackle these challenges together.

2. Food security: asymmetries and challenges in Latin America

One of the most pressing challenges in LAC is the persistent *inequality in access to food*. Despite an abundance of natural and agricultural resources in the region and the progress made in reducing extreme poverty, in 2022, "22.5% of the Latin America and the Caribbean population cannot afford a healthy diet. In the Caribbean this figure reaches 52%; in Mesoamerica, 27.8%; and in South America, 18.4%" (PAHO, 2023). This inequality in access to food is compounded by the fact that the "rapid surge in food prices in recent years increased the cost of a healthy diet in the region. The greatest burden of this increase falls on vulnerable populations such as indigenous people, rural inhabitants and women" (FAO, IFAD, PAHO, WFP and UNICEF, 2023: 47).

Thus, *rural poverty* is another major challenge that directly affects food security in Latin America, given that a large proportion of people in rural areas rely on agriculture as their main source of income and subsistence. In addition, a lack of investment in rural development and limited access to credit and modern agricultural technology, as well as the volatility of agricultural prices, mean that many rural communities are more vulnerable to food insecurity when crops fail or food prices rise. (FAO, IFAD, PAHO, WFP and UNICEF, 2023). This is reflected in the disparity between the diets of rural and urban communities, as well as in the lack of access to quality food for the most vulnerable groups, which causes high rates of food insecurity. Rural areas in LAC "are home to more than 123 million people, 50 million of whom work, meaning that rural employment supports one in five working people in the region. Poverty (45.7%) and extreme poverty (21.7%) rates in rural areas are two and three times higher than in urban areas" (ILO, 2020). With those rates of poverty, the most vulnerable groups in rural areas lack sufficient means to obtain a basic basket of food.

A further challenge for food security is *climate change*. Latin America is vulnerable to extreme weather phenomena such as droughts, floods and unpredictable weather events that impact agricultural production and food availability. This affects the region's capacity to ensure a constant supply of food. Climate change can lead to a shortage of food and an increase in food insecurity.

Loss of agricultural biodiversity is another critical challenge for food security that threatens the resilience of food systems in LAC (WWF Colombia, 2022). As modern agricultural practices tend to focus on a limited number of cash crops, there is a risk of losing varieties of indigenous and traditional crops that are essential to food diversity and security.

Another challenge is *food inflation*, whose upward trend is hitting the purchasing power of more and more households in the region, putting their food security at increasing risk. “Average food inflation in 2021 was 3.7 percentage points higher in the region than the world average. This trend is highly relevant because high prices of nutritious foods are a critical barrier to healthy diets” (FAO, IFAD, PAHO, UNICEF and WFP, 2023: 47).

These priority challenges for food security highlight the need to tackle not just food production but also equity, investment in rural development, climate change adaptation, the conservation of agricultural biodiversity and controlling food inflation to ensure a more secure and sustainable future for food in the region.

3. Drivers of LAC-EU food security cooperation

Cooperation between LAC and the EU on food security has become an essential component of rising to the challenges mentioned above. The EU has played a prominent role in supporting initiatives that strengthen food security in the region. Below we shall examine some of the key drivers of this collaboration and how they are contributing to the improvement of food security in LAC.

An initial driver of cooperation is *support for the promotion of sustainable farming*. The EU has invested in programmes that foster the adoption of environmentally friendly farming techniques. This includes the promotion of conservation agriculture, which minimises soil erosion and reduces the need for chemical inputs, and crop diversification to increase the resilience of agricultural systems and the sustainable management of natural resources (European Union, 2023). Cooperation here seeks to improve natural resource management, reduce soil degradation and promote more sustainable and environmentally friendly farming practices in order to contribute not just to food security but also to the conservation of ecosystems and biodiversity.

Investment in agricultural research and technological innovation is a second key driver to improve productivity and food quality. The EU provides financial and technical support to strengthen these areas through cooperation programmes (AL-Invest 5.0, 2020). This includes promoting joint research among scientific institutions and universities in the EU and LAC. The collaboration promotes adopting advanced farming technologies such as efficient irrigation systems and post-harvest management practices to reduce food loss (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2018). Investment in research and technology is essential to increase agricultural productivity and ensure the availability of high-quality food.

Another pillar of bi-regional cooperation is *inclusive rural development* that seeks to reduce rural poverty and improve agricultural communities’ access to adequate land and resources. The EU fosters investment in rural infrastructure, the training of farmers and promoting inclusive development models. Thus, “support for the economic and social inclusion of rural communities is essential to improve food security in Latin America” (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2018). Cooperation

A lack of investment in rural development and limited access to credit and modern agricultural technology, as well as the volatility of agricultural prices, mean that many rural communities are more vulnerable to food insecurity when crops fail.

Cooperation between the EU and LAC on these aspects not only strengthens food security in the region, but it also contributes to sustainable development and the resilience of food systems to emerging challenges.

programmes focus on strengthening local capacities and empowering rural communities so that they can manage their resources sustainably and improve their quality of life.

Cooperation between the EU and LAC on these aspects not only strengthens food security in the region, but it also contributes to sustainable development and the resilience of food systems to emerging challenges.

4. Benefits of LAC-EU food security cooperation

Bi-regional cooperation in the field of food security provides a series of significant benefits that impact both Latin America and the EU and make a substantial contribution to improving food security in the region. These benefits range from strengthening food security to fostering sustainability and economic development. Some of the key benefits of this collaboration are detailed below.

Promoting **sustainable farming practices** is one key benefit of the cooperation. Investment in sustainable farming not only improves agricultural production, it also helps to preserve the environment (World Bank Blogs, 2021). This collaboration fosters the adoption of environmentally friendly farming practices such as conservation agriculture, which minimises soil erosion and reduces the need for chemical inputs, benefitting farmers and the health of the ecosystem.

Cooperation between the EU and LAC promotes more sustainable farming practices and **resilience to climate change**. This includes the introduction of drought and flood resistant crop varieties, as well as the deployment of efficient irrigation systems. In addition, strengthening investment in **agricultural research and technology** is crucial to improve productivity and food quality. Bi-regional cooperation promotes the adoption of advanced farming technologies, which helps to “increase agricultural productivity and ensure availability of high-quality food” (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2018). This collaboration boosts innovation in the farming sector as the EU provides its experience and advanced technology in agriculture and food security, which can be adapted to the specific needs of LAC.

Cooperation between the EU and LAC also has a positive impact on **inclusive rural development**. Financial and technical support for rural development seeks to “include rural communities economically and socially, which is essential to improve food security in Latin America” (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2018) and helps to reduce rural poverty and strengthen local capacities.

Fostering fair and sustainable trade is also a goal of EU-LAC cooperation. This refers to “the importance of open and fair trade based on internationally agreed rules, productive supply chains, and access to markets, and their contribution to promote sustainable development in its three mutually supportive dimensions: economic, social and environmental”. (Council of the European Union, Declaration of the EU-CELAC Summit 2023). In the post-COVID-19 context in the EU and LAC, the construction of “resilient economies also rests on rules-based

and sustainable fair trade, as well as on investment conditions with these characteristics. The above can only be achieved if the reconstruction context also takes into consideration issues relating to climate change and biodiversity” (Centro Alemán de Información para Latinoamérica, 2020).

These benefits demonstrate that bi-regional cooperation in the field of food security is a valuable investment that not only strengthens the region’s capacity to guarantee safe and nutritious food, but also contributes to sustainable development and the wellbeing of its people. This cooperation has resulted in a series of successful projects and programmes, some of which are outlined below.

Program “AL-Invest 5.0: Inclusive Growth for Social Cohesion” stands out as one of the EU’s most important international cooperation projects in Latin America. “It began in 1994 seeking to attract European investment to Latin America and with time, after seeing the realities in the region, it changed to promote internationalisation and to promote and encourage productivity in thousands of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Latin America” (AL-Invest 5.0, 2020: 8). Over its five phases it has focused “on strengthening the production, competitiveness and internationalisation processes of Latin American MSMEs, becoming the European Union’s flagship project for the private sector” (*idem*). It has succeeded in “benefitting over 49,000 MSMEs from 18 Latin American countries, thanks to the joint efforts of 110 business institutions in Latin America and the European Union” (AL-Invest 5.0, 2020: 5).

Euroclima+. For over a decade it has been the EU’s flagship regional programme on climate action in Latin America. “In 2023, it extended its footprint to the Caribbean and it is now being implemented in all 33 LAC countries. The initiative is part of the EU’s Global Gateway strategy that builds partnerships between the EU and the Latin America and the Caribbean regions as they lead the green and just transition”. (European Union, 2023).

AgroInnova 2020-2023, promoting innovative multistrata agroforestry systems for the Central American Dry Corridor, with which the EU seeks to improve the climate resilience and food security of at least 3,000 small producers of basic grains (IICA, 2023).

ProCadenas 2019-2023. A project to provide technical assistance to strengthen the regulatory, institutional and sanitary framework of sustainable livestock production. The goal is to reduce rural poverty through the economic diversification, improved competitiveness and integration into international markets of non-traditional livestock production in Paraguay (IICA, 2023).

Food security programme in the Caribbean 2013-2017. The beneficiary countries were the CARIFORUM members (Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, The Bahamas, and Trinidad and Tobago) and the objective was “to strengthen incentives, policies and programmes for smallholders in the region” (IICA, 2023).

These examples illustrate how cooperation with the EU has resulted in specific projects that address food security challenges in the region and promote sustainable agricultural practices, improve food quality and the resilience of local communities.

Conflicts like the war in Ukraine have a significant impact on food security, with an asymmetrical effect on food price fluctuation and supply chains in a highly interconnected global food market.

These examples illustrate how cooperation with the EU has resulted in specific projects that address food security challenges in the region and promote sustainable agricultural practices, improve food quality and the resilience of local communities. In addition, LAC has assets and capabilities in the agri-food chain that have attracted foreign investment, hence: “European Union companies have led the announcements of investment projects in the food and beverage industry in Latin America and the Caribbean. Between 2017 and 2021, they announced investments worth close \$9bn, 38% of the total announced in the region in this sector [...] Brazil and Mexico accounted for the largest amount of investment project announcements by European Union companies in food and beverages (38% and 30%, respectively, between 2017 and 2021), followed by Argentina (11%) and Chile (11%)” (ECLAC, 2023: 65).

5. Latin America-European Union food security cooperation challenges and prospects

While significant food security achievements and benefits have been attained through bi-regional cooperation between LAC and the EU, there are challenges that could be addressed to strengthen it even more. Below are some of those challenges and possible projections.

First, *climate change and climate disasters* pose an ongoing and pressing threat to food security. As extreme weather phenomena become more frequent and unpredictable, it is necessary to adapt farming and food systems in LAC. Climate disasters like droughts, floods, forest fires and storms can damage crops, destroy transport and storage infrastructure and adversely affect agricultural production, causing a reduction in food supply and an increase in food prices. Therefore climate adaptation must be a priority of cooperation between the EU and Latin America in order to guarantee sustainable food security for the long term. (ECLAC, 2023)

In addition, *pandemics and health crises* like COVID-19 highlight the importance of resilient food systems. Therefore, since greater cooperation is crucial to strengthen the capacity to respond to health crises and ensure the continuity of the food supply chain, “cooperation must include the promotion of more robust food systems and better management of food crises” (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2020). LAC-EU cooperation can strengthen the capacity to respond, as well as support a constant food supply in emergency situations with resilience mechanisms that enable tackling future food crises effectively (ECLAC, 2023).

Another key challenge is investment to improve food security with a long-term approach in three major priority areas for LAC: *increasing productivity, decarbonising food production and improving equitable access for the most vulnerable*. This approach takes account of current concerns about growing food insecurity and hunger, future trends of greater pressure on agriculture and food production owing to population growth, and climate change (ECLAC, 2023: 62-63). Cooperation with the EU in this respect could focus on these three major areas. “To increase agricultural productivity, while reducing both emissions per unit of output and total sector emissions and

improving access to a healthy diet for vulnerable populations, the intensity and direction of technological change must be redefined, with major investments in digital technologies, infrastructure and training of actors at all levels of the food production chain" (*idem*).

Similarly, *conflicts like the war in Ukraine* have a significant impact on food security, with an asymmetrical effect on food price fluctuation and supply chains in a highly interconnected global food market (Aróstica, P., 2022: 7-10). Perceived shortage or instability in the supply of food may lead to speculation on commodity markets, which in turn can raise the price of food. This is why LAC-EU cooperation to tackle such scenarios is crucial.

The *transition towards sustainable food systems* is another key challenge. Cooperation can advance the promotion of organic farming, the sustainable management of natural resources and help to arrest the depletion of food supplies. So, an "approach that promotes sustainable farming practices and more environmentally friendly production and distribution systems" is required (European Union, 2023).

In addition, *digitalisation and farming technology* offer opportunities to improve productivity and efficiency in the agricultural sector. Bi-regional cooperation can encourage the adoption of digital technologies like precision agriculture and food traceability and in this respect investment in agricultural technology and the promotion of digitalisation can boost the modernisation of agriculture in the region (Sotomayor, O., Ramírez, E. and Martínez, H., 2021: 9-14).

In short, "there are three main drivers of food insecurity, and they are conflicts, economic challenges and climate-induced extreme weather" (World Bank, 2023). LAC-EU food security cooperation, then, faces constant challenges. Yet it also offers opportunities to tackle these problems together and develop innovative solutions. Cooperation and adaptation to changing circumstances will be key to attaining sustainable food security in LAC that benefits both parties.

6. Conclusions

LAC-EU cooperation has proven to be crucial in addressing the food security challenges facing the region and promoting sustainable development. This bi-regional cooperation has made significant advances: it has promoted the adoption of sustainable farming practices; it has boosted agricultural research and technology, and it has supported inclusive rural development. It has also helped to improve food availability and quality, as well as the resilience of rural communities in LAC.

Latin America "is an important food supplier, exporting 40% of its food production and representing 17% of the total world food exports" (FAO, IFAD, PAHO, UNICEF and WFP. 2023: 5). But challenges persist and they require constant attention. Climate change, inequality in access to food and health crises (like the COVID-19 pandemic) are significant obstacles to food security in LAC and cooperation with the EU can be adapted to address these challenges. Therefore, among other aspects, it is necessary

to “improve food crisis management and strengthen the resilience of food systems to extreme weather events” (UN Sustainable Development Group, 2020). Parallel to the challenges, the future prospects for LAC-EU cooperation in the field of food security are promising (ECLAC, 2023: 59-68). The transition towards more sustainable food systems, agricultural digitalisation and fostering fair and sustainable trade offers opportunities to develop a more robust bi-regional cooperation.

The Declaration of the EU-CELAC Summit 2023 noted the importance of joint cooperation, with statements such as: “We reaffirm that by working together as sovereign partners, we are stronger and better placed to face the multiple crises and challenges of our times including food insecurity, poverty, inequalities in both regions, supply chain disruptions, and rising inflation” (Council of the European Union, 2023). Clearly, the need for more resistant and efficient food systems is a priority and that is why it is necessary to develop resilience mechanisms that make it possible to tackle future food crises effectively (ECLAC, 2023; European Council, 2023). Cooperation must remain agile and geared towards concrete action.

Lastly, LAC-EU cooperation on food security is not only crucial to guarantee the availability of sufficient and nutritious food; it is also a key step towards sustainable development that will enable improving people’s quality of life. An ongoing commitment and adaptation to the changing circumstances are essential to the success of bi-regional food security cooperation.

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1. Introduction

Latin America and Australia have seen the best and worst of China's rise. On the positive side, they have enjoyed economic growth arising from China's unprecedented demand for their commodities. On the negative side, they have complained about currency manipulation, deindustrialisation, and threats to local food security arising from the displacement of fresh food farms by commodity plantations.

This chapter compares the impacts of Chinese demand on food security and national interests in Latin America and Australia. It begins by considering how soybean production is fuelling an expanding "commodity frontier" across South America, whose effects include rural unemployment and consequent urbanisation. It then considers recent developments in Chinese trade and investment with Australia, where growing wheat and barley exports are inflating land taxes and stimulating the emergence of community projects to safeguard food security.

The next section considers the case of Cuba, whose government insists that closer integration with China must avoid dependency by including projects that build national food security. The chapter also offers some ethnographic observations of daily life in Beijing, where rapid urbanisation has promoted community initiatives that promote healthier diets less reliant on imported commodities. I conclude with some reflections on the significance of these Latin American, Australian, and Chinese experiences for the European Union.

2. South America's commodity frontier

The Chinese government's New-Type Urbanisation Plan aims to increase the nation's urban population to 1 billion by 2025 (from just 17 million in 1978), constituting the largest migration in human history. The unprecedented demographic transformation has unleashed middle-class consumption of pork sustained by imported soy-based animal feed, as well as wheat, barley, and other commodities. For food producing

Expanding plantations, the collapse of small farms, the intensifying application of synthetic pesticides and herbicides, and the growth of cities to accommodate displaced rural communities has become a global problem.

nations, balancing exports to foreign markets with sustainable local food systems has become a practical and ethical challenge.

Latin American soy cultivation is concentrated in the Southern Cone, where it now accounts for 45m hectares, 90% of which are in Brazil and Argentina. By 2010, soybeans genetically modified for resistance to the herbicide glyphosate accounted for an average of 85% of the total produced in the region. This has permitted intensive application of this and other agrochemicals, despite their diffusion into water systems that sustain local ecosystems and communities. "A clear outcome," concludes a multilateral task force, "is the externalisation of the ecological, social and public health costs deriving from soybean production" (Catacora-Vargas *et al.* 2012).

Soy agribusiness has encroached on peri-urban land previously used for fresh food production, undermining ecological diversity and traditional livelihoods while accelerating rural-urban migration as land management becomes concentrated in fewer hands. Propelled by this process, Latin America's urban population has now reached 82% of the total, making it "one of the planet's most urbanised regions" (ECLAC 2021). Booming commodity exports have generated substantial macro-economic benefits, but the ecological, social, and territorial consequences are deepening.

The expansion of soybean plantations across the Southern Cone represents a new commodity frontier, with transformative consequences for the Atlantic rainforest in southern Brazil, eastern Paraguay, and north-eastern Argentina. Since the 16th century this area has been subjected to waves of intensive logging, gold and iron ore mining, cattle ranching, and sugar and coffee production (Dean 1995). The extension of these earlier commodity frontiers was resolutely enforced by colonial and post-colonial regimes, but neither their geographic scale nor output match those of soybeans.

The industrial success and territorial advance of soy is facilitated by new farming technologies, growing foreign investment, and neoliberal deregulation. These transformations echo 20th century adaptations in the region stimulated by US agribusiness, whose competitive advantages were unlocked by the introduction of free trade regimes. The cumulative consequences of these successive waves of commodity extraction are now evident in Brazil's two largest cities, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, which have absorbed entire communities displaced by agribusiness operations. Harnessing their agricultural skills in urban and peri-urban farms has become a core challenge for rural migrants, local governments, and millions of city dwellers committed to more ecologically sustainable, socially inclusive, and personally healthy food systems. There is now clear evidence that projects that bring together these actors and their agendas are strengthening Brazilian food security (Hearn 2023, Nagib and Nakamura 2020).

The new commodity frontier extends beyond South America to other food exporters, generating comparable challenges in its wake. The correlation of increasing exports with expanding plantations, the collapse of small farms, the intensifying application of synthetic pesticides and herbicides, and the growth of cities to accommodate

displaced rural communities has become a global problem that is clearly visible in Australia. South America and Australia harbour similar legacies of colonial land use and current dependency on grain exports to China, whose thirst for commodities has made it the main trade partner of both. Unlike other mining and agriculture-intensive nations, though, Australia has avoided the worst of the “resource curse”.

3. Globalisation in Australia.

China’s agricultural footprint extends to Australia, where grains have become the nation’s fastest growing export, earning \$3.5bn in 2020 (UN-Comtrade 2021). Saul Eslake (2011:145) argues that Australia is “unusual for an advanced economy” because it provides a “counterexample”: manufactured goods constitute only 16% of exports while commodities underpin economic growth, as they have since colonial times. Since the turn of the 21st century, demand for wheat, barley, and metals generated by China’s growing cities has sustained Australia, like its South American counterparts, through successive global crises.

The annual poll conducted by the Lowy Institute for International Policy (2021) canvasses public opinion on a range of issues facing Australia. In 2014, 56% of respondents agreed with the statement that the Australian government is “allowing too much investment from China”, and by 2018 the number had grown to 72%. While Australians are accustomed to large Chinese investments in mining and energy, trepidation about agriculture appears to have driven the trend, with 87% responding in 2016 that they were against “the Australian government allowing foreign companies to buy Australian farmland”. In 2021 only 6% of respondents – an all-time low – were in favour of investment from China. As a respondent to a *Sydney Morning Herald* survey put it, “China has polluted its waters, air and soil. They have no respect to their own motherland. Why would they care about the environment of Australia?” (quoted in Bachelard 2018). Hostility towards China has been aggravated by trade tariffs imposed on Australian barley, beef, and wine in 2020. While farmers have temporarily offset China’s tariffs by diverting harvests to Saudi Arabia and India, their long-term strategy remains dependent on Chinese demand.

The 1788 arrival of the First Fleet in Botany Bay and Port Jackson (now Sydney Harbour) initiated a process of territorial dispossession that, like as in South America, fractured First Nation connections with land and food to lay the foundations of industrial agriculture and mining. Of these extractive pursuits, agriculture’s social and territorial dimensions are more visible, publicly exposing the human and ecological consequences of 21st century globalisation. Loss of crop diversity, intensification of chemical inputs, and resulting demographic and environmental impacts again reveal themselves as hallmarks of the new commodity frontier. Around Australia’s fastest growing city, Melbourne (population 5.1 million), it is striking that – as in Brazilian cities – peri-urban farms are disappearing as new suburbs extend outward and surrounding agribusiness operations encroach inward. Focused squarely on commodity exports, the state and federal governments appear unconcerned that the wheat, barley, and canola plantations edging toward the city’s north and west cannot

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It falls to social enterprises and non-profit organisations to defend the viability of Australia's small farms.

fulfil local demand for fresh food. Rising land taxes leave little hope for vegetable and fruit farmers, whose capacity to supply the city is projected to fall from 41% of demand today to 18% by 2050 owing to declining availability of affordable land and the Agriculture Victoria Strategy's focus on exporting to Asia (Carey *et al.* 2018:67).

It falls to social enterprises and non-profit organisations to defend the viability of Australia's small farms. Among these is CERES Fair Food, which now supplies more than a thousand Melbourne families each week with fresh fruits and vegetables sourced from around one hundred local growers, creating jobs and protecting land from real estate and agribusiness development.

Fair Food's director, Chris Ennis, describes the initiative as "a tool for public education about the social and environmental history of Australia's food system" (interview, September 17th, 2018). As he writes in a CERES newsletter, "Over the past 12,000 years, the age of agriculture, most of us were farmers. In Australia in 1900 one in seven of us were farmers, today only one in 33 grows the food we eat" (2012:6). By locating his project in the long run of history, Chris provides a broadly appealing narrative that has attracted support from small farmers, retail businesses, online customers, and local governments. As the intermediary at the heart of this network, his nascent alliance made its mark in Moreland City Council's A\$34,000 (US\$25,000) *Food System Strategy*, the first government-funded framework in Australia to incentivise productive use of urban arable land.

As Fair Food and other projects gain traction at the grassroots, a surge of interest from foreign agribusiness investors has evoked impassioned counterreactions. The presence of Chinese finance and companies in the sector is generating objections not seen with mining, gas, oil, and other extractive industries (Hearn 2013). In 2021, amidst warnings of possible environmental damage, political interference, and arrivals of Chinese workers, the Australian government voided the State of Victoria's agreement to join China's Belt and Road Initiative. The government's view that the initiative is not consistent with Australia's foreign policy reflects concerns about its implications around the world.

Waves of enthusiasm and trepidation about China reflect a decade of allegations that the emerging superpower's pursuit of food security constitutes a "land rush" among Chinese elites who "want a slice of rural Australia" (Cranston 2012). Similar language has emerged in Brazil, where according to former Minister of Finance Antônio Delfim Netto, "the Chinese have bought Africa and now they're trying to buy Brazil" (Estadão 2010). Underpinning these allegations in both countries are simmering apprehensions about the relationship between food, land, and sovereignty. Seized on by sensationalist media and politicians, these apprehensions fuel a simple argument: China's need for food commodities has prompted agribusiness investments that threaten to covet farmland and compromise national sovereignty. An instructive contrast to this argument arises from Chinese engagement with Cuba, where colonial and postcolonial dependence on the sugar industry sparked the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and disputes about the balance of dependency and sovereignty ever since. Even more than in Brazil and Australia, China looms large in Cuban attempts to find this balance.

4. Cuban counterpoint

The eminent Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz argued in 1940 that three centuries of national dependence on the sugar industry represented a “counterpoint” with the cultivation of tobacco. Beyond the economic contrast of sugar’s stellar success as an industrial commodity compared to tobacco, he proposed a series of related cultural distinctions. These foregrounded sugar’s reliance on enslaved Africans, some 780,000 of whom were forcibly transplanted to Cuba under Spain’s colonial dominion, and the industry’s mechanisation under US control after 1898. The extractive focus of both regimes made Cuba the world’s largest sugar exporter, instilling in Ortiz an acute sensitivity to power relations.

Toward the end of his life Ortiz saw his nation’s economic dependence on the United States, entrenched by the sugar industry, give rise to the Cuban Revolution of 1959 led by Fidel Castro. He would have also observed that the resulting exchange of Soviet oil for Cuban sugar was generating a new foreign dependency. Despite the Castro government’s commitment to maintaining the sugar harvest, mass mobilisation of work brigades could not compensate for the absence of US demand and infrastructure investment. Output declined, but the dynamics of dependency persisted until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989.

Since the end of the Cold War, the Cuban government has pursued closer relations with China, but unlike their Soviet predecessors, Chinese strategists are determined to avoid the economic and political risks of clientelism. Therefore, although Chinese investment is helping to revitalise Cuba’s sugar export industry, the deepening alliance is also building capacities – under the banner of the Belt and Road Initiative – to produce corn, rice, and other staples for local consumption. The emerging paradox of local interest and foreign influence reflects a breakdown of power dichotomies reminiscent of Ortiz’s counterpoint. As Cuban officials and their Chinese counterparts pursue what they call “mutually beneficial” 21st century socialism, the counterpoint of dependency and sovereignty continues to shape the island’s history (Hearn and Hernández 2021).

Jiang Zemin visited Cuba in 2001, pledging to support the production of sugar for sale to the Chinese state, but also rice, corn, and other staples for Cuban consumption. Secured during President Hu Jintao’s 2004 and 2008 visits to Havana, Chinese tractors, irrigation, storage facilities, and other agricultural inputs have since appeared across the island. To provide electricity for the Jesus Rabi sugar mill in Matanzas and its surrounding population, China Eximbank has since financed a biomass power plant that consumes residue from the mill. Construction, engineering, and initial operations were managed by Shanghai Electric, whose 325 technicians worked alongside 250 Cuban counterparts. The plant is intended as the first of 18 planned by 2030 to operate alongside sugar mills across the country (Pérez Sanchez 2020).

Commercial agreements between Cuba and China have been accompanied by advice about stimulating food production for Cuban households rather than for export, a goal borne out in cooperation through China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Among the projects underway

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China is home to a diverse range of actors who are emerging to shape their own local food systems.

is the construction of a facility in Pinar del Rio province by the Chinese enterprise Muiyang, which aims to process 37 tonnes of rice per day for consumption in Cuba (Hernández Cáceres 2020). Unlike investments in the sugar industry, such projects aim to build the island's domestic food production capacity, supporting the Cuban government's food sovereignty narrative even as the influence of Chinese firms on the island deepens. Criticism of this influence emanates mainly from conservative US think tanks and commentators, who allege, for instance, that cooperation in sugar and rice production, oil refining, and telecommunications constitute attempts "to prop up the Cuban regime" that ultimately put China "on the wrong side of history" (Lazarus and Ellis 2021).

For Cuba, Australia, and Brazil, the need to build alliances that support sustainable food systems is becoming more visible. Chinese demand for commodities is an important driver of change, but transformations within China are raising domestic challenges that resemble those faced by its suppliers. Far from being the monolithic command economy invoked by opportunistic politicians and media, China is home to a diverse range of actors who are emerging to shape their own local food systems.

5. Unity and diversity in Beijing

Rejecting simplistic arguments that China is undermining Brazilian food security, Gustavo Oliveira (2021) writes that, "The issue is not whether Brazil is economic prey to China, but rather whether Brazilian and Chinese peasants and workers are prey to domestic and transnational corporate elites and the state actors who enable and advance their power and profits." From this perspective, the ecological and social consequences of unbridled agribusiness arise not from the actions of the Chinese state, but rather from the unjust transformations of land and labour fuelled by capitalist modes of production across these contexts. The implication is that urbanisation is posing challenges to local food systems within China that have much in common with those emerging in Australia, Brazil, and Cuba.

At my host family's dinner table in Beijing, where I lived for a year in 2007-2008 and again in 2015, urbanisation's impact on food was plain to see. As a *de facto* member of the Wang family in the suburb of Pu Huang Yu, I was required to follow a daily routine: walk the dog with the family at 8am, jam into the subway station by 9am, and most importantly be home for dinner by 6.30pm. For Mr Wang dinner time was a ceremonial occasion. Placing the large glass bowl in the centre of the living room table, he would announce the dish he had prepared that day for his wife, daughter, and me. We enjoyed lamb, beef, and chicken almost every evening, but pork was his specialty, evident in the flair he added when exclaiming "京都排骨!" (Kyoto pork ribs!). I had first met Mr Wang while living nearby in 2007, shortly after he moved his family from a corn farm in Hebei province, on the outskirts of Beijing, into the cramped high-rise apartment. Eight years on, even without the rent I was paying, his job as a clerk in the administration office of his residential complex (*hua qiu*) sustained a diet that a decade ago would have been unthinkable.

It is difficult to fully appreciate the deepening socio-economic importance of pork in China. The OECD calculates that Chinese pork consumption per capita increased from 23.9kg in 2000 to 30.3kg in 2018, stimulated by

“higher incomes and a shift – due to urbanisation – to food consumption changes that favour increased proteins” (2021). To diversify consumption, the government has promoted mutton and other sources of protein since 2018, but pork remains the clear favourite. As the New-Type Urbanisation Plan increases China’s urban population from 850 million in 2014 to 1 billion people by 2025, demand for pork is set to grow. To sustain the expanding herds requires soybeans processed into animal feed, forming a global chain that stretches from Mr Wang’s dinner table to South America’s soybean plantations. As noted, the associated commodity frontier extends to Australia’s wheat and barley fields, which provide daily carbohydrates for millions of urban dwellers like Mr Wang, and to Cuba’s sugar plantations as gleaming Chinese tractors roll in.

The need to develop locally sensitive approaches to food security will continue to influence Chinese interactions with Latin America and Australia.

To Beijing’s northeast, an hour’s bus ride beyond the last subway station at Fengbo, a progressive community is forging an alternative peri-urban future. Shared Harvest was founded in 2012 as an independent Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) cooperative, and over the subsequent five years it grew to support over 40 farmers on 36 hectares of government-awarded land. Leaving behind stagnating villages, its members have avoided the precarity of the city’s construction, factory, and informal sectors. Instead, when I first visited in 2015, they were using their knowledge to produce organic pears, pumpkins, corn, sweet potatoes, okra, mushrooms, poultry, and pork for delivery to over 800 Beijing families each week.

Shared Harvest’s director, agricultural scientist Dr Shi Yan, describes her work as cultural conservation: “By providing these jobs we offer a dignified occupation that leverages the community’s skills and ancient connections to land” (interview, July 31st, 2017). Harnessing the capacities of displaced farmers, she is an intermediary who puts their food traditions at the centre of her work. Shi presents Shared Harvest to local officials as a beacon of cultural continuity in the face of urbanisation, and in return they have provided a methane biogasification plant to produce power and fertiliser, and have extended her lease until 2027. The initiative’s success has since inspired the creation of over 1,000 community farms across China (Lyu *et al.* 2020). Many of these are operated by Shi’s former students, and all of them are actively building public and private sector alliances to advance small-scale, non-industrial approaches to agriculture.

Urbanisation has played out differently for the Wang family and for Shared Harvest’s migrant workers. Both moved from Hebei’s farmlands to Beijing’s sprawling suburbs, but while the former relies on food chains sustained by foreign commodities, the latter feed themselves and their urban customers with local produce. The experiences of both demonstrate that the need for more locally oriented food systems is as pressing in China as it is in Brazil, Australia, and Cuba.

6. Conclusion: insights for the EU

The above scenarios suggest that grassroots projects can be as transformational as global agribusiness. Recognition of community agency is easily lost in debates about international trade and investment, especially when framed by politically heated accusations that China’s

growth is generating new dependencies among food producing nations while undermining their sovereignty.

The need to develop locally sensitive approaches to food security will continue to influence Chinese interactions with Latin America and Australia. The European Union is well placed to draw insights from this process, for instance through the annual EU-China and EU-Brazil summits. These summits afford opportunities to establish a trilateral EU sub-dialogue with China and Brazil, which would furnish the EU with insights into Chinese approaches to food security, technology transfer, development financing, and other pertinent issues. It would also facilitate discussion of objectives that China wishes to pursue with the EU – and is already achieving with Brazil – such as technological cooperation, progress toward more open trade, and diversification of investment.

Australia's agriculture relations with China are also relevant for the EU, particularly regarding foreign investment in farmland. As noted, the capacity of Melbourne's peri-urban zones to feed the city is expected to decline to 18% by 2050, and other Australian cities face a similar predicament. There is a pressing need to encourage investment, both foreign and national, into localised fresh food production for domestic markets rather than simply into the export commodity sector. Safeguarding national interests has figured more explicitly into Cuban approaches to China, in part because of the island's experiences with European colonialism and subsequent dependency on the US markets. While liberal democratic states cannot easily emulate Cuba's requirement that foreign agriculture investors build local food security, the EU (and others) could consider tax and other incentives for projects that prioritise community benefit.

The capacity of localised production to build more resilient and secure food systems is widely recognised, and this article offers a glimpse of the reality on the ground. Locally oriented projects are helping to address globally relevant challenges associated with climate change, urbanisation, and food security. As these issues become more prominent at the G20, the UN, the BRICS, and other multilateral fora, the EU is well positioned to both support and learn from foreign experiences.

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FOOD SECURITY FROM A GEOPOLITICAL PERSPECTIVE: PAST, PRESENT AND THE CHALLENGES OF “GRAIN WARS”

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1. Introduction

Re-examining food security from a geopolitical perspective in the 21st century means journeying back to what is basic and indispensable, to the most strategic discovery for the survival of humanity: food. Effort and ingenuity to produce food individually or collectively, by traditional means like farming or on an industrial scale or in a laboratory as we do now, remains one of humankind’s primary motivations, both in times of peace and in times of war.

Recent events such as the spread of the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic, constant changes in the climate and acts of war like those between the Russian Federation and Ukraine are taking place amid global challenges that involve addressing food security, in other words, guaranteeing the necessary or sufficient intake of nutritious and vital food as a fundamental part of human survival.

Geopolitical analysis is an important tool to explain the limits and scope of food security at the present time. This means looking back in order to appreciate the historical-political and economic-social, as well as military, constants that shape the various geopolitical models in which conflicts over the control of strategic resources still linger. These are geographical areas devoted to food production, minerals, water, energy, or indeed anything that might become a matter of dispute, the root of a conflict in any part of the world.

The military confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, then, is a conflict for control over strategic resources. At the same time, it is a watershed event that is polarising the international order and fomenting rivalries among blocs of states, as in the case of NATO headed by the United States and the European Union (EU). The same applies to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), led by Russia and China, and the BRICS mechanism, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa and which has recently approved the incorporation of new members (Patiño, 2022: 165). They are joined by other actors like international bodies, banking institutions and even armies of

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mercenaries, as in the case of the Wagner Group, all of which are taking a stance – one way or the other – in this climate of instability that transcends the Eurasian geopolitical environment.

The instability at the heart of Eurasia arising from the tension between Russia and Ukraine therefore warrants examining other aspects of the conflict, particularly disputes over strategic resources. This leads us to the idea that it is a “grain war” by spotlighting the geostrategic value of productive land, but which is also important in terms of location, position, productivity and development, among other comparative advantages.

The key geopolitical question is: what does the territory of Ukraine possess to cause a confrontation between Russia and the European Union, each with its respective allies? To start with, the territory comprises a genuine space in development, with land that is a source of important commodities (food, mining, energy and water resources), making Ukraine the “breadbasket of Europe”. Russia, meanwhile, appears to accept “the deep-seated militarisation of its society and the endless search for security through the creation of a land-based empire” (Kaplan, 2015: 233). Through constant expansion and readjustment of its “living space” via the extension of its borders, it seeks at all costs and by all means to recover what Russian geopolitical theorists call its “near abroad” (González, 2012: 136). That means that Russia is moving ahead with a strategy of reconquering the territories in the former Soviet orbit in various ways, either through persuasion, in the case of Belarus, or direct aggression, as we see in the case of Ukraine.

Finally, geopolitical reflection on this prototype of “grain war” that Russia-Ukraine tensions raise highlights the importance of other “agricultural pan-regions” in the world. The German Karl Haushofer used this term to describe the different regions into which the world would be divided and which, in turn, would become “theatres of operations”, in military parlance (Portillo, 2004). We can envision this situation for Latin America at the present time, transformed into a garden and breadbasket for the world, given the course that food security is taking in the 21st century.

2. Historical context of grain wars

Delving deeper into the first “grain wars” in history, we might choose the expansion of the Roman Empire as our starting point, under Julius Caesar, first, and Mark Antony, later, at the height of Cleopatra’s reign. That helped to situate Egypt as the “great granary” of Imperial Rome, largely as a result of the rise of wheat production that spread to other parts of the world like the territories of North Africa, Sicily and Hispania. At the same time, a supply chain was established to distribute the cereal with the charting of new courses and more land and sea routes that converged in Rome, the centre of imperial power. China’s political leadership is currently pushing a similar undertaking through its Belt and Road Initiative, which consists of routes converging on the centre of power in Beijing (Frankopan, 2020).

Moving beyond the Mediterranean, in the Middle Ages the journeys recounted by Marco Polo became the means of expanding the exchange of food between Europe and the Far East, characterised by places

shrouded in legend that produced the silk, porcelain and spices traded by Arab and Muslim merchants, who were skilled pathfinders. This enabled the trade in spices such as cinnamon, pepper, salt, turmeric, mustard or cloves that would transform the way food was seasoned and conserved beyond the perimeter that covered that “great island” of continental mass known as Eurasia, what the British geographer and politician Halford Mackinder called the Heartland (Mackinder, 2010: 312).

In China, meanwhile, between 1421 and 1433, in an era prior to the voyages of Christopher Columbus and other Europeans to the lands of the New World, the Ming dynasty took to the task of exploring alternatives to meet the demand for grain amid shortages and the prospect of a period of famine among its people. To that end, the Chinese leaders devised a series of food supply strategies, starting with the naval and diplomatic deployment of the great treasure fleet, commanded by Admiral Zheng He. It increased China’s trade and influence in terms of food and botany in Asia, India, Africa and the Middle East.

The Chinese ships carried a rich variety of flora (including rice, soy, millet, wheat, mandarin orange, lime, lemon, orange, grapefruit and coconut seeds) which they intended to plant in foreign lands, partly as a benefit of the tributary system and as a way of offering food to each territory where the great treasure fleet put into port. We also know that the vessels carried dogs on board, some as pets, others as food and others to hunt rats, while there were coops full of Asian chickens, which were transported as valuable gifts for foreign dignitaries along with other signature Chinese products (Menzis, 2015: 70, 96-97).

The Chinese honed their naval skills through their “string of pearls” model, a network of enclaves spanning the Indo-Pacific region. But their naval decline would come in 1433, as they ended their voyages and chose to turn inwards and build walls, before sailing the seas of the world again as they do today.

Then, around 1492 and marked by the imprint of Marco Polo’s journeys, Admiral Christopher Columbus was inspired to extend the spice and precious metal route, based on his own transoceanic utopia (Queralt del Hierro, 2014). At that time, seafaring skill and Portuguese vessels (caravels), combined with Jewish financial backing, paved the way for the East India Company, determined to locate the sources of gold in the lands of Ophir and sight the spice lands of the East Indies.

Columbus’s odyssey did not lead him to the lands of Ophir, but to the islands of the Caribbean, where the gold hung from the noses and ears of the natives. His mistaken sighting of the spice islands, off the land mass that Columbus and his crew had come across, brought them other food-related “business” opportunities. In this case it was production in “gardens” devoted to growing tubers, starting with potatoes, cassava and yams; vegetables like pumpkins, lettuces and tomatoes; cacao, chilies and vanilla (Ha-Joon Chang, 2023: 193).

These opportunities grew with the cataloguing of corn grain and beans. And in that interchange of cultures and tastes, wheat appeared in America, soon joined by barley and coffee beans from Arabia. Pigs and horses taken from the Iberian Peninsula on these first voyages arrived on

The lands discovered in the New World comprise the fertile soil and humus whose nutrients facilitate the sowing and production of vast areas of land that over time have come together to form an “agricultural pan-region”.

the plains and grasslands. Likewise, the “tropical gardens” were sowed with bananas, which would cross India and Africa, as a staple for the enslaved Africans who were taken to America to work the mines for gold and silver. Sugar cane also arrived from India and with it the spread of sugar plantations throughout the continent.

Thus, to this day, the lands discovered in the New World comprise the fertile soil and humus whose nutrients facilitate the sowing and production of vast areas of land that over time have come together to form an “agricultural pan-region”. It is no longer just the Old World. Latin America has opened up to other competitors, making the region a possible “theatre of operations” of future “grain wars”, the constant goal being to secure the carbohydrates, proteins and nutrients required to guarantee the continued existence of the human groups that inhabit the different territories on various continents.

3. Russia and Ukraine, a 21st century grain war

Returning to the issue of confrontations over land and, more specifically, to explain the conflict between Russia and Ukraine through the lens of a “grain war” amid food (in)security, Ukraine’s situation is a measure of the importance of forming part of the black earth, or chernozem, belt. This is a type of soil rich in humus and carbon that allows it to retain water and nutrients, facilitating high crop yields through the seasons. This idea of belts of fertile land is present in different parts of the world, turning these geographical areas into potential sources of conflict. They are found in the great grasslands of the United States Midwest, the pampa in Argentina with its “tierras castañas” (brown earth), as well as in Russia, Kazakhstan, China, Mongolia or Mexico among other locations.

Hence the reasons for a “grain war” in Ukraine are to be found in the 68% of black earth it possesses, making it an agricultural powerhouse. It even explains the colours of its flag: yellow for the golden wheat grown in its fertile fields blanketed by the blue of the sky. This puts it in the crosshairs of global agri-food corporations.

Transnational companies of US origin such as Monsanto, satisfying 40% of the demand for seeds used in Ukraine’s cultivation areas, followed by the Cargill cereal company, with wheat and oilseed processing plants, export terminals and ships in the port areas of the Black Sea, have become Russian military targets since the outbreak of the war, as part of the group of actors linked to this conflict through agricultural interests (Ostos, 2022: 20).

China too takes part in this battle of giants for domination of the agri-food sector. For years it has been committed to buying and leasing fertile land throughout the world as part of its food self-sufficiency strategy, laid out in a 1996 white paper. The main issue China must address stems from the slim margin (8%) of agricultural land in its territory, followed by the 6.5% of its water put to agricultural use. These are conditions that ultimately limit its capacity to meet the demand for food of a population numbering over 1.4 billion, a figure that accounts for close to 21% of the world’s inhabitants. (Ostos, 2022: 20).

China's business strategy (from 2010 to recently), focusing on the acquisition of fertile land and the purchase of food around the world, combined with an increase in its middle class and a rise in their purchasing power, also changed the intake of food of this segment of the population. The change could be observed in greater consumption of proteins, meat products, citrus fruit, processed food and even spirits. This prompted China's purchase of 3m hectares (29,000 km²) of farmland (an area virtually the size of Belgium) in the Ukrainian region of Dnipropetrovsk in 2013. The area amounts to 9% of Ukraine's arable land, devoted to the establishment of farms to meet the demand for cereals and livestock the Asian giant needs for its own sustenance.

This confirms the new food security challenges arising from this type of "grain war". Namely, the United States and China are also taking part in the Russia-Ukraine conflict via their agribusiness corporations, exacerbating the struggle for predominance in the markets and circuits devoted to distributing food globally.

4. Controlling agricultural pan-regions: food security challenges

Given the above, the global dynamic created by the chief competitors in the agribusiness sector carries a warning for other "agricultural pan-regions", in this case Latin America, which has 16% of the world's agricultural land and 33% of the land suitable for agriculture (ECLAC, 2023, 22). As in its colonial past, these figures make it a tropical garden under the eager eye of the current food "corporatocracies".

Two food powerhouses in Latin America stand out: Brazil and Argentina. In Brazil's case, most of its soybean and sugar exports head to China to meet the demand of Chinese consumers for this type of product. Argentina's contribution, meanwhile, is to sell soybeans, other cereals and meat products to China, via leasing agreements or acquisition on the part of China in those strategic soils typical of the pampa.

In line with the above, it might seem the matter follows the logic of supply and demand for food between countries as part of global trade agreements. But in the current circumstances, exacerbated by the global agri-food crisis, food price imbalances are not just the result of the current war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, rather they stem from over three years of economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It brought job losses, the abandonment of farm work in some places and blockages in chains of production, not forgetting the effects of climate change. All these factors combine to create the whiplash we are facing as a "global society" today.

Given this, the severity of the war and, particularly, Russia's block on communications and constant bombing of critical infrastructure (including dams for watering crops and Ukraine's main ports), combined with Western reprisals and the veto of products and supplies from the warring countries, are having a boomerang effect throughout the supply chains used to ensure global food security.

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So, we might ask what effects the Russia-Ukraine “grain war” has on Latin America. One crucial consequence is the concern of Latin American farmers, who, caught in the crossfire, face the prospect of a shortage of fertilisers from both Russia and Ukraine. This is creating a climate of uncertainty in the short and medium term over covering the demand for these inputs used in the agricultural activity characterising several countries in the region. Brazil is one of the most vulnerable countries to this situation as it relies on Russia for close to 80% of its fertilisers.

Countries including Haiti or those comprising the Northern Triangle of Central America (Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras), whose agricultural capacity is limited – for want of productive soil, constant drought, rural violence and forced displacement, the erosion of arable land, or lack of water sources – are forced to import most of their food. Food prices are rising at the moment, partly because of the war in Ukraine, but also because of the bulge in inflation left over from the global expansion of COVID-19, which led to a drastic slowdown of the world’s economies.

This means that the current map of the food crisis in Latin American and the Caribbean countries reveals pockets of undernourishment. And that means we face a situation of greater inequality in terms of access to basic foods, but also the prospect of greater socioeconomic tension, as a result of rising costs of agricultural inputs like seeds and fertiliser, along with the increase in the price of fuel and, therefore, of transport. In short, these circumstances disrupt the mood of society, and in the process diminish the prospects of the entire Latin American agricultural pan-region.

5. Closing thoughts

This journey from the first “grain wars” to the present day, through this kind of geohistory of food, gives us a taste of the fruits, but also of the bitter flavour, of the conflicts caused by the human dilemma of survival or dominance. It is an issue that bears out the saying attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte that “an army marches on its stomach”. Wars over food become a continuation of politics or, vice versa, politics becomes a continuation of war by different means.

The geopolitical view arising from a retrospective analysis through the historical continuum of “grain wars” allows us to get to the root of the problem, the substantive issue that makes land a decisive factor of power. In the past and through to the present day, the genesis of conflicts based on strategies of occupation, expansion and domination of land or geographical spaces of strategic value, as in the case of Russia and Ukraine, leads to the involvement of other actors in these rivalries, in this case global agribusiness and food production “corporatocracies”.

These circumstances make solving this prototype of “grain war” - modern if you will - more complex. Yet they continue as they did in Rome’s imperial past in Egypt, taking in the importance of the Silk Road, which today crosses land and sea, led by China as it aims for all roads to lead to Beijing. The encounter that Columbus triggered by taking Europe to Latin America and the Caribbean through an unprecedented exchange

of food and species has driven dominance over fertile land suitable for agriculture and livestock farming, but also for mining and hydrocarbons extraction, ever since.

Lastly, we have the challenges posed by the geopolitical model of “agricultural pan-regions”, which consists of a redrawing of the world map established by the main players in the food security field. It coincides with the rise of food “corporatocracies” and the shakeup of the markets and routes for trade in strategic foodstuffs and agricultural inputs, particularly fertilisers. The situation could be an opportunity or a challenge for Latin America, whose history also forms part of the future of “grain wars” in the 21st century.

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Food price imbalances are not just the result of the current war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, rather they stem from over three years of economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

FOOD (IN)SECURITY: MERCOSUR RESPONSES IN A CONTEXT OF GREATER GLOBAL DEMAND

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1. Introduction

Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in general, but the economies of the four full members of the Southern Common Market – Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay – (henceforth Mercosur 4) in particular, are some of the world's primary food-producing areas. This is thanks to indicators that show high natural resource endowment, fertile land suitable for the planting of diverse crops, water availability, qualified human resources applied to the management of eco-sustainable agri-food policies and strategies, foreign and domestic investment that have increased yields and productivity over the years, and biotechnical advances. They characterise a highly competitive production zone comprising the four economies that make up the Mercosur 4 bloc.

Over the last two decades, global demographic changes led by China and a dynamic India (which together account for 44% of the world's population) have powered production; markets once closed or where access was limited by tariff barriers (TBs) and nontariff barriers (NTBs) have opened up; trade has liberalised thanks to rampant globalisation; and there has been sustained global demand for agricultural commodities and food arising from processes of urbanisation, with breakneck growth particularly in the emerging economies of Asia, Africa, LAC and Southeast Asia. These have been and continue to be the drivers behind decisions on public and private investment, expansion of farming activities, consolidation of agribusiness chains and the promotion of technological innovation.

Since the start of the 21st century, the incorporation of new technologies applied to improve yields, an increase in exportable surpluses, the expansion of the agricultural frontier in each of the member countries, an upsurge in the use of fertilisers, and the lure of the expansion of the food-processing industry in China, India and Southeast Asia associated with dietary and nutritional changes among the emerging urban middle classes have coincided with a boom in international prices of agricultural commodities. In addition, alliances among European, US and Asian producers, logistics firms and technological companies via mergers and

In the face of the disruption caused by the pandemic and the war between Russia and Ukraine, the Mercosur 4 economies have, to varying degrees, managed to make the most of a favourable international situation to recast themselves as reliable global suppliers.

acquisitions increased the options of intra-Mercosur agri-food business and raised its export profile. Over the last five years, in the face of the disruption caused by the pandemic and the war between Russia and Ukraine, the Mercosur 4 economies have, to varying degrees, managed to make the most of a favourable international situation to recast themselves as reliable global suppliers that help to uphold the principle of food security.

In fact, despite the different incentives employed by each member country, the bloc forms an expanding area of food supply and export that is set to be even more significant in the years to come. For that reason, assuming subregional co-responsibility in the management of a sustainable global agri-food system, Mercosur 4 offers resilience in the face of possible future crises.

Given the above, this chapter posits the idea of the importance of the Mercosur 4 economies in moderating and/or mitigating shifts in levels of production, trade, export and global supply of food. The appreciation of their natural assets and production capacity, in particular, in the European Union (EU) and China are proof of that. On the basis of these considerations, what follows is an analysis of national and regional strategies and approaches to policies by Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, the Mercosur 4 members.

2. Latin American and the Caribbean as a supply base

According to the definition provided by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), “the agri-food system is a complex, dynamic and comprehensive concept that refers to a set of production chains installed in a given territory (rural and urban) that operate thanks to the dynamics of social actors in a given national and international macroeconomic context. These production chains are supported by a set of natural resources and operate in tandem with consumer demands”. LAC is one of the most important net food exporting regions in the world and the Mercosur 4 economies make a particularly significant contribution. (IICA, 2021a).

From the European perspective, LAC is a major contributor to global agriculture. Between 2020 and 2022, it accounted for 14% of the net value of agricultural and fishing production globally (European Commission, 2023). According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the region accounts for 13% of global production of agricultural and fish products, and 17% of the net value of exports of these products. They are share percentages that, according to the forecasts of the UN agency and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), will increase over the decade (OECD-FAO, 2022). By 2032 they are set to reach a global export share in excess of 30% for crops of corn, soybeans, sugar, beef and poultry, and fish flour (USDA, 2023).

From this perspective, the Mercosur 4 countries are set to reassert their regional production leadership, boosting exports and benefiting their respective trade balances and national development strategies.

3. Mercosur 4: production and export expansion, associated factors

The Mercosur 4 account for 62% of the population of South America and 67% of its GDP. The area's exports include soybeans, corn, beef and sugar cane (IICA, 2023). Its main export destinations are Asia (60%) and the EU (13.2%). By country, the top positions are held by China (26.8%), the United States (3.5%), India (3.2%) and the Netherlands. In 2022, exports from the Mercosur 4 countries increased by 18.2%, or \$71bn (by 36.5% in 2021). Most of the growth was attributable to an increase in exports from Brazil and to, a lesser extent, Argentina, which saw its soybean exports hit by a severe drought (ECLAC, 2023).

A string of factors explains the bloc's expansion in terms of production and exports. One of them is the expansion of the land used for agriculture (IICA, 2021a), a process common to all four economies since the start of the century. Brazil, for example, went from having 30.3m hectares of land available for soybean cultivation in 2013/14 to 43m in the 2022/23 crop season. In the case of Paraguay, it has tripled the area sowed with soybeans over the last 20 years and the share of agricultural production in exports increased from 35% to 43% in the same period. In Argentina, the introduction of genetically modified soybeans in the mid-1990s triggered a production revolution that saw planting spread to other provinces and regions that had previously been considered unproductive. This process is continuing with the reclaiming of land previously used for pasture and, partly, because of advancing deforestation, which is particularly serious in the Amazon.

The current situation and the trends under way suggest that the process will continue to drive leaps in both production and exports. OECD-FAO projections on the incorporation of agricultural land for crops 2020-22 to 2032 indicate that LAC is set to gain 8m hectares, with gains too for India (10m), sub-Saharan Africa (16m) and China (1m), while there will be sharp drops in Europe and Central Asia (20m hectares) and North America (3m) (OECD-FAO, 2023). As a result, over the coming decade the shifting location of the main production bases are set to further strengthen the role played by African economies and Latin American producers.

These projections imply attractive conditions for the reception of foreign direct investment (FDI), increases in public investment, use of new technologies – drones, artificial intelligence (AI) –, innovations in farm machinery and careful management of natural resources through the application of climate-smart, regenerative agricultural techniques (European Commission, 2023).

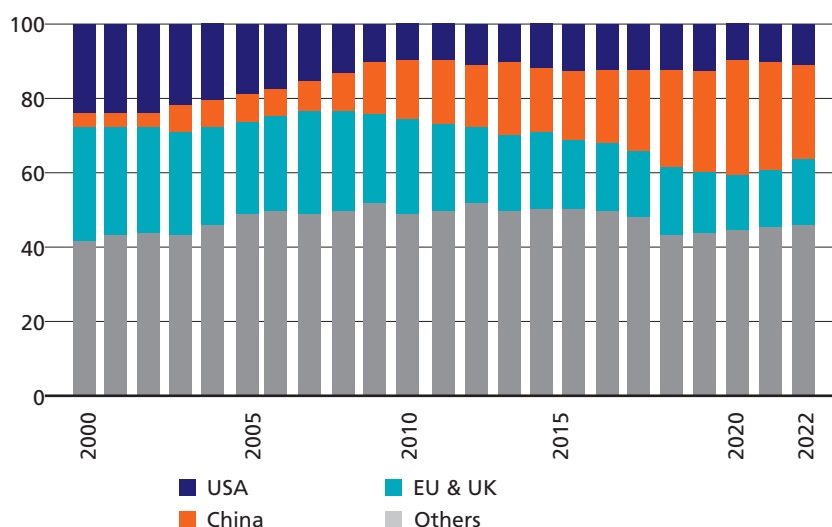
3.1. The pandemic: a window of opportunity?

The COVID-19 pandemic established the need for sustainable agri-food strategies and bolstered Mercosur 4's role as a global supplier. This was boosted still further by the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war and the resulting destruction of production bases, grain stocks and the disruption of regional supply chains that hit markets in the EU particularly hard.

Chinese capital has arrived in search of agricultural production opportunities, development and innovation in seed genetics and improved beef.

The pandemic brought new challenges like changes in consumption patterns because of prolonged isolation and additional demands on the quality of imported products. It also caused severe global trade disruptions because of unilateral suspensions of exports over fears of domestic shortages and import blockages and/or restrictions. As a result, the need to replace supply sources and cushion the impact on food security increased the importance of Mercosur 4 as an alternative supplier both to Europe and, especially, to China, whose production bases were hit by the spread of the pandemic among factory workers and farm labourers, as well as by interruption of agricultural activity.

Graphic 1. Destination of exports from Mercosur 4 (%)



Source: Percentage changes in destination of exports from Mercosur between 2000 and 2022, © Sophie Ramis, Helena Gisbert Sánchez / AFP, 2023

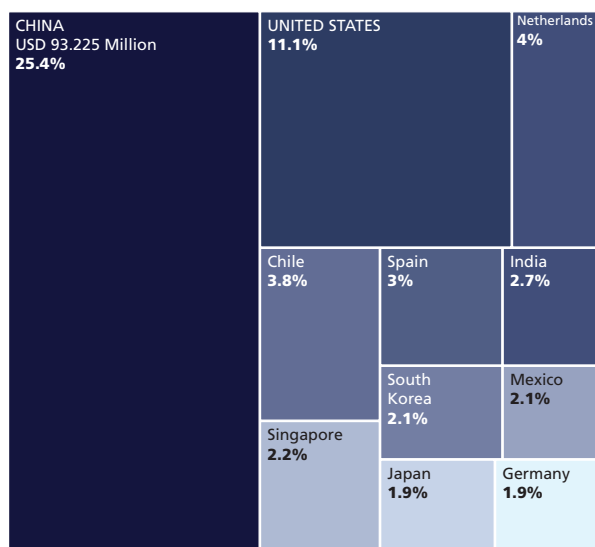
As a result of these changes, in 2022 Mercosur 4 exports increased by \$71bn over the previous year. Most of this increase was down to exports from Brazil and, to a lesser degree, from Argentina, while the contributions from Uruguay and Paraguay (the world’s fourth-largest soybean producer) were limited by production scale differentials (ECLAC, 2023).

3.2. Drive from China

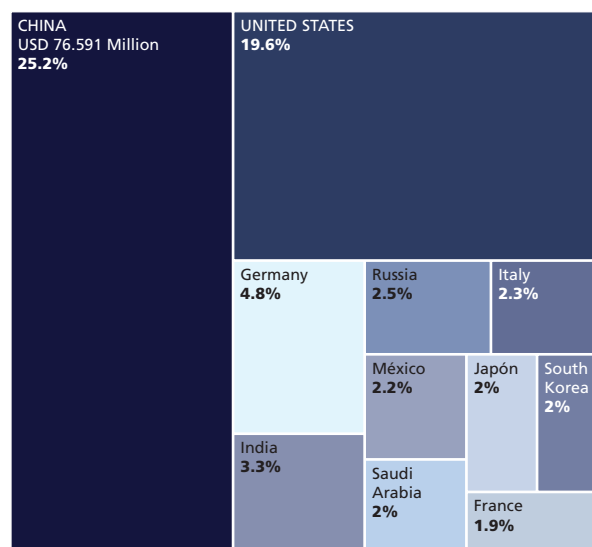
Economic exchange in general, and two-way trade between Mercosur 4 and China in particular, have expanded over the last two decades. The Chinese economy’s high rates of growth, rising demand for grain and cereal on the part of its oil-processing industries and greater protein consumption (meat) among its emerging and potent middle class are driving subregional sales whose final destination is the Chinese market. The main Mercosur 4 exports to China include soybeans, pellets, soy flour and barley. Brazil is China’s main partner in South America and a key exporter to the Asian giant thanks to its competitive agricultural sector. In Argentina’s case, 62% of its sales of agricultural products go to China, as well as 90% of its beef sales.

Table 1. Mercosur 4 trade, main importers and suppliers 2022

Exports



Imports



Source: Mercosur

Despite Paraguay maintaining diplomatic relations with Taiwan, trade with China has doubled over the last eight years. In Uruguay's case, exports to the Asian giant (excluding free zones) came to \$1.5bn in 2022, a 27.4% increase over the same period of 2021 (*Revista Parlasur*, 2023).

Another variable to take into account in China's relations with Mercosur 4 in terms of agriculture are the investments made by Chinese state-owned and private companies in the subregion's agricultural sector. Chinese capital has arrived in search of agricultural production opportunities, development and innovation in seed genetics and improved beef. Financing provided by Chinese state banks flows largely into bi-oceanic infrastructure and port logistics projects at a national and subregional level, under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

China is certainly a primary market for Mercosur 4. As such, Uruguay declared its interest in negotiating a free-trade agreement (FTA) with China, but, at the moment, the initiative does not have the backing of the other members of the bloc, particularly Argentina, as they believe it would be a breach of the commitments taken on multilaterally in the Treaty of Asunción.

3.3. The Mercosur-EU agreement

Against a backdrop of global agri-food disruptions and given the importance of upholding the principle of intra-EU food security in the face of the Russia-Ukraine conflict the signing of a Mercosur-EU agreement to create a free trade area has gained new traction. First conceived in 1999 after a meeting of EU heads of state or government and Mercosur held in Rio de Janeiro, the agreement has been under negotiation for two decades, with an initial "political" deal

Given the importance of upholding the principle of intra-EU food security in the face of the Russia-Ukraine conflict the signing of a Mercosur-EU agreement to create a free trade area has gained new traction.

struck in early 2019. The main points negotiated under the agreement include the EU liberalising 99% of its agricultural trade with Mercosur, while the Mercosur economies would remove 88% of their tariffs. The agreement also provides for the bloc opening up to imports of industrial goods, cars, telecommunications, insurance and financial services provided by EU companies (Argentine government, 2019).

The 500 million inhabitants of the EU certainly comprise a prime market for the Mercosur bloc and the EU economies are also an important source of FDI. Brazil is the EU's main trade partner, and the EU is the biggest foreign investor in Mercosur. Brazil is also the main destination of FDI placed by European firms in the region, and the fourth-biggest outside the EU. It is a similar picture in Argentina, where European FDI is in first place. For the EU, the FTA would ensure greater access to a food-supplying production area (ECLAC, 2023), allowing it to diversify supply risks caused by a war in Ukraine with no clear end in sight (Ghiotto, L and Echaide, J., 2019). The European economies' imports from Mercosur 4 include meat, sugar cane ethanol, soybeans, soy flour and fish products, and they have few options as far as expanding their border devoted to agriculture is concerned. Spain is the second-biggest destination of agri-food products shipped from Mercosur, accounting for 21.4% of sales to the EU.

Yet, despite these apparent mutual benefits, there are major obstacles to signing the agreement. Prominent among them is European resistance to endorsing the deforestation of the Amazon through a trade deal, as well as the incorporation of additional environmental protocols on the part of the EU that would affect the entry of agricultural products from the bloc. In addition to these restrictions, there are subsidy increases for European producers thanks to political determinants and the current policy of the European Green Deal, which seeks to reduce the use of pesticides by 50%, the use of fertilisers by 20% and devote 25% of the agricultural land to agroecology by 2030. These conditions are considered impositions that clash with the systems of production of the Mercosur 4 economies (Mira, 2022).

3.4. Brazil the driving force

Brazil is the region's biggest exporter and the main driver of agri-food export growth in Mercosur 4. The factors powering Brazil's transformation into an efficient food producer include sustained public-private investment, gains in arable land (particularly in the southeastern states), the incorporation of technology into different crops and greater global demand for food (*Clarín*, 2023).

Brazilian exports came to \$53.7bn in 2022 (up 19.1%). The main driver was the increase in international prices. The soybean industry accounted for \$13bn; corn (exports of which nearly tripled) provided \$8.1bn, and beef represented \$3.8bn (ECLAC, 2023). Brazil, then, has become the United States' main competitor in the global corn market, and even in the meat market. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) projections for 2031 indicate that red meat and poultry production is set to increase from 61m tonnes in 2021 to 70m by that year (USDA, 2023). As a global agro-exporter, Brazil stood in sixth place 40 years ago; today it takes third place in the global ranking (*Infobae*, 2023).

3.5. “Junior partners” count

Uruguay’s natural resource endowment affords it comparative advantages in the production of food. With over 90% of its land suitable for agricultural activity (16.5m hectares), the sector accounts for between 6% and 7% of GDP. During the 2021-2022 crop season, the total cultivated area increased by 14% year-on-year, driven primarily by soybeans, and the expansion of barley, rice and corn. The agribusiness sector plays a significant part in the country’s export mix. Its share of the global market puts it in seventh place in sales of rice, tenth in barley and sixth in soybeans (Uruguay XXI, 2022).

Paraguay is remarkable because of its rapid transformation into a competitive agro-exporting economy. According to the World Bank, “during the last two decades, Paraguay has experienced robust economic growth thanks to favourable terms of trade that have led to improvements in the prices of the country’s exported products and solid macroeconomic policies, including institutional reforms such as the inflation targeting mechanism and fiscal responsibility legislation” (World Bank, 2023).

Beef and soybeans account for nearly 70% of its exports and a third of its GDP, and the country is the world’s fourth largest soybean producer. In order to boost its export drive, certain logistics projects are looking to interconnect its domestic routes with the Bi-oceanic Road Corridor that is set to link Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina. The purpose of the corridor is to connect Brazilian soybean producers and Paraguayan farmers with Asian markets, crossing northern Argentina to the ports of northern Chile, providing a gateway to the Pacific, or the Atlantic, rather like the Panama Canal (Manrique, L., 2022).

According to the president of Paraguay, Santiago Peña, while it maintains diplomatic relations with Taiwan, on a trade level the country has “no restrictions” with China, which is its “main trading partner” and “one of the chief destinations of Paraguayan exports, primarily soybeans” (Infobae, 2023).

The importance of the principle of food security lies in the need to eliminate exclusion and the concentration of wealth or minimise situations of social vulnerability.

4. Mercosur 4: global responsibility, internal food security and policy coordination

Projecting the principle of intra-bloc food security correlates with the commitment undertaken by the bloc as a productive ecosystem with high levels of sectoral integration in the area of agriculture. For the Mercosur 4 economies, food and nutritional security provides order to strategies relating to national development, the organisation of production, job creation, the contributions the agricultural sector makes to local development, sustainable development, technology diffusion, biotech innovation, the internationalisation of farming SMEs, and industrial development by creating intra- and extra-bloc production chains.

For Brazil, for example, the importance of the principle of food security lies in the need to eliminate exclusion and the concentration of wealth or minimise situations of social vulnerability because “the challenges are permanent, as hunger and poverty are structural problems that require long-term action” (IICA, 2021). For its part, the Tekoporã food

security programme in Paraguay, geared towards families facing poverty and vulnerability, “coordinates action with soup kitchens and one of our specific goals is to diversify family diets”. In Uruguay, the legal framework approved in 2014 “establishes preferences for family farmers and artisanal fishing in public purchases”, which “fosters the sustainable development agenda and favours local production circuits” (IICA, 2021b).

In line with the above, and with a view to increasing internal levels of coordination and taking concerted external action, for two decades the Mercosur 4 economies have created various consultation mechanisms on sectoral strategies and courses of action. One example is the Southern Agricultural Council (CAS), a ministerial forum for consultation and coordinating regional action comprising the ministers and secretaries of agriculture of the member states. Its chief goal is to set priorities on the farming agenda and adopt common positions on matters of regional interest. The mechanism includes other associated states such as Chile.

The regular meetings of the CAS serve to organise and coordinate action on production, logistics, customs issues and external negotiations, among other topics, and representatives from the public and private sectors take part. Meanwhile, in December 2022, the Ad Hoc Group on Trade and Sustainable Development (GAHCDS) was formed to address the challenges the green transition poses the Mercosur 4. These initiatives provide intra-bloc cohesion and predictability on common strategies and policies aimed at building trust among local and international operators.

5. Conclusions

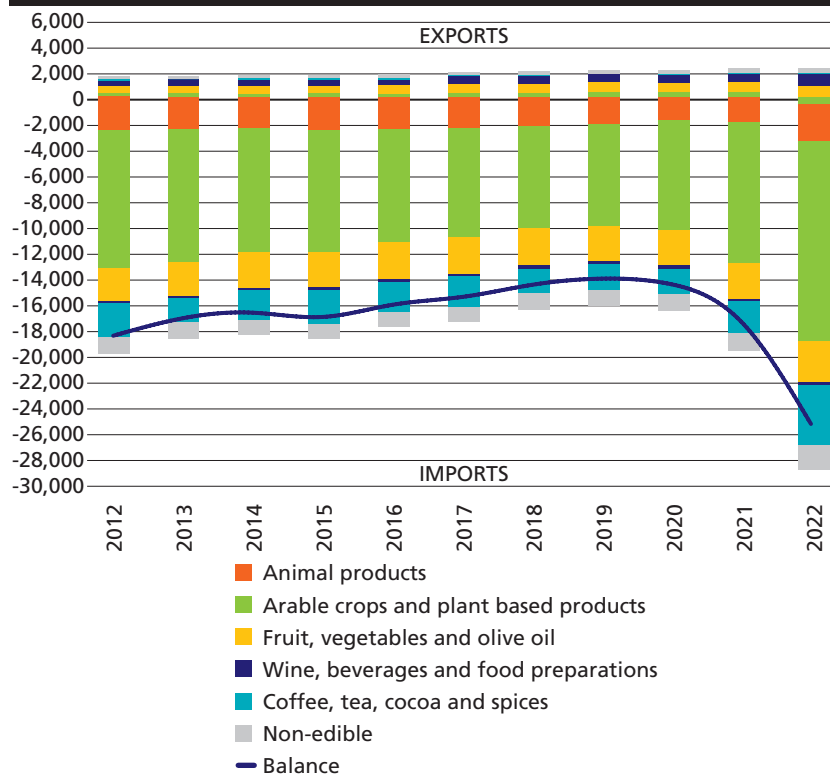
The pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war have caused disruptions in global food supply, raising international prices of agricultural commodities that had a direct effect on inflationary increases in both developed and developing economies. The confirmation of a cycle of production instability and restrictions on the world's supply of food revived debates over how to safeguard food security in the face of a breakdown in supply chains, fall in the global supply of food, trade restrictions and environmental degradation.

Given this general outlook, the producing economies of Mercosur 4 responded by maintaining strategies geared towards expanding production frontiers, investing in infrastructure and connectivity, introducing greater phytosanitary and veterinary checks and standardising quality-control and traceability procedures for agricultural products bound for export, particularly to the demanding markets of the EU and the Asia-Pacific, such as China.

In the current situation, and in order to minimise future risks, the EU's renewed interest in signing a free trade agreement and an anticipated cycle of increasing imports on the part of China and other rapidly developing economies of the Pacific and India, confirm the decisive role that the Mercosur 4 countries are playing as competitive and efficient agri-food producers.

Appendix

Figure 2. Structure of EU agri-food trade with Mercosur 4, 2012-2022



Source: AGRI-FOOD TRADE STATISTICAL FACTSHEET, European Union - Mercosur 4 European Commission, Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/agrifood-mercotur-4_en.pdf

Table 2. Evolution of EU agri-food imports from Mercosur 4, 2018 - 2022

	Imports						
	Value Mio €					%	
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Share in all Agri 2022	Change 2021-2022
Agri-food:	16,429	16,051	16,491	19,577	28,240	100.0	44.3
Animal products	2,120	1,995	1,711	1,851	2,721	9.6	47.0
Beef and veal	1,223	1,166	967	1,065	1,480	5.2	39.0
Pigmeat	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	
Poultry and eggs	479	435	360	397	712	2.6	79.3
Sheep and goat	9	8	8	5	15	0.1	200.0
Dairy products	0	0	0	0	0	0.0	
Other animal products	407	386	375	383	513	1.8	33.9
Arable crops and plant based products	7,950	7,933	8,447	10,911	15,560	55.1	42.6
Cereals	833	898	764	825	2,615	9.3	217.0
Cereal preparations and milling products	13	17	28	19	27	0.1	42.1
Oilseeds and protein crops	6,865	6,720	7,396	9,654	12,173	43.1	26.1
Vegetable oils (oilseeds and palm)	87	106	67	142	211	0.7	48.6
Margarine and other oils and fats (vegetable)	42	41	46	64	88	0.3	37.5
Sugar and isoglucose	109	151	147	207	446	1.6	115.5
Fruit, vegetables and olive oil	2,881	2,720	2,806	2,760	3,132	11.1	13.5
Vegetables	130	137	171	168	205	0.7	22.0
Fruit and nuts	1,484	1,391	1,520	1,571	1,754	6.2	11.6
Preparations of fruits, nuts and vegetables	1,235	1,175	1,088	990	1,158	4.1	17.0
Olives and olive oil	32	19	27	30	15	0.1	-50.0
Wine, beverages and food preparations	237	225	225	235	319	1.1	35.7
Wine and wine based products	118	108	124	112	130	0.5	16.1
Spirits and liqueurs	17	11	13	14	31	0.1	121.4
Beer, cider and other beverages	1	1	1	2	2	0.0	0.0
Confectionery and chocolate	7	6	5	5	8	0.0	60.0
Mixed food preparations and ingredients	93	99	82	102	147	0.5	44.1
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	1,964	2,002	2,040	2,532	4,555	16.1	79.9
Coffee, tea, cocoa and spices	1,964	2,002	2,040	2,532	4,555	16.1	79.9
Nonedible	1,278	1,175	1,262	1,288	1,952	6.9	51.6
Pet food and forage crops	286	253	246	266	371	1.3	39.5
Tobacco, cigars and cigarettes	580	601	538	547	634	2.2	15.9
Horticulture	10	9	12	10	9	0.0	-10.0
Nonedible for technical use	402	312	466	466	938	3.3	101.3
Unspecified					0	0.0	

Source: AGRI-FOOD TRADE STATISTICAL FACTSHEET, European Union - Mercosur 4 European Commission, Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-05/agrifood-mercotur-4_en.pdf,

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THE EUROPEAN UNION AND LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: FOOD SECURITY PROJECTIONS FOR BI-REGIONAL RELATIONS

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1. Introduction

Relations between Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the European Union (EU) are undergoing a revival. It is a phenomenon that needs to be properly analysed and must be framed in the situation facing both the EU and the Latin American and Caribbean countries in recent decades, particularly the present one. While some European countries have deep historical and cultural ties with LAC, those bonds were not strong enough to sustain robust and strategic relations, leaving a space that was gradually filled by other emerging powers, like China.

This chapter addresses the EU's recent policy on LAC against a new international backdrop marked by the war in Ukraine and the confrontation between the United States and China. As far as the impacts of this new situation are concerned, it will deal exclusively with food security as a vehicle for recasting LAC as a strategic partner of the EU. It is a narrow definition since both the war in Ukraine and the clash between the world's two biggest powers have repercussions on various issues on the global agenda, in aspects such as energy availability and strategic materials, international security and the appearance of new coalitions, to name just a few.

2. Food security

While the concept of food security first emerged in the 1970s, it has acquired new meanings in recent years, taking account of economic and sociocultural variables. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Food security has four main dimensions: the physical availability of food, economic access to it, utilisation, and the stability of the first three dimensions over time (FAO, 2011).

The definitions of food security as provided primarily by the FAO face new challenges, mainly because of the impact of social, geopolitical and climate risks, for example, which have prompted the use of concepts such as "food insecurity". This seeks to be a broader expression, encompassing the

Food security has four main dimensions: the physical availability of food, economic access to it, utilisation, and the stability of the first three dimensions over time.

dimensions mentioned above, but taking into consideration vulnerability, which is associated with the “likelihood of a drastic reduction in access to food or in consumption levels owing to environmental or social risks, or a limited response capacity on the part of states” (PESA, 2011).

On the European side, food security occupies a place of utmost importance in its cooperation pillar and is, as we know, a key feature of the EU’s relations with the rest of the world. In fact, the EU is the world’s leading donor. According to OECD figures, in 2019 it provided over 55% of official development assistance (ODA) (Martín and Fillol, 2022). The EU has approved a series of regulations and declarations on food security over the years, particularly with regard to combatting hunger on a global level in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda adopted by the United Nations in 2015. The EU’s approach to food security also considers sustainability a central aspect, promoting good agricultural practices that include making good use of soil, caring for biodiversity and the sustainable management of forests and grasslands.

The EU actively cooperates with international bodies specialising in the matter. For example, it participates in programmes with the FAO through initiatives that support low-resource countries to promote infrastructure – public or private – for sustainable agriculture and to achieve food production that enables reaching food security (Martín and Fillol, 2022). The EU’s joint cooperation on this subject is much broader, as it not only covers bilateral and plurilateral action with other countries, but also with another series of international bodies that include the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).

Meanwhile, and of paramount importance for the goals set out in this chapter, it is worth noting the internal policy on food security pursued by the EU. This has undergone changes in recent years, particularly since the 2000s with the definition of new goals and the establishment of the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), created in 2002 under Regulation 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council (European Union, 2002). This agency is responsible for assessing the risks in matters of food safety and it currently has a specific strategy (Strategy 2027), focusing on science, safe food and sustainability (EFSA, 2021).

The EU has devised a food security policy that not only covers cooperation as a central pillar, but also sets out an internal policy that has become all the more important recently owing to growing international conflicts and, particularly, the war in Ukraine.

As for the EU’s link with LAC through the major international cooperation mentioned above, the European countries work together with their Latin American counterparts on several agricultural research programmes, which include areas such as sustainable agriculture, incorporating technology, sustainable practices and climate change. The EU and the LAC countries have cooperated on promoting food security standards to guarantee the quality and safety of food produced in both regions. They have made progress on issues such as malnutrition, especially in deprived areas of LAC, through various programmes. Other issues tackled collectively are related to family agriculture, which is given paramount importance in terms of promoting sustainable practices.

Point 3 of the recent declaration from the EU-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) summit of July 2023 includes the importance of working together to face the multiple crises related to food insecurity, along with supply chain problems and inflation. Point 17 of the same declaration, meanwhile, refers to the importance of enhancing cooperation on a series of issues that includes food and energy security. Point 28 of the declaration mentions the Global Gateway strategy and its goal of mobilising public funding and private capital in areas including food and energy production (EU-CELAC Declaration, 2023). In addition to the large number of programmes existing between the EU and LAC countries, we must also consider the importance of the trade in food for the two regions and the role played by the partnership agreements in place (or under negotiation) between the parties.

3. A new global stage

The food security outlook in EU-LAC relations must necessarily take into account the main shifts on the global stage, in what could even be considered a new era given the magnitude of the events like the war in Ukraine, which shows no clear sign of ending. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, there have been different phases of global instability connected to an immediate increase in international prices owing to supply constraints on account of the importance of both Russia and Ukraine in the production of certain foods. The conflict triggered spikes in inflation reported in the early months of the war and an increase in poverty in markets heavily reliant on these staples, like countries in Africa. Of course, the phenomenon also spread to energy and mineral resources (Bartesaghi, 2022).

In addition to the conflict mentioned above, the COVID-19 pandemic had a global impact that sparked debates on the importance of supply chains. It is an issue that has also raised concern in the framework of the confrontation between the United States and China, which could have global implications in the event that the two main powers clash over Taiwan.

Geopolitical tensions arising out of the war in the Ukraine, confrontation among various powers and mounting distrust among countries has impacted cooperation, with a gradual increase in trade-restrictive measures, which have hit all-time highs. In fact, in a recent report on global trade the World Trade Organization (WTO) issued a warning about signs of trade fragmentation, calling for a drive towards "re-globalisation". This concept helps to give some idea of the scale of the risk the international system is facing because of the increase in geopolitical tensions (WTO, 2023).

The World Bank says we are in the midst of a global food crisis, stating that by 2030 some 670 million people will still face hunger, which is associated to shocks from climate change, a global water crisis and biodiversity loss, among other scourges that continue to plague the goal of eliminating world hunger (World Bank, 2023). In particular, it has addressed the case of the Central African Republic, where 75% of the population depends on agriculture (World Bank, 2019).

Moreover, there is a growing consensus on the fact that we are going through a climate crisis with the previously mentioned repercussions on food security not only on account of supply restrictions arising from the

The EU has devised a food security policy that not only covers cooperation as a central pillar, but also sets out an internal policy that has become all the more important recently owing to growing international conflicts.

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impossibility of sustaining production because of climate phenomena such as floods, droughts or heatwaves, but also because of the effect that food production has on carbon emissions (World Bank, 2022). The UN has warned of a failure to meet climate change goals, which impacts the achievement of the SDGs by 2030. The UN references a recent study by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) that establishes that science leaves no room for doubt that climate goals are not being met (WMO, 2023).

The recent G20 New Delhi Declaration also highlights the importance given to food security, a situation aggravated by political crises, but especially to climate change, which was the central issue tackled by the world's main powers (G20 Secretariat, 2023). The challenges set out above are not intended to cover all those currently facing the international community. But they signal a new era and require huge cooperation efforts and highlight the need for states to achieve some minimal level of cohesion through international organisations (Bartasaghi, 2021).

In parallel with the changing global backdrop driven by the confrontation between the United States and China, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the EU has faced enormous challenges of its own that have had an impact on the policies pursued with other international actors. Prominent among them are the euro crisis, the wave of terrorism that struck several European capitals some years ago, an escalating migration crisis, an increasingly widespread groundswell of nationalist and populist trends, and Brexit. All these phenomena have had systemic effects and prompted the EU to review its strategic alliances and strengthen its institutions to speed up the approval of policies that bolster EU cooperation.

4. Historical and institutional components of Europe-Latin America relations

The countries of Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean share historical and cultural roots that are still very much present and this is particularly evident in the role that Spain and Portugal continue to play at certain times when bi-regional ties need fresh impetus. Unlike the United States, Europe does not share a continent with LAC, or international bodies like the Organization of American States (OAS), created in 1948, which channel the debates on the continental agenda.

The efforts to formalise European cooperation with the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean began in the 1980s, with the accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Economic Community in 1986. Apart from contacts by some European countries in the Contadora Group in a bid to contribute to securing peace in Central America, it was not until the Rio Summit of 1999 – where regular top-level meetings were introduced (and subsequently replaced by CELAC-EU summits) – that bi-regional relations became more formal (Bartasaghi & De María, 2017).

Alongside meetings of considerable political significance, there were other initiatives like inter-parliamentary exchange (Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly); the participation of European countries in Latin American and Caribbean integration processes; Ibero-American summits, and, from the 1990s onwards, the deployment of a strategy of EU engagement with LAC through “partnership agreements”.

The first of such agreements was with Mexico in 1997; it was followed by one with Chile in 2002, and in 2008 came the agreement with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). A few years later, in 2012, an agreement was reached with Central America and negotiations began with the Andean countries, particularly Colombia, Peru and Ecuador. A deal was struck with Mercosur in 2019, the only one of those mentioned that has not been ratified (taking the economic and trade pillar as a reference) owing to the renegotiation under way because of new environmental commitments proposed by the EU. The breadth of agreements the EU has signed with the LAC countries, with the exception of Venezuela, Bolivia, Guyana and Suriname, gives the European bloc an edge over the United States and China, which have also entered into treaties in recent years, but they are not nearly as extensive as those signed by the EU.

The above-mentioned agreements could be the path towards a road map for convergence among the Latin American integration processes, as in the case of Mercosur with the Andean Community (CAN), Mercosur with the Pacific Alliance, or harmonisation within the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI) itself. Many LAC countries have granted the EU concessions of a depth that they did not grant each other in the regional blocs themselves, as in the case of Brazil and Mexico in the framework of the ALADI (Bartesaghi, 2021)

Over the last few years, the EU has approved a series of policies that impact relations with Latin America, either by incorporating new challenges or broadening existing cooperation, in what has been dubbed a relaunch of relations with LAC (with Africa too) in the framework of the new international backdrop described above.

The European Green Deal is an ambitious plan to make the EU economy more sustainable and reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, with a view to reaching climate neutrality in the EU by 2050. The policy seeks to reduce emissions, encourage the transition to renewable energy by reducing dependence on fossil fuels, promote energy efficiency and the circular economy, lower the consumption of natural resources, safeguard biodiversity and natural ecosystems and support a just transition that leaves no one behind in the shift towards a sustainable economy. This policy has implications for LAC in several fields, but especially in export flows thanks to Regulation 2023/1115 of the European Parliament and the Council, approved in 2023 and which is set to enter into force in 2024 (European Union, 2023). Under it, goods traded in the EU market must refrain from giving rise to deforestation or forest degradation. On that list are products of paramount importance in LAC's exports to Europe, including meat, cocoa, coffee, palm oil, soybeans and wood.

The ambitious European legislation has implications for trade agreements too, particularly with Mercosur, since the environmental agenda the EU has presented to the bloc as a condition for ratifying the deal has been rejected by the South American countries. On the subject of the European policy, ten LAC governments – including Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Colombia –, along with countries from other regions of the Global South like Indonesia, Nigeria or Thailand, have submitted a complaint to the European Commission as they consider the measure will disrupt trade (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of Argentina, 2023).

In 2021, the European Commission also launched the Global Gateway strategy (European Commission, 2021) in order to promote international cooperation ties through better infrastructure and connectivity in investments to improve energy efficiency. The initiative is funded through the EU budget and will mobilise over €300bn in the period 2021-2027. The projects funded by the programme are selected through a competitive process and they are assessed according to their economic, social and environmental merit.

The European Commission president said that with the programme “we will support smart investments in quality infrastructure, respecting the highest social and environmental standards, in line with the EU’s values and standards. The Global Gateway strategy is a template for how Europe can build more resilient connections with the world”.¹ In the framework of the programme, the EU intends to implement an investment plan in LAC (in Africa, Asia and the Balkans too) in key sectors related to health, digital, research and education, as well as transport, the climate and energy, pillars that are closely linked to food security. In fact, the Global Gateway coordinates its investments outside the EU through the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the EIB Group, which partner the European Commission and the European External Action Service in executing this programme. In LAC’s case, investments of over €30bn are projected and cover five main themes: climate and energy, digital, education and research, health, and sustainable transport. The projects the programme will undertake with the countries of the region are related to solar energy, green hydrogen, electricity networks and bioeconomy, for example (European Investment Bank, 2023).

Also directly relating to LAC, the EU launched a new agenda with the region in 2023, releasing it prior to the EU-CELAC Summit in Brussels (European Commission, 2023). The “New agenda for relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean” seeks to strengthen political, economic and cultural ties between the two regions, highlighting the shared values of democracy, human rights, social justice, and sustainable development.

At the launch of the new policy with LAC, the high representative of the union for foreign affairs and security policy and vice-president of the European Commission, Josep Borrell, was very clear when he stated that: “Latin America and the Caribbean are central in the fight against climate change and represent a global power in terms of biodiversity, renewable energies and strategic raw materials for the green transition”, adding the need to “move from being ‘natural partners’ to being ‘partners of choice’” (European Union Delegation in Ecuador, 2023). As for the pillars of the new agenda, many of the points established are related to energy sustainability, but also to food production, diversification focused trade, supply chain security and trade agreements. The new policy refers to the Global Gateway EU-LAC Investment Agenda as a central tool (European Commission, 2023).

As we can see, the new era of EU-LAC relations will be marked primarily by the approval of the European Green Deal and its resulting regulations; by the Global Gateway agenda with LAC, and by the EU’s new policy towards LAC that will govern action with the region through the CELAC, at subregional level (with Mercosur, the Central American Integration System, or SICA, the Pacific Alliance, Andean Community and CARICOM) and on a bilateral level.

1. In: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_es (online) [accessed October 11th, 2023]

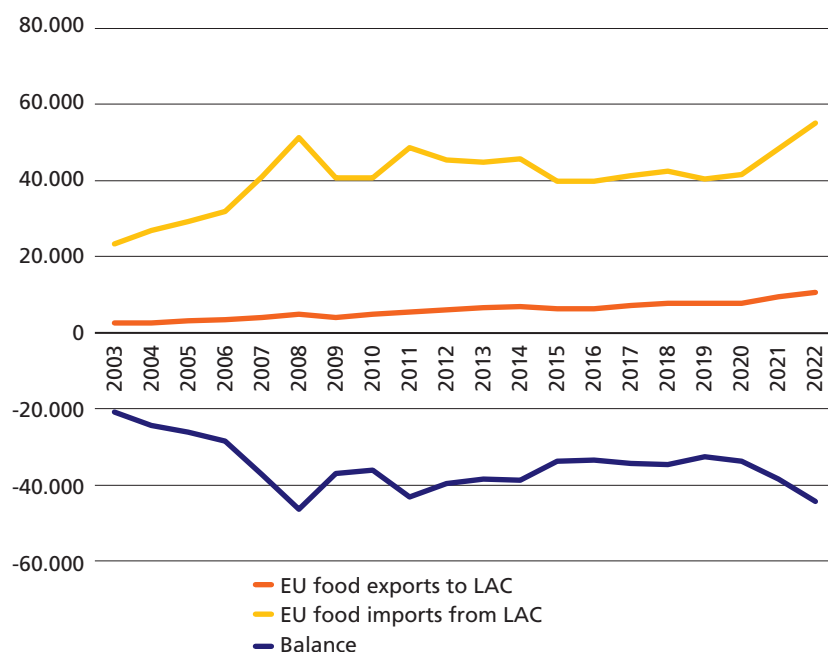
5. Trade and food security

To complement the analysis of the regulatory and institutional scope relating to the importance of food security between the EU and LAC, we must look at the evolution and current state of food trade between the two actors.² As can be seen in Graph 1, EU food purchases from LAC went through a long period of stagnation before making a marked recovery starting in 2020. In fact, taking the period 2003-2022, food exports from the EU to LAC grew at an annualised rate of 7.9%, compared to 4.7% for imports (a lower rate than the growth reported for EU food imports from the rest of the world).

The trade balance in this sector weighs heavily in favour of LAC (by close to \$45bn in 2022). As for LAC's importance as purchaser of food exported by the EU, it accounted for 1.5% in 2022 (2.3% in terms of all products). In the case of LAC as a supplier of the total acquired by the EU, that share came to 8% in food, while it was 2% of all products.

The new era of EU-LAC relations will be marked primarily by the approval of the European Green Deal and its resulting regulations; by the Global Gateway agenda with LAC, and by the EU's new policy towards LAC that will govern action with the region through the CELAC.

Graph 1. Foreign food trade between the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean



Source: Own elaboration based on Trade Map (2023).

In terms of products, the main foods exported by the EU to LAC in 2022 were beverages, followed by preparations of vegetables and fruits and by animal fats and oils (see Table 1).

As for EU food purchases from LAC, first place went to edible fruit and nuts, followed by residues from the food industries and oil seeds and oleaginous fruits (see Table 2).

2. "Food" is understood as the universe of products comprising chapters 01 to 23 of the Harmonised Commodity Description and Coding System (HS).

Table 1. Food exports from the European Union to Latin America and the Caribbean by product

Chapter	Product description	European Union (EU 27) exports to Latin America and the Caribbean, \$US thousand		Annualised change (%)	Share (%)		LAC in EU global food exports (%)
		2003	2022		2003	2022	
'01	Live animals	20,731	70,234	6.6	0.8	0.7	0.6
'02	Meat and edible meat offal	23,159	340,771	15.2	0.9	3.2	0.6
'03	Fish and crustaceans, molluscs and other aquatic invertebrates	61,527	228,766	7.2	2.4	2.1	0.8
'04	Dairy produce; birds' eggs; natural honey; edible products of animal origin...	361,083	808,245	4.3	14.3	7.5	1.1
'05	Products of animal origin, not elsewhere specified or included	29,204	145,756	8.8	1.2	1.4	3.3
'06	Live plants and products of ornamental horticulture	50,567	164,796	6.4	2.0	1.5	0.9
'07	Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	54,808	229,610	7.8	2.2	2.1	0.8
'08	Edible fruit and nuts; peel of citrus fruit or melons	21,859	296,696	14.7	0.9	2.8	0.9
'09	Coffee, tea, maté and spices	17,923	117,969	10.4	0.7	1.1	0.8
'10	Cereals	182,913	200,801	0.5	7.2	1.9	0.5
'11	Products of the milling industry; malt; starches; inulin; wheat gluten	292,275	608,163	3.9	11.6	5.7	5.7
'12	Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits; miscellaneous grains, seeds and fruit; industrial or medicinal plants;...	43,765	494,943	13.6	1.7	4.6	2.3
'13	Lac; gums, resins and other vegetable saps and extracts	44,992	196,406	8.1	1.8	1.8	5.4
'14	Vegetable plaiting materials; vegetable products not elsewhere specified or included	2,214	4,167	3.4	0.1	0.0	2.2
'15	Animal, vegetable or microbial fats and oils and their cleavage products; prepared edible fats; animal or vegetable waxes	145,972	1,011,700	10.7	5.8	9.4	2.3
'16	Preparations of meat, of fish, of crustaceans, molluscs or other aquatic invertebrates...	44,364	151,346	6.7	1.8	1.4	0.7
'17	Sugars and sugar confectionery	50,344	156,731	6.2	2.0	1.5	1.0
'18	Cocoa and cocoa preparations	63,109	292,473	8.4	2.5	2.7	1.0
'19	Preparations of cereals, flour, starch or milk; pastrycooks' products	219,611	744,817	6.6	8.7	6.9	1.4
'20	Preparations of vegetables, fruit, nuts or other parts of plants	113,565	1,023,778	12.3	4.5	9.5	2.9
'21	Miscellaneous edible preparations	183,696	844,343	8.4	7.3	7.9	2.1
'22	Beverages, spirits and vinegar	416,607	2,014,699	8.6	16.5	18.8	2.5
'23	Residues and waste from the food industries; prepared animal fodder	79,944	576,627	11.0	3.2	5.4	1.6
Subtotal	Food	2,524,232	10,723,837	8	100	100	1.5
'TOTAL	All products	50,734,004	158,857,973	6	5	7	2.3

Source: Own elaboration based on Trade Map (2023).

Table 2. Food imports of the European Union from Latin America and the Caribbean by product

Chapter	Product description	European Union (EU 27) imports from Latin America and the Caribbean, \$US thousands		Annualised change(%)	Share (%)		LAC in EU total food imports (%)
		2003	2022		2003	2022	2022
'01	Live animals	11,833	11,051	-0.4	0.1	0.0	0.1
'02	Meat and edible meat offal	1,302,592	2,199,564	2.8	5.6	4.0	4.7
'03	Fish and crustaceans, molluscs and other aquatic invertebrates	1,987,493	3,674,309	3.3	8.6	6.7	7.5
'04	Dairy produce; birds' eggs; natural honey; edible products of animal origin...	194,862	209,249	0.4	0.8	0.4	0.4
'05	Products of animal origin, not elsewhere specified or included	149,499	244,280	2.6	0.6	0.4	4.9
'06	Live plants and products of ornamental horticulture	335,393	608,325	3.2	1.5	1.1	4.7
'07	Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	280,127	684,378	4.8	1.2	1.2	2.3
'08	Edible fruit and nuts; peel of citrus fruit or melons	4,853,970	10,384,205	4.1	21.1	18.8	20.7
'09	Coffee, tea, maté and spices	1,961,129	8,249,116	7.9	8.5	14.9	30.9
'10	Cereals	572,663	2,978,266	9.1	2.5	5.4	8.4
'11	Products of the milling industry; malt; starches; inulin; wheat gluten	9,252	89,312	12.7	0.0	0.2	1.3
'12	Oil seeds and oleaginous fruits; miscellaneous grains, seeds and fruit; industrial or medicinal plants;...	2,972,381	6,043,941	3.8	12.9	10.9	16.9
'13	Lac; gums, resins and other vegetable saps and extracts	33,405	194,502	9.7	0.1	0.4	5.6
'14	Vegetable plaiting materials; vegetable products not elsewhere specified or included	12,503	15,934	1.3	0.1	0.0	2.8
'15	Animal, vegetable or microbial fats and oils and their cleavage products; prepared edible fats; animal or vegetable waxes	326,347	2,999,623	12.4	1.4	5.4	5.6
'16	Preparations of meat, of fish, of crustaceans, molluscs or other aquatic invertebrates...	652,817	1,499,960	4.5	2.8	2.7	7.1
'17	Sugars and sugar confectionery	295,086	888,995	6.0	1.3	1.6	6.4
'18	Cocoa and cocoa preparations	193,375	544,076	5.6	0.8	1.0	2.1
'19	Preparations of cereals, flour, starch or milk; pastrycooks' products	10,312	25,857	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
'20	Preparations of vegetables, fruit, nuts or other parts of plants	1,387,772	2,571,027	3.3	6.0	4.7	9.1
'21	Miscellaneous edible preparations	144,616	434,297	6.0	0.6	0.8	1.5
'22	Beverages, spirits and vinegar	793,036	2,118,499	5.3	3.4	3.8	4.4
'23	Residues and waste from the food industries; prepared animal fodder	4,578,383	8,551,647	3.3	19.9	15.5	21.6
Subtotal	Food	23,058,846	55,220,413	5	100	100	8
'TOTAL	All products	54,265,076	160,897,930	6	42	34	2

Source: Own elaboration based on Trade Map (2023).

Comparing the performance of EU food imports from LAC to the same trends in China, according to Trade Map data the Asian power bought goods to the value of \$74.4bn in 2022, growing at an annualised rate of 15.4% in the period 2003-2022, while the EU bought \$55.2bn and its purchases grew at a rate of 4.7% over the same period (Trade Map, 2023).

In summary, trade data confirm that in the last few years the EU has lost ground as a destination of the food LAC places in the world, to China in particular.

6. Conclusions

The new international context, marked by confrontation between the United States and China and the impact of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine on supply chains, prompted the EU to review its relations with other regions of the world. This can be seen not only in the case of LAC, but also in Africa and Southeast Asia.

Food security in its broadest sense (such as sustainable production, for example) is at the forefront of recent policies approved by the EU, prominent among which are the European Green Deal, the Global Gateway and the EU's policy towards LAC. The first two are more general and are not limited to the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean alone. Yet these policies do have their own chapters for these countries, as was clear at the recent CELAC-EU summit held in Brussels.

From the point of view of trade in food, the EU has not been so important to LAC as a destination for these products over the last few years, its place being taken by China. Since 2020, however, there have been signs of a certain recovery. While there is a favourable international context for relaunching relations between the EU and LAC, in which food security carries greater weight, the severity of EU legislation regarding sustainability could impinge on the new strategy, as can be seen with the difficulties in closing the agreement between the EU and Mercosur. This could continue to favour the enhancement of the LAC countries' relations with other powers such as China.

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Food security remains one of the greatest challenges facing humanity. The number of people affected by hunger in 2021 reached 9.8% of the world population, a figure that rose to 29.3% if we include the moderately food insecure. The nascent recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic has been hampered by the effects of the Ukraine war on agricultural markets, a rise in food prices and inflation that has impacted the high cost of these products, contributing to growing social inequalities. Rising energy costs too have triggered a surge in farm gate prices, distribution costs and what the consumer pays.

Against this backdrop, this publication aims to contribute to European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) food security cooperation by promoting dialogue between the two regions. It is divided into two parts. First, it compares the food security situation and challenges in the EU and LAC from a multidimensional perspective, examining the various effects of the Ukraine war and the contribution the two regions can make to global agri-food production and trade. It also analyses the impact that Chinese agricultural demand is having within China's own borders and on South America, Australia and Cuba, highlighting the need for approaches that take account of local peculiarities and how they affect the interaction between different regions. The second part examines food security from a geopolitical perspective and Mercosur responses in a context of greater global demand, analysing different variables and possible food security scenarios to improve bi-regional relations between the EU and LAC.