



VIRTUAL MEETING

“Workshop on inter-secretariat work”

Rapporteur's report

Virtual Meeting “Workshop on inter-secretariat work”
5 April 2024
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BACKGROUND AND GENERAL INFORMATION

In compliance with the agreements reached during the meeting of the VIII Summit of CELAC (Kingstown, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, 1 and 2 March 2024), among the secretaries of the organisations participating in the inter-secretariat work, a virtual working meeting was held on 5 April this year to coordinate the work of the various designated focal points. This event was convened by the Permanent Secretariat of the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA) to confirm the proposed schedule of meetings and the working methodology for the 2024 period, and to specify the leadership of each organization on the work axes already defined in the previous period.

Participants included representatives and focal points of the following regional integration organisations: the Andean Community (CAN); the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI); the Central American Integration System (SICA); the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America - Peoples' Trade Agreement (ALBA-TCP); the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) and the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA).

The workshop was opened by Ambassador Clarems Endara, Permanent Secretary of SELA, who welcomed the participants, expressed his gratitude for the participation of the various Secretariats and expressed his agreement with the ratification of the willingness of the integration mechanisms to maintain the forum on intersectionality with the objective of continuing with the work of convergence among the Secretariats.

He pointed out that inter-secretariat work had been constructive, which was once again evident in the meeting held between the various secretaries and directors within the framework of the VIII Summit of CELAC. He noted that this meeting reaffirmed the need and convenience of insisting on joint work, and underscored the progress made in the search for a common regional agenda, in which connection he reiterated the importance that SELA attaches to this mechanism. He expressed his confidence in the commitment of the authorities and in the coordination capacity that is being generated as an expression of a new stage in the region, in which regional and subregional integration mechanisms wish to work jointly to consolidate the relations that will strengthen regional convergence.

He recalled the two purposes of inter-secretariat work: to avoid duplication of functions and to promote regional convergence. He added that, although there is an effort at the CELAC level, the work that the integration mechanisms have been conducting in the construction of common issues is quite old and has an extremely high institutional and normative value. In this regard, he commented that there are projects that have already been financed and that can serve as an example of best practices that can be assimilated to consolidate regional projects. He explained that, in this regard, five areas or pillars decided by all the secretariats had been worked on, which coincided with a large part of the agenda prioritised by the countries within the framework of CELAC.

He noted that, under this prioritisation, several meetings were held to determine the integration mechanism that has made the most progress on any of the issues to shape regional public policies, either through documents or through projects that could be implemented for the benefit of the region.

SUMMARY OF INTERVENTIONS

Jean Paul Guevara, on behalf of SELA, reviewed the work that has been conducted since December 2022. To that end, he referred to the five defined areas of work: i) food and nutrition security; ii) production chains; iii) disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation; iv) sustainable energy and electricity integration; and v) cross-border cooperation and infrastructure. He also referred to the two paths defined to conduct the convergence work: on the one hand, the holding of face-to-face thematic seminars, as spaces for dialogue, exchange of experiences and identification of points of convergence. On the other hand, the methodology of a matrix of policies, programmes and thematic actions of each of the participating organisations.

He then referred to the four thematic seminars that took place in 2023 with the presence of the secretaries of the different organisations, namely: “Seminar on food and nutrition security” (20 April, San Salvador); “Seminar on regional energy integration” (21 April, San Salvador); “Seminar on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation” (9 May, Guatemala City); and the “Seminar on production chains in Latin America” (27 July, Montevideo).

He also spoke of the technical work meetings held to consolidate the thematic matrices: “Food and nutrition security” (27 September); “Production chains” (4 October); “Sustainable energy and energy integration” (6 October); and “Cross-border cooperation and infrastructure” (11 October). At these meetings, he explained, in addition to validating the information in the matrices, some graphic diagrams were presented to summarise them. Thus, he said, progress was made in a second round of meetings with the workshop “Production chains: tools for the identification of products and sectors,” led by ALADI and held on 8 October last year, with the participation of SELA.

As results and achievements, he commented that the space for coordination, harmonisation, complementarity, and convergence of agendas among the different organisations had been consolidated, and that mutual knowledge had been obtained from the matrices of each integration organisation, which was a necessary step to achieve full alignment of agencies and convergence of actions. Another achievement, he pointed out, was

the institutional strengthening of the secretariats themselves based on shared experiences. Other achievements included the signing of the *Declaration of Saint Vincent*¹, which took place within the framework of the VIII Summit of CELAC, where the progress, commitment, and willingness to continue building convergence were demonstrated.

He then presented the issues under consideration at the Workshop, namely: i) adopting a preliminary schedule of meetings; ii) the working methodology; iii) the leadership for organising the technical meetings on the five themes. In addition, it included the identification of common points on each specific topic.

At first, the possibility arose that those who had organised the face-to-face seminars could take charge of the respective themes. Thus, ALADI took on the topic of production chains; SICA, food and nutrition security; ACS, climate change and disaster risk; and CAN, cross-border cooperation. However, in order to define how to assume this responsibility, it was finally proposed that each organisation formally send a note making known its preference and possibility.

On behalf of the Andean Community, Director Alberto Lora, in response to the proposal, informed that the General Secretariat of the Andean Community supports the progress of the work being conducted by SELA with the various organisations. He reaffirmed his commitment to organize the event on cross-border cooperation and infrastructure and added that Ambassador Gonzalo Alfonso Gutiérrez, Secretary-General of the Andean Community, is interested in holding the meeting in his subregion, for which they are preparing the respective project.

He went on to point out that cross-border cooperation is an issue on which the Andean Community has been developing several actions. One of these, he explained, consisted of resuming work related to border integration between the four Andean countries, through the reactivation of the High-Level Group on Border Integration and Development (GANIDF). A second action is that developed through the Community Interoperability Project "INTERCOM," which aims to interconnect the different customs offices of the countries for the facilitation of trade and the digitalisation of existing instruments in Andean regional trade, through the exchange of customs and foreign trade data among the computer systems of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. A third action, he said, is the creation of the Regional Centre for Phytosanitary Intelligence to strengthen the prevention and management of pests in the countries of the Andean Community, prioritising the FOC R4T and on which the Andean Community is collaborating with partners such as FAO, ICA, and CAF, among others.

¹Available at: ***Declaration of Saint Vincent***

On behalf of SICA, Director Ingrid Figueroa Santamaría said that, as regards the event on food and nutrition security scheduled to be held in June, given that at the moment there is no designated Secretary-General, she requested SELA to lead the event, in coordination and with the support of SICA.

Benjamín Blanco, Deputy Secretary of ALADI, then reported on the “Seminar-Workshop on Production Linkages” that took place at its headquarters and reaffirmed the willingness to continue working on this prioritised pillar. He then raised the need to include the digital agenda in the issue of production chains and, in this respect, he informed that there had already been some conversations between the ALADI Secretary and the Secretary of the Andean Community during which it was proposed that the axis of productive value chains include the digital agenda.

He stated that ALADI would be convening a virtual meeting in the coming weeks to review the charts presented on productive value chains, together with the new dimension that would be added. Regarding the proposed digital agenda, he said that it is a topic shared by several organisations with reference to digital certification of origin; digital signature; e-commerce; interoperability of the Foreign Trade Single Windows (VUCE) and paperless cross-border trade, among others.

He also shared that ALADI had developed the Pymes Latinas Grandes Negocios platform, which he placed at the disposal of the other secretariats with a view to identifying possibilities for complementarity, building synergies, and feeding the platform. He also explained the business meetings held by the Association through Expo ALADI, a well-known brand in the region, which could also be used to identify possibilities for complementarity with the other macro business meetings held in the region (for example, the Andean Community). He added that they also have virtual meetings that take place during the business connection weeks. All of this, he pointed out, in addition to virtual training and training and capacity building courses that could be worked on among all the organisations, proposing joint offers that would benefit all citizens. ALADI's proposal is to identify these areas of convergence, he said.

Finally, he considered the methodological proposal presented to be adequate, pointing out that it is possible to work on the format of subsets to find out where there is interest from all the organisations in participating, contributing, and promoting cooperation among the integration organisations of the region through the exchange of experiences and the strengthening of the capacities installed in each one of the organisations. He proposed that ALADI convene a virtual meeting in the coming weeks and specified that each thematic area

would require a specific meeting.

Afterwards, **Ambassador Clarems Endara, Permanent Secretary of SELA**, informed that FAO is also developing a regional work on food and nutrition security, commissioned by CELAC, at whose VII Summit it was presented. However, he pointed out that, after a conversation with the Director-General of FAO for the region, Mario Lubetkin, it was agreed to conduct a joint work so that the Secretariats can reinforce their possibilities in this area. Therefore, there is no difficulty for SELA, in coordination with FAO, to conduct the event on food security.

With respect to the proposal of productive articulation with the digital agenda, he considered it very appropriate because it complements productive articulation with the scope of digital agendas, an issue that is also of interest and appears in the charts as a great coincidence on the part of all integration mechanisms. He pointed out that we are all making an important effort to advance in this digital world, to understand it in a uniform way, even conceptually, until it is used in an analogous or harmonious way in the region, but that, subsequently, it should transcend through training at the level of cyber-diplomacy, such as the one carried out by SELA.

| CONCLUSIONS

1) All participants appreciated the resumption of the inter-secretariat work meetings and were pleased with the organisation and time available, as well as the contributions of the representatives of each Secretariat.

2) Regarding the virtual technical meetings of the focal points, it was established that a monthly meeting will be held in order to make progress on the tasks set forth, seeking the alignment of the agendas within the framework of the mandate received by each of our integration processes.

3) Regarding the calendar of virtual technical meetings, during the month of May, the ALADI Secretariat will organize a workshop on production chains, with a complementary approach to the digital agenda.

4) As for the methodology that will guide the work of the virtual workshops, it was agreed to use the basis of the diagrams and subsets already elaborated, based on the matrices presented by each organisation.

5) Regarding the definition of each Secretariat on the thematic axis of which it would assume the leadership, a deadline was given until 22 April to inform the decision, by means of an official note.

6) With respect to the pending meeting on cross-border cooperation and infrastructure, the Andean Community ratified its commitment to hold it during the second half of May, for which it will count on SELA's support.

7) The Permanent Secretariat of SELA, with the technical support of SICA and in coordination with FAO, will organise the Seminar on food and nutrition security, to be held in June this year.

8) Finally, it was agreed that, in this second phase of the inter-secretariat work, concrete documents should be available as a result of the technical meetings, either a road map or another document leading to a resolution, a proposal for an agreement or a draft programme to be submitted to the authorities of each organisation.