

**MAY 2023**

# **THE EU & LULA: A NEW AGE OF COOPERATION**



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## Abstract

Based on an interview with RUSI's Dr Carlos Solar, this Info Flash explores the implications of the rise to power of Brazil's new president, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva. Commonly seen as the antithesis of the previous president, Jair Bolsonaro, Lula has already made significant changes to Brazil's position on the global stage since his inauguration five months ago. It is likely that there will be a growth in the investment of EU-Brazil cooperation, which will in turn affect European politics, economies, and even security. Though Lula's approach to politics is generally more accepted in Europe, issues may arise due to Brazil's neutrality towards Russia's war on Ukraine. The final section of the text touches on cybersecurity, as significant advancements were made in Lula's previous term as president. The field is relatively developed in Latin America, and investing in it can be beneficial for European security.

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This piece was based on an interview conducted with Dr Carlos Solar, Senior Research Fellow focusing on Latin American security at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). A transcript of the interview can be found following the article.

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## **The Situation in Brazil and its Relevance to the EU**

On January 1, 2023, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, also known as simply Lula, was inaugurated as the President of Brazil (Delivorias & Lazarou, 2023). Previously, he held two terms in office from 2003 to 2010 (Waisbich et al., 2022). A prominent member of the Workers' Party, his stance on social, political, and economic issues are often in line with the European Union's liberal values (Nolte, 2023). Additionally, the policies implemented during his terms made Brazil a key player in world politics and marked what some argue was a "Golden Age" in Brazilian diplomacy (Waisbich et al., 2022).

Conversely, former president Jair Bolsonaro strained Brazil's relationship with the EU due to a lack of harmony between his approach to politics and that of the EU (Nolte, 2023). This includes his lack of investment in the protection of the Amazon rainforest and neglect of the situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in the country (Nowak, 2023). These challenges were exacerbated by his anti-diplomatic and anti-democratic positioning (Nowak, 2023).

In the domestic scene, Brazil is experiencing critical times as the country is plagued with extreme polarisation. The population is, in essence divided between Lula and Bolsonaro supporters, and dialogue between the two groups is rare (Giacomozzi et al., 2022). This phenomenon reached a point of extreme violence on January 8 of this year, when Bolsonaro's supporters raided the Congress buildings in order to protest against Lula's presidential victory (Delivorias & Lazarou, 2023).

Accordingly, the situation in Brazil has significant implications for Europe despite its geographical distance. Apart from being home to the world's largest rainforest, whose protection is important in the EU's agenda– and in addition to being a key trade partner for Europe – Brazil is a strategic partner to the EU since 2007 (EEAS, 2021). This Strategic Partnership encompasses aspects such as sustainability, human rights and security, and the rule of law (EEAS, 2021). Therefore, the current unstable situation in Brazil may have important implications for European armies; for example, Brazil is part of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) regional bloc, with whom the EU also cooperates (EEAS, 2018). EU-CELAC relations implicate political and economic issues and are mutually beneficial, though they are often centered on the EU providing support for CELAC countries (EEAS, 2018).

### **A new age of Brazil-EU Relations and Military Implications**

When it was announced that Lula had won the 2022 Brazilian presidential elections, leaders from all over Europe expressed their satisfaction, including French President Macron, Spanish Prime Minister Sanchez, and European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell (Al Jazeera, 2022). Notably, many of them alluded to the idea that this marks a new age for Brazil that welcomes advancements through dialogue regarding issues such as climate change, which, as aforementioned, Bolsonaro notoriously neglected (Al Jazeera, 2022; Nolte, 2023). However, Dr Solar explains that Lula's victory might not automatically put Brazil into a position of respect vis-à-vis the EU, and it is crucial that Lula works to make the country's standing on the world stage more legitimate. An important gesture is to show commitment to democracy and to change the narrative of distrust that has been built over Bolsonaro's term towards Brazil's democratic institutions.

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The issue of democracy stems from Bolsonaro's anti-democratic rhetoric, illustrated by the January 8 attack on Brazil's Congress building, an act that resembled the storming of Capitol Hill in the United States two years before (Delivorias & Lazarou, 2023). Bolsonaro's supporters distrusted the validity of the election results, which led to the attack (EIU, 2023). A key difference between the attack on Capitol Hill and this one is that the Brazilian armed forces were involved in the attack, deepening the severity and significance of the incident (Oxford Analytica, 2023). It was clearly an attack on democracy, and with Brazil being the fourth most populous democracy in the world, it is an event of international importance (EIU, 2022; World Population Review, 2023). It is therefore in Europe's interest to take appropriate measures to prevent another attack of the sort from taking place in Brazil again, which would further undermine the value of democracy that the EU embraces. Accordingly, Dr Solar explains that the EU has programmes in the continent that tackle hate speech online, and it is generally successful at tackling extremism and radicalism. Just as Lula is expected to invest in democratic institutions in Brazil, Dr Solar states that it would also be important for the EU to use its soft power to push for a stronger democracy in Brazil.

The Brazilian armed forces are also a key factor to be considered. With Bolsonaro's engagement with the military, the armed forces gained significant power to negotiate with traditional politics during his term. On this issue, Dr Solar adds that the boundaries of civil-military relations significantly decreased as a result of Bolsonaro's politics. It is then possible to question if the Brazilian military will face significant changes in its relations with other countries. The EU, however, establishes relationships with governments and not militaries, but armies can set cooperative relationships with other armies around the world. Therefore, it is up to European armies to establish stronger relationships if they want to influence the military future of Brazil, while the EU's power is limited to simply attempting to convince the Brazilian army to invest more in democracy through dialogue.

Dr Solar adds that there will be a long-term shift in the relationships that Lula will prioritise. The EU should also expect that Brazil will invest more in its bilateral relationships with countries like Russia, India, and China, as Lula will likely realign Brazil's international agenda with multilateralism. Accordingly, he will likely limit the investment in relationships that Bolsonaro was devoted to, such as the United States.

### **Latin America's Neutrality on Russia's War in Ukraine**

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, European states have been adamant about their support for Ukrainians. A major issue to be considered in the EU-Brazil relationship is that the latter, just as other Latin American countries, has a highly different approach to the war. Dr Solar points out that since the Cold War, Latin American countries have adopted a non-aligned approach to international conflicts of this nature. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, for example, was disappointed to learn that Lula's approach to the ongoing war was akin to that of Bolsonaro (Grossman, 2023). However, his stance reflects the larger aforementioned trend of non-alignment within the continent. This undermines Europe's plan to provide stronger support for Ukraine and creates a clear sense of antagonism aimed towards Russia; and Dr Solar stresses that Brazil's significant size gives it

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power to undermine Europe. Consequently, a potential outcome of Latin American countries' refusal to follow Europe's lead, when it comes to the war, is that their bilateral relationships may weaken in the long term, especially given the primacy that Europe places on this issue. Instead, Lula proposed the creation of a separate bloc of non-aligned countries with countries like China and India (Grossman, 2023). It should also be noted that Latin American countries have significantly fewer resources than the US and Europe and cannot afford to offer the same support.

Dr Solar points out that it is impossible that Latin America will actually lead in a cause such as the ongoing war, as it does not have the required political will and leadership. In the West, states take strong positions and are not afraid to point fingers, while Latin American countries prefer blaming both sides. Additionally, Latin American countries are afraid of weakening their relationships with countries like China and Russia, which are significant strategic partners and, in the case of Brazil, fellow BRICS member, and will therefore not take any strong stance that might jeopardize those relationships. In essence, Europe's efforts to push Brazil and some states to contribute to the support being sent to Ukraine are futile, as they cannot be relied upon to make such a contribution.

## **Cyber Defence Investment and Strategies**

Finally, we took the chance to discuss the issue of cybersecurity in Latin America, a topic on which Dr Solar recently published a book, titled *Cybersecurity Governance in Latin America: States, Threats, and Alliances*. In it, Dr Solar shows that in 2008 Brazil took a position in tackling cybersecurity issues that were unprecedented in Latin America (Solar, 2023). This came from the 2008 National Defence Strategy, which outlines a series of actions to be taken in order to ensure national security and sovereignty (De Rezende & Blackwell, 2020; Solar, 2023). This was because the region lacked development in the area of cybersecurity, given the limited resources and organization it had, but Brazil was still able to invest in the creation of a coherent cyber defence strategy and create a niche for itself (Solar, 2023).

This is especially relevant as Lula was the president in office in 2008. Moreover, the initiative of having a National Defence Strategy took place during his first term, thus making his contribution to Brazilian security quite significant (De Rezende & Blackwell, 2020). Now, in regard to what Lula's new presidential term might have in store in the field of cybersecurity, Dr Solar states that the government will likely place more importance on its civil component. The importance of looking at cybersecurity beyond its military importance is key during this time in Brazil given the widespread use of the Internet as a tool to spread extremist ideologies and views. Consequently, cybersecurity governance will be enhanced, and relevant laws will be revised.

For the EU, this means that more resources could be invested in its cooperation with Brazil, as cybersecurity strategies are a result of both the investment of national governments and those resulting from partnerships. Additionally, Dr Solar advises the EU to invest more in education, which is crucial for the development of the field of cybersecurity, as high-quality software and hardware do not go far if the skills required to operate them are lacking. Consequently, it is essential that young people also

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## **Final remarks**

While Brazil is going through an time of social and political polarization, Lula's presidency has already proved to be a major driver for change in the relationship that the country has with the EU. It is crucial to understand the current situation in Brazil given the prevalence that it is expected to take within the EU's agenda in the coming years, in addition to the contribution it can make for European security. Despite having opposing views on the critical issue that is the Russia-Ukraine War, Brazil, and the EU appear to be headed towards a more cooperative and harmonious relationship now that Lula is president. The EU must continue to invest its available resources in the security and prosperity of Latin American countries to ensure not only their growth, but also their own ability to thrive as a continent with security.

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## Interview Transcript

Interviewee: Dr Carlos Solar

Interviewer: Mariana Fagotti

Interview date: February 27, 2023

(Redacted)

Mariana: With Lula's presidency there is a very stark difference from Bolsonaro's approach to politics, and when he was in power it put a strain on Brazil's relationship with the EU. When Lula's victory was announced, leaders from all over Europe expressed their satisfaction and were saying they were very happy to work with Brazil again the way they did years ago. So what does Lula have to do to bring Brazil out of this "dark spot" that it was in the last four years; is his victory enough to make European states want to work with Brazil again, or might it be a challenge to gain back their trust?

Dr Solar: There are two angles to this question. One is what Europeans want to see Lula do inside Brazil – everything in relation to the respect for minorities, the environment, and an overall larger commitment to restore democracy in relation to how Bolsonaro left the country. Bolsonaro was in arms against minorities and everything that didn't resemble what he tried to construct towards the far right. He distrusted some of the institutions that have supported Brazil's redemocratization since the 80s and the 90s. So Lula needs to show that he will be strong when it comes to his commitment towards democracy inside Brazil. And then on the other angle is what happens internationally. Bolsonaro drifted away from multilateralism and became really close to those that supported his agenda, like Trump, then the next day he could be traveling to Russia, then he could be meeting with Indian or Chinese authorities. Clearly, by the end of his presidency, he had made adversaries within Europe, especially those that minded democratic global governance, respect for international law and its institutions, forums for trade and commerce, and climate change. Lula will have to act in those two tracks: telling everyone elsewhere that Brazil is en route towards more democracy, and also that Brazil is gravitating more towards multilateralism.

Mariana: Actually my next question is about the issue of democracy in Brazil. In the beginning of the year, there was a tumultuous start to Lula's presidency with the attack on the Brazilian government buildings, which resembled the storming of Capitol Hill two years before. A key difference in Brazil was that the armed forces were actually involved and allowed for it to happen, so it was a clear attack on democracy and therefore something of international importance. So what can the EU do from afar to prevent other similar attacks from happening in Brazil, given that the phenomenon of Bolsonarismo is still very prevalent in Brazilian society?

Dr Solar: There are many programmes that the EU can do, it depends on what Brazil sets as a priority in terms of defending democracy. One of them could be directed towards far-right movements, and the EU is quite knowledgeable in tackling extremism and radicalism. There are some EU funds programmes elsewhere in continental Europe aimed at tackling hate speech and so on, so that could be one angle. The EU could also be working on strengthening institutions of democracy, like access to justice and courts. Bolsonaro was also quite active in tilting the justice system towards Bolsonarismo.

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Another aspect could be more transparency when it comes to institutional processes, and that's where the armed forces fit quite well. The armed forces, before and under Bolsonaro, became a lobbying institution that gained a lot of space to negotiate with traditional politics. With Bolsonaro, the military realized that they had a partner in government, so they had no limits on civil-military relations. There were many generals who sided with Bolsonaro, and Lula is now kicking them out and refreshing the military ranks. The EU is quite good at supporting programmes that strengthen political institutions. There are many that range from supporting housing and health programmes, to those that are a bit more intricate and delicate, such as those involving the military. Now, the EU doesn't necessarily have relationships with the armies, they mostly have relationships with governments. Armies can set military-to-military diplomatic relations with other armies around Europe, so it wouldn't necessarily be an EU kind of thing. However, the EU could clearly generate a narrative aimed towards the armies of EU members to start pushing for better democratic engagement from their counterparts in Brazil. So it's not a direct relationship between the EU and the Brazilian army, but rather the EU can sway its partners when it comes to military-to-military diplomacy with Brazil.

Mariana: That is very on-brand with Europe, using soft power to control a certain narrative. And the Common Defense and Security Policy is an important instrument in elevating common European security. Brazil, as well as CELAC, are strategic partners. So, how will European security be impacted as a result of Brazil's new era?

Dr Solar: It's hard to diagnose at this point. Latin American countries have been very shy when it comes to the Ukraine war, which is Europe's number one priority. They have voted against Russia in the UN, but it can clearly be seen that Lula, for instance, is promoting an alternative path towards peace, which sounds more like the plan that China is also promoting. When it comes to peace negotiations, the Ukrainians and the rest of Western Europe don't want to hear about any alternative plans because it would entail giving too much to the Russians. Lula is playing his cards with his recent trip to Washington, but in March he is going to China, so who knows what he is going to promise to Xi Jinping in terms of creating a common front towards this alternative path towards peace. It clearly undermines what Europe is trying to do, which is to convey a consolidated front against the Russians by clearly backing up the Ukrainians. Overall in Latin America, they are doing very little for Ukraine. They let President Zelensky speak in Congress, but not without any polemics. In Chile, the communist party was against Zelensky speaking in Congress, so even within countries there are some sides that don't want to have anything to do with the war. They will just condemn Russia because it looks good for their ministries of foreign affairs, to go to the UN and be on the "green list" of votes. In the region, only Nicaragua voted against the latest UN resolution last week. The EU is taking action and wants other countries to follow suit, and maybe Lula will. The EU and the US are sending and training troops and sending many resources to Ukraine. When it comes to Latin American countries, they seem out of touch with reality. It seems that they can promise but they won't deliver; they won't risk any altercation with China or with Russia. The Brazil-Russia relationship has served every single president. Lula committed to Russia because of BRICS, and Bolsonaro also committed to Russia because it was part of this semi-authoritarian, anti-Western type of movement. But now, for popularity reasons, Lula won't be very close to Russia. He will try to set these alternative peace plans, as he did with BRICS,

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which wasn't very anti-Western, but they were definitely an alternative to the Western world. So Lula will continue on that side, and that will generate some noise in the EU. For instance, the military-to-military diplomatic relations discussed earlier follow a certain channel of geopolitics, but overall geopolitics (for example, Lula's relationship with EU officials) will be tainted by this reluctance to approach peace in the way the EU is proposing. The way Latin American countries are proposing to approach the war gives too much attention to Russia, which is something the EU won't accept.

Mariana You just touched on the topic I was going to bring up next. I was going to ask what the future of Brazil-Russia relations would look like, because Lula said that Russia and Ukraine are both to blame for the war, which, like you said, is a very different approach to what Europe has. So we can see that there definitely will be a lot of cooperation between Russia and Brazil.

Dr Solar: Most countries have proposed something like this. They want to see how the conflict comes to a close and then they will slowly and gradually try to recompose relationships with Russia. Lula has four more years as president, so if the conflict ends by the end of the year, for instance, Lula will still have three more years to conduct some sort of diplomacy to build a bridge with Russia and try to bring them back into the international order. Russia will definitely need some international political support as well as trade and commerce because everyone has closed on Russia's commerce. That will be up to countries such as Brazil or even South Africa, who will be getting calls from Putin saying they need to restart business because they only really have China to do business with but that won't be enough. They need all the markets, and Brazil will be one of them.

Mariana: Brazil's stance on Ukraine is unlikely to change, the country has this history of foreign policy of being neutral. Because Europe feels so strongly about Russia being the aggressor and Ukraine being completely innocent, might the EU try to persuade Brazil to change? The German Chancellor saw Lula last month and he was very disappointed in Lula's approach, he thought maybe he'd be different from Bolsonaro. Might that make European states hesitant to work with Brazil in some ways?

Dr Solar Absolutely. They will have bilateral meetings anyway, they will participate in forums, and Lula will travel to Europe and European leaders will travel to Brazil as well. But the concept of nonalignment that the BRICS imposed 10 years ago (and now Lula will emphasize that) is very important. For Europe and the EU, there is obvious alignment. Nonalignment would mean just letting Russia step over Ukraine and support the hypothesis that both sides are guilty. Nonalignment means bringing peace, recognizing that both of them are wrong, and trying to cut the cake 50/50. The nonalignment approach to this conflict, or any conflict on a global scale, generates noise for the EU, because it is such an important actor that it will clearly take sides. Not taking sides leads to countries being persuaded by Americans to follow their stance. This war has been a wake-up call because it's happening within Europe and it's demanding a lot of European leadership and resources. There are some countries that could be doing more but are hiding behind this nonaligned type of approach.

Mariana: Lula also proposed the creation of a separate bloc of nonaligned countries with countries like China and India. Can we expect that to actually happen, and how might it affect the war?

Dr Solar: These are all basically clubs of friends. They meet once every two months, they speak on the phone once every other week, but they send a signal that big, populous countries, which can impact

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other countries' trade businesses, are actually not siding with the EU. Brazil is not a dangerous country so they will not declare war on anyone, or send tanks, planes, or jets to Russia or anything like that. But they definitely have some sort of soft power, which can help other countries to align, which was the purpose of the BRICS. When the BRICS was formed, there were conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, so these countries were pushing the narrative that the West was invading the Middle East and the North of Africa. Now there is a similar premise, there is the war in Ukraine. Unlike Bolsonaro, Lula has always been an internationally minded president, and he will try to get some credit for proposing these types of forums. They generate some pressure and will allow for closer relationships with countries like China. These forums also send a clear message that Brazil is not aligning with the West but is actually opening up some doors towards the East.

Mariana: Like you said, the US is a huge player in this conflict. The US and the EU have given so much financial, military, and even moral support to Ukraine throughout all this. How important would it actually be for a country like Brazil to provide aid? Would it have a significant impact on Ukraine?

Dr Solar: I saw a map the other day on Twitter and northern countries like Canada, the US, and the rest of Europe were colored red, and everywhere else in the Global South was just plain white, showing the difference in how much support was being given to Ukraine. I haven't kept track of what Brazil has donated, but Chile for instance has donated USD 100,000, which is nothing, it's ridiculous. Donations like that won't change anything and the Ukrainians are keeping track of who's helping them. They understand that Latin America is quite far, it has been a nonaligned region since the Cold War. Latin America also has too many demands internally so they need to spend a lot of their GDP within their countries rather than outside. They don't have a history of supporting other countries. The only time they have recently is with Haiti, but that was part of a larger UN framework, validated by the UN Security Council. But now the UN doesn't play any role whatsoever in the war, other than having voting sessions every other month, but they are not leading anything. Countries in Latin America are very focused on international law and the UN because they respect sovereignty and don't want any other countries to say anything about them. For instance, the relationship between Peru and Mexico has gone sour because AMLO is trying to defend Pedro Castillo, a former president. That's what happens in Latin America, if a country says something about another country, they will pull their ambassadors, and so on. So there is no way that these countries will actually lead in something that requires commitment and political will and leadership. That is millions of years away from how Europe and the US react to world conflicts. They take leadership, they take a stance, and they don't mind pointing fingers towards who's done wrong. In Latin America, we don't do that, we prefer to say both sides are wrong. It's like when parents see you fighting with your siblings for a toy, they don't take sides and instead just take the toy away and then neither of you can play anymore. In Latin America, politicians will do that instead of explaining why a certain party is at fault. It's quite clear that creates a feeling within the EU and other advanced democracies that are invested in the Ukraine war that they can't get Latin American countries to follow suit. They will have to police the war themselves, rather than bring these countries on board because they just decline. Going back to the question, opportunities have gone by without any strong solution from Latin American countries. When the US tried to ask Latin American countries to send them their Russian-made components so that they could give them to the Ukrainians in exchange for new American tanks and jets, most countries said no, and it was a once-in-

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a-lifetime offer to get materials that are quite new and expensive.

Mariana: As you said, the US and the EU have bigger spending abilities than Latin America, so the latter can't simply help others when Latin America itself needs a lot of help. Just to finish up, I was interested in exploring a topic that you recently published a book about, cybersecurity. Without spoiling too much, you mentioned that in 2008, Brazil's National Defense Strategy was strong and almost unprecedented in tackling cybersecurity issues and Lula was president in 2008. I'm curious to know if there will be again significant progress in managing cybersecurity in Brazil with his new presidency given how different cybersecurity is now compared to 15 years ago.

Dr Solar: Everything in the field of cybersecurity happens in baby steps. What Brazil has in its favor is that it started a long time ago, when no one else was doing that in Latin America. That is the point I'm trying to raise in the book. I'm constantly using the case of Brazil to say that they were pioneers in the region to build a cyber defense strategy, even though they didn't have that many resources or the organization to do cyber defense operations. They were very intelligent in carving a niche when it comes to cyber security within the region. There's some data from the OAS that now puts Colombia on a better standing than Brazil in terms of cyber defense, so if I were to write the book again, I would put more emphasis on Colombia. The cybersecurity agenda can be driven internally by countries, or it can also be driven by partnerships. What I'm writing at the moment is that states also need the US to help them out with cyber security. The Brazilian military will probably also keep working with the US Southern Command, which is in charge of the Southern Hemisphere. There will be more talks about what happens on the Internet, because of the far-right movements and the Bolsonarista voices still prevalent online in Brazil. This presidency will not just care about the military aspect of cyber defense and security, but also the civilian aspect. Cyber security governance will be enhanced, and laws will be revised. In Ireland, we've just seen that a new commission of experts was created by a minister to tackle online hate speech. There are internet and cyber-related measures being taken in Brazil, which is a good sign because they push things forward. Then at the end of the day the whole cyber security community, which could be made up of military and civilians, is all getting way savvier in terms of cybersecurity. Brazil also has good universities, which are preparing future generations that will be more in touch with cyber security.

Mariana: Lastly, I also saw that you wrote about Latin America actually being a lot more advanced in terms of cyber security than a lot of people might anticipate. Can European countries learn anything from Latin America?

Dr Solar: It's more likely that it's the other way around, Europeans are teaching Latin Americans a lot about cyber security. But maybe sometimes what Europeans don't know is that Latin America has a strong middle class, and they have good learning institutions. Cybersecurity is not just about the software that one can buy, but it's also about the human skills that one can have behind cybersecurity networks. The future generation of IT graduates from strong universities within the region, from Mexico all the way to Argentina, will create a second generation-type of cybersecurity experts. If I were in the EU, I would definitely be helping these countries to amass more human skills when it comes to teaching youngsters who are going to university on their awareness of cybersecurity. You don't just

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need a bunch of engineers, you also need more people studying cybercrime, and more cybersecurity for geopolitics. But of course, it's important to also develop hardware and software. It's not a problem of globalization, as young people in Latin America speak English well, and other countries have done it, such as India and Japan. They jump into this wave of technology and IT because they can pick up their language and they can start talking in the same global language of IT.

Mariana: And education is always something that needs more funding in Latin America.

Dr Solar: Yeah, and that's something the EU would love to do. If I were to advise the EU, I would say just put more money on education, because then the educated middle class will start picking u p on

new skills and will drive up industries, which is what the cybersecurity, IT, and telecommunications industries rely on. The countries leading the way in cybersecurity also have a strong industry behind them.

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