

**Democratization and civil society in the relations between the European Union and Latin American countries from 2000 to 2024.**

The impact of the European Union on the processes of democratization and the development of civil societies in Latin American countries is the main issue addressed in this dissertation. Another important element was to highlight the role of integration processes in the region as factors that promote democratization and the development of civil society. The work is based on a construct that analyses the relations between a country's level of democratization and its level of development, considering the factors that classify a given country within a region.

The specific objectives of the dissertation are: to analyze the evolution of relations between the European Union and Latin American countries (divided into directions, stages, and mechanisms of cooperation); to assess the impact of European Union policy on democratization processes and the development of civil society in Latin American countries (institutional, programmatic, and normative actions); to analyze the effectiveness of ad extra Europeanization in the context of EU relations with Latin America by examining the relation between the scale of actions and the level of financial support from the Union. programmatic, normative); analysis of the effectiveness of Europeanization ad extra in the context of EU relations with Latin America by examining the relation between the scale of activities and the level of financial support from the Union and the intensity of its impact in terms of promoting democratic values and supporting civil society; and assessment of the effectiveness of cooperation in three groups of countries, depending on their level of development.

The research problem focuses on the analysis of democratization processes and the role of civil society in relations between the European Union and Latin American countries. The research hypotheses assumed that relations between the European Union and Latin American countries since 2000 have been characterized by gradual intensification, both institutionally and programmatically, with an increasing emphasis on democratization and civil society issues. In addition, the European Union consistently promotes democratic values and the development of civil society in Latin American countries, mainly through foreign policy instruments, support programs, and development aid. Its actions contribute to the strengthening of civil society structures and the consolidation of democracy in Latin American countries. The effectiveness

of cooperation varies depending on the level of development of a given country. The author draws on liberal theory in international relations, which is characterized by the theses of the normality of political change and the citizen as the agent responsible for change. Equally important in the implemented theory is that the spread of democratic institutions on a global scale is a guarantee of peace. In the liberal tradition, it is assumed that it is the preferences of countries—and not only their capabilities—that are the key factor determining their behavior on the international stage.

A wide range of research methods were used in the dissertation. As part of the systemic analysis, the author attempted to identify and assess the role of the European Union as an actor in international relations, focusing on its impact on democratization processes and the development of civil society in selected Latin American countries. The decision-making method was necessary to identify the cause-and-effect relations between the European Union and Latin American countries. The use of new institutionalism helped the author verify how political decision-makers influence the public interest in terms of democratization and the development of civil society, primarily in relations with the European Union, which has been supporting Latin American countries in humanitarian aid and economic development since the 1980s. The use of the comparative method was crucial in the author's creation of a typology of individual Latin American countries based on five factors analyzed in recent years (2018-2023) and their verification.

The empirical contribution of this work to the discipline of political science and administration is an assessment of the effectiveness of cooperation between the European Union and individual Latin American countries. The analysis conducted has shown that all highly developed countries are characterized by an advanced level of political cooperation between actors, conditioned by the existence of extensive bilateral and multilateral agreements, as well as continuous political dialogue. Relations between the entities focus primarily on innovation, strengthening education systems through academic exchanges, strengthening the position of civil society, promoting gender equality, environmental protection, and digitization. In addition, each of these countries has the highest indicators in the region in the areas of democracy, human rights protection, respect for the rule of law, and the functioning of civil society. Moderately developed countries have a moderate or relatively high level of political cooperation with the European Union.

This cooperation includes several instruments, such as cooperation agreements, annual political dialogue, and an association agreement within the African, Caribbean, and Pacific

Group of States. In addition, there are general agreements and mechanisms for political dialogue and cooperation. Areas of cooperation focus on protecting human rights, combating poverty, strengthening democratic processes, building strong justice systems, fighting corruption, ensuring security, promoting social policies, developing institutional capacity, and supporting citizen participation. Despite the moderate level of cooperation, it has been observed that there is a lower level of democratic development and significant restrictions on the functioning of civil society, which in many countries remains partially blocked or hampered. The most difficult situation in terms of cooperation with the European Union concerns seven countries in the region classified as underdeveloped. In the case of political cooperation, there is a limited presence of institutional forms of relations. The countries belonging to this group score lowest or very low in areas such as respect for human rights, the state of democracy, and the functioning of civil society. This indicates deep institutional deficits and limited space for civic participation.