



ATLANTIC  
FUTURE

## ATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES INTERVIEWS REPORT

09

Perspectives from the Netherlands

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### ABSTRACT

Twenty individuals from the Netherlands were interviewed for this report on transatlantic geopolitics. While the North-Atlantic relationships between Europe and the US remains strong and established in issues related to security and economy, the project sought to gauge whether there was a budding pan-Atlantic community. Rather than confirm this idea, the interviewees highlighted the emergence of substantial emerging economies in Latin America and Africa and through this observation, emphasized the increasing polarity of the international community that is increasingly defined by diverse axis of power and significance and less so by traditional power blocs. While some specific topics had a distinctly Atlantic dimension, such as the issue of immigration and drug trafficking, most matters related to economy and security were firmly entrenched in the reality of a truly globalised world. When forming ideas of how Europe could maintain relevance, several interviewees saw the EU as a model for supra-national governance structures and demilitarisation and as defining itself in a soft power role.

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# ATLANTIC FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

## 09

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## 1. Introduction

During October and November 2014 and March 2015, the author of this country report interviewed nineteen individuals working in the Netherlands in a variety of fields and occupations. Interviewees were selected from the Dutch public sector, business community, civil society sector, academia and media to gauge their knowledge and perspectives about developments in the Atlantic space. The interviews were conducted using a list of questions to direct and guide conversation. While some interviews relied exclusively on the questions, the majority were conducted in a comfortable atmosphere and interviewees spoke at length about related topics and answered other questions that informed this paper. For this reason, interviews varied in length lasting from thirty minutes to ninety minutes. The diversity of backgrounds and sectors resulted in a birth of information and opinions that did not yield widespread agreement on the questions asked. While there were some overlays of consensus, particularly about shared norms and values, there were a variety of opinions on other subjects such as Europe's role and perceived potential influence in the Atlantic space and about which actors and institutions were relevant and powerful. While interviewees emphasized different information, it was however, not necessarily contradictory but instead illuminating to the perspective of a specific region or sector.

It was generally agreed that Europe and North America share strong values developed and fostered since World War II. Interviewees identified democracy, human rights and the rule of law as shared civil and political values as well as economic interdependence and shared security interests. Shared values and interests between the US and Europe are substantiated and buttressed by a variety of institutions, organisations and frameworks (e.g. World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and North American Treaty Organisation (NATO), Organisation for Economic Security and Cooperation (OESCC)) , which have membership beyond that of the Atlantic, but are international organisations where the EU and the US have strong founding presence and to a certain extent shared interests. Interviewees, thus identified the relationship between the US and Europe as a post-WWII relationship, supported by several international institutions. The bi-lateral relationship between the US and the Europe, therefore, was considered the spine of transatlantic relations and political discourse that is neither new or truly Atlantic as the project conceives the term, which is to include countries in the Atlantic Space that exist in the Southern hemisphere.

Bringing South America and Africa into the definition of the Atlantic space led many interview partners to emphasize the diversity that exists within such a broad geographic demarcation. Within the Atlantic space there are countries with diverse political ideologies, cultures, religions and environmental realities and it is difficult and disadvantageous to attempt to make generalisations on the region as a whole. Those interviewees with a specific regional focus (e.g. Central America) highlighted the fact that even within Continents countries were experiencing very different social, political, economic and environmental circumstances. In both Latin America and Africa some countries stand out as economic frontrunners such as Brazil, Colombia, Mexico in Latin America while others experience entrenched poverty and/or conflict. Experts on Africa mentioned the enormous growth capacity of specific countries and highlighted front-runners including Angola, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Tanzania, which have all experienced growth rates of over 7% for consecutive years. Another important point made, was the sheer size of many of the developing country economies emerging on the international scene, not only in terms of the potential scale of their economies but also their populations and territorial range.

Among the interview partners there was a clear consensus on two points. Firstly, that South-South cooperation was intensifying and secondly, that international relations had become more polycentric, meaning that rather than one or two axis of power there were multiple centres, some perhaps more politically, economically, or even socially oriented than others. On the first point of South-South cooperation, interview partners often pointed to Brazil's involvement in Africa but were quick to state that it would be difficult to ignore the relations that many Latin American and African countries have with Asian partners, highlighting that bilateral relationships were more based on economic synergies and opportunities than shared values or historical relationships. One representative on Africa, noted that when looking at WTO trade patterns Asian countries dominated relations with African economies. Moreover, the APEC countries in Latin America are distinctly oriented towards Asia. Several experts explained that for many developing countries in Africa and Latin America there was a growing disenchantment towards Europe and the US, particularly after the financial crisis, and increased cooperation and engagement with Asian economies. Countries like Malaysia and the Philippines offer different models of development and are perceived to have more in common with developing countries in Latin America and Africa than Europe and the US. However, such models of development do not correspond to western notions of democracy and free market economies, which in turn poses challenges for trying to conceptualize the Atlantic as a region or to foster strong cooperative arrangements between Northern Atlantic countries and Southern ones. On the second point of polycentrism, economic interviewees consistently identified the emergence of BRICS economies including Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa—countries that do not correspond only to the Atlantic region but that share similar characteristics in their level of development, size of population and extensive territory. The emergence of multiple and geographically dispersed centres of power was echoed in a similar vein by security experts that highlighted the increasingly unpredictable nature of globalisation and international security. Some examples that were highlighted included the volatile derailing of countries (i.e. Libya), violent non-state actors (i.e. Islamic extremists) and the increased connectivity that increases global vulnerability (i.e. Ebola). For this reason, it was difficult for some interview partners to try to speak about the Atlantic as a distinct region or space.

There were some issue-areas where the Atlantic was distinctly the geographic area of interest: these were immigration and illegal trade in drugs. Despite that these challenges originate and are to some extent most relevant within an Atlantic perspective, several regional experts mentioned that countries in the North and South seem to be at odds with one another on the immigration and drugs respectively as the Northern Atlantic and Southern Atlantic have different roles in the problem and different ideas of how a solution could take shape. For example, drug trafficking involves consumer and producer countries. The US and Europe are the main consuming countries and the driver of demand, and thus distinctly causal to the trade. Latin American countries are more directly dealing with the violence and lawlessness that accompany the illicit trafficking of drugs. Approaching the issue from a political perspective, the US and Europe are generally opposed to anti-criminalisation and legalisation efforts which many Latin American governments believe would be crucial to more effectively managing the trade, violence and civil conflict that occurs as a result. There are similar dynamics in regards to the issue of immigration. The number of immigrants to Europe has increased dramatically in the last year and civil conflict and human insecurity in mainly African and Middle Eastern countries has resulted in large numbers of people seeking a safer and more secure life in Europe. It was noted that Africa is increasingly important to Europe but in a specific context. Instability, conflict and crisis in Africa can have detrimental effects and direct or indirect security implications on Europe. In the US, immigration from Latin America is also substantial. Without generalizing, the political approach and public opinion in wealthier Northern

Atlantic countries has been aggressively anti-immigration with concerns about the ability of Northern countries to absorb the influx of desperate people. The trafficking of drugs and immigration are two distinctly Atlantic issues that are political priorities. They are challenges that offer both incentives for cooperation and also possibilities of conflict.

Interview partners had divergent opinions on Europe's regional influence and future role in international relations and the Atlantic space specifically. Most security experts identified the lack of a singular unified European foreign policy as a threat to European security and a weakening factor in Europe's perceived power and relevance in international affairs. Several security experts observed that European foreign affairs was becoming more introverted and focused on the near periphery of Europe. Current affairs such as the crisis in Ukraine, the financial instability of Greece and its potential exit from the Euro were reasons that many interviewees observed that the EU is more focused on integrating and strengthening the situation within EU member states and the European neighbourhood rather than on exercising its efforts abroad.

How the EU operated in international relations and security matters led some interviewees to observe the emergence of new and flexible security frameworks that allow European countries to act abroad based on their interests and capabilities without having to take the entire Union with it. The use of the *coalition of the willing* is one such example whereby individual countries become involved in international interventions through bi-lateral and multilateral relationships, rather than as a European bloc.

From a different perspective, representatives from public institutions highlighted the overall success of the European Union "project" as an example of supra-national governance that has maintained peace while continuously expanding membership of countries, achieved social economic welfare, and fostered shared values while maintaining unique and strong national identities. The widening of the European neighbourhood exhibits a new kind of influence and soft power.

## 2. The relative importance of the Atlantic region

### 2.1 Taking Stock

There was a general consensus among the twenty interview partners that since the Second World War the United States and Europe have fostered a robust socio-political and economic relationship that has contributed to significant power and importance in world affairs. The US intervention in both World Wars, but particularly the Second, contributed to several decades of peace in Europe which in turn fostered steady economic growth on both sides of the Atlantic and political alliances that led to shared interests and influence in world affairs. This relationship, however, was regarded by many interviewees as a historical alliance between Northern Atlantic countries.

Keeping an economic focus, many interviewees emphasized the emerging importance of China and specific countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. It should be noted that interviewees were hesitant to generalize about entire continents, observing instead that specific countries were experiencing rapid economic growth, political prowess and influence in geopolitical affairs. For example, Brazil is achieving strong economic growth and increasing political significance in international institutions, particularly as a representative of developing countries' interests in international forums such as the UN and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The emergence of new and formally

categorized “developing” countries, meant for many interviewees, that the former associations of power blocs, balance of power politics, bi-polarity and superpower status were less relevant. It was noted by interviewees from the private sector and from international relations (security) affairs, that power was increasingly decentralized with the emergence of a polycentric system. Polycentrism describes the disintegration of extreme concentrations of power (e.g. Cold War dynamics of the Soviet Union and the US) replaced instead by the multiple centres of economic and political importance. The role of the state in international affairs is also less traditional, in that there now exist multinational corporations that have offices in several locations around the world and that wield new power in economic and political terms. Recognising the rise of BRIC countries also seemed to distinguish power from military capacity and geopolitical relevance to that of economic activity and sheer population size. The BRIC countries were repeatedly mentioned as being important for reasons not only of their economic growth in the last decade but also by their geographic size, population and economy. Increasing emphasis on economic significance was most heavily emphasized by private sector representatives that interpreted waning US and European power as a result of the financial crisis in recent years.

There was a general consensus among interview partners that both Latin America and Africa were increasing in importance, however, this importance was perceived in relation to geographic proximity of either the US or Europe. Many interviewees considered Latin America to be the backyard of the US and therefore less of a strategic interest to Europe. Similarly, it was noted that Africa is increasingly important to Europe but in a specific context. Instability, conflict and crisis in Africa can have detrimental effects and direct or indirect security implications on Europe.

## ***2.1 Future Developments***

Interviewees from the private sector emphasized the growing importance of Africa and Latin America, and developing countries more broadly in economic and political affairs. On an economic front, they highlighted countries where consecutive years of strong growth coupled with significant resources and populations led them to assume that there would continue to be strong investment and economic development opportunities. In particular, interview partners from the economic sector pointed to the demographic relevance of some countries and cities based simply on the size of their population, geographic land mass, resources and thus economic needs. Speaking about the EU, interviewees highlighted the continuing economic crisis and fragility of the Union. Moreover, the US economy was viewed to have recovered more efficiently than Europe, in part, perhaps because of its pivoting towards Asia and policies of engagement. Among private sector interviewees there was a strong argument that investment relationships were changing as were roles in the global economy in relation to development. For example, developing countries in Asia and Africa have and continue to invest heavily in Europe. Angolese investors have reversed a decades old relationship of North-South financial flows by investing heavily in Portugal after the 2008 financial crisis. Moreover, traditional models of development and development aid are rapidly changing with new actors redefining the modalities and conditionalities of financial support. China is investing heavily in Africa and Latin America with a “no strings attached” approach that differs substantially from historical development aid contracts implemented through Western led organisations such as the IMF and World Bank. Moreover, Brazil is heavily involved in development issues in Africa on both a political and economic front illustrating the emergence of new South-South development relationships.

From a security perspective, interviewees were more cautious in defining the likely trajectory of the Atlantic region. Security in itself was noted to have become

unpredictable, decentralized and fragmented. The military and security alliance for which the North-Atlantic relations between the US and Europe are based remain with institutions such as North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). While it is assumed that the US will remain Europe's most important strategic partner and one of the most powerful military powers in the world, there are also some doubts about the course that the US will take in its foreign policy, either as an isolationist power or an international one. Some interviewees also questioned the US's continued willingness to provide the military "stick" on behalf of Europe.

New actors have also emerged that challenge traditional notions of national security and military capability. Violent non-state actors have become a major challenge to global security efforts and defy traditional security structures and strategies as they do not belong or ally themselves to a particular state or country, but influence national and international security.

For one security expert, the cyber security, the process of applying security measures to ensure confidentiality, integrity and availability of data was a new realm of security relevant for individual citizens, private companies and national governments. Interestingly, cyber security and data protection illustrate an emerging security issue where the EU and the US have strongly divergent views, measured in both public opinion and government.

### **3. Thematic Areas**

#### ***3.1 Economics and Finance***

For all six interview partners working in the area of economics and finance—the issue areas of growth of trade and investment was the most important objective facing the Atlantic space. Extensive trade partnerships between the US and European countries are well established and currently entering a new phase of integration with the Trans-Atlantic Trade Partnership (TTIP). However, the exclusivity of TTIP as a distinctly North-Atlantic trade agreement strengthened the idea that there was not a pan-Atlantic economic community emerging. Interviewees instead emphasized the bi-lateral nature of most trade relationships and particularly south-south trade and investment relationships. Latin America is an interesting example in this regard because the continent as a whole has been resistant to developing a regional trade agreement with the US. Two interviewees made the point that there was a negative perception of regional trade agreements after Mexico's involvement in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which made other Latin American countries hesitant to engage in similar relationships with the US.

Where regional economic relationships are forming is across the Pacific. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) are indicative of this. Eastern African countries such as Mozambique and Ethiopia are also distinctly pivoted towards markets in Asia. The observation of intensified economic relations across the Pacific on the one hand could indicate more south-south cooperation or it could reconfirm the idea that the Asia Pacific region is increasingly important in international trade and diplomacy because of the size of their modalities and methods of engagement with developing countries in Africa and Latin America. Countries like Brazil, have been focused in recent years, on strengthening ties with other BRICS countries. The formal creation of the New Development Bank comprised of BRIC countries in 2014 highlights new cooperative economic partnerships that are an alternative to Western led economic blocs and institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. The countries of the New Development Bank comprise three billion

people or 41% of the world's population and cover a quarter of the world's land mass and account for more than 25% of global GDP. Private sector interviewees, therefore, emphasized the importance of not underestimating the economic capability and relevance of emerging economies. Using Angola as one example of changing trade and investment dynamics, one interviewee explained that the former Portuguese colony of Angola actually bailed out Portugal during the economic recession that has plagued the country since 2008. Interestingly, Angola has also received some 300,000 Portuguese migrant workers for its booming economy. The interviewee used this example to emphasize the fact that bi-lateral relationships are by no means north-to-south but instead increasingly south-north and south-south also. Such observations about investment flows between countries highlights that bi-lateral trade relationships are predominantly based on shared interests and synergies.

While the project coordinators identified transport and infrastructure as a potentially important economic and investment issue, interviewees did not speak to the significance of this topic. Instead, several interviewees described transport and infrastructure as internal issues. While there is a need for improved infrastructure in the US and Europe it is not an economic priority and in the wake of the crisis it is not a sector that governments are currently investing in. However, south-south investments in infrastructure and transport in developing countries is indeed important and relevant in relation to the way China is investing in Africa and also in the way Brazil is investing in Africa. The investment and building of infrastructure and transport is linked to the export of resources from these countries. One interviewee with a focus on Latin America identified poor intra-regional infrastructure on the continent as one of the barriers to economic and social integration. Despite speaking Spanish and sharing certain aspects of culture, the interviewee explained that nationalism was strong in Central and South America and often thwarted economic integration and cooperation, particularly on public issues such as infrastructure and transport.

### **3.1 Security**

When asked what the main security threats in the Atlantic were, in particular in relation to fragile states, terrorism and illicit trafficking (e.g. humans, drugs, weapons), the clear majority of interviewees stated that fragile states were increasingly perceived as being the most directly threatening to global and European security. Fragile states were recognized by all interviewees as the underlying cause of many other security threats (both social, economic and political) including terrorism, immigration, conflict etc.

In Europe and the Netherlands in particular the issue of fragile states and immigration illustrate quite clearly this cause and effect relationship. Failed and fragile states in the Middle East and Africa have led to increased levels of immigration with the EU detecting the largest number of illegal border crossings in a decade. The largest refugee group by nationality is Syrian, followed by Eritreans and Somalians which correlates to the point that fragile and failing states in Africa have security ramifications for Europe. As far as fragile statehood goes, immigration was simply one manifestation of the problem. Some interviewees noted that violent non-state actors and terrorism is also related to fragile statehood among other determining factors as are issues of trafficking (i.e. human, drugs and weapons).

Terrorism was a security threat identified by the Atlantic Future projects. However, interviewees in the field of security commented that terrorism is often exaggerated as a security threat and one that may occupy a large space in the media and public conscience but that is relatively low security threat.

An interesting point mentioned by several security experts was that Europe increasingly views its security priorities as stemming from its nearer neighbourhood including its own Members. The economic situation in several Mediterranean countries has hardened the EU's resolve to stabilize those members that are vulnerable to fall into radical politics and unrest. Moreover, the crisis in Ukraine and the plane crash of the Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 in July 2014 that killed 283 passengers of which most were Dutch strongly affected Dutch public opinion and its perception of immediate security.

Speaking more generally about European security, some security experts felt that the Union's lack of a centralised foreign policy was a weakness in terms of its clout and military capabilities. The EU has relied largely on the US's military power and there was some question as to whether this was a sufficient security relationship to defend Europe and its interests abroad. There was also speculation by several experts as to the US's willingness to maintain this relationship. Inversely, interviewees coming from a public institutions background interpreted Europe's demilitarization as a security success, identifying a new typology of socio-economic and political security interests, arguing that Europe's neighbourhood policy and gradual expansion to include now twenty eight countries of diverse and previously warring status is representative of a new kind of soft power and security governance. This foreign policy and security strategy emphasizes economic integration and is buttressed by shared norms and values that are implemented through the adoption of European regulations by countries that desire EU membership.

Interview partners would have liked to see other security threats mentioned. In particular, radicalization of religion. A regional expert from Africa explained that radicalisation of religion on both the Christian and Islamic fronts is taking place across the world, and particularly in Africa. This type of extremism poses new security threats particularly in producing violent non-state action which cannot be dealt with using traditional security measures.

Maritime security was not viewed by interview partners as an important security issue.

### **3.3. People and institutions**

The interview questions posed the "state of democracy" "respect for human rights" "diplomatic exchanges" and "immigration trends" as the main political and social changes or challenges faced by the Atlantic region. Interviewees from this sector of society tended to recognize this selection of words as heavily Western values and norms and also out dated or no longer relevant ones. For example, with regard to human rights several interviewees compared the Western notion of human rights that focus more on political and civil rights with those of Asian countries and other emerging economies that associate human rights with economic ones. However, two interviewee explained that this is a rather old dictum and instead of focusing on these issues that divide countries, there should be more focus on emerging norms and convergences which do exist and fall more into defining global conceptions of norms and values goals that exist for humanity as a whole. There is a new concept in this discussion, "human dignity". This term is inclusive and transcends the definitions that are used that further cement North South or East West. Two interviewees from the private sector also emphasized the need to step away from entrenched ideas about norms and values that are typically associated with Western countries and instead to attempt to interpret more global terminology and shared values which include right to life, decent work and income.. While democracy and human rights are sometimes interpreted to be "global", interviewees tended to associate them with distinctly Western definitions.

Interestingly, one expert explained that the cultural affairs organisation for which he worked was mandated to work with countries with different notions of norms and values and regardless of their orientation to established European values (i.e. democracy and human rights). Through the proliferation of diplomatic and cultural exchanges, the expert explained, it was possible to work towards transcending the formal and often aggressing aspects of culture-clash and actually work more towards a cultural exchange. For this interviewee, cultural exchanges for which diplomatic ones could be included, were particularly important in developing or “problem” countries such as Russia. Engaging and promoting connections was noted as an important groundwork towards relations. Moreover, one interviewee emphasized the need for a focus on more modern aspects of “people and institutions” such as that which relates to young networks of entrepreneurs and technology.

Finally, it was observed by several experts that within European civil society and to some extent in the US, there was a brooding intolerance in relation to race, nationality (immigration), and sexual orientation. Elections across the EU in the last years have seen increasingly conservative governments taking power with radical right wing politics. Thus it was brought to attention, that the state of “established” norms of human rights, democracy etc., are not as established as we might think, particularly in Northern Atlantic countries that are the main proponents of such rights. Moreover, when looking at political systems in Latin America and Africa, there is a strong polarity in terms of the political systems in place and the institutional capacity of them. Several interviewees noted that the “state of democracy” is simply not possible to conceptualize within a geographic realm as expansive as the Atlantic where countries have different political systems and markedly different levels of democracy. In Latin America and the Caribbean in particular there are several countries that follow a populist political regime and aggressively pitch themselves against the West. In Africa, as well, countries seemed to be at very different levels of democratic political development making it hard to speak generally about such issues.

### ***3.4. Resources and the Environment***

The interview questions identified climate change, energy efficiency and resources as the three priority challenges or issues in the Atlantic space. Interviewees focusing on the environment consider resources and climate change to be the most pressing challenges and challenges of a distinctly global nature and thus difficult to conceptualize in a regional framework of the Atlantic. Resource depletion was seen as an overarching issue that includes natural and mineral resources (oil, gas, etc.) but importantly also water, soils, forests, arable land, and fish stocks. As far as relevant forums are concerned, none of the interviewees identify environmental and resource related forums that focus just on the Atlantic. However, the general conception of environmental problems as distinctly global led interviewees to observe two levels of relevance: local/regional (e.g., management of regional ecosystems) or truly global nature (e.g., climate change).

Two interviewees working in sustainability in the private sector emphasized leapfrogging as an important concept for developing countries. Arguing that developing countries have the right to develop their resources and provide for the needs of their growing populations and economies, these interviewees emphasized that innovations in different sectors mean that developing countries do not have to follow the same industrial growth trajectory as Western countries. The concept “leapfrogging” posits that developing countries can avoid environmentally harmful stages of development by implementing innovative and efficient technologies. Specifically, the solar revolution in Africa is an example of how developing countries can develop efficient energy infrastructure based on fossil fuels. In a related vein, one interviewee noted that the

international community needs to identify and prioritize certain resources (i.e. a specific forest, or marine area) to preserve and pay developing countries not to exploit them. Within the Atlantic there exists large areas of unexploited resources and devising cooperative schemes that prevent their unsustainable exploitation is important.

For climate change, the relevant global forum is the UNFCCC. For energy, the relevant international forums are the World Energy Council and the International Energy Agency. Forums to address environmental challenges do exist however one interviewee stated the need for platforms that encourage and incorporate the private sector. The World Economic Forum was mentioned as an important forum where there is a high level of engagement between business, government and civil society.

## 4. Concepts, trends, and projections

### 4.1 Principles, norms and values

Many interviewees felt that the idea of shared principles, norms and values applied to a collective geographic region as expansive as the Atlantic was complicated and risked imprecise generalisations. While many interviewees acknowledged a certain level of shared historical experience, in for instance the Atlantic slave trade and European and American colonization, they did not support the idea that this fostered shared values and norms in a modern context. For one historian, the Atlantic slave trade and colonialism highlighted the inherent contradiction of Western norms and values. Explaining that both the Atlantic slave trade and colonization were crimes against humanity and in direct contradiction to the norms and values that the “West” claims to stand behind.

Moreover, interviewees from public institutions and the private sector emphasized that there are shared values of humanity that are truly global in scope and are not realistically determined by shared historical experience, language or culture. Returning to the idea that at their most basic core, values such as the desire to have basic human security, including a status of peace, access to food, water and a decent income were mentioned as universal global values. Thus some interviewees seemed to suggest that globalisation and the idea of a global community supersedes any demarcation of norms and values for a specific region, and that trying to conceptualize norms and values for a space as diverse and expansive as the Atlantic space was somewhat contradictory without extending those values and norms to the global sphere.

Thus there was a general downplay on emphasizing the importance of norms and values. The exception, however, surfaced when an expert on EU trade with Asian countries explained that Europe was not engaging effectively in economic relations with Asian countries in large part because of norms and values. The expert explained that European norms and values were very important prerequisites to bi-lateral trade agreements with Asian countries and very often, also a roadblock in negotiations. When negotiating trade deals, the expert explained, that certain conditionalities regarding human rights and rule of law were non-negotiable and often prevented bi-lateral trade agreements from forming.

One regional expert, however, observed the increased radicalization of religion in many countries within the Atlantic. He emphasized that this surge in religious extremism was not only Islamic as it is often associated as but also Christian, citing the large number of Pentecostal followers in Africa. The expert noted that far beyond a foundation of established values, Pentecostal belief in Africa has an influence in many social, political and economic developments. He noted that investment relationships are often fostered through religious networks which in turn influence the economic growth and

trajectory of a country. Religious extremism, particularly, Pentacostal is also influencing political decisions and the social fabric and thus norms and values of several African societies. Citing a well known example, the expert noted the sudden and extreme condemnation of homosexuality in Ghana by the President as a religiously motivated decision. Interestingly, the Pentacostal movement has to a certain extent found its way to Africa from increasingly intense cooperation with Brazil. Islamic extremism has also spread in Africa and the Middle East affecting Liberia, Tunisia, Kenya, Nigeria, South Sudan, Mali, and other countries. While extreme poverty, corruption and a thriving arms trade compound the extremism, its presence while not creating a “culture of values” is affecting the social fabric of African countries and the orientation of the international community towards those countries.

### **4.3 The Role of the EU**

Interview partners had divergent opinions on Europe’s regional influence and future role in international relations and the Atlantic space specifically. Most security experts identified Europe’s lack of a coherent and unified foreign policy as weakness and described Europe as turning inwards on its political and economic affairs and thus lacking a foreign policy. In particular, hard line security interviewees argued that to exercise any clout in foreign policy affairs, the EU would have to act collectively and therefore would require increased military capacity and a unified foreign policy. In the current status, where foreign policy remains a realm of the individual nation state, Europe’s posture to the international community is fragmented by the different actions and interests of its members.

While it was not an opinion held by all interviewees, three experts from the security sector and four from the public/institutions sector argued that Europe was beginning to carve out a new sort of influence that was based more on soft power than traditional real power politics or “muscle flexing”. In other words, they noted that Europe was increasingly concerned with its domestic and the European neighbourhood, in one part this inward turn could be nudged by economic priorities after the recession, but they also noted that with the Ukraine crisis as an example, it was increasingly advantageous for Europe to consolidate and stabilize its neighbourhood. For this reason, two experts, one involved in security and the other from a public institution, emphasized that to some extent Europe’s most coherent and defining behaviour in “foreign policy” is the enlargement of the European Union over the last decade which as of June 2015 included twenty eight countries with several candidate countries and others “on the road to EU Membership”.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, several interviewees concluded that the EU provided an important example of the overall success of the European Union “project” as an example of supra-national governance that has successfully maintained peace in an ever expanding membership of countries, achieved social economic welfare, and fostered shared values while maintaining unique and strong national identities. This in itself, exhibits a new kind of influence and power, albeit not defined in traditional terms.

Speaking about how Europe is perceived abroad, several experts explained that for many developing countries in Africa and Latin America there was a growing disenchantment towards Europe, particularly since and during the ongoing financial crisis. Investments and economic relations are no longer a linear North to South

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<sup>1</sup> Countries on the road to EU Membership: (Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey). Potential candidates (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo). Available online: [http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/index_en.htm)

trajectory as African, Asian and Latin American countries are investing actively and internationally, and substantially in Europe. Moreover, in relation to providing an example of economic growth, many African and Asian countries like Malaysia and the Philippines offer an alternative development trajectory that is fundamentally different than that promoted by Europe, the US and the development oriented institutions and banks that have dominated Western led aid initiatives.

#### ***4.4. Main Actors and Regionalism and inter-regionalism in the Atlantic***

There was a consensus among interviewees that actors are changing as new ones emerge and non-state actors gain power and influence. Interviewees considered traditional international organizations such as the UN as useful platforms for bringing together diverse countries but ineffective in adequately managing and addressing long term challenges, particularly in matters related to the environment and resources. Instead new platforms such as the World Economic Forum were mentioned as influential centres of excellence set to improve the state of the world and integrating private and public actors.

Cities and municipal governments were acknowledged by two interviewees as increasingly important. In Africa for instance, weak public institutions at the national level have meant that many urban municipal governments have assumed roles once exclusive to the national government. For example, many cities in Africa are more capable and fit to organise and meet public needs related to health, education, urban transport, infrastructure and even investment.

Asked about the importance of regional organisations, experts from Latin America and Africa noted that economic integration was taking place at a slower pace than in the EU. Regional blocs are forming, however, many are distinctly oriented towards Asia. For example, the Trans Pacific Partnership (TTP) involves countries across the Pacific and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) involves Chile, Mexico and Peru. Reason for the tilt towards Asia can be contributed to the sheer size of the economies but also the engagement approach described above that offers a different model of economic development, aid and investment.

One interviewee noted that Latin America was hesitant to engage in regional economic cooperation with its Northern Atlantic neighbours because of the perceived negative impact the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) had on Mexico. Moreover, this interviewee noted that strong nationalist tendencies and a lack of inter-state infrastructure often hindered the effective development of regional blocs in the Latin America. Similarly in Africa, lack of infrastructure and weak inter-state relations have weakened the resolve of regional blocs and instead foreign relations are dominated by bi-lateral agreements where there are specific synergies and interests.

## **5. Conclusions Perceptions of the Atlantic Space**

Most interviewees were hesitant to proclaim that there was a pan-Atlantic space currently existing or that there was legitimate evidence to believe that one was emerging. Security experts were more inclined to highlight the long-standing shared interests of Northern-Atlantic countries which will likely remain a strong alliance between two Western countries with similar economic and security interests. However, experts emphasized the increasing multi-polarity of the world and the emergence of new countries (e.g. BRICS). The recognized importance of fast developing countries, private actors (e.g. multinational corporations) and the phenomenon of globalisation led many experts to observe that the world is more global than it has ever been and that

society and the associated economies are increasingly global, thus the attempt to conceptualize an Atlantic Space may not only be useful for some relationships or topic areas but not economics or investment.

Moreover, interviewees from public institutions and the NGO sector, particularly those working in development questioned whether it was useful to perceive of an Atlantic geographic space explaining that their work had the objective of dealing with issues of poverty that are truly global in scope and not related to one region over another. Moreover, environmental experts made similar points arguing that climate change could not legitimately be dealt with in a regional way and that intensely cooperating and bringing in countries regardless of their geographic location was necessary for any legitimate response to the challenge. Thus, experts generally felt that many societal challenges, economic, social and environmental are truly global in scope.

In matters of security, the nation state is still the predominant actor and for some experts the exact weakness of the EU which has left sovereignty over foreign affairs to individual nation states. There was a mounting concern from several experts that Europe could not any longer piggy back on the US for security and military needs. In contrast to this point of view, several other interviews from both security organisations and public institutions argued that Europe was developing a new kind of security community through soft power inclusion of countries in its near neighbourhood and the demonstrated effect of supra-national government which provides an example that has maintained peace while continuously expanding membership, achieved social economic welfare, and fostered shared values while maintaining unique and strong national identities. The widening of the European neighbourhood exhibits a new kind of influence and soft power.

How the EU operated in international relations and security matters led some interviewees to observe the emergence of new and flexible security frameworks that allow European countries to act abroad based on their interests and capabilities without having to take the entire Union with it. The use of the *coalition of the willing* is one such example whereby individual countries become involved in international interventions through bi-lateral and multilateral relationships, rather than as a European bloc. There was also an emphasis on the changing nature of the threats, which are most clearly illustrated in the fact that some conflicts are no longer nation state against nation state but increasingly complex with violent non-state actors, radical fundamentalism, and even cyber warfare.

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