

Latin America and the rules-based international order: implications for Japan and Europe

Interview with Maki Kobayashi-Terada



Maki Kobayashi-Terada graduated from Kyoto University (Faculty of Law) and Ecole Nationale d'Administration (Promotion Léon Gambetta). After serving in the Embassy of Japan in France, she worked among others at the South East Asia Division, the UN Policy Division, the Delegation of Japan to the OECD (Trade and Investment), and as Chief of the Economic Section at the Embassy of Japan in Malaysia, Director of Economic Treaties, Director of Mexico, Central America and Caribbean Affairs, Director of European Policy.

Question 1: What is the importance of Latin American and Caribbean countries for Japan?

Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries, despite of their heterogeneity within the region, interconnect closely together and are very active on the international scene. Their languages, in great majority Spanish but also Portuguese, English or French, are strong supports for their soft power, sharing inter-regionally academic works or opinions and influencing each other as well as helping to reach out to a wider international community.

We share fundamental values such as democracy, human rights, rule of law and territorial integrity. For instance, the voting postures of LAC countries at the United Nations regarding the aggression of Ukraine clearly demonstrate this point. We also share the common challenges caused by climate change, infectious diseases or natural disasters. We are thus very important partners to fight for the same causes and against common challenges.

LAC countries are also rich in natural resources and have good networks of free trade and investment with highly developed production capacities. Many Japanese companies are present in LAC countries and enjoy abundant opportunities for investments and trade. They work closely with these countries' companies and communities in the region. As for our global efforts for decarbonization, LAC countries have great sources for green and greener energy as well as critical minerals to be used in clean energy transition.

Since LAC countries are very important and are traditional partners of Japan, we have been working closely to help economic development and social stability in the region. As late Prime Minister Abe announced during his visit, we have been working to grow together, to lead international discussions together and to inspire each other over the last ten years. Now especially, under the current challenging circumstances, LAC countries are as mentioned above even more important players in maintaining international order and restore the governance for that purpose, to secure economic security and to ensure more sustainable growth and stability. Foreign Minister Hayashi, during his visit to the region in January 2023, emphasized the importance of having networks of solidarity with LAC countries for such purposes.

Japan has special ties with LAC countries, and more specifically Latin America, that has received many Japanese immigrants over the past hundred years. Around 60 % of Japanese immigrants and their descendants in the world live in Latin America. Their full integration into local societies and contributions are a factor that helped establish and facilitate cultural and people-to-people ties. These ties played a role in building significant partnerships between Japan and LAC countries.

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Question 2: What role can the LAC region play to defend a rules-based international order?

LAC countries share the fundamental values and they support territorial integrity and the non-use of force to change the *status quo* or to resolve any issues. LAC countries have fought for democracy and freedom, and people in the region have a firm belief in the necessity of a rules-based international order.

Facing the current challenging situation on the global scene, LAC countries have been sharing a sense of urgency in working together to defend and restore an international order based on the rule of law, thus ensure the economic and social stability indispensable for prosperity.

Such positions of LAC and also their capacity for food, mineral or industrial production have increased their importance in the international community under this current critical moment.

On the one hand, since they communicate closely within various sub-regional or regional settings and are very active and vocal members in international fora, we expect that LAC countries can lead discussions together involving academics or media on issue of global concern. Many of them have been working proactively on non-proliferation or disarmament issues, climate change or, more broadly and more importantly now, in upholding the United Nations Charter and strengthening our UN system. LAC countries can persuade other countries and stakeholders which sometimes do not dare to take positions, to defend common causes and protect mutual interests.

On the other hand, the enormous economic capacity of the LAC countries will help ensuring economic resilience of those who might need diversification or face economic coercion. LAC countries have concluded or are negotiating many FTA (free trade agreements) networks inside and outside the region, which support stronger supply chains and increase freer trade while expanding the investments rules sphere.

As LAC countries are strong advocates for territorial integrity and reject economic coercion or use of force to change the *status quo*, and are supporters of economic and social resilience, their firm positions and messages are an important driving force to gather voices of middle or smaller powers to support these principles.

Question 3: How can Japan and the European Union (EU) cooperate better in the building of a rules-based international order and the importance of multilateralism with LAC?

The European Union and its member states, more than other parts of the world, are important actors in a region to which they are connected historically, culturally and economically.

As LAC countries are becoming increasingly important given their role in economic security and given our shared core principles of refusing the change of *status quo* by force, Japan and the European Union will work together to strengthen our solidarity with LAC countries. To achieve this objective, we shall work together for the sustainable and inclusive growth of the region, including through digital transformation and green transformation. Japan and the EU, making use of development cooperation or private-public cooperation based on quality projects, can offer positive options in order to support the resilience of LAC countries, including taking into account climate change consequences for development.

We need to develop our dialogues with LAC partners to listen to each other, to share our understandings and thoughts to find together ways for restoring peace and order for our sustainable future. Each of us shall multiply talks with stakeholders of the region bilaterally or through international fora among political levels, officials or think-tankers. This is the best way to build strong values-based cooperation and development focused on long term common interests.

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