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[How Much Polarisation Can Democracy Bear?](#)

# The Pink Galaxy

How Left-wing Authoritarian Networks Are Infiltrating Latin America's Democracies and Damaging the Political Centre

Sebastian Grundberger

“Progressive” politicians from Latin America in lockstep with Kremlin nationalists, Chinese communists and representatives of the Iranian mullah regime: This unlikely alliance can be explained by the common rejection of “US imperialism”, “neoliberalism” – and ultimately the liberal-democratic Western model of society. The authoritarian left in Latin America is increasingly operating as a transnational structure that explicitly recognises external authoritarian regimes as allies. Domestically, the actions of this “pink galaxy” in the countries of the region are leading to the erosion of the political centre and ultimately of democracy.

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When the world learned about the death of Russian opposition activist Alexei Navalny in February 2024, there was widespread agreement about who was to blame. The majority opinion was that Russia’s Head of State Vladimir Putin should be held accountable. However, there was one particularly striking departure from this chorus: Brazil’s President Lula da Silva. “Why judge lightly?” he asked, before going on to speculate: “If you judge now and then it turns out that someone other than him [Putin] ordered the murder, then you will have to apologise later.”<sup>1</sup> Once he got going, the Brazilian head of state also expressed his unconventional view of international politics with regard to the Gaza conflict. According to Lula, the Israeli Head of State Benjamin Netanyahu is committing “genocide”. The “war he is waging between a well-prepared army and women and children” is comparable to the time when “Hitler decided to kill the Jews”.<sup>2</sup> This led to a Brazilian president having been declared *persona non grata* in Israel for the first time ever.

Lula’s statements are no exception among Latin America’s left-wing heads of state. Colombian President Gustavo Petro compared the situation in Gaza to the Nazi extermination camp in Auschwitz. When asked about possible arms deliveries to Ukraine, Petro replied: “Even if the weapons otherwise rot in Colombia, we will

not give them to anyone to continue a war.”<sup>3</sup> And while Mexico’s former left-wing populist Head of State Andrés Manuel López Obrador was celebrated by his acolytes for his “pacifist stance” towards the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, his Foreign Minister Alicia Bárcena, former Director of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), criticised the West for supplying Ukraine with weapons.

The example of Lula in particular very clearly illustrates that although some left-wing Latin American heads of state act mostly in a pragmatic and democratic manner on the domestic front, they spread the narratives of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships internationally. In 1990, former trade union leader Lula and Cuban dictator Fidel Castro founded the Foro de São Paulo, an alliance of now 127 left-wing and far-left parties and political movements. They range from Lula’s Brazilian Workers’ Party and the established Socialist Party of Chile to the Communist Party of Cuba and the authoritarian state parties of Venezuela and Nicaragua.<sup>4</sup> Most recently, the Foro attracted attention by not having only been invited as an “election observer” to the presidential elections in Venezuela on 28 July, but also congratulating “comrade Nicolás Maduro” on his “re-election” as Venezuelan President, despite all international criticism.<sup>5</sup>

## From the Pink Wave to the Pink Galaxy

The first heyday of the Foro de São Paulo went hand in hand with the so-called pink wave. This collective term was used to describe an increasing number of election victories by left-wing politicians in Latin America in the 2000s – from moderate left-wingers such as Michelle Bachelet in Chile or Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay to authoritarian regimes such as those of Rafael Correa in Ecuador or Evo Morales in Bolivia. The spectrum of the pink wave spanned from pale pink (social democratic) to deep red (left-wing autocratic). This is reflected in particular by the fact that Hugo Chávez’s election victory in Venezuela in 1998 is also included in the pink wave. Just as the pink wave encompassed democratic and authoritarian forces, today there is a whole pink galaxy of organisations and associations in which democratically legitimised and left-wing authoritarian forces form an alliance. The constellations of the pink galaxy are dominated by their most authoritarian elements and serve dictatorships as a protective wall against international criticism.

### The founding declaration of Progressive International is permeated by radical left-wing class struggle and liberation rhetoric.

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In addition to the Foro de São Paulo, other major players form part of the authoritarian-democratic organisations grouped together in the pink galaxy. In July 2019, the Grupo de Puebla, now consisting of more than 60 left-wing political figures from the region, was founded as a “progressive” activist group. The group’s key players include former Colombian President Ernesto Samper, former Ecuadorian Head of State Rafael Correa, former Bolivian President Evo Morales, former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff and former Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero.<sup>6</sup> In terms

of content, the group advocates, among other things, a lenient approach towards the authoritarian regime in Venezuela.

Only a few months after the Grupo de Puebla, Progressive International was formed as a global platform of left-wing organisations. Its foundation followed an initiative by the Sanders Institute, which is associated with US Senator Bernie Sanders, and the Democracy in Europe Movement (DiEM25) of the left-wing former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, who was banned from entering Germany in April 2024. It was for this reason that he was unable to travel to a Palestine congress in Berlin that was ultimately broken up by the police due to its anti-Semitic content. Under the leadership of the Spanish-speaking General Coordinator of Progressive International, David Adler, the organisation is showing enormous activism in Latin America, such as through declarations of solidarity with politicians such as Colombian President Gustavo Petro, who is under domestic political pressure. It mainly draws on the same circle of people and organisations as the Foro de São Paulo and the Grupo de Puebla. Progressive International’s 25-point founding declaration is permeated by radical left-wing class struggle and liberation rhetoric. Sometimes they aspire to “eradicate capitalism everywhere”, sometimes they see themselves as “peoples of the world rising up against the reactionary forces of authoritarian oligarchy.”<sup>7</sup>

The Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (Latin American Council for Social Sciences, CLACSO), founded in 1957, plays an important role within the pink galaxy. With 883 member institutes, CLACSO is now the largest association of social science research centres in Latin America. The list of CLACSO members includes a number of renowned academic institutions in Latin America and associated research institutions all over the world, including Germany.<sup>8</sup> Far from the purely academic image that CLACSO presents, the organisation stands out at leadership level for its political activism. In November 2022, a CLACSO working group accused the “Bolivian right” of

“fascist and neo-Nazi violence”.<sup>9</sup> In November 2019, another working group welcomed “the full-scale popular uprising that moves Chilean society [...] and which is expressed in the diverse forms of street struggle” against “the impacts of neoliberalism”.<sup>10</sup> A third working group published a “Communiqué in defence of Venezuela against US aggression” in April 2020 and presented the Venezuelan model as a “counter-hegemonic alternative to transnational interests” that deserved support.<sup>11</sup> This all casts doubt on the goal of “promoting democratic participation and critical thinking” as set out in CLACSO’s Declaration of Principles.<sup>12</sup>

## Russian state media readily adopt narratives from left-wing authoritarian regimes in Latin America.

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The four organisations described above – Foro de São Paulo, Grupo de Puebla, Progressive International and CLACSO – are united by their steadfast loyalty to the Cuban dictatorship, as are all the players in the pink galaxy. Havana, a favourite meeting place for these players, is a kind of socialist Vatican whose dogmas are not questioned by its left-wing authoritarian followers. For example, Progressive International praises the Cuban revolution as an “inspiration” for transforming the international system and sells stickers of Fidel Castro and Ché Guevara in the organisation’s own online shop. CLACSO Director General Karina Batthyány not only posed smiling in a photo with dictator Miguel Díaz-Canel in Havana, but in January 2023 also went as far as announcing via Twitter/X during a visit to the CLACSO member institutes there, which had been brought into line by the regime: “We are united by open, critical and socially relevant scientific knowledge.”<sup>13</sup> The Foro de São Paulo dedicated its political programme adopted in Managua (Nicaragua) in 2017 to “the example of revolutionary consistency of Commander Fidel Castro”. And the Cuban

Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez appeared as an acclaimed star guest at the Grupo de Puebla 2023 meeting.

Accordingly, the four organisations also share a deeply ambivalent attitude towards democracy. The Foro de São Paulo, for instance, calls in its basic programme for “a union of democratic forces to advance towards socialism”.<sup>14</sup> Democracy is thus hierarchically subordinated to socialism or instrumentalised as a means to the end of achieving it. It also urges democracy to “necessarily deepen its popular, direct, participatory and communitarian character”. The propaganda of the Chávez regime in Venezuela in particular used the term “direct and participatory democracy” as a substitute for representative democracy and as an element in the deconstruction of the Venezuelan state.

### The Pink Galaxy and Its International Networks

In the final months of 2023, billboards in parts of Mexico began to light up neon green as part of a large-scale advertising campaign for Russia Today (RT). This massive wave of propaganda would have been impossible in Mexico City without the approval of the city government. This was led by Claudia Sheinbaum, who was elected President of Mexico on 2 June with an overwhelming majority and was often celebrated uncritically by the international press. During the election campaign, Russia Today reported exceptionally favourably on Claudia Sheinbaum. The election winner has been closely associated with the pink galaxy for years, most recently as the host of the Grupo de Puebla 2023 meeting. The Mexican ruling party MORENA is a member of the Foro de São Paulo, too. The congratulations from Caracas, Havana, Managua and Moscow on Ms. Sheinbaum’s election were correspondingly euphoric.

RT’s Spanish-language programme is not only highly successful as the most shared Spanish-language source on the war in Ukraine, but is also on hand virtually everywhere where left-wing authoritarian politicians need to be



Reliable shield for autocrats: Brazil's President Lula da Silva (in the front) has backed Latin America's left-wing dictators for decades, among them Venezuela's Nicolás Maduro. Photo: © Ueslei Marcelino, Reuters, picture alliance.

portrayed in a good light.<sup>15</sup> The Ecuadorian ex-president Rafael Correa, who plays a key role in all four of these organisations, hosts his own talk show on RT in which he interviews friends from the pink galaxy. Russian state media readily adopt narratives from left-wing authoritarian regimes in Latin America, culminating in the claim that Venezuela is “a living democracy”. Conversely, media associated with the pink galaxy adopt Kremlin narratives. The Venezuelan television channel Telesur, for example, celebrated the “liberation” of Ukrainian cities by the Russian army.<sup>16</sup> The Chilean-Mexican online portal El Ciudadano, media partner at the Grupo de Puebla 2023 meeting, uncritically cited a “study” by the Russian state agency Sputnik, according to which 54 per cent of Europeans distrust media reporting in Europe on the conflict in

Ukraine. This was seen as proof of the “obvious reality” regarding the lack of objectivity of the main Western media and their “manipulation of the facts”.<sup>17</sup> Reports like this led the US State Department to identify El Ciudadano as a key player in an “ongoing, well-funded disinformation campaign” by the Kremlin in the region.<sup>18</sup>

In the academic field, CLACSO plays an important role in maintaining contacts with Moscow. In the midst of the war, the organisation held a Russia-Ibero-America dialogue in St. Petersburg together with the Sputnik agency, which in October 2023 was attended by the CLACSO leadership, all kinds of scientific Kremlin loyalists and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Rybakov. Atilio Borón, former CLACSO Executive Director and still closely associated with the



organisation, claims in newspaper columns that there can be “no doubt” that Russia is defending itself against NATO and US aggression in Ukraine.<sup>19</sup>

A Kremlin propaganda tool aimed directly at the political sphere was the international parliamentary conference “Russia-Latin America” opened by Vladimir Putin himself in the Russian State Duma from 29 September to 2 October 2023. Most participants were parliamentarians from member parties of the Foro de São Paulo. Panels with titles such as “A just multi-polar world: the role of parliamentary diplomacy” reflected the Kremlin ruler’s narrative. Grupo de Puebla member Jorge Rodríguez, President of the Venezuelan National Assembly, expressed solidarity with Russia in the face of Western sanctions, and Nicaragua’s special envoy for relations with Russia and dictator’s son Laureano Ortega declared that a Russian victory over Ukraine would be tantamount to a victory of “light over darkness”.<sup>20</sup>

### **In addition to Russia, the pink galaxy also looks favourably on China.**

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The communiqués of the players in the pink galaxy also express a proximity to the Putin narrative. The final declaration of the IX<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Grupo de Puebla 2023 included the following passage: “We call on Ukraine and Russia to conclude a temporary ceasefire and explore the possibility of peace.” There is no mention of Russian aggression, but “NATO’s interference and the escalation of geopolitical conflicts” were denounced.<sup>21</sup> Some members of the Grupo de Puebla emphatically praised Putin. Bolivia’s former Head of State Evo Morales does this most clearly. He greeted his “brother” Putin on his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday via Twitter/X and declared: “The dignified, free and anti-imperialist peoples support you in your struggle against the armed interventionism of the US and NATO.”<sup>22</sup>

In addition to Russia, the pink galaxy also looks favourably on China. For the Foro de São Paulo, the People’s Republic is “a factor of stability and balance for the Latin American and Caribbean region, as reflected in the defence of the principles of international law, especially non-interference in the internal affairs of Latin American countries”. China is also celebrated for its “political cooperation without preconditions”.<sup>23</sup>

An important link between the Grupo de Puebla and China is the former Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. At the virtual meeting of the Grupo de Puebla in May 2020, he caused a furore with his call for the Latin American left to “restore a multilateral order” in dialogue with China. According to Spanish media reports, Zapatero is taking full advantage of his contacts in Beijing to cultivate relations between the Chinese Communist Party and the Grupo de Puebla. One outcome was the participation of a high-ranking Chinese delegation at the Grupo de Puebla meeting in Santa Marta (Colombia) in 2022.<sup>24</sup>

Just like the Grupo de Puebla, Progressive International not only supports China’s call to abandon the US dollar as the international reserve currency, but has also been a member organisation of the so-called Qiao Collective since 2020. According to Progressive International, this is a “Chinese media collective in the diaspora that denounces US aggression against China and promotes socialism and internationalism”. In the past, Qiao sharply criticised the democratic demonstrations in Hong Kong, for example.

CLACSO, too, has close links with China. Together with Chinese state actors and Latin American academic partners, the council acted as co-organiser of the VI. “Dialogue of Civilisations” between China and Latin America in Buenos Aires on 11 September 2023. On this occasion, a book on the history of China published by CLACSO in Spanish in cooperation with a Chinese state publishing house was also presented, whose introduction lauds the

“admirable transformation” undergone by China “under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party”.<sup>25</sup>

## Iran is finding particularly enthusiastic allies in the pink galaxy.

It is no coincidence that in Latin America, the Chinese Communist Party feels most comfortable working with autocratic state parties and party organisations that include them. The Chinese Communist Party and the state parties of Cuba and Nicaragua are remarkably similar in their understanding of unity between state and party. For years, the parties united in the Foro de São Paulo have been some of the most loyal participants in all Chinese “party co-operation” events. What is more, when it comes to China asserting its long-term power interests, authoritarian regimes are better suited than democracies, especially if China succeeds in retaining the former in the long run. In contrast to centrist parties that engage in critical dialogue with the Chinese Communist Party, it is due to such contacts that the pink galaxy uncritically spreads Chinese narratives and criticism of the West.

Iran is also increasingly trying to leave its footprint in Latin America and is finding particularly enthusiastic allies in the pink galaxy. This is reflected in intensive economic cooperation between Tehran and Havana or Caracas, for example. With HispanTV, the Iranian state also has a Spanish-language television channel that can be received in large swathes of Latin America.<sup>26</sup> Politicians from the pink galaxy regularly use HispanTV as a platform for propaganda. Until 2019, a popular programme for this was “Fort Apache”, a talk show hosted by the left-wing former Spanish Deputy Prime Minister and current media entrepreneur Pablo Iglesias. In the context of the Gaza war, the Spanish-language Iranian foreign media are spreading the narrative of Israeli genocide and completely denying the Israeli state the right

to exist. The channel thus stands for a mixture of anti-Israeli, anti-Western and left-wing narratives.

The players in the pink galaxy were also quick to side with Israel’s opponents in the latest conflict. As early as 10 October 2023, Progressive International published a communiqué, also signed by numerous Latin American players, in which the terrorist attack by Hamas is played down as an “operation from the Gaza Strip on 7 October”<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, the Progressive International praised the leader of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah, as “leader of the Lebanese resistance movement” and branded his elimination by Israel as “ruthless”.<sup>28</sup> In addition to Progressive International, the Grupo de Puebla, the Foro de São Paulo and various CLACSO working groups also refer to Israel’s actions as “genocide”.

### A Transnational Left-wing Authoritarian Structure

It is striking that the protagonists in the various organisations overlap. Many representatives of the Latin American left wing are connected to more than one network at the same time. Lula’s Chief Foreign Policy Advisor, the former Brazilian Foreign Minister Celso Amorim, Ecuador’s former Foreign Minister Guillaume Long and the communist Chilean MP Carol Kariola, the former Argentinian Head of State Alberto Fernández, the former Bolivian Vice President Álvaro García Linera, the Mexican Foreign Minister under President López Obrador and former CEPAL Director General Alicia Bárcena and the Cuban MP and dictator’s daughter Mariela Castro, have close relationships with a number of the players described here.

The organisations themselves also overlap and cooperate on an ongoing basis. CLACSO is a member of Progressive International, for example. Both are working together on a research project that laments the existence of a “reactionary international” as a threat to democracy. The German Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung and the Spanish People’s Party (PP), among others, are named as part of this network.<sup>29</sup> The Executive

Secretary of the Foro de São Paulo, Mónica Valente, a member of the Brazilian Workers' Party, also sits on the council of Progressive International while its Executive Director David Adler attends meetings of the Grupo de Puebla and CLACSO publishes books by the group. The Foro de São Paulo links to CLACSO on its homepage. At the end of June 2024, Foro de São Paulo, Progressive International and Grupo de Puebla came together in Honduras to celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the alleged coup d'état against former Head of State Manuel Zelaya at the invitation of the left-wing government as part of a kind of pink galaxy "summit".<sup>30</sup> Ultimately, members of all these alliances like to invite players from Russia or

China to their meetings and have themselves invited to these countries.

This overlap includes numerous other players. Institutions such as the Centro Estratégico Latinoamericano de Geopolítica (CELAG), the Escuela de Estudios Latinoamericanos y Globales (ELAG), the Internacional Feminista or the US-based Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR) are also part of the pink galaxy. As these organisations, despite their different institutional structures, do not differ significantly either in terms of content or the group of people belonging to them, it makes sense to see them as part of a common international structure.



The pink galaxy and its European friends: For years, Spain's former Prime Minister Zapatero (fourth from left at the table) has been a key lobbyist for Latin American left-wing networks in Europe, their ambiguous relationship with democracy notwithstanding. Photo: © Matias Baglietto, Reuters, picture alliance.



Building on the traditional internationalism of the left, in many areas the pink galaxy functions according to the logic of a transnational left-wing authoritarian party. Firstly, its players share a sufficient ideological basis in their rejection of “US imperialism”, “neoliberalism” and liberal democracy. Furthermore, the pink galaxy has formalised institutional communication channels, as described above. And thirdly, they are united by a corporate instinct for power. This is not only reflected in the support of allied candidates for any position on the international stage, but also in the fact that pink galaxy members are defended even when they have been convicted of criminal activities. Despite remaining silent on the persecution and imprisonment of Venezuelan or Cuban opposition figures, for example, the legal persecution of left-wing leaders is deplored as so-called lawfare.

### **The orthodox left has hijacked the term “progressive” and filled it with authoritarian content.**

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The term “democracy” is mainly used by the pink galaxy to lash out at its political rivals; well aware that the majority of Latin America’s population, for all the signs of crisis, has a democratic orientation and a susceptibility to attacks on the democratic convictions of its political opponents. Through a permanent attack mode and the appeal to negative primary emotions such as fear, anger or frustration, the pink galaxy is often astonishingly successful in evading criticism of its own lack of democratic coherence.

The pink galaxy also succeeds in legitimising itself through European development funds, despite its obvious proximity to Russia, China and Iran. One example is the intensive cooperation between the Swedish state development agency SIDA and CLACSO. This has already given rise to a considerable body of literature

which, financed with European taxpayers’ money, denounces “neoliberalism” and “imperialism”, criticises the alleged persecution of left-wing politicians and spreads narratives from Cuba or Venezuela.

### **The Erosion of the Political Centre**

The enormous success of the pink galaxy within the Latin American left wing has also led to the moderate factions of the (social) democratic left finding it increasingly difficult to discursively assert themselves against it. One example from everyday politics is the refusal of Mario Bergara, a candidate for the Uruguayan Frente Amplio primaries who is considered a moderate, to publicly refer to Cuba as a “dictatorship”.<sup>31</sup> The former Spanish government spokesperson and PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party) minister, Isabel Rodríguez, refused to make such a statement, too.<sup>32</sup> It is also worth noting that the orthodox left has hijacked the term “progressive”, which actually points to a modern left, and fills it with authoritarian content; far too often without encountering decisive resistance from the actual “progressive”, moderate left.

The political scientist Miguel Martínez Meucci therefore accuses the social democratic left in Latin America of not only openly flirting with left-wing authoritarian regimes, but also cooperating with them.<sup>33</sup> This trend is not limited to Latin America. Apparently, European social democrats not only cultivate exchange with people from the pink galaxy, but they also view organisations such as the Grupo de Puebla as ideologically close cooperation partners. In this way, they themselves become part of the authoritarian protective wall. This pulls the rug from under the feet of Latin American social democrats, who distance themselves from authoritarian regimes due to fundamental democratic convictions.

The Spanish PSOE played a decisive role in the shift of European social democracy towards the orthodox left. It has not only pursued rapprochement, but also at least selective integration into

left-wing authoritarian networks since the time of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's government (2004 to 2011). Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's party regularly sends prominent representatives to the Grupo de Puebla. In June 2023, the social democratic S&D Group in the European Parliament organised a major event with the Grupo de Puebla, at which former Head of State Rafael Correa, who had been sentenced to eight years in prison for corruption in Ecuador, was allowed to complain about the alleged "lawfare" against him.<sup>34</sup>

For the leading authoritarian forces of the pink galaxy, politics adheres to a tribal logic – on the one side the good, the "revolutionaries", the "left-wing", the "anti-capitalists" or the "progressives"; on the other side the bad – i.e. the "neoliberals", "capitalists", "imperialists" or "right-wing". According to the principles of identity politics, which side you belong to becomes a dogmatic question of faith that does not allow for any shades of grey and is fatal for the moderate left and the political centre as a whole.

### **The Temptation of a Right-wing Authoritarian Reaction**

The difficulty of countering authoritarian approaches from the political centre is also evident on the right side of the political spectrum. In response to left-wing internationalism, some on the right strive to establish joint networks between conservative and right-wing democratic forces, and right-wing authoritarian actors. This is vividly illustrated by the admiration that the authoritarian President of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele, enjoys among large sections of the political right. The concept of Hungarian Head of State Viktor Orbán, who promises an "illiberal democracy", is also popular in Latin America, as demonstrated by the presence of the Latin American right at the European version of the US-based right-wing Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Budapest. The Spanish right-wing party Vox was particularly skilled when it came to creating a high-profile counterweight to the authoritarian

left with the Foro Madrid. Yet, instead of fighting the pink galaxy's left-wing identity politics from the democratic centre, the Foro Madrid is fighting it in part with right-wing identity politics. This is clear from the inflationary use of terms such as "totalitarian" or "communist" as well as in the often undifferentiated attitude towards populist right-wing leaders. Interestingly, also some actors of this right-wing network have positions friendly to Kremlin narratives.

### **Democracy is becoming a rhetorical figure that is hollowed out and reinterpreted.**

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The political centre therefore faces the challenge of clearly naming the activities and dangers of the pink galaxy and countering them with its own convincing narratives. At the same time, it must resist the temptation to trivialise populist representatives to the right of centre or even include them in its own ranks if they are not committed to democracy and the rule of law. One attempt to face these challenges is the Foro América Libre. This forum, held for the first time in 2023 with the support of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, brought together around 30 organisations from 25 countries in a joint action space of the centre or centre-right spectrum.<sup>35</sup> The huge media response bore testimony to the necessity of such an endeavour.

### **Conclusion: United Against Western-style Liberal Democracy**

Even if, at first glance, the various players in the pink galaxy appear to have little in common with the dictatorships in Russia, China or even the Iranian theocracy, there are convergent geopolitical interests. First and foremost, this is opposition to "neoliberalism" and "US imperialism". Ultimately, however, the rejection of liberal democracy as such plays a role, too. According to the pink galaxy, the call for "non-interference

in internal affairs” and a “multilateral world order” is directly opposed to the liberal democratic model of the West and its universal claim. Democracy is becoming a rhetorical figure, hollowed out and reinterpreted in terms of content, and hierarchically subordinated as a means to other ends, primarily “socialism” and, above all, the preservation of one’s own power. While left-wing governments have set the tone in Latin America in the two decades since the beginning of the pink wave, the approval ratings for democracy in Latin America have plummeted according to all surveys. There is certainly a causal link between the two phenomena.

The points of contact for Russia, China and Iran are evident. It is easy for them to tie in with the world view of the pink galaxy, to reinforce it with their media power, for example through RT or HispanTV, and to give it international visibility. The pink galaxy, on the one hand, and Russia, China and Iran, on the other, lend each other international legitimacy. Lucrative bilateral economic agreements with no claim to democratisation or respect for human rights make these alliances even more attractive for the different planets of the pink galaxy.

Alliances between international and Latin American authoritarian regimes have a long-standing tradition, for example in the close cooperation between the Soviet Union and Cuba. The political socialisation of some of the protagonists of today’s pink galaxy, such as Lula da Silva, dates back to that time. Anti-Americanism and sympathy for authoritarian regimes are an integral part of his political DNA. His regional power base predominantly lies in the Foro de São Paulo, which he co-founded, and with his allies in the pink galaxy. Against this backdrop, Lula’s misguided statements on current issues of international politics are no longer surprising.

There is an urgent need for democrats of all political stripes to recognise the danger that the pink galaxy poses to democracy as such and to counterbalance it from the political centre. The pink galaxy should by no means be trivialised as

a phenomenon limited to Latin America. Instead, it poses a serious threat to the values-based and rules-based multilateral order as a whole. The pink galaxy’s response to Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine has clearly demonstrated this.

*- translated from German -*

*This text is based on the argumentation of the book “The pink galaxy. How the Foro de São Paulo, the Grupo de Puebla, and their International Allies Undermine Democracy in Latin America”, published by the KAS Regional Programme Party Dialogue and Democracy in Latin America in April 2024 and available at: <https://ogy.de/fj71>.*

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