

The Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples' of Our America – People's Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP¹) as a Model for an Alternative EU Trade Agenda?

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Abstract

As a post-liberal regional integration influenced strongly by principles of socialist integration theory, the Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples' of Our America (ALBA) represents an interesting alternative approach to neoliberal trade. In its supplement, the People's Trade Treaty (TCP in Spanish), the guide lines of complementarity, cooperation and solidarity are put forward for all trade relations. On basis of these principles, ALBA-TCP developed several economic instruments influencing in trade, two of them – the Grand-National Enterprises (GNEs) and the Bank of ALBA – are analysed in the paper. The research is based on document analysis and secondary data of recent empirical investigation. Finally, the feasibility of the appliance of ALBA-TCP's trade concepts in the European Union is questioned. Concrete discussion proposals for an alternative EU trade agenda are presented and some remarks concerning the necessary preconditions for their implementation are made.

Introduction

Since a few years the European Union is in a steady state of crisis, which till present is not overcome, neither in economic, nor in social or democratic terms (Espinosa 2013: 286). The problematic economic situation led to a questioning of the European regional integration process and – predominantly in right-wing oriented circles – to considerations of abandoning the European Union. The present paper argues that regional integration per se is nothing negative, but that its outcome depends strongly on the pillars it is built on. If regional blocs are designed to support finance-led capital accumulation, not social development, the political bodies of such a union have a difficult standing. Even if they would want to change the

¹Some authors use „People's Trade Treaty (PTT)“ others “People's Trade Agreement (PTA)” as English translation for “Tratado de Comercio de los Pueblos (TCP)”. Literally, the first translation would be the correct one. On the official website of ALBA-TCP in English, the Spanish abbreviation “TCP” is used. In English publications, the authors refer either to TCP, TPP or PTA. To ease the reading, I'll stick to the officially used abbreviation “TCP”.

political alienation, this would be a very difficult – and probably only temporary – task, because of the historical genesis of the involved institutions. Nevertheless, regional integration doesn't have to foster market-liberal policies. In proof of this, the paper investigates an alternative form *of* regional integration, not an alternative *to* integration. In the theoretical realm, the integration scheme of the European Union relies on traditional economic integration theory, following Bela Balassa and Jacob Viner, promising positive effects for the economies and societies of all countries involved in the bloc, if trade barriers are eliminated (Espinosa 2011: 166-171). Throughout the world, most regional economic integration treaties and free trade agreements (FTAs) put forward that free trade should be a core value of cooperation. The exception represents the ALBA-TCP zone in Latin America, formed by Cuba and Venezuela in 2004/2005 and currently comprising eleven countries, of which Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Venezuela constitute the centre. In 2006, the People's Trade Agreement (TCP in Spanish) was signed additionally between Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela. In 2009, the principles of the People's Trade Agreement were adopted by the whole alliance. Trade within the regional bloc (and also with other economically weak partners) is not seen as a mean in itself, but as a vehicle to reduce poverty and social exclusion. Solidarity overrules competition. In the economic area of ALBA-TCP (ECOALBA-TCP), trade aspires to be fair, sustainable and to the benefit of the people. Therefore, it is supporting small-scale enterprises, cooperatives, communitarian enterprises and small producers, respecting and sometimes reviving indigenous methods of production (Briceño 2014: 13; Yaffe 2011: 132).

ALBA was installed as a counter-project to the US's proposal of a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and therefore has deeply enrooted opposition to free trade principles. Rather than relying on neo-classical integration concepts, ALBA departed from a different point for elaborating its basic principles. It promotes cooperation in investment and trade decisions instead of competition and it favours the creation of sustainable endogenous development instead of defining industrialisation as the main goal of the integration process (Ullán 2010: 48-49; Yaffe 2011: 132). The EU trade agenda, in practice, is marked by other features. Its political decisions are highly influenced by Transnational Corporations (TNCs) and promoters of their interests such as Think Tanks or other lobbying actors, who seek to optimise their conditions of capital accumulation within the European Union and abroad (Bieling 2013: 323-324; Plehwe 2012). They are backed – or at least not opposed – by the EU institutions and national governments. This means in turn that all kind of workers and small and medium enterprises have to work under rough conditions of competition. Obviously the

principles of those two integration schemes are completely different. Thus, what can the European Union learn from ALBA-TCP's conceptualization of trade?

The Bolivarian Alliance of the Peoples' of Our America (ALBA) does not pursue the goal of socialism (although some member states do), but holds strong anti-capitalist and anti-colonial principles (Hart-Landsberg 2013: 161; Tahsin 2011: 207). Far away from being a perfect archetype of a regional integration, ALBA-TCP provides interesting new considerations of how integrational efforts can be organised: "ALBA's emphasis on public rather than private ownership, domestic rather than export orientation, social rather than profit motivation, and solidaristic rather than competitive relationships provides an important (ideological and material) counterweight to capitalist imperatives. It also represents an example of how states can create regional institutions that are capable of strengthening nationally centered development efforts" (Hart-Landsberg 2013: 165; see also Erisman 2011: 255, who elaborates the same idea). I want to talk about ALBA-TCP from this perspective, enabling us to think of regional integration in a new framework, embracing new ideas for a better Europe.

The first part of the article analyses trade principles promoted by ALBA-TCP and gives a few examples for its implementation. Then I pick two instruments ALBA-TCP has developed on basis of its trade concept, the Grand-National Enterprises and the Bank of ALBA, for a closer investigation. In a last step, I will outline in which areas an alternative integration project in the European area could gather inspiration from ALBA-TCP's approach to trade. It has to be mentioned already at this point that the suggestions are rather hypothetical recommendations, as they can't be implemented under the current political and economic framework of the European Union. Nevertheless, I argue that it is important to leave the trodden path of thinking to be able to, subsequently, also leave the prevalent patterns of acting.

Theoretical Approach, Material and Methodology

My investigation starts on the basis of the premises of post-liberal integration theory. Hernández and Chaudary (2015: 5) state correctly that the integration process of ALBA-TCP can't be analysed departing from traditional integration schemes, as the main promoters of ALBA-TCP do actively reject the theoretical base they are built on. As post-liberal integration theory puts forward, alternative forms of integration – like ALBA-TCP, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) or the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) – actually were a consequence of the exhaustion of the traditional capitalist schemes of regional cooperation. The European Union, for instance, is interpreted as an "instrument of neoliberal globalization" (Sanahuja 2012: 8; Daza 2012: 5). Post-liberal regionalism defines itself through the revived focus on politics in foreign relations and on

development policies, a return of a development agenda and of the state as central economic and political actor, the goal to reach autonomy, overall of the USA, and to foster “positive integration”, also in non-trade areas, leading for example to the creation of Latin American infrastructure. Social issues and the reduction of development asymmetries are addressed and the involvement of non-state actors in the integration process is aspired (Chodor/McCarthy-Jones 2013: 219-Sanahuja 2012: 7-8).

While the proposal of Venezuela's Hugo Chávez was initially very vague, ALBA-TCP developed from a project fostering endogenous development to a complete alternative mode of integration including not only the economic, but also a political and social dimension (Briceño 2014: 2; Chodor/McCarthy-Jones 2013: 215). Some authors even go so far to judge ALBA-TCP as a regional integration project prioritising social and political issues over economics (Hernández/Chaudary 2015). In my view, this is not the most convenient interpretation. ALBA-TCP constitutes a special form of post-liberal integration, which adopts principles of socialist integration theory, but tries to implement them under capitalist surroundings. There has been a strong economic element in the initial design and in the evolution of the integration. The huge difference to other forms of integration is the role assigned to economy in relation to other dimensions of society. Increasing trade and economic growth are not seen as the main goals of the integration process. They are just means to meet the needs of the people.

As ALBA-TCP is a broad complex of bi and multilateral declarations, agreements and treaties, which are still(?) only partially implemented, I decided to focus my analysis on three main points: 1) the principles which guide trade in the ALBA-TCP zone, and two of its instruments, 2) the Grand-National Enterprises and 3) the Bank of ALBA. The principles have to be discussed to be able to evaluate on its basis the practical work of the integration in relation to trade. I chose the example of the Grand-National Enterprises, because they represent a fairly new idea, which could be an inspiration for the European Union to gain strength against Transnational Companies (TNCs). Finally, I mention the Bank of ALBA, because it highlights the necessity of progressive financial institutions supporting the integration process. Finally, I elaborate on this basis concrete suggestions for a discussion on an alternative EU trade agenda.

Following Bowen (2009), the research was methodologically realised via document analysis according to the following steps: First, I read literature on post-liberal integration theory in general and on ALBA-TCP in specific. I isolated principles and instruments, which put forward a different approach to trade than neoclassical integration theory and could, therefore,

be interesting for the European Union. In a next step, I screened ALBA-TCP's signed declarations, agreements and treaties in search for those concepts and instruments. I then decided to choose a few documents for a more detailed analysis, namely the People's Trade Agreement, the Fundamental Principles of the People's Trade Treaty, the Conceptualization of Grand-National Enterprise project in the framework of ALBA and the Constitutive Agreement of the Bank of ALBA (ALBA-TCP 2006; 2008; 2009 and Bank of ALBA 2008). The declarations were screened for the categories of political discourse they used and for the issues which were treated as key aspects. Then I complemented the collected impressions via secondary literature, which described closer the implementation and results of the analysed policies and instruments. Some authors also conducted empirical research providing interesting data (namely Altmann Borbón, Aponte García and Califano). Their findings were incorporated. Lamentably, this kind of research on ALBA-TCP constitutes an exception and there exists no statistical compilation of data by ALBA-TCP itself. Information has to be collected from diverse publications and is not complete (Absell 2011; Espinosa 2013: 295). This opens up lots of space for further investigation and permits only preliminary conclusions.

The ALBA-TCP's Alternative Trade Principles

In Latin America, in the recent years there have been developing very interesting processes: "From the heart of numerous countries and their social movements, some alternatives to the predominant neoliberal trade policies have been born such as the ALBA, the new orientation of MERCOSUR, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and, finally, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)" (Daza 2012: 4). Although officially ALBA-TCP states that the political and social dimensions are more important than the economic one, in this field important progress has been made. By now, ALBA-TCP is the second biggest bloc in Latin America, with 76 million inhabitants and intra-zone commerce of more than 6500 million dollar. The nation states have not only controlled economic activities in the past years, they have been involved as economic actors to fight poverty and social exclusion (Tahsin 2011: 207-208).

It has already been mentioned that ALBA-TCP has a special approach to trade. For a start, I'll present some fundamental principles of the People's Trade Treaty (TCP), which was adopted by the ALBA states in 2009 (selection): "1. Trade with complementariness, solidarity and cooperation, so that together we reach a worthy life and living well, promoting trade rules and of cooperation for the well-being of the people and individuals of the underprivileged sectors. 2. Sovereign trade, without conditioning nor interference in internal affairs (...). 4. Protection of national production interests (...). The rejection of the premise "export or die" (...) The

TCP proposes a trade that recognizes the differences between the different countries through rules that favours to the smallest economy. (...) 9. The favouring of the communities, communes, cooperatives, companies of social production, small and medium companies. (...) 11. Asymmetric and nonreciprocal tariff reduction that allow the less developed countries to raise their tariffs to protect their infant industries (...) 12. (...) [T]he TCP promotes and strengthens the role of the State (...). 13. (...) Recognition of the sovereign right of the countries to control and regulate all service sectors seeking for promotion of its national service companies. (...) 15. Execution of joint investments in trade issues that can adopt the form of Grand National companies. (...) 16. (...) [T]he TCP looks for a foreign investment that respects the laws, reinvests the utilities and solves any controversy with the State like any national investor. (...) 19. Adoption of mechanisms that entail monetary and financial independence. (...) 21. Publication of trade negotiations in order that the peoples can exert its protagonist and participative role in trade.” (ALBA-TCP 2009).

Trade within ALBA-TCP is mostly developed through bilateral, sometimes trilateral agreements. The broader direction of economic policies is usually fixed through multilateral agreements (Espinosa 2013: 277). In ALBA-TCP trade, the solidary, complementary aspect is very important. Resources, technology and investment are shared and its use is coordinated (Tahsin 2011: 208). Califano (2015: 95) points out that trade in ALBA-TCP is not the central objective, but the mean to reach other goals. The exchange relations between ALBA-TCP countries are guided by shared or cooperative advantages, not by competition and in the search for profit of national elites or Transnational Corporations (TNCs). The problem of unequal terms of trade is recognised and there are intentions to balance inequalities between countries through economic policy and political action (Espinosa 2013: 295; 298; Tahsin 2011: 207; Yaffe 2011: 129). The goal is the promotion of endogenous development (Tahsin 2011: 208-214). This is also possible because of the greater independence of other big players, which the cooperation in ALBA-TCP grants to its member countries, lessening for example Cuba’s dependence on other trading partners (Yaffe 2011: 135).

Hernández and Chaudary (2015: 12; 14) interpret ALBA-TCP as a Third Way between neoliberal and socialist integration models. This is an important remark, because it also explains why ALBA-TCP’s trade principles are not easy to classify. As in COMECON, trade in ALBA-TCP is partly skipping market laws and the states play a very important role in the production and distribution of goods. Nevertheless, industrialisation is a far less prominent issue than it was in the socialist integration theory (Maier 1976). Also, the objective to maintain the greatest possible autonomy of all ALBA-TCP affiliates shows a different

approach to integration.

There exist different opinions about the roots of the ALBA-TCP principles of trade. Firstly, there are clear signs of Cuban influence, as Cuba practices international solidarity already for decades, sending their doctors and teachers around the world. Also, Cuba's experience inside COMECON probably has provided some inspirations, as it was possible for Cuba to pay soviet oil with sugar (through barter), which was purchased by USSR for the double to quadruple of the world market price (Exenberger 2002: 37; Yaffe 2011). Additionally, the state has always since the Revolution played a central role in Cuba and foreign investments have been very restricted (This has been modified gradually since the Special Period in the 1990s, see Eder 2012: 36-51).

Secondly, some authors, for example Daza (2012: 7-9) and Muhr (2010: 44-45), argue the ideas of complementary and solidary trade were born out of the alter-globalisation movement. It was the Hemispheric Social Alliance (HSA) built out of social and grass roots movements in the Americas, which had formed against the US proposal of creating a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). In the year 2002, it put forward several principles of alternative trade, which Hugo Chávez later integrated into his suggestions related to ALBA. The HSA addressed not only economic, but also social, environmental and labour issues. “[I]nstead of looking for an alternative based on trade agreements, it was proposed to build a new form of integration where international agreements are based on reciprocity, mutual benefit, national sovereignty, the protection of the internal markets and respect for the basic rights of the people” (Daza 2015: 7). Ullán de la Rosa (2010: 48) insists that ALBA-TCP did not only adopt ideas promoted by the social movements, but also tried to integrate them in its structure. “[W]hat distinguishes this project from other “Third ways” in recent history in Latin America [...] is exactly its alliance with the alter-globalisation New Social Movements and their extension going beyond borders in a net of supranational relations of which the ALBA is maybe the most important nod, but not the only one.” He interprets this form of cooperation as a second phase of the alter-globalisation movement.

A third interpretation puts emphasis on Evo Morales' influence. It is said that it was the Bolivian president who proposed in 2006, when Bolivia joined ALBA, the supplement of the People's Trade Agreement (TCP in Spanish). It was signed in the same year by Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela and gave the ALBA the additional acronym “TCP”. The suggested principles were inspired by the popular Bolivian concept of “Vivir Bien” (Living well) and have been adopted by many social movements around the world (Daza 2012: 10; Muhr 2010: 44). The People's Trade Agreement (TCP) – characterised by Espinosa (2013: 278) as a first

deepening of the integration process – finally contained many smaller bilateral and trilateral agreements. Some highlights of the agreements are: Cuba grants Bolivia medical assistance, for example in the area of ophthalmological operations, and will educate Bolivian doctors at the ELAM medical school in Cuba. Additionally, Cuba will cover the costs for its medical personnel, Bolivia only has to provide the facilities. A similar agreement has been established in the education sector (literacy program). Imports from Cuba can be paid with goods (barter), in the national currency of Bolivia or in other mutually accepted coins. Venezuela will cooperate with Bolivia in the energy and mining sector and will provide 5000 scholarships for Bolivian students. Furthermore, Venezuela sets up a fund for the financing of productive infrastructure projects in Bolivia. Also in the case of Venezuela, Bolivia can pay through barter. Bolivian state and mixed companies do not have to pay taxes neither in Cuba nor in Venezuela during the period of investment recovery. Bolivia, in turn, guarantees to contribute to the energy security of the three countries. Cuba and Venezuela also declare to abolish tariffs and other non-tariff trade barriers one-sided in favour of Bolivia (ALBA-TCP 2006). Bolivia's duties are the fewest, which corresponds to its status as weakest economy. The non-reciprocity is a main characteristic of the TCP, referring for instance to the fact that not all member countries are expected to abolish their tariffs completely (Briceño 2011: 48). Another characteristic is the possibility to “pay” goods directly with other goods or with services ('barter'). This possibility is not only granted to Bolivia, also Cuba compensates part of the oil it receives from Venezuela through the provision of medical delegations to Venezuela. This helps the economically weakest countries to save foreign currency (Yaffe 2011: 134). Briceño (2014: 13) resumes that trade plays a subordinated role in ALBA-TCP. “In reality, the main goals of this regional bloc are energy integration, social policy, cooperation among state-led firms and political cooperation”. However, in the last few years there have been efforts to strengthen the trade dimension within ALBA-TCP. One example is the establishment of the ECOALBA-TCP economic area in February of 2012. The goal was to deepen the economic integration between the ALBA-TCP affiliates. The main objectives of ECOALBA-TCP are: “1. The planning and streamlining of economic relations among the Signatory Countries, thus reinforcing the complementary production and trade links. [...] 2. The circulation of assets and the coordination of production means among the Signatory Countries, which will facilitate full development of their production potentials and capacities in priority sectors in order to meet the needs of our peoples, taking into account intra-regional demand and fostering productive scaling up through various aspects, (...) based on the Development Plans formulated by each Signatory Country. 3. The coordination of economic policies among the

signatory countries in order to ensure adequate conditions for complementarity (...). 4. The promotion of production specialization according to the strengths of each country, (...). 5. The use of mechanisms and instruments of the new financial architecture designed by ALBA-TCP, with special emphasis on the consolidation of Bank of ALBA (...), as well as the [common account unit, J.E.] Regional Clearance Unitary System (SUCRE)” (SELA 2013: 16-17). Califano (2015: 88-89) highlights that ECOALBA-TCP is not conceived as a free trade area, but aspires to become a “shared development area”. Therefore, growth in trade shouldn't be seen as the only indicator for judging the success or the failure of the project. Additionally, conventional trade data only focuses on trade in goods. The export of services, which are in the case of Cuba a very relevant category, are not included. Also, the different possibilities of compensated trade lower significantly intra-ALBA-TCP trade. According to Espinosa (2013: 295), the most important task of ECOALBA-TCP is to intensify the productive net between ALBA-TCP affiliates through the creation of production chains within ECOALBA-TCP, as economic complementarity is still very low.

Grand-National Enterprises (GNEs) as New Economic Actors

As it was already mentioned, ALBA-TCP has been conceived in opposition to the FTAA. So they started to define strategic fields inside the ALBA-TCP area, where common work should be realised in the framework of Grand-National Projects (GNPs). The majority of those projects have been proposals by social movements expressed at Peoples' Summits and other public meetings (Espinosa 2013: 292). As a tool for promoting the GNPs, Grand-National Enterprises (GNEs) were foreseen. Those multi-state-owned companies operate in areas of public interest, e.g. finance and investments, education, infrastructure projects, food production, energy, environment, health, fair trade, tourism, industry, culture, sport and telecommunications (Briceño 2011: 49-53; Yaffe 2011: 136).

Every Grand-National Enterprise has to be linked to a Grand-National Project, but not every Grand-National Project has its own enterprises. For example, in the strategic area of fair trade exists a Grand-National Enterprise for industrial supplies, for the commercialisation of material input, equipment and machines for the industrial sector. Also, there is a Grand-National Enterprise for imports and exports in the ALBA-TCP area, ALBA-EXIM, which is in charge of the trade complementarity. And as a Grand-National Project, ALBA shops will be created to distribute goods produced in ALBA-TCP countries (Aponte García 2014: 197; 201; Briceño 2011: 48-49). The conceptualisation of Grand-National Projects and enterprises in 2008 was in Espinosa's view a third deepening of the integration process – after the signing of the TCP and the creation of the Bank of ALBA –, bringing forward the economic

dimension of ALBA-TCP (Espinosa 2013: 278; 292; 295).

The transnational operation area should convert them into opponents of the transnational companies (TNCs) and their free trade agenda (Daza 2012: 9). “The concept of Grannational Enterprises emerged in opposition to that of the transnational companies. Therefore, its economic dynamics will be oriented to favour the production of goods and services for meeting the human needs, ensuring its continuity and breaking with the logic of reproduction and capital accumulation” (ALBA-TCP 2008). The political leaders of ALBA-TCP concluded that the state should act as entrepreneur, but not opening itself to foreign capital. Instead, the funding should be guaranteed through a regionally controlled bank, the Bank of ALBA, about which I will write later (Califano 2015: 83; Tahsin 2001: 208). That the state possesses its own companies is nothing new. In the ALBA-TCP zone, however, the concept of state-owned enterprises has been reinterpreted in a very interesting way.

GNE's main target is to support the nation states in reaching cooperative advantage (in opposition to Ricardo's comparative advantage): “Cooperative advantage should be the key element to solve the strains emerging from the contrasting objectives pursued by the participating states: specialisation according to each state's strengths shall be coupled with an integral development of each state's productive apparatus; moreover, this is to be done in order to overcome asymmetries between countries” (Califano 2015: 82). Califano (2015: 82) goes on criticising that it never has been clearly defined what this cooperative advantages should and could be. He argues that technological pooling – foreseen in ALBA-TCP's Grand-National Projects – in his opinion would be such an advantage. Also the creation of regional value chains around the GNEs could lead to a cooperative advantage.

Grand-National Enterprises are owned by two or more states and are focused on intra-ALBA-TCP trade. They aim to integrate other public or private, large or small, local or foreign enterprises in regional value chains. In this cooperation the GNEs act as leading firms, controlling and coordinating production and distribution. They are conceived as transnationally operating state-led companies in crucial sectors, targeting the creation and occupation of central value chains, but not their monopolisation. “[A] given GNE is supposed to stretch covering a productive chain – transnationally extended – from the moment of resources allocation – upstream – till that of consumption – downstream. These extremes of the productive chain are to be controlled by governments, in order to guarantee the enterprises' social goal which it has been created for. (...) [T]heir production must be directed to local final or industrial consumption – or to that of other states involved – regardless of any other economic consideration, and the price they charge has to be “fair”.” (Califano 2015: 77-

78; 75; ALBA-TCP 2008; Aponte García 2014: 197; 201; Tahsin 2011: 209).

GNEs “are not subjected to foreign companies directions, and (...) not tied with the process, project, interests and evolution of global capitalism” (Califano 2015: 76). They allow the governments of the ALBA-TCP countries to promote their trade principles through the operation of the GNEs (Aponte García 2011: 189-190). Nevertheless, GNEs have to preserve their profitability, and their self-sustainability (without reliance on public funds) is foreseen. The profits which are made shall either be reinvested in the company or be directed to social programmes. Exports are allowed when local consumption is satisfied, but primarily to other ALBA-TCP and regional countries, as ALBA-TCP's development model is not export-led (Califano 2015: 78).

With the establishment of the economic space ECOALBA-TCP Grand-National Enterprises were seen as very central actors in its creation and stabilisation. “The institution of an economic area, ECOALBA-TCP, with productive relations at its core finds its rationale in the consideration that the Alliance has to structurally enroot itself in economic relations between its members, (...), transforming the social achievements obtained so far - (...) - in structural economic integration linkages capable of favouring the integral development of its members. Apparently, the role of the Grand-National Enterprises is to be pivotal” (Califano 2015: 74). The exact meaning of the concept “Grand-National Enterprise” is disputed. Aponte García (2014: 197; 201) defines all mixed enterprises which are owned by two or more states as Grand-National Enterprises. This leads to her statement that Venezuela and Cuba had Grand-National Enterprises already from 2005 on (before the concept was even elaborated). Califano (2015: 78-887) doesn't agree with her. In his view, there exist many mistakes about what a GNE actually is, because there is a lack of juridical investigation on GNE structures. Califano states that mixed enterprises are not Grand-National Enterprises, although they are sometimes even declared so in official documents. Mixed enterprises are juridically easier to establish and therefore far more widespread than GNEs. They share the same principles and have similar goals as GNEs. What distinguishes a GNE from a mixed enterprise is that the former is managed by an intergovernmental commission without a juridical personality. A mixed enterprise is owned by two or more states, but operates just in one. GNEs usually are composed by several mixed enterprises, which are all based in different states. All decisions are taken by consensus and their production is subjected to Grand-National Planning. The country where the enterprise is located usually holds a share of at least 51% of the GNE. The GNE for Coffee Production is an exception; all the other quite advanced GNEs plan to create a firm in every participating country.

There is still no “constitutional” treaty available for GNEs, which means they are not tied to the constitutions of the participating countries. At the moment, the establishment of every GNE at the moment is regulated through the signature of an international treaty, which is then followed by the elaboration of the companies’ statute. When this is approved, the firm can start to operate. At the moment, GNEs operate in front of the national and international law as if they were regular transnational state companies, as for example the Venezuelan oil company PDVSA. “We are then facing a political concept, lacking of a juridical base, thus subject to governments’ will and not enrooted into states’ structural relations, not even in juridical terms, let alone economic ones” (Califano 2015: 79; 78-87). This could turn out problematic for the ALBA-TCP project now that the Venezuelan opposition has won the majority in parliament. That a regime change in Venezuela could lead to problems was already pointed out beforehand by Daza (2012: 9), Erisman (2011: 254) and Hernández/Chaudary (2015: 19).

Depending on the definition, the number of Grand-National Enterprises in operation varies: Yaffe (2011: 142) writes in 2011 that “[o]ver 100 programmes and enterprises had been established by April 2009 and many more were underway.” SELA (2013: 17-19) states that in 2007, on the Fifth ALBA Summit, it was agreed to implement 32 Grand-National Projects and Enterprises. Of those 18 projects were prioritised a few months later. Under these, we can find for example the Bank of ALBA, the ALBA import and export company and the ALBA stores belonging to the GNP “Fair Trade”. Nevertheless, in 2013, when SELA published its paper, besides the Bank of ALBA only seven companies and projects had been developed or had been in the process of negotiation. At the beginning of 2015, Califano refers to official sources talking about 13 existing GNEs, output of 25 Grand-National Projects, which operate in 14 fields of action. At this point, all GNEs are bilateral, between Venezuela and another ALBA-TCP country, what wasn’t planned in the conceptualization of GNEs. According to his own narrow definition, there is currently just one GNE in operation. All the other GNEs are waiting for their social statute to be approved and will then start to run (Califano 2015: 80). So, what about the results of the Grand-National Enterprises? Briceño (2014: 12) is very sceptical: “The so-called Grand-National Projects are presented as mechanisms to further productive integration, but these are mainly state-led projects that are not articulated within domestic firms. Consequently, the potential to foster regional value chains is quite limited.” Aponte García (2014: 207-211; 217) analysed the development of trade flows of the ALBA-TCP area between 1998 and 2011, 2005 being the first year after the signing of the initial ALBA-TCP agreements. Her findings disagree with Briceño: exports grew 42% comparing

the pre- and post-ALBA-periods. If you split the whole volume of exports realised between ALBA-TCP members from 1998 to 2011, 41% were realized in the period 1998 to 2004, 59% in the period from 2005 to 2011. The petrol industry was not the fastest growing category in the post-ALBA-period, but food and beverages and industrial supplies. Nevertheless, several authors state correctly that the dependency on Venezuelan oil sells is still significant for the funding of the social programmes (Broadhead/Morrison 2012: 21; Espinosa 2013: 295; Hart-Landsberg 2013: 166-167). Referring to the bilateral trade between Cuba and Venezuela, Aponte García states (2014: 211) that effective industrial development linked to health and education has been created in Cuba.

Califano (2015: 89-90) complements Aponte García's investigation by relating trade growth rates to overall growth in GDP. According to data from CEPALSTAT, GDP growth for the five largest members of ALBA-TCP was between 2005 and 2011 about 38%, which means it was less than the expansion in trade. He also mentions correctly that the second period of investigation (2005-2011) was characterised by the outburst of the world economic crisis. Still, there has been significant growth in trade, and not mostly related to raw materials. "We may infer that the fields of exports which experienced the best performances in the ALBA-TCP period, being composed by just a narrow number of sectors so markedly outperforming the others, are in fact those in which the trade in intermediate goods had the greatest relevance. Thus, in those sectors the scope for the actual realisation of GNEs and the consequent development of production chains is apparently more significant" (Califano 2015: 90).

Problematic is the simple fact that ALBA-TCP and its initiatives have not redirected flows of goods in such a significant number as it was hoped. The economic ties between ALBA-TCP countries are still weak (Daza 2015: 9). Most of the ALBA-TCP affiliates, especially those which are economically better developed, do still trade mainly with non-member states. The other ALBA-TCP states are usually not among the five main trading partners. Venezuela's main trading partners are all not ALBA-TCP affiliates, the USA being the most important partner for exports and imports (respectively 26.4 and 23.5% in 2013). The same holds for Ecuador (44.6 % and 25.2%). Nicaragua sends 8.3 % of its exports to Venezuela, which makes it the third biggest absorber of Nicaraguan exports. The majority of Nicaraguan imports do not come from ALBA-TCP countries. Bolivia also has none of its ALBA-TCP allies among the five most important trading partners. Only for Cuba, Venezuela is very relevant, absorbing 40.3 % of its exports and providing 42.3% of Cuban imports (Califano 2015: 93). Califano observes a radial structure of trade in ALBA-TCP, evolving around

Venezuela. More than 88% of intra-ALBA-TCP trade flows in 2011 were due to bilateral trade with Venezuela. Although Venezuela increased intensively its imports from other ALBA-TCP countries, in 2011 they just reached 4.63% of the total Venezuelan imports. “Overall it can be said that trade flows between the members of the Alliance have increased significantly, though they still amount to a marginal portion of members states’ trade” (Califano 2015: 94).

Institutionalising Financial Independence – The Bank of ALBA

An important goal of ALBA-TCP is the attainment of financial sovereignty and the creation of a New Regional Financial Architecture. The idea to create the Bank of ALBA was a reaction from the Venezuelan government on the lame advances made in the implementation of the Bank of the South (Aponte García 2014: 253; 262; Chodor/McCarthy-Jones 2013: 218). ALBA-TCP member countries recognised that it was very important to reach financial independence of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and of foreign currencies. They considered that it was essential to open up an own bank to gain control over borrowing conditions. Therefore, the creation of the Bank of ALBA was a prioritised Grand-National Project (SELA 2013: 17). For Espinosa (2013: 278) the proposal and adopted decision to create a Bank of ALBA was a second deepening of the integration process in June of 2007, after the first one which was realised through the implementation of TCP in 2006. In January of 2008, the Constitutive Act of the Bank of ALBA was signed, initially by Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela. In July of 2009, the Constitutive Act was ratified by Venezuela and later in the same year also by Cuba and Nicaragua. The agreement finally entered into force on 30 August 2009, allowing for the initial release of financing allocations to high impact social projects in the areas of culture, health and education. The headquarters of the bank were established in Caracas, Venezuela (Aponte García 2014: 262-265; SELA 2013: 18; 20). The Bank of ALBA (2008: 6) aspires – corresponding to its Constitutive agreement - “to assist with social and economic development, reduce poverty and asymmetries, strengthen integration, promote a fair, dynamic, harmonic and balanced economic exchange among member countries of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) inspired on the principles of solidarity, complementarity, cooperation and respect to the sovereignty of the peoples (Bank of ALBA 2008: 6). The Bank of ALBA has the goal to support through financing the “4.1.1 Economic development of key sectors of the economy, [...]. 4.1.2 *Social development in health, education, housing and social security matters*, [...]. 4.1.3 Expansion and connection of these countries' infrastructure. [...] 4.1.4 *Promotion, strengthening and development of micro-, small- and medium-size production*, as well as

associate economies, [...]. 4.1.5 Creation of bi-national, grand national companies or any other modality of associative organization that promotes mutual interest investments [...]. 4.2 Promote, create and administer reimbursable and non-reimbursable finance funds [...]. 4.3 Provide resources for technical assistance, pre-investment, research and development studies, transfer and absorption of technology. 4.4 *Develop and promote fair trading practices* in goods and services. 4.5 Other that contribute to the purpose of BALBA²” (Bank of ALBA 2008: 6-7; emphasis mine).

The Bank of ALBA is self-sustainable and self-governed corresponding to the international practices of financial efficiency, which should lead to the creation of new resources to finance projects of the member countries. Every member states has the same number of representatives in the bank. The Bank of ALBA operates without loan conditions and on the basis of member’s consensus. Most of its money comes from Venezuela. In 2012, Venezuela proposed that every member country should allocate 1 % of its international reserves in the Bank of ALBA. For a start, Venezuela deposited its equivalent, 300 Million dollar in the reserves of the bank (Aponte García 2014: 262-265; Yaffe 2011: 137). In the final draft of ECOALBA-TCP, the Bank of ALBA is presented “as an effective instrument to finance Grand-National economic and cooperation projects, (...). The bank has financial resources available exactly for this purpose (SELA 2013: 17; 20).

The EU out of ALBA-TCP Researchers’ Perspective

Before I will go into detail on the question of how ALBA-TCP could inspire the EU in terms of trade, I want to provide an insight in the perception of the EU in the ALBA-TCP research field. This is crucial, because it already shows clearly some possible constraints for the direct transfer of concepts and instruments. Silva (2013: 93-94) and Daza (2012: 5-6) point out that Latin American left-wing governments reject free trade and related bodies such as the WTO and IMF, as well as countries and blocs promoting it, for example the US and the EU. Even more, since the crisis of the Eurozone broke out. “The crisis has raised many questions about the “social model” of European integration and has revealed its deep inequality; the fact is that the EU process of integration is on shaky ground, plagued with asymmetries, dominated by financial capital where the upper hand is held by France and Germany over countries with relatively weaker economies. The solution the EU has devised to come out of crisis is to create even more inequality and to dismantle all of the welfare system which, until recently, was its pride” (Daza 2012: 6).

² Please note that initially it was thought to use the abbreviation BALBA for the Bank of ALBA. This hasn't been widely adopted. Mostly the term „Bank of ALBA“ is in use.

Briceño (2014: 7-8) states that “Europe was traditionally the major external model” for Latin American integration processes, because of its apparently efficiently-working combination of neoliberalism and interventionism. Hernández and Chaudary (2015: 7) hold against this that the EU never was a role model for ALBA-TCP, which rejected from the beginning the old cepalist regionalism and the idea of gradual integration of Bela Balassa, as well as the basics of the new open or strategic regionalism. The different opinions about the European Union recently also caused tensions between the Latin American countries, as they couldn’t agree on a common position on the desired trade and investment relations with the European Union (Daza 2012: 11).

Alternative Trade Principles for the EU

Theoretically, in a world of transnationally functioning production relations, international cooperation transcending borders can be a very important tool to modify the economic structures according to our needs. Not surprisingly, concrete trade politics depend strongly on the principles which underlie them. If cooperation is organised on the basis of complementarity and sustainability, it can show positive effects. In the EU – contrary to the ALBA -TCP – it was always the economic dimension which dominated over political and social issues. The cooperation favoured the big economic actors – promoting capital accumulation – far more than other actors of society. An increase in trade and economic growth has always been the central goal of the European cooperation. Nevertheless, till the outbreak of the crisis this was not so obvious and not as extreme as it is today. The question is how could the European Union gather inspiration from ALBA-TCP's trade principles?

The aim in ALBA-TCP is to create fair trade, not free trade. Therefore, every trade relation is screened for possible negative development effects, before it gets established. There are two main points which could be interesting inputs for the redesign of EU trade principles. Firstly, the EU could apply the principle of fair trade to its intra-zone trade operations, with the special goal of protecting economically weaker actors and countries. The objectives would be the same as highlighted in the following statement concerning ALBA-TCP: “ALBA (...) provides a framework for governments to negotiate planned exchanges of the goods and services that reflect their respective nation's strength. These exchanges allow each nation to pursue its own development objectives in a far more sustainable and equitable way than if forced to rely solely on its own resources or respond to global market imperatives” (Hart-Landsberg 2013: 163).

Secondly, the People’s Trade Treaty arose as a reaction to the rising number of bilateral FTAs which were put forward by the USA in Latin America after the defeat of their project to create

an All-American Free Trade Area (Briceño 2011: 49). This means that the TCP could also serve as a benchmark for the redesign of the European Union's trade agreements with developing countries. It is important that the trade relations are not only changed inside the European Union, but also with external actors. The problem about this topic is that the definition of "fair trade" relations is a delicate one. Neoclassical economics would argue that trade relations without state interventions are the "fairest" ones. It requires therefore a political struggle to impose ALBA-TCP's definition of fair trade in the European Union.

The Potential of Grand-National European Enterprises

Grand-National Enterprises influence trade in a variety of ways. The most obvious way is that they realise trade operations themselves, but they can also create productive networks which promote trade and – through the alteration of persisting property relations – strengthen the power of the state, and thereby allowing the implementation of alternative trade policies.

ALBA-TCP created a counter-power against Transnational Companies (TNCs) by founding Grand-National Enterprises (GNEs). Transferring this concept to the EU would be an option to react on the current economic crisis in a neo-Keynesian way. The question if multiple-state-companies represent an alternative to TNCs is very important for a range of reasons: Firstly, in the EU state enterprises at the moment are seen as inefficient and expensive. Furthermore, on the basis of this argument their privatisation is promoted. Maybe, they could work in a more efficient way, if they were organised transnationally (e.g. regarding resource allocation). Secondly, TNCs have reached their great power partly because they do not have intense state-boundaries to any state (in the sense, that they do not care which state sponsors them through abatement of taxes, subsidised rents for state ground etc.). Therefore, they move quickly if they feel new legislation might endanger their profit. If several states own an enterprise this wouldn't be the case. Thirdly, GNEs could act as a counter-weight to TNCs in the region, being providers of fair produced goods and fostering decent working conditions. Thereby, they would put pressure on TNCs to abandon their most exploitative practices. GNEs have the potential to create new production chains, interlink production of member countries and help to create fairer trade networks. Finally, Grand-National Enterprises can help to implement projects which are considered important by the involved nation states. This can refer to classical areas of cooperation, such as infrastructure projects, but can also mean the promotion of regional food sovereignty or transnational social programmes.

If the concept of GNEs is successful in ALBA-TCP region, this could also be an interesting option for European countries to regain power against TNCs. Nevertheless, considering the current EU structures exists the danger that such GNEs are just created as a new form of

capital-state-cooperation acting in favour of profit maximisation exploiting the state's resources. Under current political circumstances such enterprises – if entirely state-owned – would also be under steady danger of (partly) privatisation. Also, as has been pointed out before, TNCs are highly supported by political structures in the EU today (Plehwe 2013). Therefore, it's hardly thinkable that exactly these structures would actively create their opponents.

A Different Agenda for European Financial Institutions

Finally, the question of the financial architecture is crucial. Banks (and funds) can play an enabling or an obstructive role in fomenting regional integration and development. Looking at its objectives, the Bank of ALBA plays more the role of a development bank than of a central bank. Nevertheless, the Bank of ALBA is partially in charge of the management of the common currency unit SUCRE, which is a task comparable of the management of the Euro in the hands of the ECB (Aponte García 2014: 265). Through the creation of the Bank of ALBA, ALBA-TCP reached financial independence of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and permitted itself to finance their ambitious projects.

The EU has its own central bank (ECB), but it does not support the weaker economic actors in the EU. Instead it is on the side of big private banks and TNCs and works in coordination with the IFIs, as the example of the Greek “bailout” shows. Silva (2013: 82) insists that the establishment of an independent Central Bank impeded that the weaker economies could shape their monetarist policies after their needs. Demirovic and Sablowski (2013: 216; 233) argue that the ECB should lose its political independence, because in its current mode of operation it only serves for the informal distribution of power.

Silva (2013: 86) goes even further stating that the main institutions of the EU are subordinated to financial capital or directly controlled by those. She names the ECB as a concrete example. ECB's main goal, to guarantee the stability of prices – no matter what the cost –, is reflected in its interventions. Theoretically, a European Central Bank could play a progressive role, funding alternative trade concepts like cooperatives and fair trade initiatives. The alignment of financial policy can decide which type of trade shall be realised or promoted, it can protect weaker actors in economic relations and fund state projects in the interest of the great majority of the population. Therefore, it is a central question who controls the banks and the lending policy.

The European Investment Bank (EIB), which is in charge of development funding at the moment, provides – among other things – credits for medium and small enterprises and for infrastructural projects, but is not guided by the same social goals as the Bank of ALBA.

Probably, it does not provide loans without conditions. As it does explicitly not publish its loan conditions on the website, this can't be verified (EIB 2016). And even if it would grant favourable credits for weaker economic actors, it is doubtful that such a lending policy could compensate the economic situation deteriorated by the actions of the Troika to save the Euro, such as the widespread austerity programmes.

Conclusion

In the current situation, it is important to reconsider what should be the base of regional integration. The policies applied in the EU – not only in relation to trade – do not only deepen the economic crisis, but also lead hundreds of thousands of people in poverty. ALBA-TCP has a different approach. “At a time of unprecedented crisis in international capitalism, the citizens of Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Italy, the UK, the US and elsewhere (...) do well to consider the ALBA alternative. Although not perfect, the fact that such an arrangement has been constructed holds out proof that there is nothing inevitable about the form of deregulated international capitalism that has promised great prosperity but delivered much misery” (Broadhead/Morrison 2012: 23; Yaffe (2011: 141) suggests the same).

I argue that it currently is crucial to think about real alternatives to the established trade patterns. This implies the necessity to present other possibilities of action, so that those affected negatively by the crisis and cut policies dispose over an alternative agenda they can promote. In this process, ALBA-TCP could serve as an inspiration for the further development of trade relations in the crisis-shaken European Union, because it managed to introduce a new logic in its (still capitalist) trade operations.

It is predictable that the actual European politics of combating the crisis will lead to greater conflicts in society, as income and wealth distribution is getting constantly more unequal. This will also open up the possibility for discussing alternative models and – subsequently – implementing different policies. Therefore it is necessary to observe closely the developments in other regions of the world, and to collect carefully suggestions which could serve as an inspiration for an alternative EU trade agenda. The presented proposals are not to be seen as reform suggestions for the European Union, but as ideas which should be discussed by a critical civil society, pursuing the goal of transformative social change. These changes, however, will not be implemented without collective action of European Union citizens, advocating their rights and demands.

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