



Enlazando Alternativas

Bi-regional network Europe-Latin America and the Caribbean

How did the Enlazando Alternativas network begin?

The Europe-Latin America and Caribbean bi-regional network "Enlazando Alternativas" (Linking Alternatives) was formed as a result of a growing awareness that the neoliberal policies and trade agenda of the European Union (EU) is being led by powerful transnational corporations and that the EU's objective is to ensure its countries unrestricted access to Latin American and Caribbean markets. The formation of this bi-regional network also reflects the need for Latin American and European civil societies to increase resistance to the "European project", to the transnational companies (TNCs) based in the European Union and to international 'free' trade policies.

The network formally began in Guadalajara, during the meeting, "Enlazando Alternativas", organized in parallel to the Third Summit of Heads of State and Governments of Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union in May 2004.

Although the network was launched in Guadalajara, several later meetings since then have consolidated and strengthened it: meetings within the framework of the Americas Social Forum in Quito (July 2006), the European Social Forum in London (October 2004), the Brussels meeting (November 2004) and the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (January 2005).

Who are we and what are our objectives?

The purpose of this new alliance between organized civil societies from both continents is to construct a world based on the concepts of peace, participatory democracy, social justice, human rights, food sovereignty, sustainability and peoples' rights to self-determination. It is a space to link current struggles, emerging grassroots' resistance movements and visions on alternatives from both regions.

The network has opened a political space for joint action and reflection where social movements, NGOs, trade unions, human rights organisations, farmers, ecological and indigenous movements, migrant and refugee groups, as well as men and women in general from both continents, can become involved.

Enlazando Alternativas: a two-way network

The formation of the bi-regional network 'Enlazando Alternativas' opens a new chapter in relations between peoples as it integrates civil society organizations from Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) with their European peers in a network that embraces the concept of solidarity and mutual support. Links of solidarity between both regions date back to the periods of dictatorship, national liberation movements and the struggle against "500 years" of colonization. **The essence of this network aims to go one step beyond these movements, re-creating these bonds of solidarity but in a global and bi-regional context that corresponds with the current challenges.**

The network intends to provide a space for articulation by social organisations and movements from both regions with the purpose of constructing alternative proposals of social and economic organisation from the bottom up, as well as to coordinate political and social dialogue between peoples. We affirm our right to give voice to these initiatives and we strongly believe in our capacity to formulate them.

What was the Social Encounter EA2?

Following up on the Guadalajara experience, the recently formed bi-regional network began preparing for the next Social Encounter: "Enlazando Alternativas 2 (EA2), held in Vienna in May 2006 during the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Governments of Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union. Over 200 organizations signed the Call to Vienna, a call to create "Social alternatives in a new era of relations between Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean".

As a central part of this meeting, the bi-regional network in conjunction with the Permanent Peoples Tribunal (TPP) also organised a first Session of the Tribunal on "Neoliberal Policies and European Transnational Companies in Latin America and the Caribbean". During the Tribunal, more than 50 organisations and affected communities made presentations on human rights and environmental violations that have been perpetrated by over 25 transnational companies based in the European Union and by their subsidiaries (Ex. Repsol YPF, Unión Fenosa, Suez, Unilever, Shell and European banks such as ABN-AMRO and others) throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.

EA2 was an event that contributed towards the consolidation of bi-regional campaigns and actions. The networks that participated in the Tribunal used the occasion to establish areas of bi-regional co-operation in campaigns on TNCs and committed themselves to investigate different forms of confronting the impunity with which transnational corporations act within current trade and investment frameworks.

What are the network's key issues?

Based on the work, struggles and experiences that led us to Vienna, three priority issues have emerged that fit the network's core focus areas:

- Free Trade Agreements
- Transnational Corporations
- Alternative regional integration

Issues such as militarization and human rights, foreign debt and cooperation for development, public services and migration are included within this general framework.

The 'Enlazando Alternativas' Network intends to address these issues from a bi-regional perspective, using a combined strategy of resistance and construction of alternatives, focussing both on Europe and LAC and on relations between both regions.

After Vienna, next steps in the consolidation of the network

After almost three years of existence, the network has positioned itself as a space for political and bi-regional mobilization. The network intends to bolster resistance to neoliberal policies on both continents, in particular against policies of European governments and corporations that affect the LAC region. Moreover, we intend to create an agenda of proposals with joint projects and demands that enable us to influence discussions on EU-LAC relations at the government level and to define an action plan as civil society on a variety of issues concerning both regions.

Given the political changes in Latin America, a unique opportunity has emerged for social movements and organisations to put forward the emancipatory and transforming proposals they have been preparing, that can build a process of political and social solidarity and which can influence government integration policies for the region.

In Europe, as well, new developments are contributing towards a deep and critical reflection on the future of the European project. Highlighted among them is the crisis triggered by the European Constitution and the EU's new strategy for a "Competitive Europe", which represents an attack on the model of a "Social Europe," but also includes an aggressive pro-business agenda that promotes far-reaching trade agreements with developing countries, among them agreements with the Andean Community and Central America.

The network intends to progress and contribute towards this by:

- Developing joint strategies to halt current negotiations seeking to implement Free Trade Agreements between Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Consolidating the struggles against European transnational corporations in Latin America and the Caribbean continuing the work of the Permanent Peoples Tribunal on this issue.
- Deepening the process of constructing alternative proposals for a solidarity-based, equitable and complementary integration based on peoples' interests.
- Taking positions and actions on existing integration processes and proposals on the American continent, such as CAN, MERCOSUR, ALADI, the South American Community of Nations, FTAA and PTAs.

Just as the Hemispheric Social Alliance has been a key stakeholder in forming the network, we also place importance on the strengthening of ties with other networks, such as for example, the networks "Our World is Not for Sale" and "Seattle to Brussels Network," both through participation in these networks or by joint organisation of activities in key moments of international convergence.

As we stated in Vienna "We trust in these new winds of change that are expressed in the intense activism and mobilisation of social movements in Europe and Latin America, in the appearance of governments of transformation such as those in Venezuela and Bolivia and others in Latin America, that are distancing themselves from free trade policies, contributing to strengthening trends towards ending current neoliberal policies and beginning a new process of peoples-based integration"

Although organizing Social Meetings/Encounters held in parallel to official Summits is neither the beginning nor the end of the network's activities and agenda, the holding of these counter-summits do provide key opportunities for strengthening, providing visibility to and consolidating the network. Currently, efforts along these lines are being made to prepare Enlazando Alternativas III to be held in Lima, Peru, in May 2008, when presidents from both continents will meet again.

Different ways to take part in our efforts and to remain informed

For further information on the activities of Enlazando Alternativas and to take part in the network's efforts, visit:

www.enlazandoalternativas.org

To take part in our electronic discussion on the EU-LAC relations and the activities of the network subscribe to the network e-list (al-ue@lists.riseup.net) writing to ceciliaolivet@tni.org

To take part in our electronic discussion list on transnationals, write to transnacionales@gmail.com

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