

The Redefinition of the EU Presence in Latin America and the Caribbean

Edited by
Gian Luca Gardini



PETER LANG

This book explores three key issues to understand the redefinition of relations between the European Union (EU) and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC): the international context, foreign policies of EU member states towards Latin America, and crucial topics on the EU-LAC agenda.

At the theoretical level, the book aims to rebalance two debates on EU-LAC relations. First, in the debate between agency and structure, the book stresses that context is a limiting factor of the agent's preferences and actions. Second, in the debate between values and interests, it finds that interests should not be made invariably dependent on values.

At the empirical level, two aspects stand out. First, the change and continuity in EU member states' foreign policies also impact the EU's own role in the continent. Second, new topics on the bi-regional and global agenda have the potential to redefine the relations between the two regions.

At a time of European alleged decline, this volume argues that the EU remains a highly significant actor in Latin America and the Caribbean.

“EU-Latin American relations are in a phase of redefinition. This timely book addresses both the structural obstacles and the prospects and areas for deeper cooperation. Against the background of diverging positions of Latin America and the EU in international politics, the proposed decoupling of political and functional agendas should be considered.”

Detlef Nolte, German Institute für Global and Area Studies (GIGA)

“This book makes an original and significant contribution to the study of the relations between the European Union and Latin American and the Caribbean. The volume blends wisely the right doses of scholarly research and policymaking sensitivity, thus making for an innovative read for academics and an insightful contribution for practitioners.”

Andrés Malamud, University of Lisbon

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Gian Luca Gardini
Udine (Italy), February 2023

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Identity and International Relations: Italian Foreign Policy Towards Latin America

Scholars of History and International Relations have stressed, in Latin America and, in particular, in Brazil, the importance of the relationship between ethnic identity and foreign policy related to the Italian case (Cervo, 1991; Aledda, 2016; Bertonha, 1997; Di Santo, 2021; Bevilacqua, De Clementi, Franzina, 2001). Since the first years after the *Risorgimento*, in the second half of the 19th century, Italy had to manage an important migratory flow that was mainly directed towards Latin America. The highest concentration was achieved in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. Thus, the first agreements and relations sought to create an institutional framework for this movement of people.

In the early 20th century, Italian political discussion also spoke of “commercial colonisation”, trying to exploit the immigrant community for national development and, at the same time, justify the national haemorrhaging of labour (Beneduzi, 2017). In the 1920s and 1930s this process reached a climax, when the Fascist project for Italian communities in Latin America produced an articulated set of actions in favour of the diffusion of Italian culture, but in association with political propaganda and Italian *grandeur*.

As Cervo (2011) claims, the Italian contribution to Brazilian national identity, through the long historical process based on immigration, is the common capital accumulated over time, which makes the bilateral relations between Brazil and Italy dynamic. The same argument could be applied to Uruguay or Argentina, whose “mark” of Italian presence can be found in their daily life and thinking of themselves as a nation (Devoto, 2008; Bresciano, 2003).

In fact, Amado Cervo – a renowned expert in International History and International Relations – emphasises the cultural characteristics brought by Italian immigrants, such as religiosity, the preoccupation with gastronomy, the culture of work and savings, the cult of family and entrepreneurship, as part of the construction of a Brazilian Italian spirit, in a connection that has produced different types of exchanges over time (Cervo, 2011).

Franco Cenni,¹ a renowned Italian Brazilian intellectual (1909–1973), recalling the visit to Brazil of the President of the Italian Republic, Giovanni Gronchi, in 1958, refers to this feeling of closeness of the population celebrating him in the streets and the Italian presence that is transversal to Brazilian society (Cenni, 2003). Among the ministers, governors, mayors, all sons of Italians who met Gronchi, Cenni stresses that the strong blood relations that had characterised the exchanges between Italy and Brazil, have turned into a new dialogue. In fact, he speaks of a new stage, which is not only based on the work of pioneers but also on investments in industry, from chemicals and pharmaceuticals to civil construction and automotive, in renewal and consolidation of common humanist values as well.

Starting from these premises, the aim of this chapter is to think, from a historical perspective, about the process of building cooperation between Italy and Latin America, considering the presence of Italian immigrants and their descendants in a double perspective. On the one hand, the presence of a community of Italian descendants in Brazil has facilitated bilateral relations; has created an idea of a communion of shared values; and, therefore, has brought some Latin American realities closer to the Italian one. On the other, this imagined proximity has identified the subcontinent with a strategic reserve, naturally intertwined with Western civilization, a resource to draw on in times of “need”. By looking across the 20th century, a variety of intensities of Italian attention in relation to the Latin American world is marked by changes in international society and domestic politics, such as the fascist policies of the 1920s and 1930s, or by the subcontinent’s economic boom, with the sharp rise in the value of commodities in the international market in the 21st century, and the birth of the Italy-Latin America Conference.

Before starting the analysis, a brief clarification on the concept of identity and its interactions with the dynamics of international politics in a global society is required. Both the contemporary identity processes and those of the 20th century are marked by interactions with different alterities that reinforce their characteristics of constant transformation, intersectionality and agency, whether on the part of individuals, communities or nation-states. Actually, belongings are plural, corresponding to different stages of personal experience, the historical past, and logics of power and oppression, within the interests played between

1 He worked at the Italian-Brazilian Cultural Institute. In 1960, he won the Italian Prize in San Paolo. In 1962, he received the silver medal from the Directorate General for Cultural Relations, which was a part of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

ethnic communities and the states (Linhard; Parsons, 2018; Suárez-Orozco, 2004; Viola, 2015; Floriani, 2004).

Understanding identity as a dynamic process in time and space and, consequently, marked by social relations and transformation, is essential, in order to understand: (a) the relationship between Italian identity and the community of Italian origin in Brazil; (b) the Brazilian and Italian bilateral policies. Identity is not essential and fixed, but it must be associated with memberships reworked over time:

Identity is, in fact, essentially comparative in nature and must be understood as originally connected to the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion. Identity is understood and best described as a relational and contextual process that refers to the way in which individuals and groups consider, construct and position themselves in relation to others according to social categories (La Barbera, 2015: 9).

Krause and Renwick (1996) associate this dynamic perception of identity with the specific studies of international relations. They seek to understand the concept from a global perspective, in an international reality in which the processes of identification are not reduced to the sphere of the nation-state as homogeneous and stable processes. The authors dwell on the disruptive perspective of the impact of globalization, which has challenged a linear reading that superimposed national identity and territoriality. Thus, it reinforces an idea of multiple loyalties and feelings of belonging, based on the different experiences of subjects, communities, national collectivities and even ethnic groups:

In contemporary “national” societies, different models of loyalty and identity co-exist, and the globalization has disrupted the links between identity and the territorially based nations-state. [...] The identification with the nation can be strong or weak. At the same time, other identities, for example, gender, ethnicity, social class, race, sexual preference, which are not rooted in an attachment to a particular territory can be highly significant (Krause and Renwick, 1996:XI–XII).

This conceptual framework can be applied to the case of Italian immigrant communities in Latin America and to the difficulty of the effectiveness of a sub-continent perspective as a strategic reserve. On the one hand, the loyalty of Italo-Brazilians in relation to national belonging has changed over time, being more addressed to the country of birth or ancestors; or in the sense of the host country, depending on the different historical and contextual times: as Cervo (2011) claimed, the Brazilian Italian identity has been constructed. On the other hand, the proximity between Latin America, as an “extreme west” (Rouquié, 2007), and Europe cannot be understood as homogeneous and timeless, especially taking into account the contemporary challenges and the policies, such

as the aggressive policies of China, in the commercial, cultural and political spheres, towards the subcontinent: if Europe is still a model today, this reality could change in the future.

Italy-Latin America relations from the 19th century to the fascist period

The Italian migratory phenomenon has been the central element of relations between Italy and Latin America since the second half of the 19th century. Annual and constant flows of Italian immigrants have strongly collaborated in the construction of the metropolitan cities such as Buenos Aires and São Paulo, where they represented an important part of the population in the first decades of the 20th century (Devoto, 2008; Fausto, 2000). Although other urban spaces such as Lima and Guayaquil, or Santiago de Chile, despite their much less representative numbers, cannot be overlooked. They also formed small rural communities in the southern states of Brazil, such as in Rio Grande do Sul or Santa Catarina (Beneduzi, 2008), or in the province of Santa Fe (Argentina), taking up cultural, architectural and social aspects of the country of origin.

At the turn of the 20th century, considerable attention was devoted to the place of the thematic debates in the newspapers on the connection between Italy and the immigrant communities in Latin America and also in the world of politics; and referring to the idea of a commercial colonization, in a distinction from the one that had just failed in the African context, with the Italian defeat in Adua, in 1896. For example, the newspaper “*L’Italia coloniale*” emphasised among its objectives the analysis of the advantages and opportunities of places of immigration for the development of Italian national production:

To examine the repercussion they have and the repercussion they could have in the field of our industries, of our trade; to see how foreign competition can be overcome in the regions enlivened by our emigration (Aquarone, 1989: 268).

Even the Italian Member of Parliament, Vittorio Buccelli, defender of the idea of migration as a synonym for economic development, the creation of new markets, in his book-length account of a trip to the south of Brazil to the state of Rio Grande do Sul, makes an apology for migratory spaces as better than African ones for Italian business (Buccelli, 1906). His text is also an indictment of the Italian capitalists who fail to see the benefits of these Latin American realities: despite the emphasis he gives to the success of the migratory enterprise, he emphasises that it could be even greater if there were a managerial group – and he refers to the policy of the Kingdom of Italy – that provided adequate knowledge

to immigrants. On the contrary, he lamented the fact that it was German traders who exploited the wealth produced by the Italian workforce.

In a forerunner to what was to become Fascist foreign policy, between the 1920s and 1930s, in the period following World War I, an Italian concern to expand relations with countries on both the South and North American continent can be observed. In this project, and we are talking about Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, the bond to be welded between the two sides of the Atlantic, the bridge between Italy and Latin America, was constituted by immigrant communities:

Firstly, the objective was to create the conditions to foster the revival of economic exchanges. Added to this was the Rome government's hope to revitalize the migratory movement; to re-establish links with the immigrant communities already present in the Americas, which [...] could prove to be effective vehicles for understanding between Italy and the American continent (Mugnaini, 2008: 35).

With the rise of Fascism, a strengthening of this policy in relation to Latin American migratory spaces can be noticed. As Bertonha (1997) points out, the first years of the Duce's policy were characterised by Italian expansion through the economy and culture, in the construction of a Latin world culturally bound to Italy. Indeed, there will be no lack of actions by the Italian government: *Nave Italia*, for example, in 1924 will circumnavigate South America in a propaganda project of the regime and Italian power. It would stop in major Latin American centres, opening up to the immigrant community and local citizens, so that they could see the country's technological greatness. This would be the first step in the improvement of relations between Italy and Latin American states. It would give rise to multinational mercantile treaties; encourage Italian migration and colonization; implement new agricultural, mining and operational concessions; develop new maritime communications with the region; create new agreements and redefine customs rates. The project was not only about increasing the export of Italian products or the establishment of new Italian companies in Latin America, but also to develop a large-scale and well-planned program of commercial expansion that would strengthen Italy's economic potential, creating important trade agreements with the region (Brandalise, 2020).

The presence of Italians in some Latin American states was considerable, which is why one of Mussolini's strategic goals involved conquering the Italian community and instrumentalising it for his own objectives (Scarzanella, 2005). Therefore, the fascist propaganda machine expanded its reach in the 1930s, reaching many countries. The radio, which was a very effective means of communication used by the regime and managed to reach the masses, including

foreigners, made it possible to switch from a defensive cultural policy (which promoted Italian values) to another, more proactive approach, as an instrument of foreign and geopolitical policy.

According to Trento (2005), the strategy of Fascist Italy was based on the construction of a different expansion in relation to that of classical imperialism, which would have been impossible given the Italian reality. In this sense, there were many events organised by the regime that emphasised Italians living outside their national borders, indicating them as part of the same community and brotherhood. Benito Mussolini's speech in 1923 in Milan can be considered emblematic of this policy: "Wherever there is an Italian, there is the tricolor, there is the homeland, there is the defense of the government" (Trento, 2005: 3). Consequently, in 1926, the Duce's words were turned into action, corresponding to the transformation in the name of the Italian community abroad: from immigrants they became Italians abroad. This was not just a play on words, but a policy aimed at creating an ethnic-national bond, where Italians in the world and in Latin America, in particular, acted as instruments of state policy.

From the post-World War II years to the end of the 20th century

In the post-war period, Italy experienced a weakened situation during the reconstruction process and didn't resume the Latin American projects of the previous period. In contrast, it concentrated on the European dimension of its foreign policy, participating in the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951; and in 1955, took part in the Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community. In relation to Latin America, as well as Brazil, Cervo (1991) points to a less dynamic moment in relations between governments, associating it with the negative adjective "laziness". Nevertheless, Italian entrepreneurship expanded in the subcontinent, also through the consolidation of big brands, such as Fiat and Pirelli; although it cannot be emphasised on cultural relations or university exchanges, which were much lower than in the fascist period, and different from the relations between other European states.

In 1989, it was clear that this phase, which began in the post-war period, was scarce in bilateral relations, compared to what it could have produced, between Italy and Latin America. However, during this time, the business community was able to build stable relations. In the same year, while Romano Prodi, then president of the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction, spoke at a conference in São Paulo, lamenting a much lower Italian presence in relation to the actual possibilities of cooperation; in Milan, at a meeting between Brazilian and Italian

entrepreneurs, Piero Sierra, then president of the Pirelli Group in Brazil, emphasised the company's persistence and continuity of design since 1929 as fundamental aspects of its success in Latin America:

The secret of this success was to be found in a long-term vision based on the country's potential, the ability to get things right and not to be stopped by red tape (Cervo, 1991: 258).

Towards the end of the 20th century, a wave of the neoliberal policies began to change the Latin American economic and social reality, with privatizations and market openings, but also with the birth of the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) in 1991 – an agreement between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. One can observe a resurgence of Italian interest in the subcontinent, especially through interactions conducted and supported by Italy at the European Union level. In the 1990s, the interest in the construction and interaction of common markets acted as a lever for the dynamics of bilateral policies; in the 21st century, it was the important international growth of commodity prices and the consequent surge in the GDP of Latin American states that created the conditions for a strong impulse in bilateral relations.

Italy and Latin America in the 21st century

Gian Luca Gardini and Peter Lambert (2011) emphasised, in a context of strong economic growth in Latin America accompanied by crisis and stagnation in most of the developed world and particularly in the EU after 2008, some relevant positive features of the region, such as the sophistication of its integration projects, the long absence of conflict since 1936, and the presence of important natural resources: “its economic and industrial growth, and the growth of its multinational corporations” (Gardini & Lambert, 2011: 5).

Since the beginning of the 21st century, Latin America has experienced a positive economic moment, with a robust GDP growth rate and substantial macroeconomic improvement:

In the five-year period 2004–08, growth was high, inflation low, public accounts improved, public debt decreased and the balance of payments went into surplus. [...] In 2008, almost all large South American countries had high growth rates; Argentina 6.8%, Brazil 5.9%, Peru 9.4% and Venezuela 4.8% (Mori, 2009: 115).

With an average increase in regional GDP of 5.7% in 2007 and 4.6% in 2008, according to data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (Mori, 2009), a variety of primary resources were gaining importance in international society. Governments aimed at policies of income

redistribution and infrastructural investments, as in the case of the PAC (Plan for Accelerating Growth) in Lula's Brazil. The subcontinent, once again, became a strategic reserve that the EU and Italy could draw upon. In this sense, the first fifteen years of the new millennium were marked by manifestations of interest by Italy in Latin American states, with bilateral projects indicating a renewed focus, at least rhetorically, on the region.

Therefore, Brazil and Mexico, two countries of strong economic relevance in Latin America, caught the attention of European institutions in 2007 and 2008, as Calandri (2009) states, with the construction of "strategic partnerships". While in the case of Mexico, we observe the deepening of already consolidated relations, with what had then become the tenth world economic power; in the Brazilian case, we have greater complexity, not only in the recognition of Brazil as a global political actor, given the economic weight gained during the Lula government (then the sixth economy), but also in action in foreign policy and inclusion in the BRICS, as well as a bridging role in relation to Lusophone Africa and Mercosur.

In the Italian sphere, the 21st century is marked by the creation of the Italy-Latin America and Caribbean Conference. Since 2003 in Milan, it was carried out every two years, promoting meetings between Italy and the governments of the region, at the level of foreign ministers, organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAECI), in collaboration with the Italian-Latin American Institute² (IILA).

The first meetings – in 2003 and 2005 – with the important collaboration of the Lombardy Region Chamber of Commerce, had a more economic and entrepreneurial approach, in search of mutual understanding, in a space that was not yet strictly intergovernmental. It was in 2007, with the Prodi government and the strategic agenda directed at Latin America (economic growth, BRICS and the re-establishment of the subcontinent's priority in Italian foreign policy) that the event took on a more political and intergovernmental approach. In this event in Rome, the President of Chile, Michele Bachelet, attended, along with several representatives of Latin American governments. On the Italian side, it counted on the participation of the entire country system (institutional leaders from government, business, trade unions, academia and civil society).

2 The IILA is an intergovernmental organization established in 1966, consisting of Italy and 20 Latin American republics. It was formed with the aim of enhancing relations among its member states. Since 2007, it has collaborated on a permanent basis with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is an observer member of the United Nations Assembly and since 2018, of the EU-ECLAC ministerial meetings.

Since 2012, Latin American states began to participate in the organization of the Conference, which further strengthened its intergovernmental character and affirmed the relevance of the event. Its importance was demonstrated in two key points: in the final declaration of 2013, with the creation of the Italo-Latin American Forum of Parliamentarians (Rossi, 2015); and, in 2014, with Law 173/2014, which provided a formal character to the congregation.

The first parliamentary forum took place in 2015, and it was established as a tool that, on the one hand, proposes actions to governments, considering the issues considered priorities in relations between Italy and Latin America; and, on the other hand, monitors their development. As a first objective, also present in the discussions of all Italy-Latin America Conferences, it proposes a development agenda primarily focused on the promotion and support of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Other topics considered important in the forum are infrastructure and renewable energy, which should serve as a link for closer cooperation between governments, bilateral agreements aimed at protecting migrants, or the fight against organised crime, supported by the Italian government, with the provision of training projects in the field of security. A final point in the priorities of the forum directly concerned the IILA. This organisation was seen as a unique international body in the European context due to its characteristics and should be supported by the forum for the relaunch of relations between the European Union and Latin America. This initiative to strengthen IILA as a privileged interlocutor in relations between the two sides of the ocean was intended to guarantee Italy a leading role in opening up Italian foreign policy to the South Atlantic.

It is noteworthy the temporal concomitance between the EU's interest in Latin America and Italy's, as well as the construction of spaces for interregional and intergovernmental dialogue. In both cases, this coincided with the moment of growth of the subcontinent's relevance in the world economy and international politics.

In fact, in 2012, a study conducted by CeSPI (Centre for International Policy Studies), a think-tank that advises the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate and MAECI on issues concerning Italian foreign policy, recommends – in a framework of high economic growth rates of Latin American countries, in an international scenario of increasing interdependence – the deepening of dialogue with Latin America, which was considered a crucial actor in relation to new common challenges: economic, social, environmental and energy (CeSPI, 2012).

CeSPI's study goes further and indicates the need for Italy to place the region at an unprecedented centrality in its foreign policy, given the rich potential of Latin American domestic markets. In spite of the weakness of the data regarding

trade exchanges in terms of interaction, which marked ninth place for Italy at the time in relation to the subcontinent, and an incidence of the latter of about 2% on Italian relations, the wealth lies in the significant percentage increase of national exports, in the turnover of Italian companies in Latin America³ (of which $\frac{3}{4}$ in Brazil, Argentina and Mexico), second globally, and in the region's status as the first foreign market for Italian construction companies. These data on bilateral relations between Italy and Latin America provide an important picture of the relevance of the region in the process of internationalisation of the Country System (CeSPI, 2012: 7, 12).

In fact, a previous CeSPI study in 2010 showcased the role of Italian entrepreneurship – as a model and as a driving force – in a renewed attention from Italian government institutions in relation to the subcontinent:

Once again, Italy has become interested in Latin America. This turnaround was inspired above all by the Italian business world, attracted by a series of factors: the positive economic cycle of the Latin American subcontinent, which was slowed down but not stopped by the global crisis; the continued openness of Latin American markets to foreign investments; the convergences with Spanish companies that allowed some large Italian groups – such as ENEL – to gain an important position in the Latin American market (CeSPI, 2010, p. 18).

In this way, the 2012 CeSPI report emphasises the Brazilian context, in which the presence of the Italian industry had strengthened during the analysed period: specifically, it emphasises the fact that construction companies obtained 1/3 of the contracts at the national level in Brazil (CeSPI, 2012). However, the rest of the Latin American reality is also impacted by the entrepreneurial interest of significant Italian companies, such as ENEL, for example, indicated as the leading private operator in the region, even though it points out a 2/3 concentration of exports in three relevant states, such as Brazil, Argentina and Mexico, two of which, Argentina and Brazil, were strongly affected by the migratory phenomenon coming from the peninsula (Rossi, 2015).

In November 2018, a new CeSPI report takes stock of the priorities that emerged in the different Italy-Latin America conferences that took place up to 2017. Although it is possible to observe some more concrete interests, such as energy cooperation agreements with Colombia and opportunities in the coal and oil mining sector, or in infrastructure, water, transport and telecommunications in Peru, most of the indications concern projects of intent. The document refers

3 The 34% of Pirelli's turnover is generated in Latin America and Fiat's 36% (CeSPI, 2012: 14).

to the promotion of sustainable development, gender equality, combating climate change, strengthening the rule of law, collaboration in peace processes and the promotion of human rights, and the development of energy networks and infrastructure. Nevertheless, the proposals made are not reflected into action. Even the affirmed interest in the Pacific Alliance remains in a vague “strengthening the participation of our economic system in a very large market” (CeSPI, 2018: 90).

Possibly, the discussion on Mercosur presented a more concrete and proactive approach, proposing a strong participation in the negotiations with the EU, with the aim of guaranteeing not only economic opportunities but also protecting Italy’s food industry. Alongside Germany and Spain but unlike other European countries, Italy was one of the EU Member States most interested in reaching an agreement between the EU and Mercosur. One of its main goals was to gain access to public procurement contracts in the Mercosur bloc (CeSPI, 2018).

Finally, the March 2020 CeSPI report emphasised the importance and need for Italy to assert its leading role as an interlocutor between the EU and Latin America. Indeed, it spoke of the progress of Sanchez’s Spain in the subcontinent, which required an urgent stance on the part of the country and the consequent counter-movement. It is worth noting the suggestions of how to achieve this main role, for example, to look at immigrant communities, which is associated with the exploitation of export opportunities and international remittances from small and medium-sized enterprises. In support of the relevance of the subcontinent, the document reports the turnover of Italian companies abroad, showing a volume of 54.2 billion in Latin America, compared to 38 billion in Asia or 20 billion in Eastern Europe (CeSPI, 2020: 15). It dwells again on the number of Italians in Latin American countries; in December 2018 there were 1,651,278,⁴ of which 842,615 were in Argentina and 447,067 in Brazil, and on the links between this community and Italy: the many Italian-Latin American associations, the foreign constituencies since 1998, and the postal vote since 2001 (CeSPI, 2020: 4). Thus, the concrete links that connect Italian descendants and the national community residing in Italy are shown. In this sense, the report mentions the meeting of parliamentarians from Latin American states of Italian origin (350), of which 166 were in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. In summary, Italy would have all the cards in order to be the protagonist in the relations between the EU and Latin America – product attractiveness, human presence, and

4 Pointing out that this number corresponds to those who hold Italian citizenship, the numbers of Italian-descendants is much higher, and going well over 30 million.

cultural affinities. However, this potential is not expressed in a political and economic projection towards the subcontinent.

This report on the latest Italy-Latin America Conference also emphasises the importance of the subcontinent for the business of Italian SMEs (in Brazil alone, they exceed 300 units). Italian SMEs need greater support from national policymakers with the main aim of building partnerships, gaining a greater understanding of subcontinental trade legislation, and advancing technological development: they need a “system of accompaniment from institutions and the central state” (CeSPI, 2020: 17). Indeed, this highlights how a study on the internationalisation dynamics of Italian companies is much more significant than one on trade volumes in order to understand the potential offered by Latin American countries to the Italian economic system.

Conclusions

This chapter shows a wave-like relationship between Italy and Latin America, with certain moments when Italian interest turned towards the subcontinent. In fact, during both periods of increased attention to Latin American countries – during fascism and in the 21st century – the impetus was provided by Italian companies. On one hand, immigrant communities are understood as an important link between the two sides of the Atlantic and a resource. Nevertheless, the fluid and changing aspect of identity is not taken into consideration, which often produces romanticised readings of an unchanged Italian identity in migratory spaces, both today and in the 1930s. In addition, the contemporary Italian policy, in relation to Latin America, is characterised by low investment in qualified professionals and “brain circulation” of academics, as well as a lack of any research or mobility program linked to Latin American countries.

Indeed, this chapter supports CeSPI’s argument that there is a lack of Italian institutional action in relation to the subcontinent (CeSPI, 2020). This chapter also echoes the words of the intellectual of dependency theory and former Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, in a speech he delivered on European influence in Latin American society in 2000. On that occasion, he mentioned European countries like Spain, England, France and Portugal, but referred to Italians instead of Italy. This choice by Cardoso indicates how the country is perceived by the international community and several actors in Latin America: “a great and influential people that does not have behind it an equally strong system and an equally strong nation, with all the structures it implies: a people without a nation” (CeSPI, 2020: 23).

The director of Pirelli Brazil, in 1989, made a strong point for the company's success: the continuity of its relationship over time. In the case of Italian foreign policy, a lack of this persistence is observed and instead, there is strong intermittence. Moreover, the moments of revival of Italian interest are also characterised by little institutional action. Following the discussions of the Italy-Latin America Conferences, and the reports provided by experts for the International Policy Observatory,⁵ a repetition of the same problems and potentialities can be noticed, with indications that are repeated on the role that the peninsula's foreign policy must play. All this suggests untapped opportunities, a lack of action by the institutions, and an absent organic economic policy aimed at Latin America.

A more pragmatic policy towards immigrant communities, one that actually sought to understand the terms of this Italian-Latin American identity, would also be of great relevance. The development of effective support networks not only for entrepreneurs, but also for the dissemination of Italian culture and the national university system, as done by other European states such as Germany, France, England or even Spain, would allow for a new foreign policy approach, where cultural and economic diplomacy would be associated with building new bonds with immigrant communities. Finally, breaking with the assumption of Latin America as the "Extreme West" (Rouquié, 2007), something distant, but close at the same time, would allow for a real understanding of the political and economic culture of the region, which is often falsely presumed to be understood.

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5 The International Policy Observatory is a cooperative project between the Italian Parliament and the International Affairs Institute, born in 2008. The objective of the project is to support members of parliament, the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and members of the diplomatic-consular network with updated analysis of relevant international topics.

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