

New data highway will bring Europe and Latin America closer

The contract to construct a fibre optic cable running under the Atlantic Ocean that will connect Latin America and Europe (from Portugal to Brazil) is now in force. By 2020, the cable will provide high broadband connectivity and boost business, scientific and cultural exchanges between the two continents.



ELLA Link

The BELLA (building the Europe Link to Latin America) Consortium, an international partnership of research and education networks whose leading investor is the European Commission, is a key participant in the project. Alongside the new cable, BELLA will also boost interconnectivity between Latin American countries, initially Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Ecuador.

Neven Mimica, Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Elżbieta Bieńkowska, Commissioner for the Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, Carlos Moedas, Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, and Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, said in a joint statement:

Latin America and Europe have never been so closely connected: we are pleased to see this intercontinental cable becoming a reality. The new digital highway will support innovation for improved earth observation services, be a step forward in the creation of an EU-Latin America common research area, and tackle Latin America's digital divide with

Europe and within the region, with potential for even more collaboration in the years to come. This project also reflects the EU's commitment to work together with Latin America towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Benefits of the cable

The benefits of this new undersea connection will be felt in areas including international cooperation and regional development, e-infrastructure, security and space.

- The cable will boost business exchanges and enable companies in Europe and Latin America to further develop a data economy, building on existing cooperation, for example in the fields of the Internet of Things and High Performance Computing. As a direct link between the two continents without intermediate connection points, it will also provide high levels of data privacy.
- The BELLA Programme, coordinated by the BELLA Consortium, will provide reserved capacity over this cable to connect European and Latin American research and education communities, supporting open science and knowledge-sharing.
- The cable will have also a particular impact on Earth Observation services, especially the Copernicus programme, by allowing a much larger volume of Earth Observation data and information to be shared and at higher speed, thereby bolstering its uptake by users on both sides of the Atlantic.
- The European Southern Observatory operates observing facilities for astronomy in the Atacama Desert, Chile, while the Cherenkov Telescope Array, an international project partly financed by Horizon 2020, is building observatory sites in Chile and Europe. Through this new high-capacity connection, these sites will be able to share astronomical data more easily, enabling new scientific discoveries.

The initiative also supports improved digital interconnectivity between Latin American countries, and will contribute to regional and inter-regional integration. It will underpin the EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) partnership by enhancing cooperation under the EU-CELAC Action Plan, notably on interconnectivity, science, research, innovation, and technology, as well as higher education. The cable will also boost connectivity to Madeira and Cabo Verde.

Background

European and Latin American Heads of State and Government have repeatedly shown their support for the development of direct broadband links between Latin America and the EU. The EU-Brazil Summit in 2014 welcomed plans for a submarine cable, and the Brussels Declaration signed at the EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) Summit in June 2015 gave further political support to the initiative.

The BELLA Programme, which is investing in the transatlantic cable to meet transatlantic research and education connectivity needs, is overseen by the BELLA (Building the Europe Link to Latin America) Consortium, composed of eleven research and education networks: GÉANT (the pan-European research and education network) and RedCLARA (the Latin American regional network) and the national networks of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Its main funder is the European Commission, which has provided approximately EUR 26.5 million from Horizon 2020, Copernicus and its regional Development Cooperation Instrument. Latin American members of the consortium are providing cash and in-kind resources, with a total value of EUR 27.2 million.

The private consortium EllaLink is responsible for building and deploying the cable. The contract agreement between BELLA and EllaLink, signed in August 2018, has now entered into force. The cable is scheduled to be ready for use in 2020.

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