

## **The European Union as an integration model for Latin America and the Caribbean – reality or wishful thinking?**

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### **Abstract**

This article analyses the European Union's model of integration as a model of integration for Latin American and the Caribbean, starting with the question 'What does "integration" really mean in LAC?'. Thus, initially, this article reveals some theoretical aspects of new regionalism under which umbrella are analyzed the organizations created since 1990 in the Latin-American space. The following part will assess the differences existing between the integration process in LAC and EU, concluding that 'there will continue to be, probably, at least for the foreseeable future, a sui generis integration'.

### **Keywords**

New regionalism, regional integration, Latin America and Caribbean, European Union, European model of integration

The European Union is seen as a sophisticated model of integration in nowadays world. Not necessarily a perfect pattern, but certainly a solid reference when trying to take co-operation to a higher level.

Any attempt of comparing Europe with other regions in terms of integration should start from the assumption that European integration has started in, and was determined by a specific historical context<sup>109</sup>, the aftermath of World War II. In a nutshell, the commitment for peace, visionary politicians, such as Robert Schuman and Konrad Adenauer, historical reconciliation and leadership of two major countries, France and Germany, which chose to

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<sup>109</sup> Sarti, Ingrid, "Theoretical and developmental challenges to contemporary South American Integration", <http://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/b08c2a70-7f77-474d-9fb4-9e63afa67142.pdf>, 2014, p.1.

replace the balance of power with the “community method”<sup>110</sup>, all this complexity makes the European integration a one of its kind process.

Obviously, the common goal would not have been enough to lead towards such a cohesive structure, if it was not built on the grounds of a similar economic philosophy and politics. Some authors believe it would not be right to use the European experience as a measurement tool in order to judge the success or failure of other integration initiatives, that one should only compare regional policies and institutional developments<sup>111</sup>; that integration in itself is a process in evolution and any attempt to emulate this “moving target” will always be problematic<sup>112</sup>.

In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), attempts to integrate regionally have been numerous and many of them tried to follow the European model. The variety of regional organizations, similar in scope, but modest in results, proves that specific conditions in the region, such as economic disparities and ideological discrepancies, made integration “à la Européenne” almost impossible. Official rhetoric aside, practical results show a different reality. Despite sustained European efforts to promote its model and experiences, LAC are following their own path towards integration. The question is if by using different ingredients, this region will be able to reach a similar level of integration as Europe. But first of all, does it want to?

What does “integration” really mean in LAC? This essay will try to answer this question by analyzing the organizations created since 1990, under the umbrella of the New Regionalism. The concept of New Regionalism is very fluid, and its complexity looked appealing to many researchers. The term as such was launched by Robert D. Palmer in 1991, in his book *New*

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<sup>110</sup> Cameron, Fraser, *The European Union as a Model for Regional Integration*, The Council on Foreign Relations, septembre 2010, [http://www.cfr.org/world/european-union-model-regional-integration/p22935\\_2010\\_p.1](http://www.cfr.org/world/european-union-model-regional-integration/p22935_2010_p.1)

<sup>111</sup> Kirchner, Emil J., “The European Union as a Model for Regional Integration: The Muslim World and Beyond”, Jean Monnet/Robert Schuman Paper Series Vol.6 No.1, 2006, p.1.

<sup>112</sup> Murray, Philomena, “Model Europe? Reflections on the EU as a Model of Regional Integration”, in P. Della Posta, M. Uvalic, A. Verdun (eds), *Globalization, Development and Integration*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2009, p. 273.

*Regionalism in Asia and the Pacific*. It was defined as the way of promoting intra-regional cooperation as an instrument of increasing the region's relevance in the international arena and thus, promoting the national interests of the states; a fundamental feature of the New Regionalism would be its openness to the world, politically and economically, as well as the capacity of linking nationalism to international aspirations of the states<sup>113</sup>.

Researchers, such as Bjorn Hettne and Andras Inotai, advocated that New Regionalism is a spontaneous process, emerging from within the region in a multipolar world, with states in leading roles, and not imposed or controlled by a superpower such as during the Cold War era<sup>114</sup>. Even if the internal motivation was strong, it is hard to believe that it had not as a mental background the only known success story at the time, the EU, as well as the perception of the USA, by most Latin Americans as the historical "common enemy". Indeed, after 1990, USA's interest in Latin America diminished considerably, creating a vacuum of power which Latin-American states tried to fill in. Between 1990-1995, approximately 30 inter-regional agreements were signed. This effervescence indicates the emergence of a new type of regionalism as a contemporary definition of unionism, a strategy to cope with globalization in order to avoid isolation of the region internationally. Briefly, New Regionalism in LAC includes the regional and sub-regional organizations created since 1990 until today (MERCOSUR, ALBA, UNASUR, CELAC, Pacific Alliance), but also older organizations, which were renamed and reshaped (SICA, Andean Community, ASC). In order to analyse their degree of integration, this paper will attempt a brief description of each organization, in the chronological order of their creation. The paper will also highlight the main instruments of cooperation between the EU and each regional/sub-regional integration organization.

**MERCOSUR** was founded in 1991 by Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay with the signing of the Treaty of Asuncion. Venezuela is a full member since July 2012, Bolivia is in

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<sup>113</sup> Palmer, Norman D., "The New Regionalism in Asia and the Pacific", Lexington Books, 1991, p.59.

<sup>114</sup> Hettne, Bjorn & Inotai Andras, "The New Regionalism – implications for Global Development and International Security", UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research, 1994, p. 1-2.

the process of becoming one. Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru are associated states. The main objective is sub-regional integration and the creation of a common market. It has an administrative Secretariat located in Montevideo and a six-month rotating Presidency. MERCOSUR institutions are the Council (gathering Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Ministers of Economy), the MERCOSUR Group (the executive organism, coordinated by the Ministries for Foreign Affairs), the Commission of Commerce (supervising the functioning of the customs union) and the Parliament (gathering representatives from the national Parliaments of the member states)<sup>115</sup>. In 1995, the EU and MERCOSUR signed an Interregional Framework Cooperation Agreement and in 2000, the parties opened negotiations for an Association Agreement. Negotiations were suspended in 2004 and re-launched in May 2010. The EU provided assistance to MERCOSUR through its 2007-2013 Regional Programme, amounting to €50 million.

**The Central American Integration System (SICA)** was founded in 1991 by Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama with the signing of the Tegucigalpa Protocol. The Dominican Republic is an associated member. Mexico, Chile and Brazil are regional observers, while Germany, Taiwan and Spain are extra-regional observers. Its objectives are to create a region of peace, liberty and democracy based on human rights protection and to achieve gradual economic integration. Its General Secretariat is located in El Salvador. Its other institutions are: the Presidential Reunion, the Parliament (PARLACEN), the Centro-American Court of Justice (CCJ), Vice-Presidents Reunion, the Ministerial Council and the Executive Committee<sup>116</sup>. The most important mechanism of developing SICA-EU relations is the San José Dialogue, established in 1984. Furthermore, in 2012 an EU-Central America Association Agreement was signed, which includes also a free trade area.

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<sup>115</sup> Assuncion Treaty and Ouro Preto Protocol, in Instrumentos Fundacionales del MERCOSUR, <http://www.mercosur.int/msweb/portal%20intermediario/es/publica/archivos/INSTRUMENTOS%20FUNDACIONALES%20DEL%20MERCOSUR.pdf>, accessed on 11.12. 2012.

<sup>116</sup> <http://www10.iadb.org/intal/intalcdi/PE/2009/02824.pdf>, accessed on 13.12.2014.

**The Association of Caribbean States (ASC)** was created in 1994 by 25 states (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Columbia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, Santa Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenadine, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela) which signed the Convention in Cartagena de Indias (Columbia). Associated states are Aruba, French Guyana, Guadeloupe, St. Martins and Netherlands Antilles. Observer states are: Spain, Italy, India, Brazil, Ecuador, Argentina, the Russian Federation, Canada, Egypt, Peru, Chile, the Netherlands, Morocco, the Republic of Korea, UK, Turkey, Ukraine and Finland. The aim of the organization is to consolidate regional cooperation in order to create a free trade area. ASC institutions are the Ministerial Council and the Secretariat<sup>117</sup>.

**The Andean Community (CAN)** was established in 1996 by Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela which decided to revive the Andean Pact of 1969, by signing the Trujillo Declaration and the Protocol modifying the original Agreement of Cartagena. Chile withdrew from the Andean Pact in 1976, and Venezuela announced its withdrawal from the Andean Community in 2006. Currently, the organization has four members and 25 observer states. Its Secretariat is located in Lima, Peru. Among all Latin-American organizations, CAN has the widest range of institutions, replicating the European model: the Presidential Council, the Foreign Relations Ministers' Council, the Andean Commission, the Tribunal of Justice, and the Andean Parliament.<sup>118</sup> CAN's main objective is to achieve economic integration by creating a common market. In 2003, CAN signed a Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement with the EU, striving to an Association Agreement. Due to the fact that Bolivia and Ecuador blocked the negotiation process by requesting special treatment, in 2012, the EU concluded a separate Free Trade Agreement only with Peru and Columbia. In its Regional Strategy Paper 2007-2013, the EU earmarked €50 million for the Andean Community.

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<sup>117</sup>Cartagena Convention, [http://www.cancilleria.gov.co/sites/default/files/Ingles\\_6.pdf](http://www.cancilleria.gov.co/sites/default/files/Ingles_6.pdf), accessed on 13.12.2014.

<sup>118</sup> Trujillo Protocol, <http://www.comunidadandina.org/Normativa.aspx?link=TP>, accessed on 13.12.2014.

**The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America - Peoples' Trade Treaty (ALBA-TCP)** is an "integration platform"<sup>119</sup> created in Havana in 2004, at then Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's initiative. The current members are states with leftist governments: Venezuela, Cuba, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Commonwealth of Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, Ecuador, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Saint Lucia. ALBA is aiming to regional economic integration based on principles such as "widest solidarity between the peoples of LAC"<sup>120</sup> and "no commercial criteria or selfish interests related to business profits"<sup>121</sup>, meaning bartering and mutual economic aid. The founding documents are the Agreement for the construction of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) and the Trade Agreements between the Peoples of our three countries (Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela). The most important achievement so far is the creation of ALBA & Petrocaribe Bank. ALBA's institutions are the Presidents' Council and the Ministers' Council, as well as the Political Commission for Permanent Coordination of ALBA. Other organisms are the Ministerial Council of Women and the Social Movements Council. In order to create a monetary union, the first step was to establish a common monetary unit called SUCRE<sup>122</sup>.

**The Union of South American Nations (UNASUR)** is a regional organization, an intergovernmental union of two regional blocs, the MERCOSUR and the CAN, tailored following the EU model. The UNASUR Constitutive Treaty was signed in 2008, in Brasilia. The Union's headquarters are located in Quito (Ecuador) and its institutions are: the Council of Heads of State and of Government, the Council of Ministers of External Relations, the South American Council for Defence, the Council of Delegates and the General Secretariat, the Parliament and the Bank of the South. The *Pro Tempore Presidency* is a rotating one, with a one-year mandate. The Foreign Ministers meet every six months.<sup>123</sup> The objective is to create a common market by progressively eliminating taxes until 2019. There is also an initiative for an integrated South-American infrastructure, as well as for creating an energy ring to

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<sup>119</sup> <http://alba-tcp.org/en/contenido/alba-tcp-eng>, accessed on 7.12. 2014.

<sup>120</sup> Idem11.

<sup>121</sup> Idem 11.

<sup>122</sup> <http://alba-tcp.org/en/contenido/alba-tcp-agreement-0>, accessed on 11.12.2014.

<sup>123</sup> Tratado Constitutivo de la UNASUR, <http://www.integracionsur.com/sudamerica/TratadoUnasurBrasil08.pdf>, accessed on 12.12.2014.

connect Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. In 2006, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Columbia, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, Peru, Surinam, Uruguay and Venezuela waived tourist visa requirements among themselves for their respective citizens.

At the most recent UNASUR Summit (5 December 2014), Ecuador launched the idea of revisiting the statute of the organization, by replacing the veto with the consensus procedure, in order to simplify the decision-making mechanism. The Summit also advanced the idea of a South-American citizenship.

**The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC)** is an intergovernmental mechanism for political dialogue comprising for the first time all the 33 states of the region<sup>124</sup>; it was created in 2011 by the signing of the Caracas Declaration, at the initiative of Mexico which felt excluded when UNASUR was founded. CELAC is a mechanism that works by consensus, aiming to become „a platform that facilitates greater presence of the region globally”<sup>125</sup>. In fact, CELAC is a regional mechanism for consultation, does not have institutions as such, and although it aims at regional integration, results have been modest so far. Recently, CELAC is subject to an internal process of reflexion regarding its functioning and the next years’ Summit could be an instrumental one – if member states so decide.

In 2012, its predecessor, the Rio Group, ceased to exist, so CELAC officially became EU’s main interlocutor in the inter-regional dialogue. The first EU-CELAC Summit was held in Santiago de Chile, on 26-27 January 2013, the next one being scheduled to take place in Brussels, on 10-11 June 2015. The political objectives of the European Union towards LAC, as mentioned in various statements of the European Commission<sup>126</sup>, are: to consolidate the political dialogue at regional and sub-regional level and bilaterally; to promote regional integration

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<sup>124</sup> Caracas Declaration, [http://www.sela.org/attach/258/default/Caracas\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.sela.org/attach/258/default/Caracas_Declaration.pdf), accessed on 13.12.2014

<sup>125</sup> Costa Rica PPT 2014, <http://www.rree.go.cr/celac/?sec=celac&cat=celac>, accessed on 11.12.2014

<sup>126</sup> European Commission, “Stronger Partnership between the European Union and Latin America (2005) and “EU-Latin America: global players in Partnership” (2009), available at [http://www.eeas.europa.eu/la/docs/com09\\_495\\_en.pdf](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/la/docs/com09_495_en.pdf), accessed on 10.12.2014.

through concluding Association Agreements with sub-regions; to promote social cohesion and tackle poverty and social exclusion through development aid.

**The Pacific Alliance** is the most recent and dynamic sub-regional mechanism of economic co-operation, established between four like-minded Pacific Rim open economies: Chile, Columbia, Mexico and Peru. An initiative of then Peruvian President Alan Garcia Perez, the organization started to function *de facto* since April 2011, but was formally launched in Chile, in 2012. Observer states are: Australia, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, France, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Panama, Paraguay, Portugal, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Uruguay, United Kingdom, and United States. The Pacific Alliance was built on coherent/converging centre-right trade policies promoted by the governments of its four members. The main objective of the organization, as stated in the Lima Declaration (April, 2011)<sup>127</sup>, is “to deepen the integration of the economies on the basis of the existing Commercial Agreements, to develop a mechanism of political dialogue and cooperation with Asia-Pacific” and to “move gradually toward the goal of free movement of goods, services, capital and people between the four countries”. Although primarily economic in nature, the Pacific Alliance added also a nascent political dimension, at the Lima Summit, by creating an informal framework for political dialogue among its members. At the Summit in Cali, Columbia (23 May 2013), the four States announced a commercial liberalization by 90%, the implementation of an unified infrastructure of foreign exchanges and the creation of a public-private committee to offer services of consulting to companies. Another objective is to sign an Agreement with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

In order to determine what makes the integration process in LAC a unique experience, thus different from the European one, this paper will quote the definition given by Nicholas Moussis in his well-known book, *Access to European Union*: “The multinational integration process is the voluntary establishment by treaty, concluded between independent states,

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<sup>127</sup> Lima Declaration, [http://wsp.presidencia.gov.co/Prensa/2011/Abril/Paginas/20110428\\_13.aspx](http://wsp.presidencia.gov.co/Prensa/2011/Abril/Paginas/20110428_13.aspx), accessed on 13.12.2014.



of common institutions and the gradual development by them of common policies pursuing common goals and serving common interests”<sup>128</sup>. The same author underlines that “common policies, developed gradually by the actors of the process, foster both political and economic integration of the participating states. Although multinational integration depends on political decisions, it greatly affects the economies of the member states. Increasingly, through the stages of customs union, common market and economic and monetary union, it opens up the participating economies to multinational trade and competition”<sup>129</sup>.

Indeed, “**integration**” as such has two major dimensions: a political dimension and an economic one. Another element should be added however, since it is becoming ever more relevant nowadays, both in Europe and in LAC: the social dimension.

For the purpose of this analysis, we define the terms, as follows:

1. *The political dimension of multinational integration* means, in the first place, that States have common interests and the political will to make them reality. Further on, it means creating the necessary instruments - common institutions - and enabling them to act in this respect. But most important of all is to establish common policies, through giving up of some of the States’ sovereignty and transferring it to the supranational institutions they have created. Researchers say that common policies make the difference between genuine integration and intergovernmental cooperation.<sup>130</sup>
2. *The economic dimension of multinational integration* has four stages: the first one is the *free trade area* (a region whose countries eliminated tariffs on goods traded between them), followed by the *customs union* (a region where States allow the free movement on their territories for all products, irrespective of their origin, and apply a common custom tariff to third countries). The third stage is the *common market* (a

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<sup>128</sup> Moussis, Nicholas, “Access to European Union”, [http://europedia.moussis.eu/discus/book\\_en.html](http://europedia.moussis.eu/discus/book_en.html), accessed on 10.12.2014.

<sup>129</sup> Tratado Constitutivo de la UNASUR, <http://www.integracionsur.com/sudamerica/TratadoUnasurBrasil08.pdf>, accessed on 12.12.2014.

<sup>130</sup> Tratado Constitutivo de la UNASUR, <http://www.integracionsur.com/sudamerica/TratadoUnasurBrasil08.pdf>, accessed on 12.12.2014.

region where goods, services, capital and labour circulate freely), and the fourth and most advanced one is the *economic and monetary union* (which imply a single monetary policy, a single currency, and the convergence of national economic policies).

3. By *social dimension*, we understand involving the civil society in elaborating common policies, but also the commitment of States towards implementing Corporate Social Responsibility national strategies, which would finally converge in a common strategy in this respect.

After carefully analyzing the fundamental documents of the abovementioned organizations, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn, as follows:

- all the Latin American and Caribbean organizations aim at regional integration but bear in mind different reasons and goals: MERCOSUR and ASC envisage mainly to achieve economic integration, SICA is oriented more towards building a region of peace and democracy and achieving regional security, CAN seeks economic integration, but is also concerned by its projection internationally; ALBA promotes co-operation based on solidarity and economic complementarity, being also interested in acquiring an international profile; UNASUR tries to cover all cooperation dimensions in order to create the common market based on a South American identity; CELAC, as a political dialogue mechanism, aims at becoming the voice of LAC in the world; last, but not least, the Pacific Alliance, less interested in the political dimension than the others, wants to take the economic dimension of integration to the highest level;
- speaking about supranational institutions, there are also differences between these organizations. The most equipped are MERCOSUR, SICA, CAN and UNASUR, which tried to replicate the European model in this respect; they are followed by ALBA and ASC; the other two, CELAC and the Pacific Alliance, have no supranational institutions at all;
- although some of them have similar institutional structure as the EU, Latin American and Caribbean organizations take decisions by consensus, at Presidential level, on the occasion of regional Summits. Consequently, the decision making process is not

always very smooth and sometimes it takes very long. Hence the difficulty to elaborate common policies. Researchers maliciously call it “the fever of Summitry”, defining it as a ‘formidable resistance to the consolidation of independent institutions’<sup>131</sup>, and draw attention upon the fact that Summits’ enthusiastic rhetoric on one hand, and failure to follow up on agreements that have been reached, on the other, damage the quality of the regional dialogue<sup>132</sup>.

- all organizations mention the social dimension in their founding documents whether in terms of “social justice”, “social inclusion”, “social development”, “involvement of the civil society”. As far as CELAC is concerned, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility has been acquiring recently more visibility, in parallel with a growing interest in the EU’s expertise in this respect.

When trying to describe the integration process in LAC, one should also take into consideration the fundamental values and principles which have been governing the region since its independence, in order to identify the difficulties and challenges<sup>133</sup>.

According to José Antonio Sanahuja, the region is tributary to a “permanent trilemma: first, the defense of the Nation-State and national sovereignty; second, its traditional ambitions for unionism and regional integration; and third, the search for greater autonomy at the international level<sup>134</sup>”. This partially explains why it is so difficult for the States of the region to cede part of their sovereignty to supranational institutions, which could apply common policies in order to attain common objectives. In our opinion, this attitude shows also a lack of political will to deepen integration.

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<sup>131</sup> Roy, Joaquín, “La integración regional en Europa y América Latina: contexto”, in “Después de Santiago: Integración Regional y Relaciones Unión Europea-América Latina”, 2013, available at <http://www10.iadb.org/intal/intalcdi/PE/2013/11827.pdf>, p.17, accessed on 24.04.2014]

<sup>132</sup> Sanahuja, José Antonio, “Towards a genuine multilateralism in external relations between the European Union and Latin America”, document produced at the request of the European Parliament’s Committee on External Affairs, 2006, available at <http://edz.bib.uni-mannheim.de/daten/edz-ma/ep/06/pe370.622-en.pdf>, accessed on 26.04.2014.

<sup>133</sup> Sarti, Ingrid, “Theoretical and developmental challenges to contemporary South American Integration”, <http://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/b08c2a70-7f77-474d-9fb4-9e63afa67142.pdf>, 2014, p.2.

<sup>134</sup> Sanahuja, José Antonio, “Post-liberal regionalism in Latin America: the case of UNASUR”, Robert Schumann Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, RSCAS 2012/05, p. 1.

Another very important aspect, which has a major influence on the integration dynamics in LAC, is ideology. In some cases, difficulties in reaching consensus due to the ideological differences within the same organization make the integration process move slowly, if moving at all.

One example in this sense is CAN. As Colombia and Peru signed Free Trade Agreements with the United States, Venezuela protested by withdrawing from the organization. Ideology also complicated negotiations between CAN and the EU. Bolivia and Ecuador requested special treatment, so the EU finally concluded the Free Trade Agreement only with Columbia and Peru. Now, the question is if CAN is still viable. One has to bear in mind that Colombia and Peru are founders of the Pacific Alliance, while Bolivia and Ecuador (ALBA members) will join MERCOSUR.

Another example is MERCOSUR, which has not been exempt of internal difficulties due to the differences between Brazil and Argentina. Now, with the admission of Venezuela and the upcoming addition of Ecuador and Bolivia, three countries with centralized economies, as full members of the organization, the main essence of MERCOSUR is questionable. One can ask how it would be possible to create a common market putting together economies based on opposite principles. On the other hand, Paraguay, which was excluded from MERCOSUR, in 2012, due to a *coup d'Etat*, was recently reinserted in the organization and maintains its initial opposition to the admission of new members. One can conclude that reaching consensus might be problematic in the future. In the inter-regional dialogue, namely the EU-MERCOSUR relations, negotiations have not been easy either. One problem is that the two more advanced countries, Brazil and Argentina, could not agree among themselves for a long time on the offer to be presented to the EU. Are we about to witness the conclusion of an agreement between the EU and only those countries wanting to (Brazil, Uruguay and maybe Argentina), as was the case with the CAN? Anyway, the negotiations are already taking place with only part of the members, as Venezuela is not, and continues not to be interested. On another hand, if Uruguay and Paraguay materialize their intention to join the Pacific Alliance, as they announced, more as a political threat, probably, what is left of MERCOSUR as a bloc? As the economic integration was a "relative failure", the organization not being able to

achieve its goals for example in custom union arrangements since 1991, it looks like the only cohesive element is the (almost) common political vision, each time closer to the ALBA ideology, if not economic philosophy. In the meanwhile, we see the Pacific Alliance achieving 90% free-tax internal commerce in just two years.

Within CELAC, which includes everyone, the situation is even more complicated. It has 33 countries of very different sizes, ideologies, economies, problems and interests. Accommodating them is a challenge for any rotating presidency of the organization. In the bi-regional dialogue with the EU, the same challenge arises: reaching the consensus. The documents to be agreed upon (Declaration and Action Plan) are very long, because everyone wants to add something, to respond to its particular interests, not consistent or even colliding, sometimes, with the one of other CELAC members, and the negotiation process takes ages. By contrast and maybe as a result of those difficulties, the results of this inter-regional co-operation are not spectacular and there is certainly room for improvement, both in methodology and in concrete action.

A different example, on a positive note this time, is that of the Pacific Alliance. This organization, created by States with similar ideologies and comparable economies, is a success story. Critics say that its political dimension is modest and it has no institutions. However, it remains attached to its initial objective to create a common market, which is becoming reality. Let us not forget that the EU started as a small economic community and developed gradually into the complex integration process we witness today.

Bearing in mind the two types of Latin-American organizations, on one hand more inclusive organizations, which mix different ideologies and economies, and on the other hand organizations small in number of members, but coherent on all aspects, we can ask ourselves if in Latin America and Caribbean the economic dimension of integration can be achieved only by sacrificing the political dimension and vice versa; if integration as a whole, like the European one, is not an illusion for this region, at least in this historical moment. We have also observed that among the Latin American organizations, those having a more developed political dimension, such as CELAC, UNASUR and ALBA, pay more attention to the social

dimension than the others, which are focusing on the economic dimension.

Certainly, the evolution of Neo-Regionalism in LAC is substantially different from other experiences in the world. Finally, the future of the Latin-American integration process depends mostly on the States in the region, on their political commitment towards integration. Unfortunately, in the region there is not – as it was the case in Europe - a group of States with a common vision, willing to take the lead, to put regional objectives before the national ones and to push forward the integration efforts. Even the biggest States, which could have a considerable influence, are not very interested in assuming this role.

So, there will continue to be, probably, at least for the foreseeable future, a *sui generis* integration, resembling more to intergovernmental cooperation, borrowing from other integration models (the EU, for instance) those parts that can be conveniently adapted to the conditions and the philosophy of the region. The official rhetoric will probably remain the same, since – as someone once said – speaking about integration in LAC means to say all or nothing. From the European perspective, it becomes clear that inter-regional co-operation with Latin-America and the Caribbean is at a crossroads and needs to be reshaped and re-launched in order to become viable and fruitful.

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