



I EU-LAC Forum of Journalists:
'Why should Latin America and the Caribbean be of relevance to the
European Union and vice versa?
Building a bi-regional narrative beyond topics'

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- Report -

1. Background

The mandate of the EU-LAC Foundation is to work closely with its 62 members to promote bi-regional partnership and dialogue, in particular through the involvement of civil society in all its organised forms. An essential part of this mandate is to foster discussions on issues high on the agenda of the strategic partnership between the European Union (EU), and Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), as well as to encourage inputs into intergovernmental processes from different sectors.

In this context, the Foundation organised the I EU-LAC Forum of journalists under the title "Why should Latin America and the Caribbean be of relevance to the European Union and vice versa? Building a bi-regional narrative beyond the topics". The Forum, financed with resources provided to the Foundation by the European Union and the German Federal Foreign Office, was also supported by the EUPOP project of the European Union, the ZEIT-Stiftung and the Deutsche Welle, and with the cooperation of the Real Instituto Elcano and the Asociación de Periodistas Europeos. The Forum took the form of a two-day debate session involving journalists, media experts and academics from countries of both regions.

Description

The Forum of Journalists was articulated in two working groups. The first was moderated by Juan de Oñate of the Asociación de Periodistas Europeos and was held in Spanish. The second by Miguel Ángel Aguilar, also from the Asociación de Periodistas Europeos. Carlos Malamud, from the Real Instituto Elcano, was moderator of the two working groups, rotating between the different sessions. Each group was made up of about 20 participants, from both public and private media outlets, print media, radio and television.

The working groups took the form of brainstorming - with no formal presentations or written statements -. As such, the participants sought to respond to the guiding questions articulated around the objectives of the Forum. The moderators were in charge of guiding the debate and drawing up conclusions and recommendations during the plenary sessions.

Objectives

The objectives of this I Forum were:

- To provide an informal platform for debate among journalists on EU-LAC relations;
- To contribute to fostering trust and mutual understanding between journalists and media experts working on bi-regional relations, or the reality of the other region, nurturing their exchanges with new perspectives;
- Address the content of the bi-regional relationship from a media perspective, and;
- Identify which cooperation activities between EU-LAC media professionals could be developed or reinforced within the framework of the bi-regional partnership.

Participants

Together with the partner organisations and especially the EUPOP programme, a total of 40 participants were selected and invited, the vast majority of whom were journalists, from 25 countries of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean. This I Forum was actively attended by 21 journalists and participants associated with media and institutions from Latin America and the Caribbean and 19 affiliated with the European Union (see list of participants attached). It should be noted that among those invited to participate, a generational, gender and media diversity balance was maintained, including specialised magazines, radio, television, newspapers and digital media. Also, experts from academia and relevant programmes took part in the activity. The two Co-Presidencies of the EU-LAC Foundation Board and the host country were represented at the opening and closing sessions.

2. Development of the Seminar

The keynote speech was given by Josette Altmann, Secretary General of the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO)

Josette Altmann presented her ideas on three fundamental lines of analysis. The first concerns the bi-regional relationship between Latin America and the Caribbean and the European Union. The second relates to the common points that unite the two regions. And the third, the challenge faced by both regions in a changing world of great uncertainty.

On both sides of the Atlantic, both social and political changes have taken place in recent decades. Latin America and the Caribbean went from being a scene of armed conflicts and dictatorships to be a relatively stable region within a few years. In the last two years, the World Bank has identified global economic growth, yet the question remains as to how long it can be sustained. Despite this widespread growth, there is a great difference between the way economic and political elites interpret these numbers and the experience of how people are living them, especially the middle and most

vulnerable classes. The paradox of more economic growth with more inequality continues. Distribution continues to generate great inequalities. Then, continues the speaker, can we talk about an equitable growth? Is this growth generating the same opportunities for everyone? These inequalities are mobilising protests and increasing social conflict throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. There is a citizen anger that is finding a way to express itself in the streets and at the polls. This situation, although in a very different way, is also being experienced in Europe, where through the democratic exercise of the vote, citizens are choosing leaders who represent the anti-status quo without taking into account other types of considerations. This trend has seen the growth of radical rights on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as the emergence of political leaders who promote themselves as anti-status quo and oppose multilateralism.

Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean continue to be strategic allies in the international arena on important issues, particularly in the defence of human rights and diversity and in actions to address the effects of climate change. It should be noted, however, that when we talk about the European Union it is clear to us that, despite its occasional setbacks and many challenges, it is still the reference point for Europe. The contrary is the case in Latin America and the Caribbean, which, despite the CELAC mechanism, does not yet represent a compact union between all Latin American and Caribbean states. In this context, a challenge for Europe is to be able to maintain a dialogue with a group characterised by its heterogeneity, its diversity and by not yet having reached a high level of integration.

On the other hand, while it is important to work on the relationship between both regions, it is necessary to prioritise the challenges specific to each one, which can sometimes be a limitation to progress in strengthening the bi-regional partnership. Nevertheless, we must begin by pointing out that it is appropriate for Latin America and the Caribbean to have a strong and united Europe, which is not only a catalyst for political stability, but also a driving force for economic and social development.

Some of the questions that arise from this context are: What will be the new policy of the European Union towards Latin America and the Caribbean, at this time of change within the European Union? How will Latin America and the Caribbean view its relationship with Europe and what are the points of convergence with the EU? It can be said in advance that, if these two regions come together, it is partly because they are natural partners in terms of similar ideals and values, but if they decide to go their separate ways, this would leave room for other actors with more distant cosmovisions and different priorities.

Because of the many and great risks that the world faces, concluded Josette Altmann, the two regions have to use common values to build the project of a pluralistic and pluralist world.

Working Groups and Plenary Sessions

Participants were divided into two working groups according to language preferences and a balanced distribution by region, gender and type of medium was maintained. The working groups and plenary sessions were oriented to answer the following questions:

1. Looking to the other side. When is it informed about what is happening in the other region?
2. How to make Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean to be mutually interested on each other?
3. The media business model in Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean. Exportable examples?
4. Common problems, different solutions? How do the media in both regions deal with problems such as populism or growing democratic disaffection?
5. Is collaborative journalism possible in both regions?
6. Beyond countries, will there ever be a European journalism and a Latin American and Caribbean journalism?

3. Summary of responses to guiding questions

1) The look at each other. When is informed what happens in the other region?

A lack of public interest was identified in both regions in knowing what is happening in the world. This is an epiphenomenon, a product of the lack of enlightened public opinion, fed by isolationist and nationalist tendencies. The same tendencies have slowed down the integration processes in both regions and have been the basis for a phenomenon like Brexit. On the other hand, other actors, mainly China, are assuming a growing role and the bi-regional relationship on both sides is being neglected. Globalisation seems to have produced a self-absorption in society, which only looks outwards when there are economic interests. However, this does not mean that there are no mutual interests. Europe closely followed Latin America and the Caribbean during the time of transition from dictatorships to democracies. The extent of coverage on the region in Europe is less than 20 years ago and unequal by country. Today, there is still a mutual interest in the field of sport, especially football.

On the other hand, the international news received is anecdotal or sensationalist. The scope of public interest broadcasting has diminished. The example of a viral video in Chile of a kangaroo running with another animal on its back was mentioned, whilst there was scarce coverage of the impact of the smoke from the Australian fires, which reached the country. Beyond the anecdotes, the role of journalists is to make countries and regions known. Examples were given of journalistic coverage in Europe of Central American migration and of the criminalisation of abortion in certain Latin American countries. In any case, interest in the other presupposes knowledge. The question is whether there is good mutual knowledge and whether this knowledge serves to establish a relationship. Hence the importance of this type of fora, whereby we can get to know each other better.

2) How can we make Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean interested in each other?

Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union have much more in common than they communicate; what happens in one country not only affects that country but also the others, even on the other side of the Atlantic. The greatest common identity at the moment between both regions is the defence of values and principles. A greater general knowledge of the other region should be encouraged as well as news that identifies one region with another and explain the context beyond the specific news. Definitely, we must return to the issues that unite both regions and explain the joint story.

One of the proposals to encourage this interest is to develop or finance research based on big data or digital surveys that collect data on the characteristics of information in each region; in terms of coverage, sources and issues related to the consumption of digital news. An example that illustrates this is the report on digital news by Reuters and the University of Oxford.

Another way of promoting interest in the other region is by generating data that provide information on the presence of Latin America and the Caribbean in the press or in the European media and vice versa. To this end, projects should be created that provide data on business models, information consumption, news, agenda information on both sides in order to bring these regions closer together.

The responsibility of journalists is to be able to reach out to audiences so that they are interested in one or another region, to get to know each other and to learn more about the other. In summary, and as a central axis, in order for both regions to be mutually interested, it is necessary to focus on issues that are of interest to the common citizen and in an accessible language and format.

3) The media business model in Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean. Exportable examples?

The new media are looking for different forms of financing whilst the old media have to reinvent themselves in order to seek and bet on quality to build up reader loyalty and convince them to pay for online content in the face of the decline of other formats. It is essential to innovate and not to neglect the narrative. Some common forms of monetary support are: direct payment, ideological financing, business financing and public financing.

However, innovative forms have emerged such as precarious financing based on the organisation of events by the media. At the forum, the idea of allying a media outlet with an agency that collects data, conducts surveys, collects information and delivers business intelligence to companies, but with investigative journalists detached from the newsroom, was also discussed. It was noted that journalistic work should also be separated from research work commissioned by third parties to avoid conflicts of interest.

There are also a number of options on the internet for funding, for example Patreon, a micro-funding or crowdfunding website, a digital platform for the creation of creative projects that brings together different promoters. The challenge of this type of platform is the low profitability it offers for there are not many people willing to invest in these projects. Nonetheless, many people are informed by social networks and do not care so much about the quality of information, but to be able to replicate it. A unique and exemplary case is that of the New York Times. It is one of the few media in the world that, instead of reducing its staff, has increased it and is committed to quality with a positive result since there is an international audience willing to pay for content that is of interest to them. However, more local media cannot necessarily count on a wide enough audience.

For future meetings between journalists, it would be important to focus beyond the profitability of the media, such as the working conditions of journalists and their personal and professional development plans.

4) Common problems, different solutions? How do media in both regions deal with problems such as populism or growing democratic disaffection?

One of the points mentioned at the forum was the democratic crisis and disaffection, which leads to reflection by the media and opens up an opportunity for constructive criticism of democracy in the two regions. It also offers the opportunity to explain democracy itself more and to advocate for more equitable conditions for the populations. This is a crisis that extends to the social, political, economic and media spheres, which also forces journalists to question themselves and perhaps to leave their comfort zone. This situation allows public opinion to see that there are common problems between countries and regions and that they have to cooperate to find solutions. However, the difficulty of explaining what is happening in Europe and vice versa was also identified, since in the media there is a lack of knowledge of the historical context of the countries of the other region.

5) Is collaborative journalism possible in both regions?

One of the ideas proposed to encourage collaborative journalism was the "Erasmus for Journalists". This means that the media exchange journalists by allowing them to work for short periods in the respective newsrooms with mutual benefits and limited costs. This would improve coverage of other regions and countries and help create in-depth pool of knowledge at both ends of the collaboration.

Some participants stated that "journalism will either be collaborative or it will not be", as without collaboration it would be impossible to address common issues and provide quality information. An example of this is the joint investigation of Peruvian and European journalists on the 'Ndrangheta's traffic in the Port of *El Callao*. Another way is through collaboration agreements between media, which allow for the sharing of material, information and research. The importance of extending these models to the bi-regional level, making alliances of "republication" and information transfer, was stressed. Finally, common spaces, such as the EU-LAC Forum, constitute opportunities for journalists to network with each other and with the media for which they work.

6) Beyond countries, will there ever be a European journalism and a Latin American and Caribbean journalism?

From the Latin American and Caribbean point of view, a general lack of knowledge was identified about what is happening even in neighbouring countries. For this reason, there is a need to generate real knowledge, not only bi-regional, but also intraregional, with the aim of founding new working models that stop the processes of disaffection between the two regions. In this regard, the fact that there is no journalistic unity between the Caribbean and Latin America makes this situation difficult.

By virtue of the foregoing, a general pattern was identified according to which each country is closed in on itself, privileging relations with hegemonic countries and disregarding the relations of its environment. This reciprocal ignorance reduces opportunities in the commercial and economic field and does not allow for progress in terms of values, human rights and freedoms.

In the case of the EU, there is the same general feeling of lack of interest in what is happening even in neighbouring countries and especially of indifference towards

countries that are not at the centre of the international narrative. Despite the fact that there are many media that are published in the member countries of the EU, none of them can be considered European in the sense that it has a relevant presence in each and every member country.

In this context it would be important to think about alternative forms of media financing. In both cases, it was concluded that the EU-LAC Forum served as a starting point for a possible network of development, collaboration and cooperation between journalists from the two regions that could foster a better relationship not only bi-regionally, but also intra-regionally.

4. Conclusions

During this first Forum for Journalists it became clear how journalism can act as a fundamental instrument in the construction of better relations between the EU, Latin America and the Caribbean, starting by improving the mutual information to which public opinion has access. By way of reflection, the Forum participants formulated a large number of proposals and recommendations to bring the two regions closer together, with special emphasis on the development of collaborative journalism. Of the proposals that were put forward, the following should be highlighted:

- Building broader and stronger networks;
- Big data: collect more data on the current situation of journalism and journalists;
- Proposals for exchanges and training of professionals;
- Joint research to improve intra- and bi-regional knowledge.

In the evaluations carried out by the participants at the end of the Forum, the role of the EU-LAC Foundation in creating these links was highlighted in order to facilitate mutual knowledge and greater reciprocal visibility. However, journalists from both regions acknowledged a mutual lack of knowledge and stated that this Forum will allow them to formalise a number of personal contacts that will open new doors and give them the possibility to address new issues. On the other hand, a high percentage of the participants, 85%, indicated that they had benefited from the event and considered that the content of the Forum was useful in their field of work.

This report is transmitted to all Forum participants, as well as to the Foundation's official contact points in the 61 countries of the European Union, Latin America and the Caribbean. Each reference to its content shall be accompanied by an acknowledgement of the source and notified to the Foundation.

5. Annexes

1. Detailed programme
2. List of participants