The European Union - Latin America and the Caribbean Digital Alliance: Geopolitics in the Era of Technological Global Governance

Mario Torres Tarrin

Summary

This article examines the European Union (EU)-Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Digital Alliance initiative, which is a geopolitical response by the EU to restore relations with LAC countries and address the challenges presented by the digital age. Likewise, the reconfiguration of the traditional international system and the global governance system, both altered by the emergence of new geopolitical actors, the Big Tech Companies (BTC), are studied. In addition, the different geopolitical dilemmas faced by both regions are analyzed in order to position themselves as global actors rather than global observers. Finally, potential areas of cooperation are pointed out, highlighting the regulation of cyberspace and the external action of BTC, for which Techplomacy can serve as an instrument of foreign policy, defense and security in order to create international norms and standards in the era of global technological governance.

Keywords: European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean, digital alliance, techplomacy, geopolitics, big tech companies, global tech governance.

New Territorial Spaces, New Geopolitical Actors: The Cyberspace and Big Tech Companies

When Halford John Mackinder, in 1904, presented his geopolitical theory of the heartland, he defended the relevance of the study of territorial space in terms of domination and the exercise of power. For Mackinder, whoever rules Eastern Europe will rule the heartland; whoever rules the heartland will rule the World Island, and whoever rules the World Island will rule the world. Since then, throughout history, empires and nation states have sought to dominate this geographical region of Europe. Today, however, there is a new, non-physical dimension, called cyberspace, which has become the new heartland, with new actors struggling to dominate and exert their power in this virtual environment that integrates numerous technologies that enable the development of communications, facilitates the exchange of information and generates multiple activities through instruments such as the Internet, communication networks, data servers, operating systems and software, and cloud computing, among others.

The current international system is being reconfigured. On the one hand, we can see a – regional and global - dispute among the current powers, the emerging powers and the historical powers that claim a place on the international scene on the basis of their past as regional or hegemonic powers. If, today, a list of great powers were to be drawn up, the first group would undoubtedly include the United States (US), the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the European Union (EU), while the second group would include Russia, India, Japan, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia. All these countries aspire not only to be regional hegemonic powers, but also to be global players. Likewise, among the powers that claim a place in the international arena from a historical perspective are the PRC (the Chinese Empire), Iran (the Persian Empire), Turkey (the Ottoman Empire) and Japan (the Empire of Japan).

It should be noted that the EU, in turn, integrates among its member states several countries that in the past were regional empires (at the European level) and others that were global empires, because their territories covered several continents, as is the case of the Spanish Empire, the Portuguese Empire or the French Empire. Another great empire was the British Empire, although this has not been included in the above list as it does not currently belong to the EU. Nevertheless, it is part of the sphere of great empires that had a transcendence as global players at a certain moment in history.

Another country claiming its place in the international arena is Russia, considering its historical past as the Russian Empire. It is interesting how, despite the fact that the Russian president, Vladimir Putin considers that the fall of the Soviet Union was the biggest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century,[1] does not take the Soviet Union as an example of a successful period as a hegemonic power. Instead, he takes the empire of the tsars as a reference; something contradictory, since communism fought against the empire of the tsars and sought to eliminate all historical vestiges of that past.

Therefore, the word empire should not be a pejorative term. In fact, the history of mankind shows that all civilizational construction has been profoundly influenced by the formation and development of empires. Etymologically, empire comes from the Latin imperium, which means the action of ruling, that is, of commanding. Consequently, the term empire refers to that political organization that seeks to rule over other political organizations, be they cities, city- states, nation-states or unions of states. In fact, thanks to empires there is an indelible mark in the legal, political, economic, social and cultural evolution of the regions they controlled, contributing positively to the construction and development of the multiple civilizations that have existed throughout the history of mankind.

When we think of the international system, we immediately think of a system composed of nation states. Its very name indicates that it is an inter-national system, i.e., a system between nations. There is usually a scholarly consensus that the beginning of this system originated with the signing of the peace treaties of

Osnabrück and Münster in 1548, which put an end to the Thirty Years' War in the Holy Roman Empire and the Eighty Years' War between Spain and the United Provinces of the Netherlands. These treaties, also known as the Peace of Westphalia, are fundamental in European history, but also in the history of international relations and world order.

Since the concept of State sovereignty is developed in these treaties, the German princes of the Holy Roman Empire gained the right to govern their territories with greater autonomy, in that they were recognized sovereignty as individual states, establishing that no external power should intervene in the internal affairs of another state. This was the origin of the modern concept of the nation-state. The treaties, in addition to seeking peace, sought to reconfigure the world order established up to that time, creating a new balance of power with the emergence of new geopolitical actors, the nation-states. The aim was to establish a balance of power to prevent the hegemony of a single nation or coalition of nations, laying the foundations for the development of international law by defining relations between states based on sovereignty and legal equality.

The Westphalian international system operated between 1548 and 1951. During this period, nation-states were the only actors in the international arena that conducted development policies for their populations. However, the year 1951 marked a new milestone in the history of international relations, with the beginning of a new global order based on a world of regions,[2] since that year, with the signing of the Treaty of Paris, the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was created. This treaty marked the beginning of the integration of European states into a regional union, the region being understood as a group of countries that share a political project[3] and that - with this type of political organization - seek to transcend the central state.[4]

European regional integration started with six states, but is now a regional union of 27 countries, called the EU. However, Europe was not the only continent to create integration bodies and forge a common system of rules and institutions. In fact, the American states were the first to integrate, when in 1889, they organized the First American International Conference, held in Washington from October 2, 1889 to April 19, 1890, with the aim of adopting an arbitration plan to peacefully resolve issues that might arise between them in the future, promote trade and expand markets, among others. During this continental conference, the International Union of American Republics was created, which was later renamed the Pan American Union and eventually became the Organization of American States (OAS). Thanks to this process, a network of institutions and provisions began to develop that would come to be known as the Interamerican system, the oldest international institutional system,[5] predating even the United Nations system. In this sense, it can be said that the American countries have contributed to the international system and the world order, creating two models: regional integration on a continental scale and a model of a system of international institutions.

These two historical references provide evidence that new political actors called regional organisms or regional unions emerged on both sides of the Atlantic. However, the process of American integration had a different evolution to European integration, by prioritizing an intergovernmental working method and claiming to be a forum for continental political consultation, rather than an integration process that promotes the transfer of national competencies in favor of the creation and development of supranational or community institutions. On the other hand, European integration allowed the creation of a common High Authority (the ECSC) to organize the free movement of coal and steel, as well as free access to production sources.[6] Gradually, the European States ceded powers to this common authority. The ECSC's powers were extended by the 1957 Treaties of Rome, which established the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community. Subsequently, the Maastricht Treaty marked a new stage in European integration by considering not only the economic sphere but also the political integration of the European States as objectives, moving from a European Economic Community to a political union, which ended up being the current EU.

The 1980s and 1990s were characterized by the emergence of new actors in the international arena. Non-governmental organizations, associations and foundations began to develop external action, opening offices in different countries to influence policy and promote common interests and values, and interacting with governments at different levels (local, regional and national), as well as with regional integration and international organizations. Furthermore, during these decades, technological advances were made that ended up being disruptive technologies, affecting the traditional functioning of the world order. Disruptive technologies such as the Internet, web browsers and HTML language completely transformed communications and enabled unprecedented global interconnectivity, giving rise to a Fourth Industrial Revolution,[7] whose characteristic is the convergence of digital, physical and biological technologies,[8] which have an impact on all areas of society (legal, economic, commercial, cultural, social and environmental).

In business terms, there was a disruption in the processes of design, production, marketing and communication of goods and services, modifying international trade and the labor market. The largest companies in the technology sector, commonly known as Big Tech Companies (BTC), are those that have not only created, but also manage, direct and control cyberspace. These BTC are playing a key role in the development and implementation of the so-called Industry 4.0.[9] The concept Industry 4.0 refers to the implementation of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, characterized by the integration of advanced digital technologies into manufacturing and production processes. Technologies such as the Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Big Data and data analysis, robotics, augmented reality and virtual reality, 3 D printing, among others, are once again modifying the functioning of the labor market and altering trade flows worldwide.

The most important BTC are mainly American and Chinese, including Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Apple, Nvidia, Meta, Tesla, Tencent, Alibaba, Xiaomi and Baidu. To exemplify their economic power, it can be mentioned that the capital of the first three BTC within the 10 Top Ranking worldwide (Microsoft, Apple and Nvidia) is equivalent to 7.771 trillion dollars,[10] while the Gross National Product of Germany and France totals 5.581 trillion dollars,[11] evidencing that their economic capacity and power is superior to most of the States.

The innovations produced by the BTC in artificial intelligence, data analytics, internet of things, cloud services, are some of the emerging technologies that are transforming sectors such as industry, agriculture, construction or service sectors such as education, health, banking, etc. On the other hand, companies engaged in social networks, data analytics, security and defense services, become systemic rivals for governments, who see the advantages of these BTC's services, but also appreciate their power and influence in cyberspace. Through social networks, it is possible to develop not only information campaigns to promote values or raise awareness of a specific issue (such as the protection of the environment or the defense of human rights, among others), but also disinformation or counter-information campaigns to alter the political life of countries (overthrowing legitimately democratic regimes or authoritarian regimes) and to modify the voting intentions of a population in elections, be they local, national or regional in scope.

Suddenly, governments find themselves challenged by new economic actors beyond their control, because governments have neither the human nor the financial resources to cope with the economic power and influence wielded by the BTCs. These new companies intervene not only in the economic, commercial, political and cultural life of states, but also in the affairs of global governance, such as international economy and trade, defense, security and international peace. Therefore, the BTC are de facto new players on the international scene.

The events described above have reconfigured the traditional international system, since major global issues are no longer dealt with exclusively by States, nor are development policies. Consequently, we are witnessing global governance involving multiple actors at multiple levels: States, regional integration organizations (such as the EU), international organizations, institutions that exercise external action and participate in the political life of countries (non-governmental organizations, associations and foundations with a global scope), and the BTC.

While it is true that the major BTCs are private initiatives, many of them in their early days received government grants, and those that did not receive grants now have contracts with governments; that is, there is a relationship between the BTCs and governments. What is not clear, however, is which of them has the power in that relationship, who serves whom, and most importantly, who wields geopolitical power in today's world. In that sense, it could be said that the current global governance is primarily technological and those who wield power are the BTC, considered the new

empires, which have created their own heartland, called cyberspace.

The EU does not own BTC, but through the creation of standards it exercises a role as a regulatory actor, which means that it can become a global actor within technological governance. Nevertheless, global governance, like technology governance, requires strategic partners to promote ideas, strengthen positions and exert influence in international forums and summits where decisions on global issues are made. This is where a strategic partnership between the countries of the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) once again plays an important role, considering that in 2009 the European Commission - in an official document - described the EU-LAC strategic partnership as an association of global actors.[12] It should not be forgotten that interregional relations between European and Latin American countries were born in the 1960s, precisely to coordinate joint positions at the First United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, held in Geneva in 1964.

Since that Conference, 60 years of EU-LAC interregional relations have passed. It should be noted that among the greatest achievements of this bi-regional strategic partnership is the signing of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, which was adopted by 195 parties in December 2015, but by the end of 2016 had only been ratified by 97 countries, of which 50 were European, Latin American and Caribbean countries. Today, more than ever, it is necessary for these countries to push, within the framework of the United Nations, for the convening of a world conference to create a binding treaty to regulate cyberspace and the external action of the BTC. In this sense, the EU and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (Celac) can promote a new interregionalism, an interregionalism 4.0 for a technological global governance 4.0.

EU-LAC Digital Alliance and Geopolitical Dilemmas

At present, relations between European, Latin American and Caribbean countries are conducted within the framework of the EU-Celac Summits, which represent an extension of the EU-LAC Summits, held since 1999. In 2010, at the summit held in Mexico, 33 LAC countries decided to merge the Rio Group and the LAC Summits on Development and Cooperation into a single forum, creating Celac, establishing it as the official counterpart for relations with the EU and the development of Euro-Latin American and Caribbean interregionalism.

The First EU-Celac Summit was held in Santiago de Chile in 2013, and the Second in Brussels, in 2015; since then, the summits have been suspended until July 2023, when the Third EU-Celac Summit was held in Brussels. The reason for the suspension of the summits was the political crisis in Venezuela in 2015, which generated a division among the Celac members themselves, interrupting their own summits and causing the suspension of the EU-Celac bi- regional summits. The reestablishment of relations between the EU and Venezuela is framed within the New Agenda for EU-LAC

Relations, concretized in the conclusions of the EU-Celac Summit of 2023. The EU advocates finding a peaceful, democratic and inclusive solution, led by Venezuelans, to end the political stalemate of recent years.[13] Now, as this article is being written, on July 28, 2024, general elections have been held in Venezuela, in which both the governing party and the opposition claim to be the winners of the elections. Undoubtedly, this may aggravate the political crisis in Venezuela, divide the LAC countries once again, and stall the progress that had been made in restoring relations between the EU and Venezuela. The day after the elections, a group of countries including Paraguay, Argentina, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Panama, Peru, Dominican Republic and Uruguay requested an emergency meeting of the OAS to address the situation regarding the elections in Venezuela.[14]

In October 2022, under the pro tempore Presidency of Celac, a meeting at EU-Celac ministerial level was held in Argentina with the aim of re-establishing the EU-Celac Summit system, suspended in 2015. At this meeting, the EU-Celac 2022-2023 bi-regional roadmap Renovation of the bioregional association to strengthen peace and sustainable development,[15] of which four stages stand out. The first includes the Second D4D (Digital for Development) Hub in Action High Level Event for EU-LAC Digital Cooperation in December 2022, under the Czech EU presidency, introducing two topics to the bi-regional agenda: (1) The creation of an inclusive digitization center on the human being with the support of digital technologies, and (2) The creation of a digital investment package for a global link to LAC. The second and third stages involve the launch of the digital alliance and the first high level dialogue on digital policies in 2023, during the Swedish presidency of the EU. Finally, the fourth stage comprises the reestablishment of the EU-Celac Summits in July 2023, under the Spanish EU Presidency.

Now, to maximize the potential of the digital alliance, both regions will have to overcome the following geopolitical dilemmas, posed in the form of a question:

How will the EU and Celac countries develop their relations faced with the commercial dispute between the US and the PRC?

Given that the two countries are the main trading partners of the EU and LAC countries, the trade dispute between the US and the PRC is not only economic-financial, but mainly geopolitical.[16] The Americans see their leadership in the world order challenged by the Chinese government's foreign action. Also, within the context of the BTC era and disruptive technologies, such a dispute redefines concepts such as sovereignty and nationalism. Currently, there is talk about the importance of having and defending technological sovereignty to reduce dependence on foreign technologies. In the case of technological nationalism, this is defined as the strategies and policies implemented by a government to promote the development of national technologies. Therefore, it is likely that both EU member states and Celac member states will want to implement policies that promote technological nationalism, seeking to develop and protect their technological

sovereignty.

Which will be the geopolitical priorities that the new American government's administration will adopt after the November 2024 elections?

It depends on which party wins the elections: Democrats or Republicans. In principle, according to the candidates' speeches, US support for Ukraine and Israel is expected to continue under the Democrats. However, regardless of the outcome of these conflicts, both affect EU foreign policy more directly than the US.

For LAC countries, the return of President Trump may bring uncertainty among Western democracies. The confrontation with the PRC could be even greater with the Republican candidate, a fact that will force the EU and LAC countries to position themselves, which would likely alter foreign policy, security and defense priorities for both regions. The EU therefore needs reliable like-minded partners, such as the LAC countries, with whom it can address geopolitical challenges, promote multilateralism and defend democracy and the rule of law.[17]

What will be the future of NATO?

The war between Russia and Ukraine highlighted the EU's lack of strategic, military and defense and security autonomy. Therefore, the EU must move forward with its plans to develop a European defense and defense industry, because only then will it have the capacity to act independently.

NATO contemplates within its membership types the so-called global partners. Within this category are countries such as Australia, Iraq, Japan, South Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand and Pakistan. In LAC, Colombia is called a NATO partner and, although Brazil and Argentina have another denomination, this is only attributed to the US, which catalogs them as extra-NATO principal allies. However, it should be noted that on April 18, 2024, Argentina applied for global NATO partner. The difference between being a global partner and a NATO member is participation in military operations. The member country is obliged to be part of military operations in the event of a possible global crisis, while the global partner has no such obligation.

The inclusion in NATO of two new members, Sweden and Finland, which are themselves EU member states, is undoubtedly an event that will not only affect the political life of the EU but will also force a rethinking of the new global role of the alliance. For the time being, the incorporation of these two countries into NATO will represent major changes on the following fronts:

• Innovation and EU external relations: The levels of innovation on the part of the Nordic countries as a whole mean that their interests and relations with third countries are different from those of EU member states from central or southern

Europe, which could lead to a change in the EU's agenda with respect to foreign policy, security and defense priorities.

- Security and defense: The Russia-Ukraine war primarily affects Europeans more than Americans, given that it is taking place in European territory. Washington's perspective is therefore not the same as that of Brussels. Even after the war is over, the Europeans will have to define how they will re-establish relations with Russia. Since this is a neighboring country, it cannot live eternally sanctioned and, at some point, the EU will have to re-establish political, economic, commercial and financial relations with it. Although, undoubtedly, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has generated such mistrust within the EU that it will be difficult to re-establish good neighborly ties.

- The new Arctic sea route could mean a change in international trade. Chinese and Russian ports will play an important role in this new route, but first the routes within the Arctic Council, where the Nordic countries have a great weight, will have to be well defined, which would probably lead to tensions between the Nordic countries and Russia or, perhaps, to the turning point required in relations with Russia.

- Reconfiguration of decision-making within the EU. With the developments described above, Sweden and Finland will have more political weight within the EU, and it is likely that Denmark will join the Baltic countries, which have been defining themselves as Nordic for years, which would make the Northern European countries gain more weight within the EU and seek to exert more influence on decision-making within the EU's geopolitical future.

What are the effects of Brexit's impact for the EU?

The repercussions of Brexit have not yet been calculated, nor has the economic and social impact of the UK's exit from the EU been measured, nor has the loss of the defensive and military power that the UK brought to the EU as a whole been assessed. The speed of today's world moved from Brexit to COVID-19, then to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and then to the Israel-Hamas conflict, including its implications in the region. Therefore, the EU needs to move from being a reactive actor to being proactive, but with its own strategic thinking.

In addition, increased spending on armaments could have an impact on the spending of European governments, which will have less recovery funds available for their economies. In February 2024, the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, announced that the EU would soon present a strategy for the European defense industry, designed to strengthen military production and arms supply.[18]

What will be the effects of the changes in six Latin American and Caribbean governments?

During 2024, presidential elections will be held in LAC in El Salvador, Panama, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela,[19] which will undoubtedly have repercussions on EU-Celac relations.

One Belt, One Road or Global Gateway?

Currently, in geopolitical terms there are two major interregional initiatives. On the one hand, the Chinese initiative of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Silk Maritime Route of the 21st century, also known as One Belt, One Road, which goes beyond a mere strategy of global infrastructure development to facilitate trade and connect the PRC with the rest of Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas (mainly LAC). It is estimated that, within the framework of this initiative, the PRC has invested in 200 cooperation agreements with more than 150 countries (out of the 193 countries according to the United Nations) and 30 international organizations to develop physical infrastructure development projects (railways, roads, ports and even satellites).[20]

In 2023, Chinese President Xi Jinping, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the launch of the One Belt, One Road, mentioned that covering land, ocean, sky, and internet, this network has driven flow of goods, capital, technologies and human resources among the participating countries and highlighted that the strategy has its roots in the long history of the PRC to facilitate trade through the old silk routes that connected Asia, Middle East and Europe.[21]

On the other hand, the EU launched its own initiative called Global Gateway, which aims to mobilize up to €300 billion in investments by 2027 to boost global infrastructure and seek to strengthen connections between Europe and the rest of the world. The European initiative is a geopolitical response to the Chinese initiative, aiming to reverse the position that the PRC has in the different countries where there is a project related to the One Belt, One Road. While the Chinese focus on regions such as Asia, Europe, Africa and Latin America, the EU focuses mainly on Africa, LAC, the Indo-Pacific and the Western Balkans.

The truth is that the two initiatives rival each other not only in economic and commercial terms, but also in the type of model for future international cooperation. The Chinese implement a bilateral cooperation model, while the EU uses multilateral cooperation, seeking to involve government institutions, the private sector and international partners. Additionally, the Chinese government has been criticized for the lack of transparency regarding the agreements signed with countries, the lack of commitment to the environment and sustainable development, as well as the lack of respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. In addition, there is a growing debt produced by the default of some countries that have not been able

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to honor the loans granted by the PRC, which has generated an even greater dependence on the Asian giant. On the other hand, the EU remains committed to investment programs that respect international standards, sustainability and transparency.

If one had to mention what is the main advantage of the Chinese initiative over the European one, it would undoubtedly be the level of investments that the PRC has made and is willing to make. If the EU wants to compete, it will have to multiply its level of investments; otherwise, its Global Gateway will not reach the proposed target.

Table. Comparative table of EU and PRC initiatives

Global Gateway	*One Belt, One Road*
Objectives: • Sustainability: Promote sustainable projects from an environmental, economic and social perspective. • Digitalization: Improve digital connectivity through digital infrastructure. • Green transition: Support the transition to renewable and sustainable energies. • Health and education: Invest in health and education systems. • Resilience: Mainly in infrastructure and supply chains.	Objectives: • Infrastructure: Build and improve transportation infrastructure (ports, roads, railroads, and airports). • Trade: Promote and facilitate trade between the PRC and participating countries. • Connectivity: Promote connectivity between Asia, Europe and Africa. • Financial cooperation: Promote financial co-operation and the use of the yuan in international trade.
Strategy: • Transparency and sustainability. • Promote international norms and standards. • Collaborate with the private sector.	Strategy: • Bilateral agreements for specific projects between the PRC and the countries participating in the initiative. • Prioritize the financing of projects of infrastructure.
Financing: • EU budget, European financial institutions and private sector. • 300 billion investment expected of euros until the year 2027.	Financing: • Financing from Chinese state-owned banks and sovereign wealth funds. • An estimated investment of U.S. dollars.

Source: Global Gateway and One Belt, One Road documents. Own elaboration.

What will be the stance of LAC countries on the alignment happening with the so-called Global South?

Today, the PRC and Russia are betting on strengthening the Global South. At the

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same time, there is a dispute between Mexico, Brazil and Argentina to be the regional leaders with respect to the Global South. The three countries will have to balance their interests and define their partners, allies and strategic partners in order not to lose space and weight in the international arena. In this context, if the LAC countries aspire to be part of the Global South (a concept that refers to a geopolitical category that encompasses the developing countries of Africa, Asia, Oceania and LAC), they would be accepting to be global observers, rather than global players. In other words, they would be accepting to be recipients of economic and political models, consumers of other producing countries and mere observers in decision-making on the major issues of global governance.

It should be recalled that this concept began to be used during the 1980s and 1990s as an alternative to avoid the negative connotations of the Third World concept, which belonged to a categorization of countries including three types: first world countries (capitalist countries led by the U.S.), second world countries (communist countries led by the Soviet Union) and the third world (countries not aligned with any of the powers).

In this global, complex and dynamic context, the EU-LAC Digital Alliance is an initiative that seeks to strengthen cooperation in matters concerning the digital era between the two regions. This bi-regional alliance aims to promote sustainable and inclusive digital transformation, improve connectivity and foster innovation and technological development, optimizing, for example, Internet connectivity and access. Furthermore, the EU-LAC Digital Alliance aims not only to promote the digitization of small and medium-sized enterprises to improve their competitiveness and access to global markets, but also to implement training and education programs to improve the digital skills of the population, as well as to facilitate collaboration between startups, research centers and technology companies in both regions, among others.

The bi-regional partnership also aims to (1) develop legal frameworks to protect citizens' privacy and personal data, (2) implement cybersecurity measures to protect critical infrastructure and digital systems, and (3) promote inclusive and transparent digital governance that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms. However, cyberspace and the external action of the BTC can only be regulated by creating rules at the global level. In that sense, the EU-LAC bi-regional digital partnership can foster a new interregionalism 4.0 for a Governance 4.0.[22]

Conclusions

On July 19, 2024, there was a computer blackout that showed the weakness and vulnerability of countries whose governments can do little or nothing in the face of the current digital age, led by the BTC. A problem caused by the Falcon CrowdStrike antivirus affected only 1% of Windows users (8.5 million users); however, this was enough to cause chaos in airports around the world, with an average of 5,000 flights

being cancelled.[23]

The digital era offers opportunities, but it also presents challenges that affect individuals, organizations and governments alike. Privacy and data protection, cybersecurity and fundamental rights are directly affected by the process of digitization of the economy. Therefore, the digital era requires a multifaceted and collaborative approach to ensure equitable, secure and sustainable technological development.

History shows that international scientific cooperation is a positive way to build bridges between countries and contribute to regional integration.[24] The answer lies in rethinking EU-Celac interregionalism in the digital age, through the development and implementation of a Techplomacy as a foreign policy instrument for a Global Tech Governance.[25] The Techplomacy was an initiative presented by the Danish government in 2017, within the framework of its foreign and security policy strategy, which envisaged three new concepts within the history of international relations: Techplomacy, Tech Ambassadors and Tech Embassies. In this sense, the Techplomacy consists of developing a foreign policy focused on the BTCs, a fact that evidences the geopolitical weight that these companies possess in the international system, and how their foreign action affects decision-making on global governance agenda issues.

With this strategy, Denmark became the first country in the world to elevate technology and digitalization to a cross-cutting foreign and security policy priority. In this regard, in 2017, Jeppe Kofod, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, noted, "We have been too naïve for too long about the technological revolution. We need to ensure that the democratic governments establish the limits for the tech industry, and not the other way around. That is where the Danish initiative called Techplomacy comes into place".[26]

If we used to say that the social divide occurred because sectors of society were unable to access quality education that would allow them to enter the labor market, we should take into account that, if we do not make a digital transition prioritizing education, then the social divide will be exacerbated by the digital divide between people, which will result in an increase in social inequality.

Faced with the era of the BTC, as new geopolitical actors, governments must analyze how to solve the following major challenges:

• The legal context: It is necessary to regulate the collection and control of user data, as well as to balance competition in the technology sector. The control of data opens a debate on a new form of sovereignty, digital sovereignty. Since 1995, the EU started working in this area, first with the creation of the Data Protection Directive and then - in 2015 - with the regulation called General Data Protection Regulation.[27] which defined the fundamental rights of individuals in the

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digital age, the obligations of those who process data, the methods to ensure compliance, and the sanctions for those who breach the rules.

- Cyber threats: The BTC are currently one of the main players in the field of cybersecurity, and - therefore - their infrastructure and action can be considered critical for the national security of countries.

- Cyber espionage: States and non-state actors can conduct espionage through the use of technological platforms.

- Anti-competitive and monopolistic practices: The BTCs have faced accusations of monopolistic practices, leading to complaints and fines by regulators, mainly in the U.S. and EU, for dominant use in certain markets. Balancing fair competition with technological innovation is therefore one of the biggest challenges facing governments.

- The BTC and its influence on political life: There are companies, power groups and even governments that - it is suspected - use platforms to carry out information, disinformation and counterinformation campaigns. Disinformation campaigns can manipulate public opinion and influence electoral processes and thus alter a country's political system. These campaigns can help overthrow undemocratic, dictatorial regimes, but also freely and democratically elected governments.

- Digital inequality: Lack of access to technology and connectivity can create first- and second-class countries. If before we spoke in economic terms of developed countries and developing countries, we are likely to have the same definitions, but -this time- taking into consideration their levels of technological development and their access to Internet connectivity, which could generate new categories of countries (technologically advanced countries, technologically developing countries, technologically undeveloped countries).

Each of these challenges is valid for both EU and LAC countries. Both regions can establish such a digital alliance and - on the basis of it - seek to be global actors, rather than being global observers in the new era of technological global governance, where the new world leaders and geopolitical actors are the BTCs (new empires with their own heartland). Consequently, if governments wish to be actors in this new geo-tech-political era, they will have to seek to conquer the new heartland, cyberspace, because whoever controls cyberspace will control the world.

About the author:

Mario Torres Jarrín - Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca / Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos

Dr. Torres is director of the Institute of European Studies and Human Rights at the

Pontifical University of Salamanca (Spain). Previously, he was a professor and research associate at the Faculty of Business, Economics and Law of the Friedrich Alexander University Erlangen-Nuremberg (Germany) and at the Faculty of Humanities of Stockholm University, as well as director of the European Institute of International Studies (Sweden). He has been a visiting professor at the Copenhagen Business School (Denmark), University of Bergen and University of Oslo (Norway), University Institute of Lisbon (Portugal), National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (Romania), University of Salamanca (Spain), University of Economics and Anglo-American University (Czech Republic), as well as in different diplomatic academies in Europe, Asia and America. He is also a member of several international scientific committees, within the framework of the United Nations, G20 and the European Union, as well as a member of the academic councils of the European Union-Latin America and the Caribbean Academic Forum, the Center for Latin American Studies (Czech Republic), the Latin American Center of European Union Studies at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (Brazil) and the Center for International Studies of the Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina (Argentina). His research has been published in Sweden, Germany, the United States, Brazil, Spain, Belgium, Peru, Mexico, Chile, France, Switzerland, Italy, Saudi Arabia and India.

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