



La CELAC en el escenario contemporáneo de América Latina y del Caribe

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ÍNDICE

| | |
|---|-----|
| Presentación. <i>Adrián Bonilla</i> | 5 |
| Introducción. La integración en la política exterior latinoamericana: Apuntes para el análisis. <i>Grace Jaramillo</i> | 7 |
| La política exterior de México: De Calderón a Peña Nieto. <i>Jorge Chabat</i> | 27 |
| La política exterior latinoamericana y caribeña y la CELAC: Los casos de Cuba, Haití y República Dominicana. <i>Antonio F. Romero G.</i> | 45 |
| Caricom Foreign Policy Since 2009: A Search for Coherence in National and Regional Agendas. <i>Jessica Byron</i> | 79 |
| Política exterior de los países centroamericanos: Una perspectiva general. <i>Carlos Murillo Zamora</i> | 101 |
| La política exterior de la Región Andina. <i>Diana Marcela Rojas</i> | 119 |
| La política exterior de Brasil en perspectiva: Del activismo internacional a la continuidad y pérdida del impulso. <i>Alcides Costa Vaz</i> | 145 |
| La política exterior del Cono Sur: Desafíos y oportunidades. <i>Paz Verónica Milet</i> | 159 |
| Realidad y ficción en las relaciones entre la CELAC y la Unión Europea. <i>Wolf Grabendorff</i> | 175 |
| La CELAC y el momento multilateral contemporáneo <i>Adrián Bonilla</i> | 193 |
| Relación de autores | 207 |

CARICOM FOREIGN POLICY SINCE 2009: A SEARCH FOR COHERENCE IN NATIONAL AND REGIONAL AGENDAS

Jessica Byron⁵¹

Introduction

This chapter analyzes the foreign policy initiatives of the countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), between 2009 and the present⁵². A separate chapter in this volume focuses on Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Although there is no detailed analysis here, reference is made to Haiti because of its CARICOM membership and the resulting implications for regional diplomacy.

A 2009 baseline has been chosen because the global economic recession, which gripped the region at that time, represents a crucial juncture in domestic and foreign policy orientation. Six of the fourteen states experienced electoral changes of government between 2010 and 2013⁵³. GDP growth rates fell from 4.8% in 2007 to negative growth of 0.8% in 2010, rising to a fragile 1.0% in 2012, when the sub-region's average debt burden had reached 65.5% of GDP (Alleyne et al., 2013: p. 8-9). In January 2010, CARICOM's newest member state, Haiti, suffered an earthquake that killed over 230,000 people, generated economic losses amounting to 120% of its GDP and reduced 80% of government revenues (Haiti MSPP, 2013; CARICOM, 2010a). During these years, the main variables shaping foreign policy choices and directions have been economic crisis and the resulting social and political tensions.

Changes in governments did not mean major ideological reorientation but more subtle policy shifts, although Surinamese and Haitian

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52 CARICOM contains fourteen independent members: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago.

53 See www.caribbeanelections.org

elections in 2010 and 2011 gave new regional visibility to their leadership. The focus of most administrations remained on crisis governance, resource-seeking diplomacy and, economic and institutional restructuring programs which were primarily driven by the international financial institutions. Eight states entered into agreements with the International Monetary Fund (Girvan, 2011; Acevedo et al, 2013). Between 2010 and 2013, there was tremendous pressure on regional institutions and processes, rendering some increasingly dysfunctional while pushing others to deepen traditional forms of integration even as their member states also explored uncharted territory. Caribbean actors showed interest in new regional initiatives and explored development partnerships beyond their traditional alignments. In addition, they maintained their traditional economic and security partnerships and a focus on issues of vulnerability, climate change and sustainable development.

The following thematic areas have featured in Caribbean foreign policies since 2009:

- Multilateral diplomacy on sustainable development, climate change, global financial and trade policies, global security initiatives
- Relations with the European Union (EU) and the United States (US)
- The expanding relationship with China
- Old and new forms of regional cooperation

We begin by briefly reviewing Caribbean small states' foreign policy characteristics before outlining the political and institutional context in which foreign policy is developed and implemented. Finally, we elaborate on the agenda outlined above and draw conclusions.

A framework for understanding CARICOM foreign policy

Whatever the paradigm used, Caribbean foreign policy analysis emphasizes the constraints of the geopolitical environment and, an asymmetrical international system compounded by the security and economic vulnerabilities of the actors, their high external dependence

and limited capabilities (Maingot and Lozano, 2005; Sanders, 2005). Some more nuanced analyses have also highlighted strategies used to offset dependence and increase international leverage (Erisman, 1992, 2003; Cooper and Shaw, 2009). CARICOM foreign policy thought is often referred to as “Small State Ideology”, implying that it invokes the specific constraints and permanent vulnerabilities of small size and argues for special concessions in the international system (Braveboy-Wagner, 2008). This small state identity has shaped their diplomacy. They deploy their limited resources taking into account both the risks and benefits attached to international engagement. Like other small developing states, they operate primarily at the regional level, focus their diplomatic resources on multilateral fora and on significant partnerships with more powerful actors. They rely mostly on diplomatic and juridical instruments to pursue goals related to security, international trade and development assistance (Braveboy-Wagner, 2008; Edis, 1991; Commonwealth Secretariat, 1987, 1997).

Caribbean small state discourse, anchored on the twin concepts of vulnerability and support for resilience-building, intensified in the 21st century with the dramatic changes being wrought by economic globalization. Adjustment strategies were intended to increase competitiveness, strengthen national and regional governance and produce more effective diplomacy (Bernal, 2000, Payne and Sutton, 2007). However, restructuring failed to keep pace with global economic liberalization. Weaker administrations, absorbed with domestic challenges, manifested diminished regional coordination or leadership and increasingly divergent foreign policy perspectives. By 2010, Caribbean actors were still focused on adaptation strategies but the prognosis was more somber. Vulnerability remained their defining feature, but the case for special concessions was harder to make in a less receptive international environment with many countries in difficult circumstances. For some small actors, dire fiscal situations, the need for short-term bailouts and political expediency competed with the construction of sustainable development.

Nonetheless, the new global configurations and emerging power centres made it imperative to review international relationships and regional arrangements. They sought to redefine development with a stronger focus on self-help and sustainability and established the

Caribbean Growth Forum in 2012. Additionally, they explored more South-South cooperation and pursued new sources of development funding, even while continuing to call on the international community to revise its economic regimes and cater more to the fragility of Small Highly Indebted Middle Income Countries (SHIMICs).

In this context, CARICOM actors have crusaded mostly, although not entirely, for issues which affect small states. The strategies attached to this world view have included regional integration, “club diplomacy” and diverse coalitions, multilateralism and the pursuit of specific themes in international institutions that are important for their development goals: lobbying for the reform of international trade and financial regimes, a focus on global environmental policies, development assistance and the security concerns of small, vulnerable societies (Braveboy-Wagner, 2008; Cooper and Shaw, 2009; Dookeran, 2013a).

CARICOM countries support the international norms of sovereignty, territorial integrity and equality for all states, non-discrimination and the right to sustainable human development. Three countries, Dominica, Guyana and Suriname make explicit reference in their constitutions to the principle of social justice at national and international levels. While respecting political and ideological pluralism, in their domestic and subregional space they promote the norms of representative democracy, non-aggression and the peaceful settlement of disputes. A cross section of foreign policy and mission statements also refer to protecting the interests of nationals, outreach to their diasporas, promoting multilateral cooperation, and developing their economies by facilitating international trade and investment.⁵⁴

Institutional Framework for Foreign Policy Formulation and Implementation

The foreign ministries and their political directorates are the primary agencies responsible for the management of external relations. Although all the ministries are small by international standards, Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados and Guyana have considerably stronger institutional capacity with which to conduct their diplomacy and to exercise regional leadership. The remaining states have minuscule

⁵⁴ Foreign policy statements for Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad accessed 9/02/2014.

foreign affairs establishments. For the six members of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), national capabilities are supplemented by some degree of foreign policy coordination and joint diplomatic representation organized through the OECS Secretariat. CARICOM also has a mandate for foreign policy coordination.

Each country conducts diplomatic relations with well over 100 states, primarily at the multilateral level. The four larger countries each hold membership in between 46 to 50 international organizations, while each smaller state has membership in between 38 and 45 organizations. Smaller countries have approximately ten foreign missions each, a handful of general consulates and a network of honorary consuls. The four larger states have between 18 and 22 foreign missions each and a small number of general consulates (Foreign Ministry websites; CIA World Factbook, 2013). CARICOM states' missions are concentrated in North American and European locations and many are accredited both to multilateral organizations and to individual countries. During the last decade, representation in Asia and Latin America increased, while their presence in Africa remains limited but is complemented by interaction in the forums of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), Commonwealth and the United Nations (UN).

Foreign policy decision-making in such small units is strongly influenced by global systemic factors and by individual variables, specifically the personalities and ideological perspectives of the chief policy-makers (Braveboy-Wagner, 2008; Hey, 2003). In most cases, decision-making is highly centralized and the political leadership exercises keen oversight of the foreign policy domain. Two Prime Ministers (Antigua and Dominica) hold the portfolio of Foreign Affairs while in most other states, the foreign minister is a senior political ally. The foreign ministries work closely with trade and investment agencies, legal and national security ministries, finance and development ministries and during the past decade of new directions in development cooperation, ministries of health and education. Ever since the 1990s, some foreign ministries have engaged in administrative restructuring and technical capacity building. There is also a greater participation of non-state actors, especially private sector interests and civil society groups in economic policy-making and diplomacy (Braveboy-Wagner, 2008; Byron, 2008).

Many CARICOM constitutions state that the task of Parliament is to “make laws for the peace, order and good government of the country” (e.g. Constitutions of Barbados, Bahamas, Dominica, Trinidad). All the parliaments have a role in the conduct of foreign policy through their ratification of international agreements and their annual scrutiny of the budget. Many have deliberated on IMF structural adjustment programs during the last five years. Parliamentary participation in certain foreign policy themes has been institutionalized, e.g. in the case of European Union-ACP relations through the ACP-EU Parliamentary Assembly and the institutions of the CARIFORUM Economic Partnership Agreement. Or in the OECS case, it was the creation of the OECS Parliamentary Assembly in 2012. However, most CARICOM parliaments do not systematically monitor foreign policy matters in general. It depends on the level of organization of political parties and parliamentary committees and the commitment and expertise of individual parliamentarians or civil society organizations to monitor and lobby for transparent disclosure and discussion of foreign policy developments that hold major implications for the society. An illustration of this was the Jamaican parliament’s deliberations on a US extradition request in 2010, which led ultimately to a change in the government’s leadership (Luton, 2010; Jamaica Gleaner, 2009).

CARICOM’s treaty objectives include the coordination of foreign policy. The Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) reviews and coordinates policies on a range of multilateral issues. It contributes to managing relations among its member states and with the wider hemispheric environment, often by establishing frameworks for regular policy dialogue, economic and development cooperation with partner countries. COFCOR has achieved partial success in these activities, primarily in policy coordination in global multilateral institutions and in strengthening the leverage of its fourteen states through collective action. In the period under review, different states have demonstrated leadership in various areas of collective policy, namely Guyana, Belize and Jamaica on climate change and sustainable development; Trinidad on security issues and the global financial systems; St. Vincent and Trinidad on regional integration themes; Jamaica on matters relating to Haiti; Jamaica, Trinidad, Guyana and OECS countries on Latin American

integration. But there are also quite intractable challenges to foreign policy coordination.

The Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) manages intra-Community economic cooperation and supervises international economic relations. COTED and its subsidiary, the CARICOM Office of Trade Negotiations, have directed bilateral and multilateral trade and development negotiations since 1997. COTED has an ever more complex agenda. In addition to the routine trade disputes and challenges of implementing the CSME program, the last decade has witnessed increasingly divergent national economic interests, resulting in unilateral actions, which have challenged CARICOM coordination. At times, collective decisions have been fuelled by the initiatives of individual states threatening to defect from Community policies perceived to be outdated⁵⁵. CARICOM has made efforts in revising its regimes to increase flexibility and provide more space for member states' diversity⁵⁶.

Finally, CARICOM Heads of Government meet twice annually to consult on community and international affairs. Between 2010 and 2013, there was an intensification of high-level diplomatic consultations at these summits involving the Presidents of Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, the Chief Minister of St. Martin, Secretaries-General of the UN and the OAS, the Presidents of the World Bank and the IDB and the EU Development Commissioner, EU and ACP ministerial representatives (CARICOM Secretariat, 2010, 2011, 2012).

CARICOM's Global Governance Agenda

CARICOM has historically shown greater coordination in its contribution to global policy-making than in some other areas of foreign policy. These are generally broad normative issues, which have externally imposed timelines and regional agencies provide technical and logistical support in the preparation of collective positions. Climate change was confirmed as a priority issue in 2009

⁵⁵ Trinidad and Tobago led the way in initiating trade agreements with the Dominican Republic and with Costa Rica.

⁵⁶ This has been the case with Belize in SICA and Guyana and Suriname in UNASUR.

when the region published its Declaration of Liliendaal which was followed up with an Implementation Plan for a Regional Framework for Resilience to Climate Change in 2012. This work was coordinated by the CARICOM Centre for Climate Change in Belize. CARICOM states work closely with, and periodically chair the AOSIS lobby at the UN. Efforts focus now on rallying international financial and technical support for their adaptation program (Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2013; Scobie, 2013).

A related priority area has been the UN Sustainable Development Agenda post-2015. In preparation for the 2014 Samoa Conference on the Special Needs of Small Island Developing States, CARICOM states in July 2013 in Jamaica approved a Caribbean Policy Document for post 2015. They also set up a regional taskforce to coordinate their further involvement in defining global Sustainable Development Goals. Regional priorities include moving beyond using GDP as a measure of development, having stronger implementation and accountability mechanisms for international commitments, poverty reduction and climate change adaptation (CARICOM, 2013a; Scobie, 2013).

In line with the group's security agenda and supported by IMPACS, their regional security coordination agency, CARICOM states participated actively in the negotiation and adoption of the UN Arms Trade Treaty in New York, 2012–2013. The global regime is viewed as an important boost to their national efforts to curb small arms trafficking and the escalation of gun violence. IMPACS and Trinidad led CARICOM's participation in these negotiations (Joseph, 2013).

Trinidad has also played a leading role in CARICOM's calls for multilateral financial policy reforms. CARICOM's diplomacy has hammered away at the international community's policies, advocating greater support for SHIMICs (Dookeran, 2013b; Spencer, 2012). Regional spokespersons (Dominica, 2011; Haiti, 2013) have applauded World Bank and IMF support for the regulation of the Caribbean financial sector (CARTAC) and the extended access of OECS countries to the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust Fund. But they have also called for an expanded disaster insurance fund and a more determined focus on the rehabilitation of Haiti. In 2012

and 2013, there were three regional consultations with the IMF, culminating in the release of an IMF research paper *Caribbean Small States: Challenges of High Debt and Low Growth* (IMF, 2013).

Maintaining ‘Old’ Partnerships – the United States and the European Union

US-Caribbean relations improved considerably after the 2008 election of President Obama. Security cooperation was given a new orientation with the launch of the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative in 2010, which has to date received funding of US\$263 million from the United States. In addition to narcotics and arms interdiction, the cooperation has emphasized citizen security, programs for vulnerable youth, justice reform and anti-corruption. CARICOM IMPACS plays a coordinating role in implementation. Four annual Caribbean-US Security Dialogues have been held, which include consultation with various Caribbean interest groups (US State Department, 7/12/2013). After a long period of doldrums, a new trade policy initiative was launched with the signing of a US-CARICOM Trade and Investment Framework Agreement in Trinidad, in May 2013 by the US Vice President and by the CARICOM's Chair, Haitian President Martelly. The US-CARICOM Council on Trade and Investment had its inaugural meeting in November 2013 with an agenda for further trade liberalization, e-commerce development and intellectual property protection (US Trade Representative, 2013). CARICOM-US merchandise trade for 2012 was valued at US\$22 billion. Most of this trade is accounted for by Trinidad. Many other countries have trade deficits with the United States which, nonetheless, remains among the top three trade partners for them all (WTO, 2012). Finally, CARICOM states have consistently advocated for Cuba's reintegration into hemispheric organizations and collaborated with the United States on Haiti's post-earthquake rehabilitation.

The current period has witnessed the difficult implementation of the 2008 European Union-CARIFORUM Economic Partnership Agreement against the background of the Eurozone Crisis and economic woes in most CARIFORUM states. The process has been plagued with delays despite the existence of funding in the amount of 140 million Euros for 2012-2015 to facilitate implementation.

By 2011, all joint institutions provided for in the treaty had been constituted and convened, except for the Consultative Committee which would facilitate the participation of civil society. By 2013, most countries had established national implementation committees. Some were struggling to introduce the first round of tariff reductions due in 2011, in the context of debt, recession, austerity programs, and their dependence on customs revenues. All were challenged by the legislative and institutional changes required by the EPA (Lindsay, 2013; Gomes, 2013; Banks, 2013). The second round of tariff cuts was due in 2013. Even before more substantial tariff eliminations, 2011 statistics showed EU-CARIFORUM trade at 8 billion Euros, with a CARIFORUM trade deficit of 2.2 billion Euros (EU Commission, 2013). With the exception of the Dominican Republic, few CARIFORUM countries have yet made significant progress in exploiting the provisions of the EPA to gain new market access and build competitiveness. Although the EU remains a substantial trade partner, with the exception of Guyana and Trinidad, merchandise exports to Europe have declined sharply since 2007.

The EU in 2011 published a new global development policy *Agenda for Change* that focuses frontally on the least developed countries. Most Caribbean countries are classified as Middle Income Countries. A Joint Caribbean-EU Partnership Strategy was approved in 2012, which lists priority cooperation areas as regional integration, Haitian reconstruction, crime and security, climate change, natural disaster management and joint action in multilateral fora. Over 40% of the Caribbean allocation in the 11th European Development Fund (2014-2020) may be destined for Haiti as a Least Developed Country (www.welcomeeurope.com). It is envisaged that development finance may be increased by blending ODA with other sources of funding. The Caribbean Investment Facility was set up for this purpose in 2012 with available EU funding of 40 million Euros (Sherriff, 2014).

...And Building New Ones

During the years of crisis, China emerged as a major investor and development partner in the Caribbean. China's original focus on neutralizing Taiwan's presence has broadened to include significant loans and grants for physical infrastructural development featuring

projects such as highways, bridges, dams, sea walls, air and sea ports and public buildings. Chinese firms have also invested in extractive and agricultural industries and in tourism. Between 2003 and 2011, Chinese FDI in the Caribbean, including Cuba, increased 500% (Bernal, 2013). China-Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forums were held in 2005, 2007 and 2011 to develop business relations and bilateral agreements were signed with many countries (Sanchez, Tu L., 2012; CNC Forum, 2013). Finally, in May 2013, Xi Jipin made the first visit by a Chinese president to the CARICOM region, meeting with eight CARICOM leaders in Trinidad, offering a further US\$3 billion in loans and an expanded scholarship program for tertiary students (Fontaine, 2013; Wigglesworth, 2013). Cultural cooperation has advanced with the establishment of Confucius Centres in Jamaica and Trinidad and there is limited military cooperation with both countries.

Nine CARICOM countries have bilateral relations with China. Nonetheless, there is no collective CARICOM policy towards China and five countries maintain diplomatic links with Taiwan (Bernal, 2013). While China ranks among the top ten trade partners for most CARICOM countries, trade flows are extremely asymmetrical and CARICOM countries have the task of developing their own exports of goods and services to this new market (WTO, 2012; Sanchez, Tu L., 2012; CNC Forum, 2011).

Expanding Regional Cooperation Spaces

The last three years have witnessed advances *and* setbacks in regional integration. The OECS member states revised the Treaty of Basseterre and established their Economic Union in June 2010. Various new institutions were inaugurated, including the East Caribbean Parliamentary Assembly in 2012, and associate membership agreements are being negotiated with the French Caribbean. On the negative side, the collapse of regional banking and insurance companies in 2009-2010 wiped out approximately 10% of GDP in the East Caribbean Currency Union (IMF, 2013) plunging the Central Bank authorities into crisis containment mode (ECCB, 2013).

CARICOM experienced a deepening crisis of governance, credibility, member state antagonisms and indifference between 2009 and 2011, when implementation of the Single Market and Economy agenda was suspended. However, the members also selected new administrative leadership and in 2012 endorsed proposals for institutional rationalization. National consultations began in June 2013 on a five-year strategic plan. Despite the grouping's challenges, the French Caribbean and Netherlands Antilles applied for associate membership in 2012-2013. The Caribbean Public Health Agency was launched in 2011, there are notable success stories among the other functional agencies and work continues on regulating the regional financial sector.

The community agenda has been partly dominated by Haitian developments -humanitarian relief and reconstruction consultations-with the international community after January 2010 (CARICOM, 2010a, 2010b). In 2011, CARICOM collaborated with the OAS to observe Haitian presidential elections, also granting Haiti three years of non-reciprocal market access and business travel facilitation. In 2013, Haiti assumed the rotating chairmanship of the organization and hosted its first CARICOM summit.

Relations with the Dominican Republic have cooled despite President Medina's overtures in 2013 and continued expressions of interest in CARICOM membership. Haiti's concerns and human rights considerations influenced CARICOM's recent response to the nationality ruling of the Constitutional Court of the Dominican Republic –its suspension of consideration of the Dominican Republic's accession (CARICOM, 2013b; CARICOM, 2013c).

Conversely, Cuba-CARICOM relations are anchored in strong ties of solidarity, multilateral and bilateral cooperation agreements, and maintained by annual ministerial meetings and triennial summits. Almost all states have missions in Cuba and benefit from an extensive program of technical cooperation that emphasizes health and education. Since 2011 when the Cuban Congress approved new guidelines for economic policy, the management of cooperation has been evolving towards greater rationalization and pragmatism, more triangulation of aid and counterpart contributions from recipient

governments. Cuba-CARICOM trade flows are modest but with scope for expansion, especially in services.

Brazil's engagement with CARICOM was earlier centered on bilateral links with Guyana (Partial Scope Agreement, 2001), Suriname and Haiti. In April 2010, Brazil's Caribbean presence strengthened dramatically with their first multilateral summit in Brasilia. It now has bilateral agreements and embassies in at least 11 CARICOM countries and accreditation to CARICOM and the OECS. Six CARICOM countries have embassies in Brasilia. Twenty-one cooperation agreements were signed in 2010 and approximately 9% of Brazil's technical cooperation funding was allocated for Caribbean projects. Brazil has focused technical cooperation programs on agriculture, health, education and training and disaster management. It has become a donor member of the Caribbean Development Bank (Brazilian Cooperation Agency, 2011; Declaration of Brasilia, 2010). A second multilateral summit, planned for Suriname since 2012 is still in the planning stages. CARICOM regards Brazil as a strategic partner on Haitian reconstruction, trade and development and global governance issues.

CARICOM's coordinating functions have also been increasingly challenged by a proliferation of regional integration initiatives and the divergent priorities of its members. The lack of cohesion is most evident in engagements with PetroCaribe, ALBA, UNASUR and MERCOSUR. Twelve member-states participate in PetroCaribe as part of their efforts to reduce energy import bills and access development funding. They now procure over 50% of fuel imports from Venezuela. Barbados and Trinidad opted out, arguing that PetroCaribe would accelerate foreign debt and undermine CSME arrangements (Bryan in Cooper and Shaw, 2009: p. 149-150). In addition to becoming the foundation for Venezuelan trade and investment with the Caribbean, the deferred payments scheme of PetroCaribe has generated financing for a range of social programs in participating countries in the past decade (PetroCaribe, 2013). However, debates about the longer-term political and economic sustainability of the program continue (Jacome, 2011). Moreover, President Chavez' administration essentially transformed the Venezuelan partnership from a multilateral one grounded in CARICOM institutions to a series of bilateral arrangements with

PetroCaribe beneficiaries and further economic cooperation within ALBA.

Four OECS states joined ALBA from 2008-2013 and Haiti is described as a “guest member”. They participate fully in the development cooperation activities and moderately in ALBA’s foreign policy coordination. Some are full contributors to ALBA Bank but none have joined the Sucre monetary system. They maintain that the OECS and CARICOM are still their primary reference points for foreign policy coordination. However, there appears to be no routine procedure for dialogue on alternative regional cooperation systems within the CARICOM or OECS policy framework. The question of competing commitments in larger and more influential organizations will certainly be posed with renewed urgency following the 2013 accession of Guyana and Suriname as associate members to MERCOSUR (Mercopress, 2013). Both have been members of UNASUR since 2008.

Finally, CARICOM participation in the development of CELAC has been led by Jamaica, Trinidad and Guyana since 2008. CELAC is perceived as a valuable mechanism for foreign policy coordination that offers CARICOM full representation in its leadership structure and could provide additional leverage for global governance concerns. However, organized support from the CARICOM Secretariat and from member states will be required to build on the CELAC diplomatic opportunity. Thus far, CARICOM’s institutional engagement has been weak.

Conclusion

The review shows increasing cooperation with non-traditional partners for CARICOM, particularly since 2009. This is attributed to a shifting international landscape, changing relations with traditional partners, economic necessity and evolving political and ideological configurations in all countries concerned. Latin American-Caribbean integration has broadened and deepened and in the process, new regional identities and interests are emerging.

Regional exchanges are heavily weighted towards development cooperation, although these have potential for increasing commercial

flows. CARICOM actors are largely on the receiving end. South and Central American countries (Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, Guatemala) are significant trade partners only for seven CARICOM states and most have conspicuous trade deficits with Latin America (WTO, 2012). External debt to Venezuela has risen sharply with PetroCaribe (Jacome, 2011). Redressing these imbalances and constructing a foundation for sustainable regional integration will only happen through domestic economic restructuring, the generation of new growth sectors and greater emphasis on transport and communications networks between Latin America and the Caribbean.

The CARICOM/OECS models of integration remain integral elements of these small states' survival and development strategies. Sub-regional foreign policy coordination, although under-utilized at times, provides them with more coherence, better preparation and, a more effective platform for multilateral diplomacy. However, CARICOM's regional vision must be critically overhauled in light of the transformed external environment. Institutional reform has so far focused on managerial efficiency and a reduced regional agenda (Landell Mills, 2012). Other influential voices have, however, argued that minimalist reforms will render the grouping less relevant and that there should be broader approaches to reshaping Caribbean regionalism and harnessing forces of convergence (Gonsalves, 2012; Dookeran, 2013). This will require a more proactive and better resourced COFCOR and COTED, support by member governments for fulsome deliberations on LAC integration, and for some states, more effective harnessing of regional and national political and technical expertise in crafting and implementing foreign policy.

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