PERSPECTIVES FROM THE ATLANTIC

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"Like everything metaphysical, the harmony between thought and reality
is to be found in the grammar of the language"

(Wittgenstein 2001 [1953]).

When speaking about transatlantic relations, what first comes to mind is the link between the United States of America and Europe. After the Cold War, links between the two regions were forged to the point that it is difficult to envisage a space that includes not only the North Atlantic, but also Africa and South and Central America. As seen in other chapters of this monograph, the Atlantic Future project has identified the links and interdependencies that glue these regions together. Almost 500 stakeholders across the wider Atlantic were interviewed during the fall of 2014 and the spring of 2015 to furnish the project with a preliminary insight into their *imaginarium*. Stakeholders were able to identify commonalities across the region and the threats that unite or divide us. The majority were sceptical about the existence of an Atlantic Space. However, while it seems that stakeholders are not ready yet to accept the Atlantic Space as a reality, the idea was not dismissed, and many perceived its potential.

To complement the interview reports, published to present the results of the interviews on a regional basis[1], this chapter focuses on two particular questions that interviewees were asked: *Do you believe that a pan-Atlantic space or "Atlantic Rim" could be formed? If not, under what circumstances do you think this pan-Atlantic space could take shape?* A total of 488 stakeholders were interviewed from the public (160), private (83), academia (126), media (60) and civil society (59) sectors, all of them with a professional background related to transatlantic issues. Interviews were carried out in 25 countries of the Atlantic Space: Angola, Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Colombia, France, Germany, Ghana, Honduras, Italy, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Nigeria, Poland, Portugal, Senegal, Spain, South Africa, United States, United Kingdom, and Venezuela. In addition, interviews were conducted at the

[1]. The interview reports can be accessed at the Atlantic Future project website, under the series "Perspectives from African countries", "Perspectives from Europe", "Perspectives from International Organizations" and "Perspectives from the Americas": http://www.atlanticfuture.eu/contents/search/results

headquarters of international organizations in Geneva, Washington D.C. and New York. Around 20 interviewees were selected in each country – with the exception of Brussels and London, where 40 interviews were conducted[2]. For the public sector, diplomats, heads of units and divisions, and directors and representatives at supra-national organizations were selected. For the private sector, managers of companies, multinationals, chambers of commerce and professional organizations were chosen. For academia, professors and researchers were selected. For the media, analysts, editors and heads of international affairs sections were included in the selection. Finally, from the civil society sector, associations and non-governmental institutions and activities were consulted as well.

Figure 1. Map showing the countries around the Atlantic Space where interviews were carried out
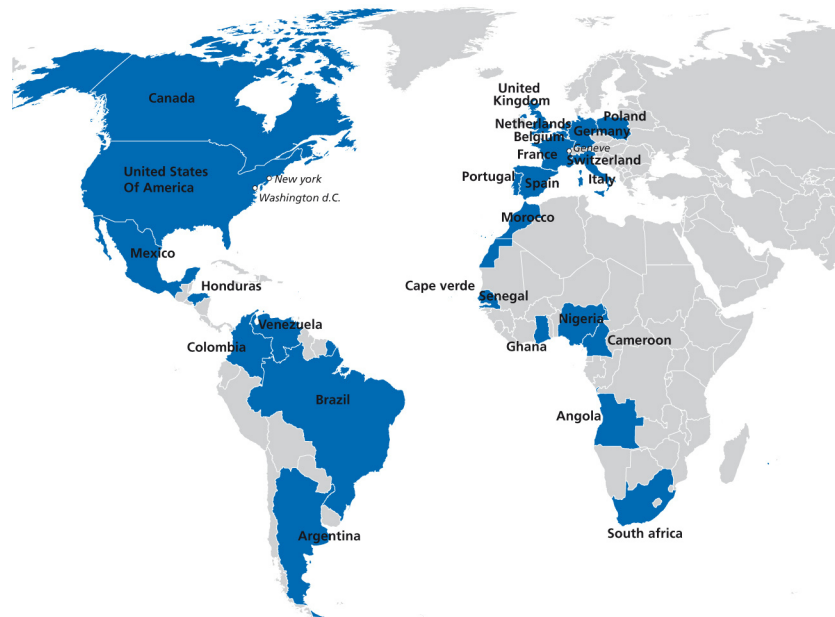
Source: Atlantic Future project.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face and by telematic means in those cases where security constrictions, such as the Ebola outbreak and the security situation in West Africa, made it advisable. The interviews were conducted following a standardized questionnaire that consisted of three sections dedicated to: regional dynamics, economics, security, environment, social and political challenges, convergence and/or divergence of norms and interests, regional and interregional relations, and a final question about the possible emergence of a pan-Atlantic space. The responses were transcribed, codified and analysed using Nvivo qualitative analysis software. Hence, for the purpose of limiting the scope of the paper and acknowledging that 488 interviewees cannot provide an accurate picture of what stakeholders around the Atlantic might believe, this chapter aims to provide the reader with an initial examination of their thoughts and opinions regarding the configuration of the Atlantic as a geopolitical and autonomous space, the obstacles to it, and what would be needed for this space to emerge in the future.

2. The difference between the number of interviews performed in Belgium and Great Britain is due to the relevance that both cities have: as a business hub, in the case of London; and as the headquarters of European Union institutions, think tanks, and businesses, in the case of Brussels.

The Atlantic Space: an attractive idea whose time has not yet come

Most stakeholders reacted with scepticism when asked about the emergence of an Atlantic Space. However, they showed different degrees of scepticism: while some were adamant that it would never emerge, others saw its potential. After analysing the interviews by profile and by region, it can be concluded that, firstly, there is a convergence of views regarding the reasons for the emergence or not of this Atlantic Space. And, secondly, the main differences are found on a regional level rather than according to the different profiles, which reflects how approaches to the Atlantic region are built based on different needs and interests. 18 out of 25 countries were generally sceptical about the emergence of a pan-Atlantic space: Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, France, Germany, Ghana, Italy, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Poland, Senegal, South Africa, Spain, United Kingdom and Venezuela. This was also the general perception among representatives of international organizations in Geneva, Washington D.C., and New York. However, interviewees from Angola, Cape Verde, Colombia, Honduras and Portugal were more inclined to consider the emergence of this space possible, based on their strategic positions and economic interests. Interviewees from the United States shared a positive view regarding the emergence of an Atlantic Space but recognized that many challenges and obstacles still need to be overcome, for instance: the current level of fragmentation in the region, the distrust between North and South and differences among the four regions of the Atlantic. Finally, the case of Morocco deserves special mention because, while the country has developed and is investing in an Atlantic strategy, some of those interviewed confessed that they were looking more to Europe and the Mediterranean than towards the Atlantic.

When considering the profile of the interviewees, there seems to be a consensus amongst most of them about the main factors making possible or inhibiting the emergence of this space. Those that considered the existence of this Atlantic Space possible argued that it could be beneficial for Africa and for South and Central America. Interviewees from all sectors saw in the realms of economics, security and environmental policies the potential to build collaborative relationships amongst the regions. And some of those surveyed from the public and private sectors in Africa even believed that the emergence of this space would be the result of a natural process. Furthermore, all of the profiles mentioned the existence of this Atlantic relationship between United States and Europe. However, one interviewee from the academic sector in South America added that this configuration would "call for a process of regional reconstruction". Additionally, interviewees from all the regions pointed out the existence of regional forums or partnerships as a first step for the integration of the Atlantic region. They mentioned that these forums could be a driver of unity in the region. Some interviewees, however, argued that this would depend on how open these frameworks are to third-party countries.

In contrast, those who did not consider the emergence of this Atlantic Space viable cited as the main reason the existence of different levels of development among the regions. Some agreed that it is better to focus on the local or regional level in order to solve local or regional problems, and others thought it was important to prioritise bilateral relations as the best way to move forward. Regarding the potential signing of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), interviewees from

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all the profiles, and particularly those from Africa, Europe, and South and Central America, mentioned that this agreement would thwart any prospects for Atlantic integration because it would only benefit the northern powers. Some interviewees added that populist ideologies in South America could fuel anti-imperialistic feelings in some countries, which could hinder regional integration. Finally, noteworthy was that people across all the sectors believed that Brazil, South Africa, Europe (the European Union) and the United States do not have any interest in this Atlantic idea. According to them, most of the Atlantic countries consider Asian markets to be more attractive.

The "ifs of the Atlantic equation"

As mentioned before, there were varying degrees of scepticism or acceptance among the interviewees when asked about the emergence of this Atlantic Space. Many of them thought the emergence of the Atlantic Space was a possibility only if certain conditions were in place.

The heterogeneity of the Atlantic

Stakeholders identified the different levels of development (economic, social and political), instability (institutional and in terms of security), regional fragmentation and ideological differences in Africa and South and Central America (with anti-West and left populist governments in South America), as the main reasons for the absence of a wider Atlantic Space. With Africa the disparities were more pronounced, due to the issues of religion, family configurations, and the importance of values such as the rule of law, democracy, and respect for human rights, among others. Thus, in the view of those interviewees, the Atlantic Space could only succeed if such differences were reduced through economic improvement and institutional consolidation, in order to align the interests and needs of the regions.

About interests and geostrategic vision

Interviewees pointed out the different interests driving the national and geostrategic positions of Atlantic countries. A representative from the public sector in Europe described the political and strategic interests of the main Atlantic actors as follows: "the most Atlantic countries are Spain, France, Great Britain, and the United States. Central America is not focusing on the Atlantic (they are turning their backs on the Atlantic), for Brazil the north and south of the Atlantic are equally important, while Argentina and Uruguay are more focused on the south of the Atlantic". The interviewee added that "Mexico functions as a bridge between the Pacific and the Atlantic, while in Africa there is a less Atlantic-centred vision". According to interviewees, for Africa and South and Central America the question is how to achieve economic growth and open their economies to the global market while trying to reinforce their political and social structure and face their security challenges. Stakeholders from these regions and of all the profiles also thought that investing in South-South cooperation is key, considering the potential and the common needs that these regions have.

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Regarding North America, representatives from the private sector in Europe were of the opinion that the "pan-Atlantic idea would only take off if American businesses had an interest or stood to gain from it". The European academic sector saw the shift by the United States from the Atlantic to Asia as a major obstacle. Interviewees from Poland saw this shift as particularly worrisome due to security concerns, in light of Russian hostility and instability within the European sphere (Hörst and Piatkiewicz 2015). Along this line, interviewees from Europe and North America highlighted that the shift to Asia was central to the Obama administration, but emphasized that this could change in 2016, with the presidential elections coming up. In the words of a public representative from Europe: "under a new Unites States President, a new rapprochement towards the Atlantic may happen, which would result in boosting a pan-Atlantic space". This opinion contrasted with those of public and private representatives who saw the negotiation of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) as "the core of an Atlantic community" and "as the way to counterbalance China's presence in the region and global trade".

With regard to Europe, interviewees made reference to the crisis that the European Union has been experiencing since 2008. In particular, those surveyed from Europe, North America and international organizations believed that the European Union is going through an inward-looking period, focused on its internal institutional and economic crisis. However, the tension with Russia, the Ukrainian conflict, and the refugee crisis are forcing the EU to look outwards again. Nevertheless, almost all of those polled indicated that one of the most important problems facing the European Union is the lack of a European identity and a common voice on foreign policy among its member states. Public representatives added that United Kingdom's departure would cause great instability.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, in the view of the majority of interviewees, of all profiles and from all regions, the potential emergence of a pan-Atlantic space would depend on the capacity of Atlantic countries to align their national interests with those of other actors, to move away from isolationist positions, and to recognize other states as potential partners helping them to overcome risks and generate opportunities.

The relevance of bilateral relations

On a regional level, interviewees from all profiles and the four regions mentioned the different levels of regional integration that the continents have experienced in recent years. According to them, there has been a proliferation of regional organizations based on trade and security agreements, such as the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS), the Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM), the Ibero-American Summit, the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), the Union of South American Nations (Unasur), and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), just to name a few. These regional and interregional forums were mentioned as an example of Atlantic cooperation and the seed from which an Atlantic Space could emerge. Nevertheless, those surveyed thought that regional conflicts, political ideologies and economic interests had in some cases undermined the efficiency of such multilateral frameworks. Therefore, some indicated that bilateral relations work more efficiently in the Atlantic. As a private sector representative

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from Europe mentioned, "if a pan-Atlantic space develops, we risk having a format like BRICS, where the exercise is purely theoretical and it struggles to put any initiatives forward, due to internal divisions". An interviewee from the private sector in North America even added that a wider pan-Atlantic forum would be only a "show" that adds more confusion to the networks that have been already created. According to this person: "it is more important that the regions strengthen themselves before looking for a greater relationship with other regions". Hence, according to the responses, an Atlantic Space could only emerge if the regional frameworks in place were unblocked, fair treatment was secured for all four regions, and new frameworks ensured the participation of all sectors of society.

Existing relations in the Atlantic Space

Some of those surveyed understood the Atlantic Space as the relationship between the United States and Europe, one institutionalized through different forums, such as NATO, and that is currently boosted through the negotiation of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). When interviewees where asked about the expansion of the concept of the Atlantic Space to include the southern Atlantic, respondents from all the profiles said that including South and Central America could be considered, due to triangular relations that are already in place on an issue-by-issue basis. However, people from North America, South and Central America, and Europe, generally viewed the inclusion of Africa in a possible pan-Atlantic configuration as problematic, at least until instability is overcome in Africa.

External powers in the Atlantic

Interviewees from all the regions and profiles referred in one way or another to the role external factors play in the construction of a wider pan-Atlantic area. On a positive side, many respondents agreed on the influence that Asia and, in particular, China, has for the Atlantic countries as an attractive source of growth and economic development. For example, an interviewee from the civil society sector in Europe mentioned that "the Atlantic is the past, the Pacific is the future" while one from the private sector in Africa asserted that "Asia has offered more benefits in terms of visible and identifiable inputs: infrastructure and technology", and added that "Asian countries bring the latest technologies, as opposed to Europe's practice of producing outdated and obsolete things". Furthermore, most of the interviewees stated that one cannot talk about the construction of a pan-Atlantic alliance while neglecting the important role that Asian countries play in the Atlantic region. As a representative of the European public sector mentioned "we need to learn how to relate to Asia". However, some respondents from the public sector (South America and Europe) perceived this Asian presence as a risk and added that we could speak about the possible creation of an Atlantic Space as a counterweight to the role of Asia in the global economy.

Respondents from Europe and North America, in particular, mentioned the threat that Russian hostilities, the Ukraine crisis, and the rise of reli-

gious radicalism (Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State [IS]) could entail as drivers or as disruptive variables for the construction of the Atlantic region. In this regard, worthy of mention is how European and North American interviewees from the academic sector believed – in line with a more realistic approach to international relations – that, in order for this Atlantic Space to succeed, the main actors in the region would have to identify a common threat. As a respondent from the academic sector in North America stated, "to bring such a pan-Atlantic space into being, there would need to be a perception of a growing threat from other regions, like China, for example, and that we need to do more together to defend ourselves against this 'threat'". Consequently, in the interviewees' opinion, the role of China, competition between the three world powers (China, Europe and the United States) over "who owns Africa" and the current Russian hostilities in Europe and the Middle East could be drivers for collaborative relations in the Atlantic. According to them, the pan-Atlantic foundation will be determined depending on how the Atlantic powers manage their interactions with these external factors.

The obstacles for an Atlantic integration

During the fieldwork stakeholders were asked about the obstacles to the emergence of a wider Atlantic Space. An analysis of their responses shows that there is general agreement on the main challenges it faces. A majority of the interviewees viewed the lack of infrastructure in the South Atlantic, geographical distances, the language differences, access to funding in the South Atlantic, restrictions on the mobility of persons and goods in the North Atlantic, a lack of technology and a business-friendly environment in the South, divergent values among the regions, political instability in the South, and the spread of corruption all over the Atlantic, as the main impediments to more collaborative relations in the region. Additionally, respondents viewed the rise of nationalistic political parties in the North Atlantic, left-wing populist parties with anti-imperialistic views in the South, and anti-Islamic sentiment in the North, as a hurdle to future forms of collaboration.

It is also worth mentioning that some respondents from North, South and Central America considered the lack of political will an obstacle for the countries of the Atlantic to push forward with this Atlantic initiative. According to them, countries like Brazil, Argentina and South Africa are more focused on fostering a South Atlantic community, moving away from North-South dependency. They also pointed out the disenchantment that the southern countries exhibit with the role of the European Union on a global level, the inward-looking process in which the European Union is immersed, and the United States' lack of action in Africa and in the Atlantic in general. On a more general level, all the respondents from Africa, Europe and South America coincided in identifying the lack of knowledge that the regions have about each other, especially with regard to the North's ignorance of the southern countries, and South America's ignorance of Africa. As a matter of fact, the most pressing issue for the construction of a pan-Atlantic space is the North-South divide, which was a constant in all the interviews.

Interviewees across all the profiles and regions agreed that, in economic terms, the excess of bureaucracy, corruption and the lack of a

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business-friendly environment in Africa, South and Central America, together with protectionist measures and the quality standards imposed by the European Union (in the case of Africa, North, South and Central America) hampered the possible emergence of an Atlantic market. Furthermore, almost all the Interviewees shared the impression that there is a degree of mistrust from the South towards the North Atlantic, based on the colonial past and the North's position of dominance. Interviewees from Africa and South and Central America added the different views between the North and the South in terms of: the use of the force, surveillance programmes, and the responsibility to protect, among others. A representative from the public sector in Africa added that: "African regions are not left to govern each other alone without external interference. For instance, whenever an institution is established in Africa, outside powers attempt to immediately control their functioning. That was the case with the African Union, the fight between the US and China for Africa, and the position of France in Western African organizations. For all intents and purposes, France does not allow its former colonies to actually become independent".

Finally, for some interviewees, particularly representatives of international organizations, the idea of fostering regional integration through the creation of regional organizations and forums is an idea that prospered during the 1990s, but which no longer fits in today's global world. For these respondents, challenges today are of a global nature and, therefore, there is a need for global solutions and participation by all kinds of actors, from state to non-state entities (multinationals, civil society, unions, cities, individuals, etc.). Therefore, in the view of the interviewees it is a good *theoretical exercise* to think about the Atlantic in these terms, but it is not constructive to fragment the regions between oceans when issues that transcend regional frontiers are of the utmost importance to regional configurations. As mentioned by an interviewee from the private sector in South America: "It is the complementarity of investment resources and development potential, such as that seen between Brazil and Mozambique, that is the key factor to building cooperation, rather than geographical considerations".

So, what will it take to establish a pan-Atlantic region?

Nobody doubts the links among North Atlantic countries nowadays. On the contrary, when speaking about a wider Atlantic Space, much resistance is encountered. Different levels of development, and mistrust among the regions (South towards North) are obstacles for the Atlantic configuration. However, the results of the interviews show that there is common ground upon which a pan-Atlantic space could be built on an issue-to-issue basis and lead, in the long run, to a regional reconfiguration. In particular, interviewees from all the profiles and regions insisted on the importance of economic opportunities, security concerns, energy resources and environmental considerations to each particular region on the Atlantic, and on the need for interregional cooperation in these areas.

In the case of economics, interviewees matching all the profiles and from all the regions believed that trade is the key to a pan-Atlantic configura-

tion. Trade agreements, investment, portfolio flows, services, intra- and inter-regional connectivity, the insertion of Atlantic countries into the global value chains, technological development and fair treatment between the four regions are among the areas and conditions for pan-Atlantic integration. Moreover, in the area of energy and shale, offshore and low-carbon developments taking place in the Atlantic are opening up a new era in the Atlantic. Some of the stakeholders noted the importance of these discoveries and new production, and what they could entail for the reconfiguration of the global energy market should the Atlantic have the capacity to become the East's energy supplier.

Regarding security in the Atlantic, many interviewees from all the regions referred to the consequences that the actions of non-state actors have, as they erode stability, not only in the Atlantic but globally. The trafficking of people, arms and drugs are some of the most pressing issues that connect the four regions of the Atlantic. Moreover, their relationships to transnational terrorist cells are challenging the traditional security realm of state and transnational organizations. Likewise, maritime delimitation and the protection of maritime routes have become a source of concern and security measures, given the need to protect these global routes from the threat of piracy – especially in the Gulf of Guinea. From a human security approach, poverty, food and energy security are becoming increasingly demanding issues that would require an Atlantic answer.

Finally, most of the interviewees from Europe and South, Central and North America considered it necessary to start dealing with climate change considerations. Some of them recognized the importance that the European Union has had through policy development in this area. In the case of resource depletion, interviewees corresponding to all the profiles and from all the regions coincided in the opinion that this issue requires an Atlantic answer. It is to be noted that many respondents referred to fishing depletion.

In all of these areas, interviewees identified states such as South Africa, Nigeria, Angola, Brazil, the United States and the European Union as the main actors to lead change or support the idea of pan-Atlantic regional configuration. Stakeholders featuring all the profiles and from all the regions also recognized the relevance of non-state actors. For them, multinationals, cities, local governments, individuals and terrorist organizations will have an enormous impact on decision-making.

The Atlantic regions have historically been characterized by their high level of interdependence. Commerce, migration flows, shared norms and values, languages and culture are only a few of the assets shared by these regions. While the idea of a wider Atlantic is not obvious, there are numerous opportunities for cooperation in the areas of the economy, security and environment that can be taken as starting points to align national and regional interests for the construction of an Atlantic Space.

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