



A joined-up Union, a stronger Europe

JOINT
Research Papers No. 18

February 2023

The EU Trapped in the Venezuelan Labyrinth: Challenges to Finding a Way Out

**Anna Ayuso, Marianne Riddervold
and Elsa Lilja Gunnarsdottir**



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N. 959143.

This publication reflects only the view of the author(s) and the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

The EU Trapped in the Venezuelan Labyrinth: Challenges to Finding a Way Out

Anna Ayuso, Marianne Riddervold and Elsa Lilja Gunnarsdottir*

Abstract

This report explores how EU Foreign and Security Policy towards the political crisis in Venezuela can be assessed against the backdrop of diverging positions within the EU and as well as between the EU, the United States and other powers. The EU's Venezuela policy has been anchored in three main pillars: first, supporting dialogue platforms between the government and the opposition; second, sanctioning the Maduro regime to force it to negotiate; and third, providing humanitarian aid helping neighbouring countries' attend to the massive migratory flow of Venezuelans. Intra-EU contestation was linked to the recognition of opposition leader Guaidó as Venezuela's interim president in 2019, but has eased since the EU dropped its recognition in 2021. Multipolar competition, and how it plays into patterns of regional fragmentation, has been another significant obstacle to the EU achieving its main foreign policy goal of free, fair and democratic elections. In the future, the EU approach should build on the renewed consensus between member states and focus on mediation, conditional sanctions relief, electoral observation, parliamentary diplomacy, support for regional governance and interregional cooperation.


* Anna Ayuso is Senior Research Fellow at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB). Marianne Riddervold is Research Professor at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI). Elsa Lilja Gunnarsdottir is Junior Research Fellow at NUPI.

Introduction

Venezuela has become a matter of growing concern for and involvement of the European Union. Years of increasingly authoritarian rule and economic mismanagement by President Nicolás Maduro, who has been in power since 2013, have turned the country into an international pariah and a source of regional instability. The situation descended into open crisis in 2019, when the opposition-controlled National Assembly designated its speaker, Juan Guaidó, as interim president to protest against the irregularity of Maduro's re-election the year before. Since then, the EU's aim has been to contribute to a peaceful solution to the political, social and humanitarian crisis by restoring a democratic process, but so far not much has changed on the ground. Neither sanctions nor the diplomatic efforts of an EU-supported International Contact Group, nor a mediation process led by Norway (again backed by the EU) have managed to drag Venezuela out of its prolonged political standstill and dire humanitarian predicament. Guaidó, who never got universal recognition inside the EU, failed to push Maduro to a negotiated settlement and ensure a democratic transition. Consequently, his domestic and international legitimacy wavered, until the National Assembly voted to remove him from the interim presidency in December 2022. Meanwhile, the population has been facing a severe social and humanitarian crisis. According to the United Nations, as of September 2022 7.1 million Venezuelans had left the country.¹

This report assesses the European Union Foreign and Security Policy (EUFSP), a broad framework that includes the action by both EU institutions and member states, related to the Venezuelan conflict against the backdrop of diverging positions within the EU and between the EU, the United States and other democratic states such as Canada or Japan, on the one hand, and China and Russia (and other authoritarian governments such as Cuba), on the other. It takes into consideration heightened global tensions following the Ukraine war, regional fragmentation in Latin America, and continued stalemate between Venezuelan parties in spite of several attempts of finding a negotiated solution to the conflict. It pays particular attention to three factors constraining EUFSP: first, internal divisions within the EU; second, the effect on Venezuela of geopolitical rivalries between multiple external

¹ World Vision, *Venezuela Crisis Response - Situation Report "Hope without Borders"*, July to September 2022, 18 November 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/node/3908498>.



powers; and third, the nexus between this bigger geopolitical picture and regional fragmentation.² The analysis draws on official documents from EU member states and institutions and secondary sources, complemented with ten interviews with EU and member state officials and members of the European Parliament (MEPs).³

This report finds that internal contestation on EUFSP towards Venezuela has been one of the main constraints on EU action, though divergences were centred more on means rather than goals. Contestation has been linked mainly to Guaidó's standing, as nine countries initially refused to accept him as the legitimate (interim) president of Venezuela. Domestic dynamics explain this reluctance. Overall, the main argument was that the EU is in no position to decide who should be the president of a country following a contested election in a third country, but this was often accompanied with a resistance to follow a policy line that was associated with the United States. EUFSP towards Venezuela has also suffered from the effect of regional dynamics and global powers' competition. Venezuela is strategically important due to its considerable oil reserves and the impact of its political crisis in the Latin American region. Great powers have consequently been drawn into it. Russia and China, but also Iran and Turkey, have undermined the effectiveness of US and EU pressure policy on Maduro.

The EU has provided humanitarian aid and deployed election observation missions in the attempt to facilitate the restoration of democratic practices in Venezuela. It has sought coordination with neighbouring states such as Colombia and Brazil and made an attempt at unfreezing the political dialogue with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). Cooperation with the United States has been another component of EUFSP towards Venezuela, especially after Joe Biden replaced Donald Trump as US president in early 2021. Following the war in Ukraine, both the EU and the United States have been more open to a limited and conditional re-engagement with the Maduro regime, ostensibly in the attempt to

² Riccardo Alcaro et al., "A Joined-Up Union, a Stronger Europe. A Conceptual Framework to Investigate EU Foreign and Security Policy in a Complex and Contested World", in *JOINT Research Papers*, No. 8 (August 2022), <https://www.jointproject.eu/?p=969>.

³ Between November 2022 and January 2023, ten interviews were held with guarantees of strict confidentiality. The people interviewed were personnel from the EEAS staff, diplomats and experts/civil servants from different countries, members of the European Parliament, and national parliaments. Interviewees requested anonymity and we therefore refer to them by date only. Several member state officials declined to be interviewed.

secure alternatives to Russian oil supplies to the global market.⁴

We start the report by briefly explaining the Venezuela crisis and then describing EUFSP towards it. We then explore the three factors constraining EUFSP – internal contestation, multipolar competition and regional fragmentation. When exploring internal contestation, we zoom in on the content and sources of contestation expressed by the nine member states who initially opposed a common recognition of Guaidó, and how some of these countries' positions changed. We also discuss the debates in the European Parliament (EP) in cases where they diverge from that of the Council. When discussing multipolar competition, we review the policies of the United States, China and Russia as well as their impact on the effectiveness of EUFSP. We also analyse how multipolar competition has increased regional fragmentation, negatively influenced EU relations with Latin America and prevented initiatives such as the International Contact Group, which sought a concerted regional response to the Venezuelan crisis, from prospering. We finally analyse EU mitigation strategies to deal with the negative effects of such constraining factors, showing how EUFSP towards Venezuela increasingly focuses on election observation, humanitarian assistance and support to civil society, before making a few recommendations on how EUFSP could be improved.

1. The trajectory of Venezuela's political crisis

The rise to power of hard-left President Hugo Chávez in 1998 started a process of profound institutional transformation in Venezuela. A new constitution was approved in 1999, which expanded the list of rights constitutionally guaranteed but also removed the parliament's power to impeach the president. Another key moment was the launch of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution, an attempt to build an inter-American coalition ostensibly based on the expansion of citizens' rights and the state's role in the economy.⁵ Under the banner of the Bolivarian Revolution, Chávez limited the room for democratic dissent, centralised power,

⁴ Rosa Jiménez, "La UE se plantea pedir a Estados Unidos más exenciones para el petróleo venezolano", in *EuroEFE*, 11 November 2022, <https://euroefe.euractiv.es/?p=74917>.

⁵ Armando Chaguaceda and María Isabel Puerta, "Decadencia autoritaria en Venezuela: proceso histórico y desarrollos recientes", in *Diálogo Político*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (October 2017), p. 152-167, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320555833>.

introduced measures such as price controls and nationalisation of economic activities and imprisoned his political adversaries.⁶ Chávez's shift towards authoritarianism, which was mirrored by a similar non-democratic conduct of factions of the opposition, accelerated after a failed military coup in 2004.⁷ It is fair to assume that Chávez became radicalised also in response to increasing domestic polarisation, pressure from the Organization of American States (OAS) and his increasingly strong alliance with Cuba.⁸ Chávez's ties with Cuba intensified over the years, with more than 40,000 Cuban advisers and military personnel reportedly deployed to Venezuela in return, amongst others, for discounted oil supplies.⁹ After Chávez died of cancer in 2013, Nicolás Maduro, Chávez's vice-president and designated heir, won a contested presidential election by a very thin margin. In the midst of social discontent, the police brutally repressed street protests, leaving dozens of demonstrators dead and many others injured.¹⁰ Opposition leaders were imprisoned. After the Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD), a coalition of opposition forces, won 112 of the 167 seats in the 2015 elections for Venezuela's National Assembly, Maduro progressively reduced the National Assembly's power and the MUD's ability to thwart the executive's policies.

In March 2017 Venezuela's Supreme Court, packed with government appointees, tried to strip the National Assembly of its legislative powers, arguing that the body was in contempt of the court's rulings for having sworn in three lawmakers who had been suspended for alleged fraud.¹¹ Protests against the ruling were repressed by security forces, causing the death of well over a hundred people.¹² In May,

⁶ Marta Valiñas et al., *Report of the Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela* (A/HRC/48/69), 28 December 2021, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/48/69>.

⁷ Mónica Nanjari, "20 años del intento golpista contra Chávez que terminó por fortalecerlo", in *Deutsche Welle*, 10 April 2022, <https://p.dw.com/p/49fRr>.

⁸ Susanne Grätius and Anna Ayuso Pozo, "Sanciones como instrumento de coerción: ¿cuán similares son las políticas de Estados Unidos y la Unión Europea hacia Venezuela?", in *América Latina Hoy*, Vol. 85 (2020), p. 31-53, <https://doi.org/10.14201/alh.21989>.

⁹ Haroldo Dilla Alfonso, "Hugo Chávez y Cuba: subsidiando postposiciones fatales", in *Nueva Sociedad*, No. 205 (Septiembre-Octubre 2006), p. 141-158, <https://www.nuso.org/articulo/3347>.

¹⁰ "Post-Vote Venezuela Violence", in *Deutsche Welle*, 16 April 2013, <https://www.dw.com/en/a-16748400>.

¹¹ "Venezuela Supreme Court Grants Itself Powers", in *Deutsche Welle*, 30 March 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/a-38214811>.

¹² Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social, *Venezuela: 6.729 protestas y 163 fallecidos desde el 1 de abril de 2017*, 2 August 2017, <https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/?p=2139>.

Maduro launched a legally dubious process to elect 545 members of a Constituent National Assembly tasked with drafting a new Constitution, and with powers to pass legislation.¹³ Since then, the government and the opposition have contested the legal basis of each other's actions.

Different international actors have attempted to broker a national reconciliation. In 2014 the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), alongside the Holy See, unsuccessfully sponsored a dialogue initiative.¹⁴ Another attempt was led in 2016 by Spain's former prime minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the ex-Dominican Republic president Leonel Fernández and former president of Panamá Martín Torrijos.¹⁵ The negotiations dragged on until January 2017 without results. To convince the opposition to participate in the following presidential election of May 2018, the government proposed reopening dialogue through an international support group sponsored by the president of the Dominican Republic, Danilo Medina, and again the Spanish Rodríguez Zapatero. Observer countries – Chile and Mexico for the opposition and Nicaragua, Bolivia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines for the government – supported the initiative.¹⁶ The negotiation aimed to establish guarantees for a fair presidential ballot with international observation and the release of political prisoners. When the Venezuelan National Electoral Committee (CNE) disqualified the MUD and other main opposition parties from the election,¹⁷ the opposition withdrew from the dialogue, and Mexico and Chile abandoned the mediation process. Most of the opposition called for a boycott of the election.¹⁸ Amidst internal and international protests, Maduro was eventually declared the winner.

¹³ International Crisis Group, "Power without the People: Averting Venezuela's Breakdown", in *Latin America Briefings*, No. 36 (19 June 2017), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/5186>.

¹⁴ David Smilde and Geoff Ramsey, "International Peacemaking in Venezuela's Intractable Conflict", in *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, No. 109 (January-June 2020), p. 157-179, <http://doi.org/10.32992/erlacs.10582>.

¹⁵ Alfredo Meza, "Zapatero cita en Dominicana a la oposición y el Gobierno de Maduro", in *El País*, 28 May 2016, https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/05/28/america/1464455695_399407.html.

¹⁶ "Productive Talks between Maduro and Opposition", in *Deutsche Welle*, 15 September 2017, <https://www.dw.com/en/a-40520601>.

¹⁷ "Supremo venezolano ordena excluir a la MUD de la validación electoral", in *Deutsche Welle*, 26 January 2018, <https://p.dw.com/p/2rXTh>.

¹⁸ Leonardo Niño, "Comunidad internacional alega falta de 'transparencia' en las elecciones de Venezuela", in *France 24*, 20 May 2018, <https://www.france24.com/es/20180519-elecciones-venezuela-maduro-comunidad-internacional>.

Maduro began his second term on 10 January 2019. Two weeks later, Juan Guaidó Márquez, then speaker of the National Assembly (the highest state body with an opposition majority) proclaimed himself interim president, invoking article 233 of the Constitution,¹⁹ which gives such an authority to the speaker of the National Assembly in the event of a power vacuum and until elections can be held. Immediately, the United States, the OAS and the Lima Group – comprising Canada, Mexico and several South American states – recognised him as the legitimate president.²⁰ In the following weeks nearly sixty countries followed suit, including most member states of the EU. Venezuela was in the midst of an already acute political and humanitarian crisis,²¹ yet the Maduro government could sustain domestic and international pressure thanks to support from Russia as well as China, Cuba, Turkey and Iran (see below).²² The crisis worsened after Guaidó called for an uprising against Maduro in April 2019, failing however to win support from the military, whose leadership remained loyal to Maduro.²³ Subsequently, the Guaidó-led opposition boycotted the December 2020 parliamentary election, which saw a turnout of just 30 per cent.²⁴

As the crisis was unfolding in Venezuela, new international mediation efforts were made. In February 2019, the EU supported the creation of the International Contact Group (ICG) with the goal of promoting a peaceful political transition.²⁵ Specifically, the aim of the ICG was to “build trust and create the conditions that are necessary for

¹⁹ “Crisis en Venezuela: Los artículos de la Constitución a los que aduce Juan Guaidó en su juramento”, in *El Mundo Internacional*, 24 January 2019, <https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2019/01/24/5c49bf1dfdddf4e888b468e.html>.

²⁰ “Estos son los países que han reconocido a Guaidó como presidente de Venezuela”, in *Europa Press*, 23 January 2019, <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-paises-reconocen-juan-guaido-presidente-venezuela-20190123230113.html>.

²¹ Susanne Gratius and José Manuel Puente, “Las claves de la crisis venezolana”, in *Foreign Affairs Latinoamérica*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (April-June 2019), p. 5-15.

²² Moises Rendon and Claudia Fernandez, “The Fabulous Five: How Foreign Actors Prop up the Maduro Regime in Venezuela”, in *CSIS Briefs*, October 2020, <https://www.csis.org/node/58528>.

²³ John Paul Rathbone and Gideon Long, “Venezuela’s Juan Guaidó Calls for Uprising against Nicolás Maduro”, in *Financial Times*, 30 April 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/b4ec0c2e-6b37-11e9-a9a5-351eeaf6d84>.

²⁴ National Electoral Council website: *Elecciones Asamblea Nacional 2020*, http://www.cne.gob.ve/web/estadisticas/index_resultados_elecciones.php.

²⁵ David Smilde and Geoff Ramsey, “International Peacemaking in Venezuela’s Intractable Conflict”, cit.

a credible process to emerge in line with the relevant provisions of the Constitution of Venezuela”.²⁶ It listed a number of trust-building measures, such as ending all electoral restrictions on parties and politicians, releasing political prisoners, and appointing independent members of the National Electoral Council. Throughout the first half of 2019, the ICG supported a dialogue between Maduro and Guaidó, overseen by the Norwegian government. Negotiations, attended by representatives of Maduro and Guaidó, commenced in Barbados in July. The initiative eventually morphed into the so-called Mexico City process, once again led by Norway and with the Netherlands and Russia acting as guarantors of the opposition and the government respectively. Initially the process achieved some important results. The Maduro government accepted a reshuffling of the composition of the national electoral council²⁷ and the Venezuelan opposition agreed to participate in the November 2021 regional and local elections, while the government and the EU agreed on the deployment of an electoral observation mission. However, the whole process ground to a halt after a Colombian businessman close to Maduro, Alex Saab, was arrested in Cape Verde in September 2021 upon an extradition request by the United States on money laundering charges. In the attempt to stall the extradition to the United States, the Venezuelan government officially made Saab part of its negotiation team in Mexico.²⁸

In sum, various parallel attempts have been made to promote a negotiated solution to the crisis. However, neither pressure nor diplomacy have so far been successful. The Maduro government has remained in power, resisting international pressure and seeking out allies. The prospects for a peaceful political transition remain dim. In the next section, we illustrate the EU’s involvement in the Venezuela crisis more in depth.

²⁶ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the Press Conference Following the First Day of Informal Meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Ministers*, Bucharest, 31 August 2018, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/57481_en.

²⁷ Florantonia Singer, “Venezuela elige un nuevo consejo electoral con mayor presencia opositora”, in *El País*, 5 May 2021, <https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-05-05/venezuela-elige-un-nuevo-consejo-electoral-con-mayor-presencia-opositora.html>.

²⁸ “Venezuela exige la liberación de Alex Saab para reanudar el diálogo con la oposición en México”, in *Europa Press*, 6 January 2022, <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-venezuela-exige-liberacion-alex-saab-reanudar-dialogo-oposicion-mexico-20220106012054.html>.

2. The three dimensions of EUFSP in the Venezuela crisis

Latin America has not traditionally been a priority region for the EU. It is, however, a region with which interregional relations have been forged not only on economic interests, but also on the defence of common principles and shared values.²⁹ Europe's engagement with the region virtually started when Spain and Portugal joined the European Economic Community in 1986.³⁰ Since 1999, a strategic partnership has been in place. Yet, EU engagement has been hindered by the emergence of authoritarian regimes in Venezuela and Nicaragua and the growing presence of extra-regional autocratic powers such as China and Russia.

Since 2015, the falling prices of oil, Venezuela's biggest export, coupled with the Maduro regime's economic mismanagement, a quasi-embargo regime imposed by the United States and, more recently, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, have seen Venezuela's economy nosedive. Venezuela's economic and political crisis has prompted the largest migration crisis in the region's history, with around seven million Venezuelans forced to flee to neighbouring countries, as well as the United States and Europe.³¹ Venezuela's political crisis has consequently captured ever more EU attention.

In response to Maduro's attempts to disqualify the National Assembly in 2017, the EU started to craft a policy in support of "an urgent, constructive and effective dialogue between the Government and the parliamentary majority, [thereby] creating the conditions for peaceful solutions to the multidimensional challenges the country faces".³² Citing widespread frauds, the EU rejected the results of the 2018 presidential election, ostensibly won by Maduro, and stood with the National

²⁹ Andres Serbin and Andrei Serbin Pont (eds), *¿Por qué la Unión Europea debería ser de relevancia para América Latina y el Caribe?*, Hamburgo, Fundación EU-LAC, CRIES, 2018, <https://eulacfoundation.org/es/system/files/relevancia-ue-lac-es-web.pdf>.

³⁰ Roberto Dominguez, *EU Foreign Policy towards Latin America*, Basingstoke/New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

³¹ Francisco Rodríguez, "To Halt the Venezuelan Migration Crisis, Stop Banning Venezuelan Oil", in *Foreign Policy*, 1 November 2022, <https://bit.ly/3fmjBvd>.

³² Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Venezuela*, 18 July 2016, point 1, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/05/15/fac-venezuela-conclusions>.

Assembly.³³ The EU objective has since been a peaceful transition that leads to free and transparent elections and Venezuela's "re-introduction" into regional and global trade and political frameworks. The EU's policy towards Venezuela has revolved around three components,³⁴ ostensibly complementary with one another.³⁵

First, the EU has taken steps to promote dialogue between the government and the opposition, including by supporting the creation of the ICG,³⁶ which since 2019 has tried to facilitate a negotiated solution to the crisis.³⁷ It certainly did not help, however, that only eight EU member states and five Latin American countries initially participated in the ICG.

Second, the EU has adopted sanctions and targeted measures (freezing of assets and visa restrictions) against officials of the Maduro government³⁸ to press the regime to negotiate. As a result of sanctions and the refusal to recognise Maduro as Venezuela's legitimate president, the EU ceased to be perceived as a neutral actor and "lost credibility to lead a negotiated solution";³⁹ the fact that the EU countries who had done so dropped recognition of Guaidó as Venezuela's interim president in January 2021 improved only marginally the EU's status as mediator. In fact, the role of the EU in the negotiations has been limited to supporting mediation efforts by Norway, which have proceeded on and off for over two years.⁴⁰

³³ Council of the European Union, *Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the Presidential and Regional Elections in Venezuela*, 22 May 2018, <http://europa.eu/!PM79rb>.

³⁴ Council of the European Union, *Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on Venezuela*, 27 September 2019, <https://europa.eu/!Nc69jk>.

³⁵ Susanne Gratius and Anna Ayuso Pozo, "Sanciones como instrumento de coerción", cit.

³⁶ EEAS, *EU Works for Political Solution to the Crisis in Venezuela*, September 2019, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/67798>.

³⁷ David Smilde and Geoff Ramsey, "International Peacemaking in Venezuela's Intractable Conflict", cit.

³⁸ Council of the European Union, *Decision (CFSP) 2017/2074 of 12 November 2017 Concerning Restrictive Measures in View of the Situation in Venezuela*, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2017/2074/oj>.

³⁹ Susanne Gratius and José Manuel Puente, "Las claves de la crisis venezolana", cit., p. 11.

⁴⁰ "EU No Longer Recognises Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's Interim President", in *Euronews*, 7 January 2021, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2021/01/07/eu-no-longer-recognises-juan-guaido-as-venezuela-s-interim-president>.

Third, the EU has offered humanitarian aid to both Venezuelans and neighbouring states struggling to cope with massive immigration flows. Between 2016 and 2020, the EU granted 314 million euros in emergency humanitarian aid, and continues to provide help to this day.⁴¹ The assistance is given through international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), United Nations agencies as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross. It focuses on providing healthcare, water, sanitation and hygiene, food and education, as well as aid to refugees and internally displaced, prioritising vulnerable groups.⁴²

In May 2020, the EU and Spain jointly organised an international donor conference in solidarity with Venezuelan refugees and migrants, which resulted in pledges for 2.5 billion US dollars, including 653 million in donations.⁴³ However, Maduro rejected the aid and called the conference a “fraudulent spectacle organized by a group of governments, self-proclaimed donors”.⁴⁴ In June 2021, Canada hosted a second international donor conference in solidarity with Venezuelan refugees and migrants, in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration, co-leaders of the Regional Platform for Inter-institutional Coordination for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela.⁴⁵ Again, Maduro called the conference a “media farce”.⁴⁶ There is, however, increasingly hope for cooperation with the Maduro-regime when it comes to humanitarian assistance. The November 2022 *Mesa Social* deal between the Maduro government and the opposition, agreed upon in the Norway-facilitated

⁴¹ Website of the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations: *Venezuela Factsheet*, <https://europa.eu/!4rr8fr>.


⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Conferencia Internacional de Donantes en solidaridad con los refugiados y migrantes venezolanos*, 26 May 2020, https://www.exteriores.gob.es/es/Comunicacion/Noticias/Paginas/Noticias/20200519_MINISTERIO6.aspx.

⁴⁴ Venezuela Government, *Comunicué*, 27 May 2020, <https://mppre.gob.ve/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Venezuela-deplores-alleged-EU-concern-over-COVID-19-situation-in-the-country.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Canada Government website: *International Donors' Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants*, 17 June 2021, <https://www.international.gc.ca/campaign-campagne/international-donors-internationale-donateurs/index.aspx>.

⁴⁶ Venezuela Government, *Comunicado*, 17 June 2021, <https://ultimasnoticias.com.ve/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Venezuela-condena-cinismo-de-caricaturesca-convocatoria-y-exige-a-los-gobiernos-que-cesen-agresion-politica.pdf>; Yurany Arciniegas, “Donantes prometen más de US \$1.500 millones para venezolanos y Caracas lo tilda de ‘farsa mediática’”, in *France 24*, 18 June 2021, <https://www.france24.com/es/américa-latina/20210618-conferencia-donantes-migrantes-venezuela-maduro>.



Mexico talks, opens the doors for international organisations to better coordinate humanitarian work and allows for Venezuelan funds frozen abroad to be released to finance social projects.⁴⁷

Support for mediation, sanctions and provision of humanitarian aid have thus been the main focuses of EU and member states' involvement in the Venezuela crisis. Results have hardly matched ambitions, however. In the next section we trace EUFSP difficulties back to intra-EU contestation, competition from external powers and the fragmented nature of Latin America's regional governance mechanisms.

3. The constraints on EUFSP towards Venezuela

3.1 Internal contestation

Internal or intra-EU contestation refers to the process by which individual EU member states take decisions that do not align with objectives agreed-upon at the EU level for reasons of domestic expediency.⁴⁸ Seen from this angle, there has apparently been little internal contestation on most of the EU's objectives in Venezuela. All member states and institutions support the overall aims of a peaceful resolution to the crisis and restoration of democratic norms and practices in Venezuela. They have all agreed to put pressure on the Maduro regime through various types of sanctions and resolutions. Mediation efforts have also enjoyed large support from the EU, and most of its member states and have lately supported monitoring international electoral missions. However, intra-EU debates on Venezuela have not always been unanimous. In fact, EU member states split on the major issue of whether to recognise Guaidó as the legitimate interim president of Venezuela.

⁴⁷ Carmen Menéndez, "El Gobierno venezolano y la oposición llegan a un primer acuerdo", in *Euronews*, 27 November 2022, <https://es.euronews.com/2022/11/27/venezuela-el-gobierno-y-la-oposicion-llegan-a-un-primer-acuerdo-en-mexico>.

⁴⁸ Riccardo Alcaro et al., "A Joined-Up Union, a Stronger Europe", cit.

In January 2019, then High Representative / Vice President of the European Commission (HR/VP) Federica Mogherini reaffirmed, on behalf of the EU, that the May 2018 elections were neither free nor credible, announced the intention to establish the ICG and warned that, “in the absence of an announcement on the organisation of fresh elections with the necessary guarantees over the next days”, the EU would basically recognise Guaidó as the legitimate interim president.⁴⁹ On 31 January 2019,⁵⁰ the European Parliament recognised Guaidó and asked EU member states and the HR/VP to follow suit in a resolution adopted with 439 votes in favour, 104 against and 88 abstentions.⁵¹

Hence, the EU apparently planned to arrive at a common position on the recognition of Venezuela’s president. However, it soon emerged that the necessary unanimity among EU member states was lacking. On 4 February, only nineteen out of the then twenty-eight member states recognised Guaidó, supporting his right to call for free, fair and democratic presidential elections.⁵² Nine countries – Cyprus, Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia –, while expressing support for the National Assembly, refused to join their fellow EU partners and the EP in recognising Guaidó as the legitimate interim president of Venezuela. Eventually most of them changed position, but Cyprus and Italy did not. Italy in particular prevented the EU from reaching a common position on the matter, as explained below.⁵³

The reasons behind the initial reluctance of these member states and their consequent change of mind vary: peer pressure among member states, changes in governments, disagreements within ruling coalitions and developments in the

⁴⁹ Council of the European Union, *Venezuela: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union*, 6 January 2021, <https://europa.eu/!ct78UV>.

⁵⁰ European Parliament, *Venezuela: Parliament Recognises Guaidó, Urges EU to Follow Suit*, 31 January 2019, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190125IPR24303>.

⁵¹ European Parliament, *Resolution of 31 January 2019 on the Situation in Venezuela*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0061_EN.html.

⁵² The statement was joined by Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom (then EU member). France et al., *Joint Declaration on Venezuela*, 4 February 2019, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/venezuela/events/article/joint-declaration-on-venezuela-04-02-19>.

⁵³ Michael Stott, “EU Drops Recognition of Juan Guaidó as Venezuela’s Interim President”, in *Financial Times*, 6 January 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/aa372f3a-a1ac-41da-848a-46355fc3ec4f>.

country's crisis all played into their decisions.

Romania, which held the presidency of the EU Council in early 2019, was amongst the first to change position. Only four days after the joint statement by the initial nineteen, President Klaus Iohannis explained that he had reversed his decision after close analysis of the situation from the “political, diplomatic and juridical point of view” and after most EU member states, allies and partners recognised the legitimacy of Guaidó as interim president.⁵⁴ Seemingly in an effort to justify Romania's belated decision, Iohannis put emphasis on the responsibility felt by his country, as holder of the EU Council presidency, to seek a pan-European consensus. In reality, the Romanian government was wrought by internal disagreements (with Iohannis even going as far as to state that “Romania [was] not ready”⁵⁵ to hold the EU presidency).⁵⁶ Whether the chaos surrounding the government and pressure to live up to their commitments put any pressure on Romania is uncertain, though the president's statement on 8 February might suggest as much.

For certain member states, it took longer to back the position shared by the majority of EU states. Greece's left-wing government led by Alexis Tsipras stated that the Greek position was for the EU “not to drag ourselves behind the initiatives of other great powers”,⁵⁷ namely the United States, the staunchest supporter of Guaidó. However, in July 2019, soon after a new government spearheaded by the centre-right New Democracy party was inaugurated, Greece changed its stance “in accordance with the common EU position in the statement of the EU High Representative”.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Romanian Presidency, *Romania Recognises Juan Guaidó as Interim President of Venezuela*, 8 February 2019, <https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/romania-recognises-juan-guaido-as-interim-president-of-venezuela>.

⁵⁵ Barbara Wesel, “A Missed Chance to Show EU Unity”, in *Deutsche Welle*, 2 February 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/a-47337182>.

⁵⁶ “Govt. Says Romania Is Ready for EU Council Presidency”, in *Romania Insider*, 14 November 2018, <https://www.romania-insider.com/govt-romania-ready-eu-council-presidency>.

⁵⁷ Greece's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs Giorgos Katrougalos' Statement on the Recent Developments in Venezuela*, 29 January 2019, <https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/statements-speeches/alternate-minister-of-foreign-affairs-giorgos-katrougalos-statement-on-the-recent-developments-in-venezuela-29-january-2019.html>.

⁵⁸ Greece's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Announcement on the Recognition of J. Guaido as President a.i. of Venezuela*, 12 July 2019, <https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/statements-speeches/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-announcement-on-the-recognition-of-guaido-as-president-ai-of-venezuela.html>.

Disagreements within the ruling coalition shaped Slovakia's position on Venezuela. While the Slovakian foreign ministry stated that they viewed Guaidó as the only legitimate representative of the Venezuelan people, two out of three coalition parties in the Slovakian government did not back this position, and hence Slovakia did not join the group of states recognising Guaidó.⁵⁹ Robert Fico, head of the governing left-wing party Smer, saw it as an effort to install a puppet head of state, while the Slovak National Party, also in the government coalition, stated that Slovakia should stay neutral.⁶⁰ However, in July 2020, after Maduro threatened to expel the EU ambassador to Venezuela over new sanctions, Slovakia's newly formed conservative government decided to recognise Guaidó.⁶¹

The lead-up to the Italian position on Venezuela was not clear-cut. Although mainstream centre-left and centre-right parties urged a united EU response, Italy's Five Star Movement, an anti-establishment force that at the time ruled in coalition with the right-wing League party, said they would "never recognize people who appoint themselves president". According to Five Star, EU restrictive measures such as sanctions, asset-freezing and ultimatums would invite military intervention.⁶² The League, on the other hand, came out strongly in favour of Guaidó.⁶³ Eventually, the lack of intra-coalition consensus on the recognition question led Italy to block a joint EU declaration. Then Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte later explained that while his government believed Maduro had no democratic legitimacy, it did not wish to provoke further radicalisation on either side and contribute to a spiral of violence that would worsen the situation for the Venezuelan people.⁶⁴

In the end, the issue of Guaidó's recognition faded after the opposition leader failed to muster enough internal and international support to compel Maduro to leave office or accept a compromise. In a declaration by the HR/VP of 6 January 2021,

⁵⁹ "Slovakia Declines to Back Venezuela's Guaidó as Diplomats Gather in Montevideo", in *Euractiv*, 7 February 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/?p=1311514>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "Divided Italy Blocks EU Statement on Recognizing Venezuela's Guaido", in *Reuters*, 4 February 2019, <https://reut.rs/2GnYOhN>.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Associated Press, "Italy Explains Refusal to Recognize Venezuela's Guaido", in *The Washington Post*, 11 May 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/italy-explains-refusal-to-recognize-venezuelas-guaido/2019/05/11/39ecc008-741b-11e9-9331-30bc5836f48e_story.html.

Guaidó was referred to as a member of the “outgoing National Assembly”,⁶⁵ and as an “important actor and privileged interlocutor” in an EU Foreign Affairs Council statement of 25 January 2021,⁶⁶ but not as interim president. This came after the new legislature, elected in a 2020 election boycotted by the opposition, took over and appointed a new head of the assembly.

3.2 The debate in the European Parliament

To an extent, the disagreements amongst member states were reflected in the debate within the EP, which pointed to ideology being an important factor shaping member states’ position. Although the EP only has little authority over foreign policy, it has an important symbolic role and may even influence policies by setting the agenda or putting pressure on the Council.⁶⁷

The debates in the EP on the Venezuelan crisis were driven mostly by the centre-right European People’s Party (EPP). Conservative Spanish MEPs were especially active – as most of the deputies who prepare EP resolutions on Venezuela are Spanish. The ties of the Spanish Popular Party with Voluntad Popular, the party of Guaidó, were also decisive for the determined support of the EP for his interim presidency.⁶⁸

Starting in 2013, the EP denounced the Maduro government through resolutions on Venezuela, all of them critical of the human rights situation and highlighting the decline in human security. In 2017, the EP awarded the Sakharov Prize⁶⁹ for human rights to the Venezuelan opposition. The EP also recommended that the EU Council approve an arms embargo and targeted sanctions against members

⁶⁵ Council of the European Union, *Venezuela: Declaration by the High Representative...*, cit.

⁶⁶ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Venezuela*, 25 January 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48053/st05582-en21.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Paula Lamoso González and Stelios Stavridis, “El Parlamento Europeo como tribuna moral internacional: el caso de Venezuela”, in *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, No. 131 (September 2022), p. 185-210, <https://doi.org/10.24241/rcai.2022.131.2.185>.

⁶⁸ Interviews with EP members, November 2022 and January 2023.

⁶⁹ European Parliament, *The Democratic Opposition in Venezuela - 2017, Venezuela*, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sakharovprize/en/the-democratic-opposition-in-venezuela-2/products-details/20200331CAN54209>.

of the Maduro government, which were actually agreed upon in November 2017.⁷⁰ The adoption of targeted sanctions by the Council was accompanied by pressure from the EP to do more.⁷¹ In 2019, the EP was the first European institution to unconditionally recognise Guaidó as the legitimate interim president⁷² and was the last to drop it in 2021. The EP also backed investigations by the International Criminal Court into the crimes perpetrated by the Venezuelan regime.⁷³ Sections of the extreme left with contacts to the Maduro regime voted against them, as did the representatives of Podemos (Spain), Syriza (Greece) or Five Star (Italy), reflecting in the EP divergences that also played out within the ruling coalitions of certain EU governments.⁷⁴

Against the backdrop of great support for a tough line on Maduro, the initiative of HR/VP Josep Borrell to send an EU mission to observe regional and local elections of 2021 in Venezuela did not meet universal support in the EP.⁷⁵ The EPP rejected it on the grounds that it implied recognition of the Maduro government. Ultimately, the addition of an EP delegation was approved by a large majority, even if the PPE continued to refuse participation.⁷⁶ The MEPs who participated in the mission believe that the mission's final report lays the groundwork for the changes that are needed to ensure fair presidential elections in 2024.⁷⁷ Critics say the report shows that the conditions for fair and transparent elections were not in place and highlight that the members of the mission were expelled before finishing their work and that the Maduro government refused to accept the results of the

⁷⁰ Susanne Gratius, "The West Against the Rest? Democracy Versus Autocracy Promotion in Venezuela", in *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (January 2022), p. 141-158, <https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.13243>.

⁷¹ European Parliament, *Resolution of 16 January 2020 on the Situation in Venezuela after the Illegal Election of the New National Assembly Presidency and Bureau (Parliamentary Coup)*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0013_EN.html.

⁷² European Parliament, *Resolution of 31 January 2019 on the Situation in Venezuela*, cit.

⁷³ European Parliament, *Resolution of 18 July 2019 on the Situation in Venezuela*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0007_EN.html.

⁷⁴ Interview with EP members from different groups, December 2022 and January 2022.

⁷⁵ EEAS, *Venezuela: EU Deploys Election Observation Mission*, 29 September 2021, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/104849>.

⁷⁶ EPP Group, *EPP Group Not to Participate in EP Electoral Mission to Venezuela*, 9 November 2021, <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/news/epp-group-won-t-participate-in-mission-to-venezuela>.

⁷⁷ EU Election Observation Mission, *Venezuela 2021 Final Report*, 22 February 2022, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/111306>.

observation mission report anyway.⁷⁸

3.3 Multipolar competition

Multipolar competition, which we understand as multiple power centres competing for establishing different forms of regional and global orders,⁷⁹ has had a strong impact on the EU's ability to achieve its overall objective of a peaceful and democratic solution to the Venezuela crisis. Multipolar competition in the region is characterised by the divide between the EU and the United States on one side and Russia and China, as well as Cuba, Iran and Turkey, on the other. While the former have imposed sanctions, frozen diplomatic relations with Caracas and strongly condemned the Maduro regime, the latter have provided aid and helped the regime circumvent EU and US sanctions.⁸⁰ Russia's and China's support has also influenced Maduro's attitude towards negotiations. In the words of Smilde and Ramsey,

as long as Maduro can count on China and Russia for financial support – even if it is less than it was in previous years [...] his BATNA [best alternative to a negotiated agreement] is a plausible plan to wait until the opposition collapses and the international community tires of exercising diplomatic pressure.⁸¹

The United States has a strong strategic, political and economic interest in Venezuela and the region more broadly, and its weight has often limited the EU's wiggle room in Venezuela, particularly when Brussels and Washington have differed on how to approach the crisis. The EU is undoubtedly the less influential player between the two. Although the EU may influence developments on the

⁷⁸ Juan Diego Quesada, "Venezuela expulsa a los observadores de la UE", in *El País*, 3 December 2021, <https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-12-03/venezuela-expulsa-a-los-observadores-de-la-ue.html>.

⁷⁹ For a lengthier discussion of the three concepts of multipolar competition, regional fragmentation and internal contestation and the ways in which they affect the governance structures of EU foreign and security policy, see Riccardo Alcaro et al., "A Joined-Up Union, a Stronger Europe", cit.

⁸⁰ Susanne Gratius, "The West Against the Rest?", cit.; David Smilde and Geoff Ramsey, "International Peacemaking in Venezuela's Intractable Conflict", cit.

⁸¹ David Smilde and Geoff Ramsey, "International Peacemaking in Venezuela's Intractable Conflict", cit., p. 172.

ground, its role largely depends on the extent to which it aligns and coordinates with the United States.⁸² As summed up by an interviewee, “Venezuela is important to the EU due to the EU’s human rights focus, and some member states’ historic links to Venezuela. But in the end, this is the US’ backyard. The US is the biggest piece of the puzzle except Venezuela itself”.⁸³ Venezuelans, who would prefer the EU to play a bigger role as a non-polarising force, are all too aware of this and see the Union as too dependent on the United States.⁸⁴

Under President Trump (2017–21), in spite of heightened transatlantic animosity, the EU and the United States shared, in fact, commonalities on Venezuela. Both stressed the need for new elections, condemned Maduro’s takeover of institutions, scaled down diplomatic relations, and imposed sanctions. However, while the Trump Administration openly pursued a policy of regime change (even suggesting that military intervention was an option),⁸⁵ the EU’s focus was on a negotiated political transition. To illustrate, while the EU expressed a willingness to lift sanctions in exchange for negotiations and political change, the Trump Administration’s “maximum pressure” aimed at creating fractures in the regime that would eventually lead to its collapse.⁸⁶ It explicitly stated it did not trust Maduro’s willingness to engage in sincere negotiations or that there could be free and fair elections as long as Maduro was president. In early 2019, the Trump Administration broadened the reach of its sanctions against the Venezuelan regime by targeting the Venezuelan oil company PDVSA, parent company of the US-based Citgo, prompting a virtual oil embargo.⁸⁷ Then in mid-2019, when announcing the imposition of new sanctions, the United States claimed that “the time for dialogue

⁸² Susanne Gratius, “The West Against the Rest?”, cit.; Raúl Stolk and Gabriela Mesones Rojo, “Venezuela: Perceptions of Europe Framed by Domestic Crises”, in Rosa Balfour, Lizza Bomassi and Marta Martinelli (eds), *The Southern Mirror: Reflections on Europe from the Global South*, Brussels, Carnegie Europe, 2022, p. 65-78, <https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/87312>. Also interviews, 2022 and 2023.

⁸³ Interview with a national expert, November 2022.

⁸⁴ Raúl Stolk and Gabriela Mesones Rojo, “Venezuela: Perceptions of Europe Framed by Domestic Crises”, cit., p. 77.

⁸⁵ Brian Ellsworth, “Trump Says U.S. Military Intervention in Venezuela ‘an Option,’ Russia Objects”, in *Reuters*, 3 February 2019, <https://reut.rs/2GannEs>.

⁸⁶ David Smilde and Geoff Ramsey, “International Peacemaking in Venezuela’s Intractable Conflict”, cit., p. 171.

⁸⁷ Jeremy Diamond and Allie Malloy, “Trump Approves Sanctions on Venezuelan Oil Company”, in *CNN*, 29 January 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/01/28/politics/us-sanctions-venezuelan-oil-company>.

is over”.⁸⁸ National Security Advisor John Bolton stated that Venezuela had joined an “exclusive club of rogue states” like Cuba, Iran, Syria, North Korea that are subject to that form of sanctions.⁸⁹

Trump’s intransigence hindered the EU-supported negotiation process between the government and the opposition. Both the EU and the opposition accepted that elections could be held with Maduro in office if strict transparency and fairness conditions were met, and both were open to trade sanctions relief in exchange for democratic change.⁹⁰ In addition to disincentivising Maduro from making concessions in return for sanctions relief more difficult, Trump’s maximum pressure was used by Maduro also “as an excuse to step back from the table”.⁹¹

After Biden took office as president in January 2021, the US approach shifted.⁹² Washington’s official policy is still to condemn Maduro, support the opposition and alleviate the humanitarian crisis. While most sanctions and other legal, political, and economic restrictions are still in place, the Biden Administration is nonetheless open to dialogue, more in line with EU preferences. As argued by an interviewee, both the EU and the United States “are now open to lifting sanctions if there is improvement in Venezuela”.⁹³ US officials have met with Maduro over a prisoner swap and allowed oil company Chevron to partially restart its activities in Venezuela.⁹⁴ The EU and the United States have also engaged in dialogue to secure humanitarian aid, resulting in the first humanitarian aid package being negotiated in 2022.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Mitra Taj, “Bolton Says Time to Act Against Venezuela’s Maduro after U.S. Freezes Assets”, in *Euronews*, 12 September 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/08/05/us-opposes-new-vote-in-venezuela-with-maduro-still-in-power-bolton>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.; David Smilde and Geoff Ramsey, “International Peacemaking in Venezuela’s Intractable Conflict”, cit., p. 170.

⁹⁰ Interviews, December 2022 and January 2023; David Smilde and Geoff Ramsey, “International Peacemaking in Venezuela’s Intractable Conflict”, cit., p. 171.

⁹¹ Interview with EP members, December 2020.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Interview with a EU official, November 2022.

⁹⁴ Clare Ribando Seelke, “Venezuela: Political Crisis and U.S. Policy”, in *CRS In Focus*, 2 December 2022, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF10230.pdf>.

⁹⁵ EEAS, *Venezuela: Hope for a Negotiated Political Solution*, 16 November 2022 <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/422618>.

This change in the US approach is likely to sustain more EU-US cooperation over time and thus the EU's ability to impact the situation on the ground. At the same time, EU influence over political developments in Venezuela is and will remain limited and largely dependent on Washington. According to an interviewee, "the US needs to land its position before the EU can do anything, and the EU waits for the US".⁹⁶ Interviewees have also pointed out that, while improved, transatlantic cooperation has limits: "there are few transatlantic meeting places where the Venezuela conflict is discussed".⁹⁷ Some interviewees also argued that the United States, as well as Norway, have been reluctant to let the EU play a big part in negotiations, since the complex nature of EU foreign policy processes and the number of actors involved risk undermining the confidentiality of the talks.⁹⁸ As put by one interviewee, "the EU has not been invited to take part in the negotiations, because it can't be trusted to be discreet, there are simply too many actors, the EU can't keep the negotiations secret".⁹⁹

Russia and China have also hampered an effective EU policy towards Venezuela, because they have an incentive to strengthen ties with Latin American countries, especially those like Venezuela who are at loggerheads with Washington, to expand their global clout. Russia has actively supported Venezuela's authoritarian leader, including through weapons sales,¹⁰⁰ even if it purportedly backs the Mexico process.¹⁰¹ China's approach aims at safeguarding its investments in Venezuela. When Maduro's hold on power appeared less certain, there were reports that the Chinese government engaged in consultations with the opposition in order to safeguard their commercial interests.¹⁰² Thus, while Moscow and Beijing's policies are, their interests do not entirely converge.

⁹⁶ Interview with a EU official, November 2022.

⁹⁷ Interview with a national expert, November 2022. Also, other interviews, 2022 and 2023.

⁹⁸ Interviews with national diplomats and EP members, 2022 and 2023.

⁹⁹ Interview with a national expert, November 2022.

¹⁰⁰ Susanne Grätius, "The West Against the Rest?", cit.

¹⁰¹ Martin Arostegui, "Venezuela's Opposition Welcomes Failure of Talks with Maduro", in *VOA News*, 4 June 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/a/4945538.html>.

¹⁰² Kejal Vyas, "China Talks with Venezuela Opposition to Protect Investments", in *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 February 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-holds-talks-with-venezuelanopposition-on-debt-oil-projects-11549993261>.

Russia's policy is driven by three primary interests: ideology, energy and geopolitics. Ideology is reflected in the opposition to Western liberalism shared by Putin and Maduro.¹⁰³ With regards to energy, Russia has invested 17 billion US dollars in oil and gas in the country¹⁰⁴ and supports Venezuelan oil exports to India and China.¹⁰⁵ In geopolitical terms, Russia's policy towards Venezuela is linked to its broader goal of undermining Western-led orders.¹⁰⁶

While China shares with Russia the argument against interference in domestic affairs of third countries, its policy towards Venezuela is much more cautious, economically oriented and not overtly political.¹⁰⁷ China is Venezuela's biggest creditor and oil investor, and has been its biggest lender for the last decade.¹⁰⁸ From 2003 onwards, China provided massive loans to Venezuela in exchange for Venezuelan oil – a deal that, in light of China's industry's high demand for energy, “created an economic boom for both countries”.¹⁰⁹ In the years that followed, cooperation and Chinese investment expanded and diversified to a number of different sectors, including infrastructure engineering and arms deals (in 2021 China was still the second largest seller of arms to Venezuela after Russia).¹¹⁰ While more than 40 per cent of all Chinese investments in Latin America have been

¹⁰³ Susanne Grätius, “The West Against the Rest?”, cit. 149.

¹⁰⁴ Alexander Gabuev, “Russia's Support for Venezuela Has Deep Roots”, in *Financial Times*, 3 February 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/0e9618e4-23c8-11e9-b20d-5376ca5216eb>.

¹⁰⁵ Rosneft helped Venezuela skirt sanctions during 2019 by becoming the main trader of Venezuelan oil, and by taking care of shipping and marketing to get it to buyers in India and China. See Olga Yagova, Chen Aizhu and Marianna Parraga, “Rosneft Becomes Top Venezuelan Oil Trader, Helping Offset U.S. Pressure”, in *Reuters*, 22 August 2019, <https://reut.rs/2ZaqGpe>; David Smilde and Geoff Ramsey, “International Peacemaking in Venezuela's Intractable Conflict”, cit., p. 171; Susanne Grätius, “The West Against the Rest?”, cit.

¹⁰⁶ Bert Hoffmann, “More than ‘Authoritarian Solidarity’: Unbundling the International Cooperation Survival Package of Socialist Cuba”, in *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No.1 (July 2018), p. 117-139, <http://www.tfd.org.tw/export/sites/tfd/files/publication/journal/117-139-More-Than-Authoritarian-Solidarity.pdf>.

¹⁰⁷ Susanne Grätius, “The West Against the Rest?”, cit., p. 150.

¹⁰⁸ Ivan Garcia, “The Future of the Sino-Venezuelan Relationship: Make or Break?”, in *Harvard International Review*, 22 December 2021, <https://hir.harvard.edu/the-future-of-the-sino-venezuelan-relationship-make-or-break>. See also Stephen B. Kaplan and Michael A. Penfold, “China-Venezuela Economic Relations: Hedging Venezuelan Bets with Chinese Characteristics”, in *Wilson Center Reports*, 2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/china-venezuela-economic-relations-hedging-venezuelan-bets-chinese-characteristics>.

¹⁰⁹ Anthony Navone, “Could China Play a Role in Venezuela's Crisis?”, in *USIP Analysis and Commentary*, 27 July 2021, <https://www.usip.org/node/140516>.

¹¹⁰ Ivan Garcia, “The Future of the Sino-Venezuelan Relationship: Make or Break?”, cit.

made in Venezuela,¹¹¹ when oil prices dropped in 2016, China stopped lending money to Caracas. Estimates from 2021 suggest that Venezuela still owes China 20 billion US dollars.¹¹² Thus said, China has kept seeing Maduro as its safest bet. It dismissed the recognition of Guaidó as “interference” in Venezuela’s internal affairs in 2019¹¹³ and, even if it promotes a negotiated solution to the crisis,¹¹⁴ has contributed to undermining the EU and US attempts to press Maduro to make concessions.¹¹⁵ China continues to import oil from Venezuela and has helped Venezuela during the Covid crisis,¹¹⁶ while Maduro supports China’s Belt and Road initiative.¹¹⁷ Still, China’s position is not fixed and it is not unreasonable to assume that it could change its calculus on Maduro if its interests in Venezuela were to be better protected in other scenarios.¹¹⁸

Finally, Iran and Turkey have also played a role in providing Maduro an economic and political lifeline, including by bypassing US sanctions. Dialogue between Caracas and Ankara intensified in 2016, after the Turkish government accused the United States and Europe to have tacitly supported a failed coup attempt.¹¹⁹ While Western countries were imposing sanctions on Venezuela, Turkey signed agreements on trade, energy and air transport, becoming one of the greatest importers of Venezuelan gold, a key source of income for the Maduro regime given the fall of oil exports (at least until it was itself targeted by US sanctions in 2019).¹²⁰ Iran, for its part, has a long established relationship with Venezuela, as

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Alicia Hernández, “China Remains Quiet and Pragmatic on Venezuela Crisis”, in *Diálogo Chino*, 20 January 2020, <https://dialogochino.net/en/?p=32983>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. See also David Smilde and Geoff Ramsey, “International Peacemaking in Venezuela’s Intractable Conflict”, cit.

¹¹⁵ Carla Hobbs and José Ignacio Torreblanca, “Byting Back: The EU’s Digital Alliance with Latin America and the Caribbean”, in *ECFR Policy Briefs*, October 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/?p=97582>.

¹¹⁶ “Venezuela recibe 55 toneladas de ayuda técnica de China contra el coronavirus”, in *El País*, 29 March 2020.

¹¹⁷ Anthony Navone, “Could China Play a Role in Venezuela’s Crisis?”, cit.

¹¹⁸ Xiaoyu Lu and Maryhen Jiménez Morales, “Why China Could Support Regime Change in Venezuela”, in *The Diplomat*, 22 February 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/why-china-could-support-regime-change-in-venezuela>.

¹¹⁹ Imdat Oner, “New Breathing Room for the Maduro Regime: Authoritarian Coalition”, in *Global Americans*, 22 May 2018, <https://wp.me/p9GBMb-32c>.

¹²⁰ International Crisis Group, “Overcoming the Global Rift on Venezuela”, in *Latin America Reports*, No. 93 (17 February 2022), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/18483>.

both countries are founders of OPEC. The two deepened political ties when they both became targets of harsh sanctions under the Trump Administration. Tehran compensated the collapse of Venezuelan oil production by providing gasoline to the country, but also equipment and assistance to maintain some Venezuelan refineries afloat.¹²¹

3.4 The impact of the war in Ukraine: Re-engaging Venezuela?

The Maduro regime has stayed close to Russia since the latter invaded Ukraine. It allows Russian citizens to travel to Venezuela and in December 2022 agreed to advance cooperation in more avenues, such as the possibility of including Venezuela in the Russian payment system Mir.¹²² Maduro has also blamed the West for escalating the situation in Ukraine, calling Western sanctions madness and claiming that the West wants to destroy Russia.¹²³

At the same time, the Ukraine conflict has led to a renewed willingness in the United States and the EU to engage with the Maduro regime, given Venezuela's capacity to supply much needed oil after Western states cut their imports from Russia.¹²⁴ Prior to imposing sanctions on Caracas, the United States used to be among the biggest buyers of Venezuelan oil, together with India and China (ironically, the United States replaced oil imports from Venezuela with increased imports from Russia in 2018).¹²⁵ In June 2022, the United States allowed EU firms to resume shipments of Venezuelan oil to Europe, something that was previously denied by US sanctions. Chevron's production of Venezuelan oil is also expected to increase rapidly.¹²⁶ Maduro seemed willing to resume negotiations with the opposition in Mexico in November 2022 with the aim of unfreezing Venezuela's

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² RaylÍ Luján, "Russia-Venezuela Relations Remain Deep Despite Global Isolation of Moscow", in *Bloomberg Línea*, 24 March 2022, <https://www.bloomberglinea.com/english/russia-venezuela-relations-remain-deep-despite-global-isolation-of-moscow>.

¹²³ Pavel Tarasenko, "From Friend to Competitor: How Russia's War Has Strengthened Venezuela's Hand", in *Carnegie Politika*, 9 December 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88604>.

¹²⁴ RaylÍ Luján, "Russia-Venezuela Relations Remain Deep Despite Global Isolation of Moscow", cit.

¹²⁵ Pavel Tarasenko, "From Friend to Competitor", cit.

¹²⁶ Ibid.



assets in Western banks, though little progress has been made on that front.¹²⁷ The fact that EU states are “very concerned with getting the same conditions for their firms as US firms, of getting a level playing field,” following Washington’s re-engagement and Chevron’s way back to Venezuela, suggests that the EU is focusing on how to re-engage in energy trade with Venezuela.¹²⁸ For the EU and the US, a re-engagement presupposes a more stable political landscape and is hence also a driver for continuing to seek a negotiated solution. After all, “there is little willingness for companies to engage due to the high risks. Private companies need basic guarantees and stability to invest”.¹²⁹ At the same time, this concern for securing a level playing field for EU firms also points to possible tensions in the EU–US relationship vis-à-vis Venezuela.

With the US and the EU seemingly more willing to re-engage with Maduro, it seems the Maduro regime has benefited from playing the waiting game. As oil trade slowly resumes, albeit under some conditions and at a reduced rate for now, the economic situation in Venezuela might improve, which may also help alleviate the humanitarian crisis if the economy is managed to the benefit of the people, which is a precondition for sanctions relief. Since the opposition remains fragmented, as further discussed below, a loosening of sanctions and improved economic situation may even lead Maduro to allow for more democratic elections, in line with the EU’s preferences, should he feel he has regained public support.

3.5 Regional fragmentation

The Venezuelan crisis has revealed the weakness of the institutional framework of multilateral governance in Latin America, a victim of the political polarisation and fragmentation that has spread throughout the region. The problems come from afar. At the beginning of the century, the revolutionary vision of Chávez, together with the self-confident leadership of Lula da Silva in Brazil and the autonomist regionalism of the Kirchner governments in Argentina, promoted the emergence of a Latin American multilateralism that styled itself as “post-liberal” or “post-

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Interview with a EU official, November 2022.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

hegemonic”.¹³⁰ This was based on the postulate of “socialism of the XXI century” and opposed the liberal regionalism that had dominated the previous decade. Post-liberal regionalism gave rise to numerous initiatives in addition to those already in existence and configured a multidimensional multilateral structure of different regional spaces ranging from the hemispheric sphere to sub-regional spaces. This multi-layered framework between ideologically disparate projects generated collisions between different forums with overlapping competencies.¹³¹

UNASUR, initially conceived to facilitate a convergence of the Andean Community and Mercosur, focused on economic integration. It later became a project that worked for political agreements on issues of security, energy integration and intergovernmental cooperation on social issues. UNASUR managed for a short while to be a dynamic mechanism for regional interactions, but as the situation in Venezuela deteriorated, it began to crack. Between 2014 and 2017, under the chairmanship of Ernesto Samper, UNASUR took on the role of “accompaniment”,¹³² observing parliamentary elections that saw the opposition win by an absolute majority in 2015.¹³³ But it was unable to react when the National Assembly’s powers were suspended by the Supreme Court of Justice and Venezuela slipped progressively towards authoritarianism.¹³⁴

The end of Samper’s mandate and the two-year blockade by Venezuela and Bolivia of the candidacy of Argentine’s José Octavio Bordón to UNASUR secretary general eventually led to the abandonment of the organisation by Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Colombia, Ecuador and, after the fall of President Evo Morales, Bolivia

¹³⁰ Pía Riggirozzi and Diana Tussie (eds), *The Rise of Post-Hegemonic Regionalism. The Case of Latin America*, Springer, 2012.

¹³¹ Andrés Malamud, “Regionalism in the Americas: Segmented, Overlapping, and Sovereignty-Boosting”, in Jürgen Rüland and Astrid Carrapatoso (eds), *Handbook on Global Governance and Regionalism*, Cheltenham/Northampton, Elgar, 2022, p. 230-247.

¹³² Víctor Carlos Pascual Planchuelo, “La ‘observación’ electoral de la OEA vs. el ‘acompañamiento’ de UNASUR en las recientes elecciones de Venezuela”, in *América Latina Hoy*, Vol. 75 (2017), p. 127-148, <https://doi.org/10.14201/alh201775127148>.

¹³³ “Oposición en Venezuela obtiene histórica victoria en las elecciones parlamentarias”, in *BBC News*, 7 December 2015, https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/12/151204_venezuela_parlamentarias_oposicion_chavismo_dp.

¹³⁴ Pablo Celi, “La fragilidad de UNASUR en un pantano de conflictos”, in *Nueva Sociedad*, May 2017, <https://nuso.org/articulo/4744>.

too.¹³⁵ The decomposition of UNASUR was followed by the attempt to create an alternative body called the Forum for the Progress of South America (PROSUR), an initiative led by Chile and Colombia.¹³⁶ But with left-leaning parties returning to government in Argentina (2019), Chile (2022), Colombia (2022) and Brazil (2022), the future of PROSUR became unknown.¹³⁷ Previously, in August 2016, Venezuela had been indefinitely suspended from its membership in Mercosur,¹³⁸ adding to the fragmentation within the region.¹³⁹ These changes show the weakness of an intergovernmental regional cooperation model.¹⁴⁰

The OAS has also become a fierce battlefield as the Venezuelan crisis deepened. The organisation is composed of all 35 independent states of the Americas.¹⁴¹ When leftist governments are prevalent in Latin America, blocking minorities generally play in favour of Maduro.¹⁴² The latter used to get considerable support from small Caribbean countries with which the Venezuelan government had special relations through the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA)¹⁴³ and the PetroCaribe initiative,¹⁴⁴ a regional oil procurement agreement.

¹³⁵ Andrea Amaya Porras, "Seis países suramericanos anunciaron suspender su participación en UNASUR", in *France 24*, 21 April 2018, <https://www.france24.com/es/20180421-unasur-paises-miembros-retiran-bloque>.

¹³⁶ "Sudamérica lanza Prosur, nuevo bloque regional que excluye a Venezuela", in *El Comercio*, 22 March 2019, <https://www.elcomercio.com/?p=347374>.

¹³⁷ "Boric suspende participación de Chile en foro Prosur", in *Deutsche Welle*, 4 April 2022, <https://p.dw.com/p/49PZz>.

¹³⁸ Mercosur, *Suspensión de Venezuela en el MERCOSUR*, 5 August 2017, <https://www.mercosur.int/?p=3732>.

¹³⁹ Andrés Malamud, "Regionalism in the Americas: Segmented, Overlapping, and Sovereignty-Boosting", cit.

¹⁴⁰ Detlef Nolte, "Auge y declive del regionalismo latinoamericano en la primera marea rosa: lecciones para el presente", in *Ciclos*, Vol. 29, No. 59 (2022), p. 3-26, <https://ojs.econ.uba.ar/index.php/revistaCICLOS/article/view/2592>.

¹⁴¹ Organization of American States (OAS) website: *Who We Are*, https://www.oas.org/en/about/who_we_are.asp.

¹⁴² Katarzyna Krzywicka, "La Organización de Estados Americanos frente a la crisis del Estado en Venezuela", in *Revista del CESLA*, No. 23 (2019), p. 383-398, <https://www.revistadelcesla.com/index.php/revistadelcesla/article/view/532>.

¹⁴³ ALBA is an organisation created in 2004 to cooperate between countries with governments identified with the socialism of the 21st century financed mainly by Venezuela. See official website: <https://portalalba.org>.

¹⁴⁴ Created in 2005, PetroCaribe is a solidarity energy cooperation agreement proposed by the Government of Venezuela to provide Caribbean countries with access to energy resources at preferential prices. Venezuela and Governments of the Caribbean, *PetroCaribe Energy Cooperation Agreement*, 2005, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/la_energy_policies/51.

However, since the political deterioration in Venezuela, critical positions towards the Maduro government have been expanding, also due to Venezuela's inability to provide oil supply as much as it had done in previous years. OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro led several initiatives condemning the political and human rights situation in Venezuela that revealed deep divisions among member states.¹⁴⁵ To avoid continued accusations of the violation of human rights, the Maduro government formally withdrew from the OAS in April 2017,¹⁴⁶ although it took two years before his decision became operational.

In June 2018, the OAS General Assembly considered Maduro's re-election illegitimate.¹⁴⁷ The contradictions and ideological struggles worsened in January 2019, when Guaidó proclaimed himself interim president. The political conflict forced all countries to decide between one or the other and further divided the region between those who supported Guaidó and those who continued to support Maduro. Eventually the OAS adopted a resolution recognising Guaidó at the expense of Maduro.¹⁴⁸ Guaidó withdrew Venezuela's request to leave the OAS and, in April 2019, the interim president's envoy occupied the Venezuelan seat in the Permanent Council.¹⁴⁹ However, in the context of weak Latin American integration, the OAS has been unable to adopt an arbitrator role due to tensions between opposing blocs, pro and against Maduro, and the end of Guaidó's term leaves the current delegation without legal support.

The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) has been another victim of the fragmentation and polarisation of the region during the Venezuelan crisis.¹⁵⁰ During Bolivia's pro tempore presidency in 2019, President Morales

¹⁴⁵ Katarzyna Krzywicka, "La Organización de Estados Americanos frente a la crisis del Estado en Venezuela", cit.

¹⁴⁶ Arturo Wallace, "¿Qué gana y qué pierde Venezuela con retirarse de la OEA?", in *BBC News*, 27 April 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-39739813>.

¹⁴⁷ "La OEA abre el proceso para la suspensión de Venezuela y desconoce la reelección de Nicolás Maduro", in *BBC News*, 6 June 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-44378985>.

¹⁴⁸ "Grupo de Lima, OEA y otros gobiernos apoyan proclamación de Guaidó", in *Voz de América*, 23 January 2019, <https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/4756592.html>.

¹⁴⁹ "OEA reconoce a representante de Venezuela 'designado' por Guaidó", in *Deutsche Welle*, 9 April 2019, <https://p.dw.com/p/3GX0j>.

¹⁵⁰ Detlef Nolte, "Auge y declive del regionalismo latinoamericano en la primera marea rosa", cit.; Anna Ayuso, "Venezuela, la desintegración de la integración", in *Política Exterior*, Vol. 34, No. 196

blocked any debate that questioned Maduro's legitimacy. Later the political crisis of Bolivia itself resulted in the total paralysis of CELAC.¹⁵¹ This blockade gave rise to the Lima Group, initially a group of twelve American countries, including Canada, and the recognition of Guaidó.¹⁵² In the opposite direction, the Puebla Group was formed, a forum made up of political representatives (several former presidents) and intellectuals who constitute a lobby against what they consider to be foreign interference in Venezuela.¹⁵³

The assumption by Mexico of CELAC's pro tempore presidency in 2020 generated expectations for revamping the organisation's ability to function as a regional governance body. However, such expectations were dashed as Brazil, at the time still ruled by Jair Bolsonaro (2019–2022), refused to participate, as it considered that CELAC was protecting the governments of Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba.¹⁵⁴ During the 2021 summit, the question of Venezuela was not discussed to avoid friction. The political changes in the region, with progressive governments leading most Latin American countries, including neighbouring Brazil and Colombia, may provide a less polarised environment to promote negotiations with the Venezuelan regime. During the Argentinian pro tempore presidency all the member countries attended the CELAC summit held in Buenos Aires on 24 January 2023, and welcomed the agreements reached in November 2022 between Maduro government and the opposition.¹⁵⁵ Whether this may lead to progress towards national reconciliation, however, remains very much in doubt.

(July/August 2020), p. 110-116, <https://www.politicaexterior.com/?p=283622>.

¹⁵¹ Fernando Vicente Prieto, "CELAC, OEA y los caminos posibles para la integración", in *Nueva Tribuna*, 25 September 2021, <https://www.nuevatribuna.es/articulo/global/celac-oea-caminos-posibles-integracion/20210925230604191362.html>.

¹⁵² Argentina et al., *Declaración del Grupo de Lima*, 30 April 2019, <https://www.peruea.org/comunicado-del-grupo-de-lima-20190430>.

¹⁵³ Puebla Group, *Declaración Grupo de Puebla sobre las elecciones en Venezuela*, 10 December 2020, <https://www.grupodepuebla.org/?p=6327>.

¹⁵⁴ "Brasil no colaborará con la CELAC por la presencia de Cuba y Venezuela", in *Europa Press*, 16 January 2020, <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-brasil-no-colaborara-celac-presencia-cuba-venezuela-20200116011741.html>.

¹⁵⁵ Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), *Declaración de Buenos Aires*, 24 January 2023, para. 104, <https://www.cancilleria.gob.ar/es/actualidad/noticias/cumbre-celac-declaracion-de-buenos-aires>.

Table 1 | Constraining factors on EUFSP towards Venezuela

EUFSP constraint	Operationalisation	Explanation
<i>Intra-EU contestation</i>	<i>Object of contestation:</i> Legitimacy of means to secure peaceful transition to democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of Guaidó as interim president • International electoral mission
<i>Multipolar competition</i>	<i>Actors:</i> EU USA China Russia Turkey Iran	<i>Sanctions</i> (hard contestation): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US – Targeted and economic sanctions • EU – Targeted sanctions • China, Russia, Turkey and Iran - Engagement with Venezuela to circumvent EU and US sanctions
		<i>Political dialogue and mediation</i> (low contestation): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US – (not involved) • EU – International Contact Group (full involvement), Norwegian mediation (support) • China (not involved but in favour) • Russia, Turkey, Iran (not involved)
		<i>Humanitarian aid</i> (low divergence) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US – Involved through non-governmental and international institutions • EU – Involved in regional initiatives. • China – Involved sending cooperation • Russia – Involved sending cooperation
		<i>International electoral mission 2022</i> (contestations): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US – disagreement • EU – fully involved. • China, Russia, Turkey and Iran - not involved but not opposed
		<i>Recognition of Guaidó as interim president</i> (strong contestation) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US – Full recognition • EU – Internal contestation - fragmented recognition • China, Russia, Iran Turkey – Non-recognition and non-intervention claims
<i>Impact of the Ukraine war</i>	Changes in EU and US strategy	<i>Reengagement:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US – Bilateral talks, humanitarian aid, flexibilization of sanction for oil companies, support Norwegian mediation • EU – Humanitarian aid, support Norwegian mediation, end the recognition of Guaidó as interim president
<i>Regional fragmentation</i>	Lack of consensus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OAS – Strong confrontation and recognition of Guaidó • CELAC – Boycott from far-right governments • UNASUR – Institutional disintegration • Lima Group – Support Guaidó • Puebla Group – Support Maduro

The Venezuelan issue has been an obstacle to the proper development of interregional dialogue and has undermined the bases of shared values between the EU and CELAC, especially regarding democracy and the protection of human rights.

4. EU mitigation strategies

In the attempt to facilitate a peaceful political transition in Venezuela, the EU has gradually integrated its (not very successful) “sanctions-plus-support for mediation” strategy with other measures, smaller in ambition but with direct impact on the ground, such as electoral observation and humanitarian aid. With Russia’s war in Ukraine and the energy challenge facing Europe, the United States and the EU have been compelled to consider toning down pressure on the Maduro regime. Intra-EU divisions have also diminished following the 2021 decision not to recognise Guaidó as interim president anymore. In addition, the wish to re-establish EU–CELAC summits and conclude a trade agreement with Mercosur suggest that a more effective EU engagement also depends on reduced regional fragmentation. In sum, in parallel to geopolitical changes affecting EU and US policies towards more engagement with the Maduro regime, the EU is changing its policies from pressure through sanctions and other foreign policy means to softer tools and a more bottom-up approach.

A main pillar of EU attempts to reduce Venezuela’s internal fragmentation has been the *support for negotiations*, in particular focusing on the Mexico talks. After the agreement between the government of Maduro and the opposition to release resources for humanitarian aid in the talks in Mexico, HR/VP Josep Borrell hinted that the EU was willing to review the sanctions if progress in the dialogue was achieved.¹⁵⁶ The matter was discussed by the EU Council in January 2023, although there were no statements.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Benito Villaamil, “La Unión Europea se prepara para un cambio radical en su relación con Venezuela”, in *Nueva Tribuna*, 21 January 2023, <https://www.nuevatribuna.es/articulo/global/ue-ve-situacion-venezuela-totalmente-diferente-aspira-cambiar-posicion/20230121195824207407.html>.

¹⁵⁷ Council of the European Union, *Foreign Affairs Council*, 23 January 2023, <https://europa.eu/!dj7QYq>.

After the divisions over recognising Guaidó, the deployment of *electoral observation missions* to Venezuela could have provoked further splits. In the end, however, electoral observation has provided a degree of mitigation of intra-EU differences. The EU deployed an Election Observation Mission (EOM) to monitor local and state elections in Venezuela on 21 November 2021, at the request of the National Electoral Council.¹⁵⁸ A total of 134 observers from twenty-two EU member states, as well as Norway and Switzerland, were deployed to all Venezuelan states. The mission concluded with a set of recommendations for improvement which, according to interviews, offer a roadmap for the EU to continue working with the Maduro regime, and which could help achieve the EU goals in Venezuela.¹⁵⁹

According to an EU official,

the EU's electoral missions were initially controversial, but have proved to be a success. In an objective and very technical way they have identified shortcomings and provided recommendations for the future. Once these reports were out, they gathered a lot of support, not only from EU member states but also from the Venezuelan parties themselves. Although the United States was initially sceptical, it now perceives the EOMs as important accessory instruments for monitoring and advice.¹⁶⁰

Other interviewees see more limits in the results of the mission. After all, what they “observed” was hardly cause for satisfaction. They point to the serious deficiencies observed as

lack of legal certainty, which caused the arbitrary disqualification of candidates and the rerun elections in the State of Barinas; the handing over of party symbols and electoral ticket to internal minority party factions; the extensive use of state resources in the campaign; and the unequal access to mass media by candidates.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ EEAS, *Venezuela: EU Deploys Election Observation Mission*, cit.

¹⁵⁹ EEAS, *Isabel Santos, Chief Observer of the European Union Election Observation Mission for the Regional and Municipal Elections Venezuela 2021, Presents the Mission's Final Report and Recommendations*, 22 February 2022, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/111302>.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with a government official, 11 November 2022.

¹⁶¹ Interviews with EP members from different parties, December 2022 and January 2023.

As the elections were clearly insufficiently free and fair, the concern was that electoral observation could eventually “whitewash” the Maduro regime’s undemocratic practices. According to these interviewees, sending in EOMs also risks emphasising the EU’s double standards, with the EU refusing to recognise the legitimacy of elections under Maduro while at the same time negotiating an electoral observation mission.¹⁶²

The EU has also committed to *continued and increased focus on aid*. However, humanitarian aid has not been free of politicisation, particularly at the beginning of the political crisis. The first two donor conferences in 2020 and 2021 were poorly received by the regime, which saw them as an indirect attempt to legitimise Guaidó’s claims, which made it difficult to reach those affected most by the crisis. Later, as part of the Mexico-based talks, both the Maduro government and the opposition committed to the distribution of humanitarian aid, which has raised hopes for a depoliticisation of humanitarian assistance through multilateral channels.¹⁶³ The United States and EU countries have agreed to unblock parts of state funds they had frozen following the disputed 2018 elections on the condition they are for social programs under the supervision of the United Nations. Three billion dollars in state funds are supposed to be directed towards humanitarian assistance.¹⁶⁴ Some European political groups were reluctant to agree with the Maduro government since they worried Maduro would use it to regain legitimacy and support of his own regime.¹⁶⁵ Also, in December 2022, the EU announced it would host, together with Canada, the next International Conference to further assist Venezuelan refugees and migrants.¹⁶⁶

Finally, the EU has kept open *engagement with regional institutions*. As explained in the previous section, however, CELAC has not been able to generate much


¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ “La ONU y el Gobierno de Venezuela acuerdan un plan de respuesta humanitaria de cara a 2023”, in *Europa Press*, 3 August 2023, <https://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-onu-gobierno-venezuela-acuerdan-plan-respuesta-humanitaria-cara-2023-20220803144734.html>.

¹⁶⁴ Jorge Guzmán and Mónica Rico Benítez, “A New Role for the EU in Venezuela”, in *CEPS Articles*, 4 December 2020, <https://www.ceps.eu/?p=31515>.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with a EP member, 2023.

¹⁶⁶ European Commission, *EU and Canada to Co-host the Next International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants*, 5 December 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_7428.



consensus and there is no other instance of intra-regional negotiation that could bring all supporting parties together.


Policy recommendations

Based on the analysis above, there are several actions that the EU and its member states could take to improve their mitigation strategies. The EU increasingly acknowledges that condemnation and sanctions policies have not worked, not least because of the continuous support Maduro has received from China and Russia.

First, the EU needs a clearer, *knowledge-based action plan* that takes all different factors affecting Venezuelan policies into consideration, including the impact of external forces and the different positions of a split opposition. This plan must analyse the correlation of internal forces and the external support that the Maduro government maintains. Likewise, it is necessary to make a realistic assessment of the suitable means and instruments to achieve the democratisation objectives. In the same way, the EU should avoid reactive actions and automatic alignments without first analysing the possible negative effects in the search for a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Second, the EU should draw on its many instruments to help contribute to free elections in 2024. Both *public and parliamentary diplomacy* is essential. In recent years, EP political contacts with different sectors of the Venezuelan opposition have multiplied. These contacts with different parties are very important to help overcome the opposition's fragmentation. It is also in the Maduro government's interest to avoid the isolation to which it has been subjected. Beyond the difficult diplomatic relations with the government, the deployment of active parliamentary diplomacy and public diplomacy is important to reduce polarisation.

Third, based on the report from the Electoral Observation Commission, the EU should actively help develop a *document that sets out the conditions for a free and balanced electoral process* that has the support of all parties. This document should include the principal recommendations of the final report: reinforce the separation of powers and confidence in the independence of the Supreme Court;



suppress any government prerogative to deprive citizens of their fundamental right to stand for election; strengthen the sanctioning powers of the electoral commission by introducing a control system; balance the coverage of state media during electoral campaigns; repeal any law that limits freedom of expression; inform citizens about their selection as polling station members in order to increase the presence of trained and accredited polling station members. In line with that, the EU should insist on deploying further *election monitoring missions*, which so far have been considered legitimate by all parties involved, both externally and internally.

Fourth, the EU should continue to back *regionally-owned mediation processes*. It is necessary to resume a dialogue in which consensus around democracy is recomposed. The EU and its member states should actively support initiatives such as the Mexico talks and engage – collectively and individually – in dialogue with other countries in the region who may contribute constructively to a solution of the crisis. The reopening of Venezuela diplomatic relations with Colombia and Brazil represents a change in the regional context that can help a democratic transition. The EU should intensify *bilateral talks* with countries in the region that support a negotiated solution to the conflicts such as Brazil, Colombia or Chile.

Fifth, the reinforcement of *interregional cooperation* is also necessary. The promise of reactivation of the EU-CELAC Summits and negotiations on Association Agreements, including with Mercosur during the Spanish presidency of the European Council in the second semester of 2023, is promising.¹⁶⁷ This is a way to try to recover parts of the lost ground that other extra-regional actors such as China and Russia have taken advantage of.

Sixth, the EU should continue to provide *humanitarian aid* to Venezuela. This is an area where the EU has made substantial contributions, and an avenue where the EU could really prosper as a global player. Increased visibility of EU aid could help emphasise this. Channelling aid through non-political organisations and international organisations such as the Red Cross may avoid a politicisation and instrumentalisation of humanitarian aid.

¹⁶⁷ Fernando Heller, “Spain to Organise EU-Latin America-Caribbean Summit in 2023”, in *Euractiv*, 24 August 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/?p=1798467>.

Seventh, the EU should strengthen *coordination with the United States*, especially in support of the democratic process and humanitarian aid. An example of this is the recent *Mesa Social* agreement which redirects frozen government funds towards humanitarian relief efforts, which was supported by the United States and the EU through a joint statement. Closer transatlantic coordination on energy might be a way for the EU to secure a level playing field now that the United States is gradually allowing firms such as Chevron back into the country. Increased trade in oil and engagement with the Maduro regime should not be unconditional and undermine progress towards free and fair elections. Now that the United States is re-opening some channels of communication with Venezuela, the EU should be bolder in its outreach to both Maduro and the opposition, given, of course, that Maduro shows that he is willing to go ahead with democratic reforms.

Table 2 | Existing and potential mitigation strategies

Strategy	Mitigation of intra-EU divisions	Mitigation of multipolar competition	Regional fragmentation
<i>Pressure strategy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Develop a clear action plan with broad internal support · Flexible sanctions conditioned on steps towards democratisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · EU–US coordination · Avoid reactive alignments · Assessing China and Russia’s support for Maduro 	Engage cooperation with regional powers such as Brazil, Colombia or Chile
<i>Political dialogue and mediation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Conduct a more informed assessment of the domestic situation in Venezuela · Promote electoral observation missions · Engage in balanced dialogue with government and opposition forces · Public and parliamentary diplomacy 	Consider dialogue with China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Support international mediation (Mexico talks) · Promote and support regional democratisation and cooperation initiatives · Reopen EU–CELAC dialogue
<i>Humanitarian aid</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Support the agreement between government and opposition forces · Assistance to migrants and refugees · Cooperation with civil society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Avoid politicisation of humanitarian aid · Use of international humanitarian aid channels · Increase EU leadership in donor coalitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Engage with regional initiatives · Increase coordination with neighbouring states to attend to migrants and refugees


Conclusions

This report has explored EU foreign policy towards Venezuela, focusing on the three factors that have constrained EU policies: internal contestation, multipolar competition and regional fragmentation.

The EU operates in an environment of geopolitical rivalries, intra-EU divisions and regional fragmentation that directly influence its ability to promote their preferences.¹⁶⁸ During Chávez's presidency, Venezuela had already tightened ties with both China and Russia. This was part of an assertive diplomacy that Chávez practised in the region in alliance with Cuba and other countries such as Nicaragua and, for as long as Morales was president, Bolivia too. Maduro, increasingly isolated from Western countries, doubled down on Chávez's anti-Western diplomacy, and was rewarded for that. China and Russia's assistance to the Venezuelan government has been a major factor hampering the EU's efforts to make meaningful progress towards achieving the goal of a peaceful democratic transition in Venezuela. Intra-EU divisions have also negatively impacted EUFSP towards Venezuela, particularly on the recognition of Guaidó as interim president, driven by disagreements between political forces composing some EU member states governments, thus affecting the perception of the EU as a credible actor. At the same time, the EU has not sufficiently engaged in a broader dialogue with all the different actors on the ground in Venezuela. This has contributed to, or at least has not helped avoid, a further fragmentation of the opposition, and has made it more difficult for the EU to engage also with less radicalised pro-government sectors. EUFSP has, furthermore, suffered from a lack of a clear plan on how to apply sanctions in combination with other policies. The EU now increasingly acknowledges that effective sanctions policies must be accompanied by a framework of incentives that can help bring both parties to the table.

The EU has over time devised some key mitigating measures to reduce the negative impact of the factors discussed above. In short, the EU is shifting its focus from pressure through sanctions and other foreign policy means to the

¹⁶⁸ Also see Susanne Grätius, "The West Against the Rest?", cit., p. 156.



application of softer tools and a more bottom-up approach. Key mitigating factors include the promotion of democracy through election monitoring missions and support for civil society, as well as a strengthened focus on aid and development to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. Following Russia's war in Ukraine and the energy challenge facing Europe, and in line with the Biden Administration's cautious rapprochement with Venezuela, the EU is now considering limited re-engagement of the Maduro regime, including through regional governance mechanisms such as CELAC. Furthermore, the EU has pursued a renewed focus on economic interaction, especially through a trade deal with Mercosur, which could be used as an incentive for the organisation and Venezuela to re-engage.

In the hope of a gradual lifting of sanctions, Maduro could seize the opportunity and allow the opposition to take part in elections slated for 2024. After all, the risks to his regime are now relatively low: with a fragmented opposition and economic growth following a gradual lifting of the sanctions, some observers claim that Maduro may even win the next elections fair and square.¹⁶⁹ The political, social and humanitarian crisis facing Venezuela will however not be over shortly, and the EU should continue to be actively engaged to help achieve a long-term peaceful solution to the many challenges the country is facing.

¹⁶⁹ Pavel Tarasenko, "From Friend to Competitor", cit.

References

Riccardo Alcaro et al., “A Joined-Up Union, a Stronger Europe. A Conceptual Framework to Investigate EU Foreign and Security Policy in a Complex and Contested World”, in *JOINT Research Papers*, No. 8 (August 2022), <https://www.jointproject.eu/?p=969>

Andrea Amaya Porras, “Seis países suramericanos anunciaron suspender su participación en UNASUR”, in *France 24*, 21 April 2018, <https://www.france24.com/es/20180421-unasur-paises-miembros-retiran-bloque>

Yurany Arciniegas, “Donantes prometen más de US \$1.500 millones para venezolanos y Caracas lo tilda de ‘farsa mediática’”, in *France 24*, 18 June 2021, <https://www.france24.com/es/américa-latina/20210618-conferencia-donantes-migrantes-venezuela-maduro>

Argentina et al., *Declaración del Grupo de Lima*, 30 April 2019, <https://www.peruoea.org/comunicado-del-grupo-de-lima-20190430>

Martin Arostegui, “Venezuela’s Opposition Welcomes Failure of Talks with Maduro”, in *VOA News*, 4 June 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/a/4945538.html>

Associated Press, “Italy Explains Refusal to Recognize Venezuela’s Guaidó”, in *The Washington Post*, 11 May 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/italy-explains-refusal-to-recognize-venezuelas-guaido/2019/05/11/39ecc008-741b-11e9-9331-30bc5836f48e_story.html

Anna Ayuso, “Venezuela, la desintegración de la integración”, in *Política Exterior*, Vol. 34, No. 196 (July/August 2020), p. 110-116, <https://www.politicaexterior.com/?p=283622>

Gerardo Caetano and Nicolás Pose “La debilidad de los regionalismos latinoamericanos frente a los escenarios actuales. Notas para Debate”, in *Fundación Carolina Documentos de Trabajo*, No. 41 (December 2020), <https://doi.org/10.33960/issn-e.1885-9119.DT41>

Pablo Celi, “La fragilidad de UNASUR en un pantano de conflictos”, in *Nueva Sociedad*, May 2017, <https://nuso.org/articulo/4744>

Armando Chaguaceda and María Isabel Puerta, “Decadencia autoritaria en Venezuela: proceso histórico y desarrollos recientes”, in *Diálogo Político*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (October 2017), p. 152-167, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320555833>

Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), *Declaración de Buenos Aires*, 24 January 2023, <https://www.cancilleria.gob.ar/es/actualidad/noticias/cumbre-celac-declaracion-de-buenos-aires>

Harry Cooper and Christian Oliver, “Bulgaria Caught between NATO and the Kremlin”, in *Politico*, 12 September 2016, <https://www.politico.eu/?p=445941>

Javier Corrales, “Authoritarian Survival: Why Maduro Hasn’t Fallen”, in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (July 2020), p. 39-53, DOI 10.1353/jod.2020.0044

Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Venezuela*, 18 July 2016, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/05/15/fac-venezuela-conclusions>

Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Venezuela*, 25 January 2021, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48053/st05582-en21.pdf>

Council of the European Union, *Decision (CFSP)2017/2074 of 12 November 2017 Concerning Restrictive Measures in View of the Situation in Venezuela*, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2017/2074/oj>

Council of the European Union, *Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the Presidential and Regional Elections in Venezuela*, 22 May 2018, <http://europa.eu/!PM79rb>

Council of the European Union, *Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the Situation in Venezuela*, 26 January 2019, <https://europa.eu/!RK73Yr>

Council of the European Union, *Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on Venezuela*, 27 September 2019, <https://europa.eu/!Nc69jk>

Council of the European Union, *Foreign Affairs Council*, 23 January 2023, <https://europa.eu/!dj7QYq>

Council of the European Union, *Venezuela: Council Adopts Conclusions on the Outcome of the Legislative Elections*, 25 January 2021, <https://europa.eu/!DQ49Yn>

Council of the European Union, *Venezuela: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the European Union*, 6 January 2021, <https://europa.eu/!ct78UV>

Jeremy Diamond and Allie Malloy, "Trump Approves Sanctions on Venezuelan Oil Company", in *CNN*, 29 January 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/01/28/politics/us-sanctions-venezuelan-oil-company>

Haroldo Dilla Alfonso, "Hugo Chávez y Cuba: subsidiando postposiciones fatales", in *Nueva Sociedad*, No. 205 (Septiembre-Octubre 2006), p. 141-158, <https://www.nuso.org/articulo/3347>

Roberto Dominguez, *EU Foreign Policy towards Latin America*, Basingstoke/New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015

Brian Ellsworth, "Trump Says U.S. Military Intervention in Venezuela 'an Option,' Russia Objects", in *Reuters*, 3 February 2019, <https://reut.rs/2GannEs>

EPP Group, *EPP Group Not to Participate in EP Electoral Mission to Venezuela*, 9 November 2021, <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/news/epp-group-won-t-participate-in-mission-to-venezuela>

EU Election Observation Mission, *Venezuela 2021 Final Report*, 22 February 2022, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/111306>

European Commission, *EU and Canada to Co-host the Next International Conference in Solidarity with Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants*, 5 December 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_7428

European External Action Service (EEAS), *EU Works for Political Solution to the Crisis in Venezuela*, September 2019, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/67798>

EEAS, *Isabel Santos, Chief Observer of the European Union Election Observation Mission for the Regional and Municipal Elections Venezuela 2021, Presents the Mission's Final Report and Recommendations*, 22 February 2022, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/111302>

EEAS, *Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the Press Conference Following the First Day of Informal Meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Ministers*, Bucharest, 31 August 2018, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/57481_en

EEAS, *Venezuela: EU Deploys Election Observation Mission*, 29 September 2021, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/104849>

EEAS, *Venezuela: Hope for a Negotiated Political Solution*, 16 November 2022 <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/422618>

European Parliament, *The Democratic Opposition in Venezuela - 2017, Venezuela*, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sakharovprize/en/the-democratic-opposition-in-venezuela-2/products-details/20200331CAN54209>

European Parliament, *Resolution of 31 January 2019 on the Situation in Venezuela*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0061_EN.html

European Parliament, *Resolution of 18 July 2019 on the Situation in Venezuela*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0007_EN.html

European Parliament, *Resolution of 16 January 2020 on the Situation in Venezuela after the Illegal Election of the New National Assembly Presidency and Bureau (Parliamentary Coup)*, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0013_EN.html

European Parliament, *Resolution of 21 January 2021 on the Latest Developments in the National Assembly of Venezuela*, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/>

European Parliament, *Venezuela: Parliament Recognises Guaidó, Urges EU to Follow Suit*, 31 January 2019, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190125IPR24303>

France et al., *Joint Declaration on Venezuela*, 4 February 2019, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/venezuela/events/article/joint-declaration-on-venezuela-04-02-19>

Alexander Gabuev, "Russia's Support for Venezuela Has Deep Roots", in *Financial Times*, 3 February 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/0e9618e4-23c8-11e9-b20d-5376ca5216eb>

Ivan Garcia, "The Future of the Sino-Venezuelan Relationship: Make or Break?", in *Harvard International Review*, 22 December 2021, <https://hir.harvard.edu/the-future-of-the-sino-venezuelan-relationship-make-or-break>

Susanne Gratius, "The West Against the Rest? Democracy Versus Autocracy Promotion in Venezuela", in *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (January 2022), p. 141-158, <https://doi.org/10.1111/blar.13243>

Susanne Gratius and Anna Ayuso Pozo, "Sanciones como instrumento de coerción: ¿cuán similares son las políticas de Estados Unidos y la Unión Europea hacia Venezuela?", in *América Latina Hoy*, Vol. 85 (2020), p. 31-53, <https://doi.org/10.14201/alh.21989>

Susanne Gratius and José Manuel Puente, "Las claves de la crisis venezolana", in *Foreign Affairs Latinoamérica*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (April-June 2019), p. 5-15

Greece's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs Giorgos Katrougalos' Statement on the Recent Developments in Venezuela*, 29 January 2019, <https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/statements-speeches/alternate-minister-of-foreign-affairs-giorgos-katrougalos-statement-on-the-recent-developments-in-venezuela-29-january-2019.html>

Greece's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs Announcement on the Recognition of J. Guaido as President a.i. of Venezuela*, 12 July 2019, <https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/statements-speeches/ministry-of-foreign-affairs-announcement-on-the-recognition-of-guaido-as-president-ai-of-venezuela.html>

Jorge Guzmán and Mónica Rico Benítez, "A New Role for the EU in Venezuela", in *CEPS Articles*, 4 December 2020, <https://www.ceps.eu/?p=31515>

Fernando Heller, "Spain to Organise EU-Latin America-Caribbean Summit in 2023", in *Euractiv*, 24 August 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/?p=1798467>

Alicia Hernández, "China Remains Quiet and Pragmatic on Venezuela Crisis", in *Diálogo Chino*, 20 January 2020, <https://dialogochino.net/en/?p=32983>

Carla Hobbs and José Ignacio Torreblanca, "Byting Back: The EU's Digital Alliance with Latin America and the Caribbean", in *ECFR Policy Briefs*, October 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/?p=97582>

Bert Hoffmann, "More than 'Authoritarian Solidarity': Unbundling the International Cooperation Survival Package of Socialist Cuba", in *Taiwan Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No.1 (July 2018), p. 117-139, <http://www.tfd.org.tw/export/sites/tfd/files/publication/journal/117-139-More-Than-Authoritarian-Solidarity.pdf>

International Crisis Group, "Overcoming the Global Rift on Venezuela", in *Latin America Reports*, No. 93 (17 February 2022), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/18483>

International Crisis Group, "Power without the People: Averting Venezuela's Breakdown", in *Latin America Briefings*, No. 36 (19 June 2017), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/node/5186>

Rosa Jiménez, "La UE se plantea pedir a Estados Unidos más exenciones para el petróleo venezolano", in *EuroEFE*, 11 November 2022, <https://euroefe.euractiv.es/?p=74917>

Stephen B. Kaplan and Michael A. Penfold, "China-Venezuela Economic Relations: Hedging Venezuelan Bets with Chinese Characteristics", in *Wilson Center Reports*,

2019, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/china-venezuela-economic-relations-hedging-venezuelan-bets-chinese-characteristics>

Katarzyna Krzywicka, “La Organización de Estados Americanos frente a la crisis del Estado en Venezuela”, in *Revista del CESLA*, No. 23 (2019), p. 383-398, <https://www.revistadelcesla.com/index.php/revistadelcesla/article/view/532>

Paula Lamoso González and Stelios Stavridis, “El Parlamento Europeo como tribuna moral internacional: el caso de Venezuela”, in *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, No. 131 (September 2022), p. 185-210, <https://doi.org/10.24241/rci.2022.131.2.185>

Abraham F. Lowenthal, “Venezuela in 2023 and Beyond: Charting a New Course”, in *Wilson Center Reports*, January 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/venezuela-2023-and-beyond-charting-new-course>

Xiaoyu Lu and Maryhen Jiménez Morales, “Why China Could Support Regime Change in Venezuela”, in *The Diplomat*, 22 February 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/why-china-could-support-regime-change-in-venezuela>

Raylí Luján, “Russia-Venezuela Relations Remain Deep Despite Global Isolation of Moscow”, in *Bloomberg Línea*, 24 March 2022, <https://www.bloomberglinea.com/english/russia-venezuela-relations-remain-deep-despite-global-isolation-of-moscow>

Andrés Malamud, “Regionalism in the Americas: Segmented, Overlapping, and Sovereignty-Boosting”, in Jürgen Rüland and Astrid Carrapatoso (eds), *Handbook on Global Governance and Regionalism*, Cheltenham/Northampton, Elgar, 2022, p. 230-247

Humberto Márquez, “New Political Agreement Finally Tackles Venezuela’s Social Crisis”, in *IPS*, 16 December 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/node/3917103>

Carmen Menéndez, “El Gobierno venezolano y la oposición llegan a un primer acuerdo”, in *Euronews*, 27 November 2022, <https://es.euronews.com/2022/11/27/venezuela-el-gobierno-y-la-oposicion-llegan-a-un-primer-acuerdo-en-mexico>

Mercosur, *Suspensión de Venezuela en el MERCOSUR*, 5 August 2017, <https://www.mercosur.int/?p=3732>

Alfredo Meza, “Zapatero cita en Dominicana a la oposición y el Gobierno de Maduro”, in *El País*, 28 May 2016, https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/05/28/america/1464455695_399407.html

Mónica Nanjari, “20 años del intento golpista contra Chávez que terminó por fortalecerlo”, in *Deutsche Welle*, 10 April 2022, <https://p.dw.com/p/49fRr>

Anthony Navone, “Could China Play a Role in Venezuela’s Crisis?”, in *USIP Analysis and Commentary*, 27 July 2021, <https://www.usip.org/node/140516>

Leonardo Niño, “Comunidad internacional alega falta de ‘transparencia’ en las elecciones de Venezuela”, in *France 24*, 20 May 2018, <https://www.france24.com/es/20180519-elecciones-venezuela-maduro-comunidad-internacional>

Detlef Nolte, “Auge y declive del regionalismo latinoamericano en la primera marea rosa: lecciones para el presente”, in *Ciclos*, Vol. 29, No. 59 (2022), p. 3-26, <https://ojs.econ.uba.ar/index.php/revistaCICLOS/article/view/2592>

Observatorio Venezolano de Conflictividad Social, *Venezuela: 6.729 protestas y 163 fallecidos desde el 1 de abril de 2017*, 2 August 2017, <https://www.observatoriodeconflictos.org.ve/?p=2139>

Imdat Oner, “New Breathing Room for the Maduro Regime: Authoritarian Coalition”, in *Global Americans*, 22 May 2018, <https://wp.me/p9GBMb-32c>

Diego Oré, “Venezuela’s Frozen Funds to Be Gradually Released for Humanitarian Aid”, in *Reuters*, 26 November 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/venezuelas-frozen-funds-be-gradually-released-humanitarian-aid-2022-11-26>

Victor Carlos Pascual Planchuelo, “La ‘observación’ electoral de la OEA vs. el ‘acompañamiento’ de UNASUR en las recientes elecciones de Venezuela”, in *América Latina Hoy*, Vol. 75 (2017), p. 127-148, <https://doi.org/10.14201/alh201775127148>

Fernando Vicente Prieto, “CELAC, OEA y los caminos posibles para la integración”, in *Nueva Tribuna*, 25 September 2021, <https://www.nuevatribuna.es/articulo/global/celac-oea-caminos-posibles-integracion/20210925230604191362.html>

Puebla Group, *Declaración Grupo de Puebla sobre las elecciones en Venezuela*, 10 December 2020, <https://www.grupodepuebla.org/?p=6327>

Juan Diego Quesada, “Venezuela expulsa a los observadores de la UE”, in *El País*, 3 December 2021, <https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-12-03/venezuela-expulsa-a-los-observadores-de-la-ue.html>

John Paul Rathbone and Gideon Long, “Venezuela’s Juan Guaidó Calls for Uprising against Nicolás Maduro”, in *Financial Times*, 30 April 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/b4ec0c2e-6b37-11e9-a9a5-351eeae6d84>

Moises Rendon and Claudia Fernandez, “The Fabulous Five: How Foreign Actors Prop up the Maduro Regime in Venezuela”, in *CSIS Briefs*, October 2020, <https://www.csis.org/node/58528>

Andrew Rettman, “Italy Gags EU on Venezuela Crisis”, in *EUobserver*, 5 February 2019, <https://euobserver.com/world/144091>

Clare Ribando Seelke, “Venezuela: Political Crisis and U.S. Policy”, in *CRS In Focus*, 2 December 2022, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/IF10230.pdf>

Pía Riggirozzi and Diana Tussie (eds), *The Rise of Post-Hegemonic Regionalism. The Case of Latin America*, Springer, 2012

Francisco Rodríguez, “To Halt the Venezuelan Migration Crisis, Stop Banning Venezuelan Oil”, in *Foreign Policy*, 1 November 2022, <https://bit.ly/3fmjBvd>

Romanian Presidency, *Romania Recognises Juan Guaidó as Interim President of Venezuela*, 8 February 2019, <https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/romania-recognises-juan-guaido-as-interim-president-of-venezuela>

Andres Serbin and Andrei Serbin Pont (eds), *¿Por qué la Unión Europea debería ser de relevancia para América Latina y el Caribe?*, Hamburgo, Fundación EU-LAC, CRIES, 2018, <https://eulacfoundation.org/es/system/files/relevcia-ue-lac-es-web.pdf>

Florantonia Singer, “Venezuela elige un nuevo consejo electoral con mayor presencia opositora”, in *El País*, 5 May 2021, <https://elpais.com/internacional/2021-05-05/venezuela-elige-un-nuevo-consejo-electoral-con-mayor-presencia-opositora.html>

David Smilde and Geoff Ramsey, “International Peacemaking in Venezuela’s Intractable Conflict”, in *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, No. 109 (January-June 2020), p. 157-179, <http://doi.org/10.32992/erlacs.10582>

Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Conferencia Internacional de Donantes en solidaridad con los refugiados y migrantes venezolanos*, 26 May 2020, https://www.exteriores.gob.es/es/Comunicacion/Noticias/Paginas/Noticias/20200519_MINISTERIO6.aspx

Raúl Stolk and Gabriela Mesones Rojo, “Venezuela: Perceptions of Europe Framed by Domestic Crises”, in Rosa Balfour, Lizza Bomassi and Marta Martinelli (eds), *The Southern Mirror: Reflections on Europe from the Global South*, Brussels, Carnegie Europe, 2022, p. 65-78, <https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/87312>

Michael Stott, “EU Drops Recognition of Juan Guaidó as Venezuela’s Interim President”, in *Financial Times*, 6 January 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/aa372f3a-a1ac-41da-848a-46355fc3ec4f>

Mitra Taj, “Bolton Says Time to Act Against Venezuela’s Maduro after U.S. Freezes Assets”, in *Euronews*, 12 September 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/08/05/us-opposes-new-vote-in-venezuela-with-maduro-still-in-power-bolton>

Pavel Tarasenko, “From Friend to Competitor: How Russia’s War Has Strengthened Venezuela’s Hand”, in *Carnegie Politika*, 9 December 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88604>

Marta Valiñas et al., *Report of the Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela* (A/HRC/48/69), 28 December 2021, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/48/69>

Venezuela and Governments of the Caribbean, *PetroCaribe Energy Cooperation Agreement*, 2005, https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/la_energy_policies/51

Venezuela Government, *Communiqué*, 27 May 2020, <https://mppre.gob.ve/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Venezuela-deplores-alleged-EU-concern-over-COVID-19-situation-in-the-country.pdf>

Venezuela Government, *Comunicado*, 17 June 2021, <https://ultimasnoticias.com.ve/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Venezuela-condena-cinismo-de-caricaturesca-convocatoria-y-exige-a-los-gobiernos-que-cesen-agresion-politica.pdf>

Benito Villaamil, “La Unión Europea se prepara para un cambio radical en su relación con Venezuela”, in *Nueva Tribuna*, 21 January 2023, <https://www.nuevatribuna.es/articulo/global/ue-ve-situacion-venezuela-totalmente-diferente-aspira-cambiar-posicion/20230121195824207407.html>

Kejal Vyas, “China Talks with Venezuela Opposition to Protect Investments”, in *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 February 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-holds-talks-with-venezuelanopposition-on-debt-oil-projects-11549993261>

Arturo Wallace, “¿Qué gana y qué pierde Venezuela con retirarse de la OEA?”, in *BBC News*, 27 April 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-america-latina-39739813>

Barbara Wesel, “A Missed Chance to Show EU Unity”, in *Deutsche Welle*, 2 February 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/a-47337182>

World Vision, *Venezuela Crisis Response - Situation Report “Hope without Borders”, July to September 2022*, 18 November 2022, <https://reliefweb.int/node/3908498>

Olga Yagova, Chen Aizhu and Marianna Parraga, “Rosneft Becomes Top Venezuelan Oil Trader, Helping Offset U.S. Pressure”, in *Reuters*, 22 August 2019, <https://reut.rs/2ZaqGpe>



www.jointproject.eu



info@jointproject.eu



facebook.com/JOINTprojectonline



[@joint_project](https://twitter.com/joint_project)



linkedin.com/company/joint-project



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N. 959143. This publication reflects only the view of the author(s) and the European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.