

LATIN AMERICAN INTEGRATION IN DISPUTE? MERCOSUR, THREE  
DECADES BETWEEN REGIONALISMS

*INTEGRAÇÃO LATINO-AMERICANA EM DISPUTA? MERCOSUL, TRÊS DÉCADAS  
ENTRE REGIONALISMOS*

*¿INTEGRACIÓN LATINOAMERICANA EN DISPUTA? MERCOSUR, TRES DÉCADAS  
ENTRE REGIONALISMOS*



Gabriel Dib Daud de VUONO<sup>1</sup>  
e-mail: gabriel.devuono@usp.br



Wagner Tadeu IGLECIAS<sup>2</sup>  
e-mail: wi6@usp.br

**How to reference this article:**

VUONO, G. D. D.; IGLECIAS, W. T. Latin American integration in dispute? Mercosur, three decades between regionalisms. **Teoria & Pesquisa: Revista de Ciência Política**, São Carlos, v. 32, n. esp. 3, e023031, 2023. e-ISSN: 2236-0107. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14244/tp.v32iesp.3.1028>



| **Submitted:** 31/03/2023  
| **Required revisions:** 26/06/2023  
| **Approved:** 11/10/2023  
| **Published:** 20/12/2023

---

**Editors:** Profa. Dra. Simone Diniz  
Prof. Dr. Eduardo de Lima Caldas  
Profa. Dra. Mércia Kaline Freitas Alves  
Dr. Vinícius Silva Alves

**Deputy Executive Editor:** Prof. Dr. José Anderson Santos Cruz

---

<sup>1</sup> University of São Paulo (USP), São Paulo – SP – Brazil. PhD student in Latin American Integration (PROLAM-USP).

<sup>2</sup> University of São Paulo (USP), São Paulo – SP – Brazil. PhD in Sociology from the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences (FFLCH-USP). Professor at the School of Arts, Sciences and Humanities (EACH-USP) and the Postgraduate Program in Latin American Integration (PROLAM-USP).

**ABSTRACT:** This paper discusses the integration models that have historically been object of dispute in Latin America, examining how these political tensions have had repercussions on the trajectory of three decades of Mercosur integration. Thus, the goal was to realize a systematization of Latin American integration tendencies based on the comprehension of developmental, open, post-liberal and post-hegemonic regionalisms, and based on this understanding, this paper analyses the dynamics of Mercosur integration under the regional consensus that formed around the different tendencies of Latin American regionalism. The methodology employed proposes an interdisciplinary study in the field of human and social sciences, with a qualitative approach, which was carried out through the procedures of bibliographical review and documental research. The results obtained point out that Mercosur is in constant dispute between different projects, on the one hand based on neoliberal ideas, focused on open regionalism and on a liberalizing economic-commercial dynamic, on the other hand reformist that propose a multidimensional perspective to the integration process, which incorporate new agendas to the bloc, such as social and participatory, without, however, promoting a break with its liberalizing economic vocation.

**KEYWORDS:** Integration of Latin America. Latin American regionalism. Mercosur.

**RESUMO:** *O presente artigo discute os modelos de integração que têm sido historicamente objeto de disputa na América Latina, abordando-se de que maneira essas tensões políticas repercutem na trajetória de três décadas de integração do Mercosul. Assim, objetivou-se realizar uma sistematização das concepções de integração latino-americana a partir da compreensão dos regionalismos desenvolvimentista, aberto, pós-liberal e pós-hegemônico, e a partir desse entendimento, buscou-se analisar a dinâmica da integração do Mercosul sob os consensos regionais que se formaram em torno das distintas tendências do regionalismo latino-americano. A metodologia empregada propõe um estudo interdisciplinar no campo das ciências humanas e sociais, de abordagem qualitativa, o qual realizou-se mediante os procedimentos de revisão bibliográfica e pesquisa documental. Os resultados obtidos apontam que o Mercosul está em constante disputa entre diferentes projetos, ora baseados em preceitos neoliberais, voltados ao regionalismo aberto e centrados em uma dinâmica econômica-comercial liberalizante, ora reformistas que propõem uma perspectiva multidimensional ao processo de integração, que incorporam novas agendas ao bloco, como a social e participativa, sem, contudo, promover uma ruptura de sua vocação econômica liberalizante.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Integração da América Latina. Regionalismo latino-americano. Mercosul.*

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo analiza los modelos de integración que históricamente han sido objeto de disputa en América Latina, abordando cómo estas tensiones políticas han repercutido en la trayectoria de tres décadas de integración del Mercosur. Así, el objetivo fue realizar una sistematización de los conceptos de integración latinoamericana desde la comprensión de los regionalismos desarrollista, abierto, posliberal y poshegemónico, y desde esa comprensión se buscó analizar la dinámica de la integración del Mercosur bajo el consenso regional que se formó en torno a las distintas tendencias del regionalismo latinoamericano. La metodología empleada propone un estudio interdisciplinario en el campo de las ciencias humanas y sociales, con enfoque cualitativo, que se llevó a cabo a través de los procedimientos de revisión bibliográfica e investigación documental. Los resultados obtenidos señalan que el Mercosur se encuentra en constante disputa entre diferentes proyectos, a veces basados en preceptos neoliberales, enfocados en el regionalismo abierto y centrados en una dinámica económico-comercial liberalizadora, a veces reformista que proponen una perspectiva multidimensional al proceso de integración, que incorporan nuevas agendas al bloque, como la social y la participativa, sin, sin embargo, promover una ruptura con su vocación económica liberalizadora.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Integración latinoamericana. Regionalismo latinoamericano. Mercosur.

---

## Introduction

Latin American integration is a constantly disputed project that stems, on the one hand, from the defense of the interests of fractions of the Latin American bourgeoisie, the agrarian elites and the large industrial business community, and on the other hand, from popular sectors, left-wing political forces, trade unions and social movements. In this controversy, different political and economic orientations influence the design of the region's integration, its institutional architecture, principles, strategies and objectives.

Mercosur, as the result of a process of regional integration initially undertaken by four South American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), is no exception to the trends and conflicts concerning the direction of integration in Latin America, or even in parts of the subcontinent, as has been the case in South America over more than three decades of regional cooperation. In order to understand the main political ideas that have influenced the Mercosur integration process, it is necessary to present a theoretical debate on the main ideas of Latin American regionalism from the second half of the 20th century to the present day, highlighting the understanding of developmental, open, post-liberal and post-hegemonic regionalisms, which is what this article sets out to do.

Based on an understanding of the trends in contemporary Latin American regionalism, we will analyze the tensions present in Mercosur, from its beginnings in the mid-1980s, through its creation on the threshold of the 1990s, as well as the bloc's advances and setbacks over the three decades of its existence. The aim is to present a critical assessment of the Mercosur integration process, analyzing the neoliberal foundations of its formation, the transformations driven by progressive South American governments and the implications of the new right-wing political scenario on the continent.

Mercosur is a process in dispute between different projects: dependent integration, linked to the precepts of the Washington Consensus and open regionalism, and reformist integration, which is guided by the precepts of post-liberal regionalism, presenting multidimensional integration proposals, commitments to democratizing the bloc and improving social conditions in the region. In the history of Mercosur, this dispute has become apparent at different times, either through proposals that advocate reducing the bloc to a platform for promoting trade or a market for the circulation of production factors, or through those that aim to broaden the core of the integration process, adding new dimensions by promoting political, social, cultural and participatory agendas.

The conflict within Mercosur is related to the correlation of forces at national level, in each of the member countries, which occupy the presidency of the republic and the main spaces of institutional power and are able to decisively influence the conduct of the regional integration process, guiding it according to their foreign policy for the region. Mercosur has thus been influenced by different strands of Latin American regionalism during its history, depending on the political-ideological consensus that has been formed in the region.

### **Latin American crossroads between regionalisms**

Conceived by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) between 1950 and 1970, developmental regionalism was characterized as a proposal for regional integration centred on encouraging industrialization through import substitution, with the aim of diversifying and seeking productive complementarity between the region's economies (FURTADO, 1970; PREBISCH, 2000). In Latin America, one of the main centers for formulating proposals on development and regional integration was ECLAC, a regional commission linked to the United Nations, based in Santiago de Chile, which was created in

1948 with the aim of establishing strategies to foster development in the region<sup>3</sup>. ECLAC was home to numerous Latin American economists who influenced the formulation of the institution's theses on Latin American development, including the Argentine Raúl Prebisch, its first director, and the Brazilian Celso Furtado.

Based on the analysis of unequal development between central and peripheral countries, the organization presented alternatives to the free trade that had been in force in Latin America since the processes of Independence a century and a half earlier, in line with the historical moment after the 1929 Crisis, marked by the resumption of the role of the state in economic development in the central countries and the adoption, since the 1930s and 1940s, of the national-developmental model in Latin America (BIELSCHOWSKY, 2000).

From the outset, ECLAC criticized economist David Ricardo's Theory of Comparative Advantage with the aim of reducing the region's degree of economic dependence on rich countries by increasing industrialization through import substitution. Cepal's ideas on development are essentially related to proposals for the competitive international insertion of Latin American economies in international trade, the valorization of increased productivity and employment, and economic growth linked to social justice (BETETA; MORENO-BRID, 2012).

The theory of the deterioration of the terms of trade developed by Prebisch points out that the definition of economic development strategies linked to the export of primary resources and raw materials of mineral, animal or vegetable origin is susceptible to an increasing loss of value compared to the technological and industrial products produced and marketed by the central capitalist economies. In the process of deteriorating terms of trade, Latin American economies lose international competitiveness and strengthen ties of economic dependence on the central capitalist economies.

In this sense, the concept of center-periphery is fundamental to the organization's economic thinking, which considers the deterioration of the terms of trade between the capitalist center, densely industrialized and a supplier of secondary goods, and the global periphery, reserved for the production of primary-export goods and wealth and a consumer market for industrialized goods and services of a high technological standard. Under Prebisch's leadership, the document entitled *Latin American Common Market* proposed the creation of a common market for the region with the aim of intensifying intra-regional trade and contributing to Latin

---

<sup>3</sup> The regional integration project is older than the creation of ECLAC and dates back to the beginning of the 19th century, having faced resistance from Latin American oligarchies, who opposed Latin American unity because of the defense of local interests (IANNI, 1993).

America's industrialization process, proposing a state stance of greater intervention in Latin American economies (ECLAC, 1959).

For José Maurício Domingues (2007), in his work *Aproximações à América Latina: desafios contemporâneos* (Approaches to Latin America: contemporary challenges), the problem of development and underdevelopment (eradication of poverty and social inequalities in a peripheral capitalist society) emerged in the 1960s and 1970s from the reflections and proposals of ECLAC economists, especially Furtado. Reducing poverty, social and regional inequalities, and encouraging public policies aimed at the development and industrialization of peripheral economies are theoretical and practical contributions from ECLAC and Furtado's thinking, which are related to proposals for Latin American development and which reject the centrality of the production and export of commodities as a development strategy.

In his work *Formação Econômica da América Latina* (Economic Formation of Latin America), Celso Furtado (1970) establishes a relationship between development and regional integration, stating that an industrial policy combined with incentives for the productive complementarity typical of developmental regional integration processes are essential instruments for overcoming Latin America's condition of underdevelopment. Many ECLAC economists from the 1950s to the 1970s, including Furtado, saw regional integration as an instrument for the industrial development of Latin American countries as peripheral economies in the context of global capitalism. According to the author, import substitution industrialization would reduce inequalities in economic and commercial relations between the center and the periphery, and would also enable Latin American economies to free themselves from the process of deteriorating terms of trade.

Furtado (1970) believes that overcoming underdevelopment implies overcoming the isolation of Latin American economies and states through regional integration. However, he states that integration schemes based solely on commercial liberalization processes, such as free trade zones and customs unions, can contribute little to the development of the associated states, except in cases of integration between states with low industrialization and an approximate degree of development. The author affirms that regional integration should not be understood only as a development policy, but also as a political plan to promote a regional project capable of promoting political and social transformations in Latin American societies.

Developmental regionalism remained the main theoretical current guiding regional integration processes between the 1950s and 1980s in Latin America. However, towards the end of the 1980s, and more decisively throughout the 1990s, open regionalism (also known as

"new regionalism") gained ground in the debates on Latin American integration, representing a turning point in the tradition of ECLAC thinking.

Open regionalism was developed within the framework of the ECLAC discussions, which abandoned the developmentalist theses in order to propose Latin America's international insertion into the world market through trade liberalization and economic openness at regional level. Open regionalism was conceived in opposition to developmentalism, rejecting the policy of industrialization through import substitution and protection of Latin American producers, such as the most incipient or least competitive industrial sectors at international level, and proposing a model of regional integration based on the neoliberal theses that became hegemonic at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the following decade.<sup>4</sup>

In a report entitled *El regionalismo abierto en América Latina y el Caribe: la integración económica al servicio de la transformación productiva con equidad* (Open regionalism in Latin America and the Caribbean: economic integration at the service of productive transformation with equity), ECLAC presents the proposal for a new Latin American regionalism. The proposals contained in the document published in 1994 represent a substantive change in ECLAC's thinking on development and regional integration and confront the main theses elaborated by the organization since its formation. In this context, ECLAC (1994) presented recommendations aimed at stimulating trade liberalization in Latin America as a desirable policy in the face of the Latin American crisis of the 1980s, aimed at containing hyperinflation and the internal and external indebtedness of Latin American economies (OLIVEIRA, 2014). It also stated that open regionalism would be able to encourage industrial specialization and the entry of foreign investment into the region, which should boost economic growth with equity (ECLAC, 1994).

According to ECLAC's new guidelines (1994), Latin America should orient its production of goods and services towards supplying the international market, stimulating exports and increasing its participation in international trade. To this end, it was proposed to eliminate trade barriers by signing international treaties aimed at forming free trade zones (FTAs) and customs unions with the aim of establishing areas of trade preference at regional level. Free trade areas (FTAs) are set up by eliminating import tariffs and various taxes (known as "tariff barriers") and by removing administrative measures applicable to international trade,

---

<sup>4</sup> Neoliberalism is based on political and economic ideas centered on free enterprise, the right to property and the encouragement of entrepreneurial freedoms and capacities, framing society in the domain of the market, based on the understanding that the greater these freedoms, the greater the social well-being (HARVEY, 2008).

such as licensing and technical and phytosanitary import requirements (known as "non-tariff barriers") (BALASSA, 1964; CASELLA, 1996). In the case of customs unions, they are formed by adding a common external tariff to a free trade area in relation to imports from third countries (BALASSA, 1964; CASELLA, 1996).

The new international order that emerged with the end of the Cold War, from the end of the USSR and real socialism, the crisis of European social democracy, the technological revolution and the growing financialization of the world economy, was characterized by the offensive of neoliberal globalization and the intensification of regionalization processes. In this scenario, José Antonio Sanahuja (2009) states that open regionalism is understood as a stage in the insertion of Latin American countries into the global economy, and Flávia Guerra Cavalcanti (2019) considers open regionalism to be a kind of free trade laboratory on a smaller scale, with the aim of inserting Latin American economies into world free trade after perfecting trade liberalization at regional level. ECLAC itself (1994, p. 11, our translation) states that, based on the propositions of open regionalism, "integration processes would be the future foundations of an international economy free of protectionism and barriers to the exchange of goods and services". In this way, ECLAC understands open regionalism as a stage in the process of economic liberalization and a preparatory phase for Latin American integration into the global economy. Thus, the ultimate aim of open regionalism is to deepen the incorporation of Latin American economies into world capitalism, marked by the neoliberal accumulation regime.

Sanahuja (2009) highlights the "paradox" of open regionalism, since the model proposed by ECLAC claims to give the state the capacity to regulate international economic phenomena, but the adoption of the open regionalism agenda has the opposite effect, i.e. it causes economic deregulation and the internal deepening of the effects of globalization. Therefore, open regionalism operates as an instrument in favor of neoliberal structural adjustments implemented at national level. In the same vein, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) understands regional integration as part of the process of structural reforms implemented in the light of the Washington Consensus, stating that open regionalism is essential to the process of neoliberal reforms, the strategy of economic openness, state subsidiarity and the primacy of private initiative over the economic domain (IDB, 2003; DEVLIN; ESTEVADEORDAL, 2001).

The IDB (2003, p. 4, our translation) understands open regionalism as an instrument of the neoliberal international strategy established with the aim of promoting "a total structural change of policy in Latin America, with a view to creating more open economies",



characterizing it as a complementary policy to the liberalization initiatives undertaken on a national and multilateral scale. Therefore, regional integration circumscribed within the field of open regionalism works as a mechanism to benefit public policies guided by neoliberal reason. In this way, it helps to perpetuate Latin America in the international division of labor as an exporter of primary goods from the exploitation of natural resources, mineral extraction, agricultural cultivation and livestock production (MERINO, 2017).

In the text "*El MERCOSUR en tiempos de retorno neoliberal*" (MERCOSUR in times of neoliberal return), Gabriel Merino (2018) identifies open regionalism as a form of dependent regionalism that makes Latin American development impossible, since it favors the maintenance of the structural elements that constitute Latin America's peripheral condition in the capitalist system. From this perspective, open regionalism translates into a project to deepen Latin American dependence, aimed at encouraging free trade and Latin American integration into global value chains, promoting a subordinate international insertion of the region into the interests of international capital and a geopolitical alignment with Western powers, especially the United States of America (MERINO, 2017).

The neoliberal integration model was a regional consensus that guided the foreign policy of most countries in the region in the 1990s, when Mercosur was formed. The phenomenon of Latin American regionalization was relatively homogeneous in the period, as it centered on the paradigm of open regionalism, because the process of re-democratization and the ideological convergence of the civilian governments elected in Latin America in the late 1980s and early 1990s created the conditions for a new cycle of regional integration (BRICEÑO-RUIZ, 2013; OLIVEIRA, 2014).

Understanding contemporary Latin American regionalism must consider national political dynamics, which together have a decisive influence on the process of regional integration. The political processes in Latin America in the early years of the 21st century, with the rise to power of different left-wing and center-left currents, have had repercussions on a regional scale, stimulating theoretical conceptions and political practices that are alternatives to open regionalism. In this context, post-liberal and post-hegemonic regionalism were formulated, alternative regionalisms resulting from the action and articulation of progressive governments, political forces and social actors in Latin America in the early 2000s.

In line with the new internal and regional political dynamics established in the period, post-liberal and post-hegemonic regionalisms are critical of open regionalism and are proposed as alternatives to the neoliberal model of integration. The inability of the neoliberal model to

solve the economic and social crises of the 1980s and 1990s, coupled with the discrediting of liberal democracy and traditional political parties, contributed to the rise of left-wing and center-left governments in Latin America at the beginning of the 21st century (HARNECKER, 2018). In this regional political scenario of the advance of progressive forces, political agendas were implemented aimed at increasing the degree of national sovereignty, reducing social inequalities, deepening democracy and developing regional integration initiatives (HARNECKER, 2018).

The rise of progressive governments in the first decade of this century is the result of a change in the correlation of forces in Latin America, which imposed certain obstacles to US influence and produced a turning point in Latin American regionalism. The formation of the Buenos Aires Consensus of 2003, established between Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Argentina's Néstor Kirchner, the collapse of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) project at the Mar del Plata Summit in 2005, the creation of regional political spaces without the presence of the US, such as the Bolivarian Alternative for America (ALBA) in 2004, the Union of South American Nations in 2008 and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) in 2011, profoundly marked Latin American integration in the period (BRICEÑO-RUIZ, 2013).

Post-liberal regionalism proposes valuing the social, cultural and participatory dimensions in the process of regional integration, with the intention of breaking away from the monopoly of commercial and economic agendas characteristic of experiences linked to open regionalism (SANAHUJA, 2009). The new conceptions of regionalism that emerged in Latin America in the early years of the 21st century criticized, to varying degrees, the precepts established by the Washington Consensus and, in turn, the limits established by open regionalism, seeking to reverse the social consequences of the neoliberal policies implemented in the 1990s (SERBIN, 2013).

Regional integration processes guided by the concept of post-liberal regionalism seek to reverse the neoliberal trend that established the rule of state subsidiarity in economic and social organization, proposing the empowerment of state actors in relation to market forces and private agents at regional level (SERBIN, 2012). Post-liberal regionalism's critical perspective on the globalization process proposes repositioning the state and directing national and regional public policies towards issues concerning Latin American development, such as reducing poverty and social inequalities (SANAHUJA, 2009).

In the post-liberal perspective, regional integration is conceived as an instrument for development and understood as a process of reinvigorating the state in the face of globalization and the social maladjustments produced by the neoliberal program. While open regionalism seeks to exclusively serve the interests of financial capital, transnational companies and agro-export sectors, post-liberal regionalism is committed to implementing regional policies aimed at promoting the reduction of inequalities and greater social welfare (LOCKHART, 2013). In this context, the post-liberal conception proposes increasing the organizational complexity of integration processes and creating new institutions, deepening cooperation in non-commercial matters, coordinating policies in different strategic areas for the region, such as infrastructure and energy security, and encouraging South-South cooperation as part of Latin America's international projection strategy (SANAHUJA, 2009).

Alternative regionalisms stand out for their promotion of a peace and security agenda for the region through the articulation of a defense policy, especially aimed at containing US interventionism in Latin America. Therefore, US foreign policy is a reference element for integration processes oriented within the framework of these regionalisms, centered on the defense of national sovereignty and resistance to US supremacy on the continent (SERBIN, 2012). According to Cavalcanti (2019), post-hegemonic regionalism proposes a sovereign foreign policy in relation to the US, seeking to break with automatic alignment with the hemispheric power through a non-subservient or subaltern regionalism critical of neoliberalism.

The post-hegemonic matrix presents anti-imperialist characteristics in a scenario of recent transformations in the world economy and geopolitics, which coincide with the arrival of progressive forces to power in Latin America and point to the constitution of a multipolar international order, with the rise of China, the revitalization of Russian power, the economic growth of India and the ascendancy of medium-sized players in the global debate, such as Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, South Korea, Mexico pressuring the former G-7 (USA, Japan, Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy and Canada).

### **Mercosur's background: developmentalism and Argentine-Brazilian cooperation**

In the first half of the 1980s, the international context was marked by the adoption of fiscal austerity measures by Latin American countries, the growing deterioration of global terms of trade and protectionism in commercial relations. During this period, Argentina and Brazil were heavily in debt, their economies were suffering from the rise of the dollar and the

devaluation of national currencies in a global context of economic recession, which led to an increase in the number of unemployed workers and the growth of poverty.

The rise in US interest rates drained dollars from all over the world to the US and made the loan contracts taken out by Latin American countries in the 1970s practically unpayable. The value of the dollar increased because US currency flowed into the US financial market, making it more expensive and rarer in Latin America. This led to the foreign debt crisis that bankrupted Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Venezuela, among others, in the early 1980s (BOUZAS, 1985).

The difficulty of formulating effective solutions to the serious economic and social crisis they were experiencing can be understood as one of the reasons why the two countries intensified their bilateral relations with the aim of establishing an economic cooperation program (MARIANO, 2015). It should also be noted that Argentina was in a situation of economic stagnation and international isolation due to the Falklands War, which caused friction in the Platine country's diplomatic relations with the European Community and the USA. Thus, in view of the friction in relations with the central powers, and considering that Argentina was no longer in a political, economic or military position to compete for the leading role in South America, there was no alternative, within the framework of capitalist development, but to reorient its foreign policy and join Brazil in a regional articulation (BANDEIRA, 1995).

Furthermore, the reasons that stimulated the integration process also had extra-economic foundations. The synchronicity of the re-democratizations carried out in the South American countries during the 1980s also stimulated cooperation and led to the formation of different forums for political consultation in the region (BIZZOZZERO, 2010). Argentina and Brazil were undergoing a democratic transition, with Presidents Raúl Alfonsín and José Sarney forming the first post-dictatorship civilian governments, but the risks of restoring the military regime were real, especially in Argentina. Thus, the aim of preventing setbacks and solidifying the newly established liberal democracies in the Southern Cone was added to the economic reasons motivating closer bilateral relations between the two countries (BUENO; RAMANZINI JÚNIOR; VIGEVANI, 2014).

In this context, in 1985, the presidents of Argentina and Brazil launched a bilateral integration process by signing the Iguazu Declaration. This project represented a sharp turning point in the relationship between the two South American countries, which had previously been marked by disputes and mistrust. The Argentine-Brazilian initiative put an end to the conflictual relations and the dispute over South American leadership, while guaranteeing the possibility of

expanding the influence of both countries in the subcontinent. The Declaration of Iguazú allowed for closer bilateral cooperation ties in the pursuit and defense of common interests in international forums and the promotion of projects in economic, scientific and technological cooperation within the framework of an integration process that would foster the deepening of bilateral trade relations and the complementarity of industrial economic sectors (CANDEAS, 2010).

The initiative promoted by the Sarney and Alfonsín governments was based on a cooperation program that sought to resume economic growth through the adoption of developmentalist policies aimed at expanding the domestic market and stimulating complementarity between the productive sectors of Argentina and Brazil (MARIANO, 2015). Both countries pursued economic integration from a developmentalist perspective of regionalism aimed at industrial strengthening and the synergy of their economies. However, there are nuanced positions in this regard, such as Damián Paikin's (2019) assertion that the bilateral integration agreements between Argentina and Brazil in the 1980s oscillated between adopting an integration model aimed at industrialization through import substitution and open regionalism, the latter which would come to prevail as the hegemonic model in the following decade.

On 29 July 1986, the *Economic Integration and Cooperation Program (Programa de Integração e Cooperação Econômica - PICE)* was created, which instituted protocols aimed at integrating Argentine and Brazilian productive sectors, establishing a gradual and progressive integration program. The PICE made it possible for bilateral agreements to be signed on various issues on the common agenda between Argentina and Brazil, with a view to integration along the lines of developmental regionalism, which included, in addition to trade issues, additional agreements and protocols on the creation of binational companies, energy cooperation, agreements on productive and industrial synergy, transport and communications, as well as the project to create a common currency. The aim of the PICE was to create a commercial chain involving Argentina and Brazil, in which both could exploit their comparative advantages in order to increase the competitiveness of different sectors of the economy. The PICE also allowed for the direct participation of business groups interested in the economic and commercial results they could achieve by advancing the Argentine-Brazilian bilateral agenda.

In 1988, Argentina and Brazil signed the *Treaty on Integration, Cooperation and Development* with the aim of creating an integrated economic area between the two countries by removing customs tariffs and non-tariff barriers to free trade in order to promote the

harmonization of customs, trade, agricultural, industrial, transport, communications, scientific and technological policies, and the coordination of monetary, fiscal, exchange and capital policies.

The development of the Argentine-Brazilian cooperation process led to the need to reformulate the foreign policies of the other South American countries, especially those located in the south of the subcontinent, which had closer economic and commercial ties with the two founders of the bloc. Thus, faced with the risk of isolation in the face of the integration process undertaken by Argentina and Brazil, the initiative aroused interest in other South American countries such as Uruguay and Paraguay (post-Stersnerism), which later joined the process (CAETANO, 2011).

During the Uruguayan government presided over by Julio María Sanguinetti (1985-1990), who was in charge of making the transition from dictatorship to democracy in that country, there was a change in the way foreign relations were conducted, abandoning the international isolation promoted by the Uruguayan military dictatorship and leading a process of international reinsertion of the country (FERRO, 2006). As a result of the new regional reality that was emerging, Uruguay and Paraguay redefined their respective foreign policies in order to converge with the regional process driven by Argentina and Brazil, which led to the creation of Mercosur in the early 1990s.

### **Open regionalism and the formation of Mercosur**

In the context of the transition of the world capitalist system to a regime marked by neoliberal hegemony, the Argentine-Brazilian integration program established by the Treaty of Integration, Cooperation and Development was substantially reformulated by the *Buenos Aires Act* signed on 7 July 1990. The document signed by presidents Fernando Collor de Mello and Carlos Saúl Menem expressed the aim of bringing the integration process back into line with the neoliberal ideas that were now hegemonic, promoting a change of direction in regional integration, moving away from the developmentalist perspective led by Sarney and Alfonsín (BANDEIRA, 1995; CAETANO, 2011).

According to Lincoln Bizzozero (2010), the convergence of the political orientation of the presidents of the republic elected in Argentina in 1989 and in Brazil and Uruguay in 1990, especially with regard to the role and attributions of the state, the market and the relationship between civil society and state entities, allowed for the formation of a consensus for a turn

towards open regionalism. The *Buenos Aires Act* portrayed the convergence between the governments and signalled their adherence to neoliberal logic, under the allegation of the need for adequate international economic insertion of both countries in a globalized world.

The presence of neoliberal theses in the drafting of the *Buenos Aires Act* is recurrent when it mentions the need to modernize Latin American economies and increase the supply and quality of goods circulating in the Brazilian and Argentine markets. Thus, the formation of a common market was foreseen through the coordination of macroeconomic policies and the reduction of tariffs, which should occur in a faster and more widespread manner, accelerating the pace of trade liberalization between the countries (BANDEIRA, 1995). In this way, the consensus established by South American governments in the early 1990s led to the formation of Mercosur as a regional integration project based on the dictates of open regionalism, promoting a break with the developmentalist regionalism of the previous decade.

Paraguay moved closer to the Argentine-Brazilian initiative after the end of Alfredo Stroessner's dictatorship (1954-1989). Since the country's re-democratization, Paraguay's foreign policy has undergone substantial transformations in order to promote its international reinsertion, especially at regional level, seeking to overcome the diplomatic isolation produced during the last stage of the Stroessner regime. In this process of reordering foreign policy, Paraguay's accession to Mercosur was based on the understanding that concerted regional action would allow greater negotiating capacity on relevant issues, which Paraguay alone would have little ability to influence, such as those related to international trade (YEGROS; BREZZO, 2013). Thus, Paraguay's incorporation into Mercosur is a reflection of the rearrangement of its foreign policy during the period of democratic transition.

When Paraguay entered the negotiations to form the bloc, Paraguayan diplomacy was faced with negotiations at an advanced stage. Paraguay's weaknesses due to its position as a mediterranean country and its lower level of relative development were not taken into account in the negotiations. The Paraguayan government of Andrés Rodríguez Pedotti (1989-1993) abruptly joined Mercosur without holding a public debate with the country's social organizations about the impacts of joining an integration project based on trade liberalization and the competitiveness of economic subjects in a context of obvious structural asymmetries between Paraguay and the other countries (YORE; PALAU, 2001).

According to Ricardo Scavone Yegros and Liliana M. Brezzo (2013), Paraguayans feared that they would remain isolated in the subcontinent by not joining Mercosur. Proponents of joining the bloc claimed that given Paraguay's dependence on the other countries in the River

Plate Basin, especially in terms of its relations with Argentina and Brazil, maintaining Paraguay's isolation in the region would be more disadvantageous. Thus, joining Mercosur was not seen as a choice by the favorable sectors, but rather as the only possible form of international insertion at that time capable of overcoming Paraguay's isolationism.

From a neoliberal point of view, joining Mercosur would allow Paraguay to increase its exports and gain access to an expanded market. However, Paraguay's precarious industry suffered negatively from the impacts of the policy of tariff reductions resulting from the formation of Mercosur, exposing the existing productive asymmetries between its economy and that of the other member countries. As a result of these disparities, joining the bloc stimulated the preservation of the commodity-based export character of the Paraguayan economy, deepened the regional influence of Argentina and Brazil and accentuated the dependence of the smaller economies on the larger ones (MASI; BITTENCOURT, 2002; RODRIGUEZ, 2001).

As in the other Mercosur member countries, the political scenario of re-establishing democratic regimes and the problem of foreign debt influenced Uruguay's foreign policy, which expanded and intensified during this period, focusing on actions in favor of an agenda of cooperation and regional integration (PÉREZ ANTÓN, 2005). According to Lilia Ferro (2006), many transformations took place in Uruguay's international insertion model during the consolidation of neoliberal globalization, incorporating adherence to the precepts of open regionalism into the list of government measures.

Uruguayan President Luis Alberto Lacalle of the National Party (1990-1995) was very enthusiastic about his country joining Mercosur. Lacalle was the first civilian to assume the presidency of the Uruguayan Republic after the end of the military dictatorship, and during his term he oriented his government towards neoliberal ideas, promoting a political agenda of structural adjustments, privatizations and economic deregulation. Under the same logic, he led Uruguay's foreign policy towards economic openness, belatedly joining the Economic Complementation Agreements signed between Argentina and Brazil in 1985, and then the 1991 Treaty of Asunción, which created Mercosur.

Uruguay's accession to Mercosur was perceived by the government and the country's elites as the only possible strategy for international integration in a context marked by the end of Cold War bipolarity and the intensification of the trade liberalization process. During this period, Nastasia Barceló (2020) presents the perceptions that existed in Uruguayan society regarding the country's participation in the integration process, stating that government authorities were satisfied with the development of diplomatic negotiations, however, sectors of



the country demanded greater speed in Uruguay's accession, as well as criticizing the peripheral position that the country played. The Uruguayan export bourgeoisie and the liberal government of Luis Alberto Lacalle saw Mercosur as a platform for expanding Uruguayan interests on a global scale, preferring regional consultation and the joint defense of issues that were sensitive to the country in the international order to isolated action (BARCELÓ, 2020).

The accession of Paraguay and Uruguay to the Argentine-Brazilian integration process culminated in the creation of Mercosur in 1991 through the signing of the Treaty of Asunción, which was signed with the aim of forming an integrated economic space between the four countries, structured under the dictates of open regionalism in line with the political orientations of the governments of the time. Mercosur emerged as a fundamentally commercial integration process, institutionally organized in a low-complexity intergovernmental model and structured in the light of neoliberal ideas (CAETANO, 2011). Neoliberalism became hegemonic in Latin America during the 1990s, and the creation of Mercosur is the result of and, at the same time, contributed to the sedimentation of the trend towards economic liberalization in the region.

Mercosur was created as an auxiliary instrument for implementing neoliberal policies, promoting accelerated trade liberalization through the reduction and elimination of customs tariffs and economic and social deregulation. Thus, the bloc was conceived as a sub-regional instrument in favour of structural adjustments and reforms undertaken at national level, accelerating trade liberalization programs (BANDEIRA, 2010; MARTIN, 2010; MARIANO, 2015; VÁZQUEZ, 2017). The aim was to intensify the pace of implementation of neoliberal agendas and perpetuate them by advancing the Mercosur integration process and consolidating its legal-institutional framework. In this sense, Tullo Vigevani (1996) states that the reduction in the deadlines proposed for the creation of the free trade area and the customs union was due to the strategy of accelerating economic liberalization undertaken by the national governments.

Luiz Moniz Bandeira (2010, p. 115, our translation) states that the creation of Mercosur was mirrored in the "mercantilist and free-trade spirit of the time", whereby it was conceived as a preparatory stage for the commercial liberalization of countries at world level, in line with the economic policies developed by the Brazilian government of Fernando Collor de Mello and his Argentine counterpart Carlos Menem. In adopting open regionalism, the strategy was to promote the gradual opening of their economies, first at regional level and later extending the effects of trade opening to the global sphere (BANDEIRA, 2010; PAIKIN, 2019). Mercosur thus became the regional expression of neoliberal globalization, since its purpose was to

promote insertion into world trade through adherence to the free market and an eminently commercial agenda (MERINO, 2018).

### **Mercosur of the Buenos Aires Consensus**

The presidential terms of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil and Néstor Kirchner in Argentina, which began in 2003, produced transformations in the South American integration process. The election of Néstor Kirchner to the presidency resulted in a significant change in Argentine foreign policy, driving a break with the policy of automatic alignment with the US and an understanding of regional integration as a potential mechanism for national development and reducing Argentina's dependence on the hegemonic centers of global capitalism (GRANATO; ALLENDE, 2013). Similarly, the Lula government focused on strengthening South-South cooperation, placing South America at the center of its international agenda (GARCIA, 2018).

The reorientation of Brazilian and Argentine foreign policy produced renewed stimulus for South American integration during this period (PAIKIN, 2019). According to Marco Aurélio Garcia (2018), former special adviser for international affairs to the Lula government, regional integration was defined as the central axis of the country's international insertion. This corroborates the understanding that priority was given to strengthening international relations with South American countries and working in Latin American organizations during Lula da Silva's first two presidential terms (CAVALCANTI, 2019).

The transformation in the way Mercosur is run was marked by the set of proposals for South American development launched by Lula and Kirchner and brought together in the Buenos Aires Consensus of 2003. The Buenos Aires Consensus is a political declaration signed by the presidents of Brazil and Argentina in opposition to the guidelines proposed by the 1989 Washington Consensus. In a political context of the exhaustion of neoliberal policies, the Buenos Aires Consensus was a bilateral document that established new guiding paradigms for joint and coordinated political and economic action between Brazil and Argentina on a national, regional and international scale. In this scenario, the progressive governments of both countries led a paradigm shift in the integration process, adding new regional agendas to the bloc and expanding its territorial dimension in the subcontinent by approaching the other South American nations under the status of associated countries (CAVALCANTI, 2019; LO BRUTTO; CRIVELLI, 2019).

In this vein, Mariana Vázquez (2017) argues that the Argentine-Brazilian understanding expressed in the Buenos Aires Consensus emerged as a milestone in the reconfiguration of the integration process, in other words, a turning point in the bloc's conduct, marked by an approximation to the assumptions of post-liberal regionalism. Thus, the deepening of the strategic alliance between Argentina and Brazil and the extension of Mercosur to other South American countries (as member states or associates) triggered a process of revitalization of the bloc and implied the reformulation of South American integration through the adoption of new regional agendas.

The Buenos Aires Consensus of 2003 expressed reformist ideas about regional integration based on the combination of economic growth within the framework of the capitalist system and the reduction of poverty and social and regional inequalities. In this sense, based on the consensus established between Argentina and Brazil, bilateral cooperation and South American integration were intensified in order to conduct it as a strategy for development and international integration, which should combine economic growth and social justice, as highlighted in item 16 of the Buenos Aires Consensus.

Despite the contestatory nature of the Buenos Aires Consensus, the transformations promoted by the progressive governments were limited to a process of revision of the South American bloc, which preserved its economic and trade guidelines, transcending them by implementing secondary social, political and participatory agendas (BRICEÑO-RUIZ, 2013). It should be noted that, in this new stage, there was no break with the free trade precepts of open regionalism, and neoliberal characteristics were retained in the integration process, such as the priority of agendas related to increasing international trade, the maintenance of bureaucratization and low institutional complexity (MARIANO, 2015).

After the progressive turn in the politics of the South American countries, rapprochement with Venezuela began during the presidency of Hugo Chávez. On 8 July 2004 the country became an associate member and on 18 October of the same year Economic Complementation Agreement No. 59 was signed between Mercosur, Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela, which established the creation of a free trade zone between the countries. The Protocol of Adhesion of Venezuela as a full member of the bloc was signed in 2006 and required the unanimous approval of the parliaments of the member countries; however, the Venezuelan incorporation was resisted, especially in the Paraguayan parliament, and remained obstructed until 2012.

Following the parliamentary coup on 29 June 2012 that ousted Paraguayan President Fernando Lugo through an impeachment process, the other members suspended the country's participation, arguing that it had violated the Ushuaia Protocol. This protocol establishes the democratic clause in the Community's legal system, allowing the suspension and application of sanctions to a country that suffers a breach of its democratic-constitutional order. In this context in which Paraguay had its rights as a member state suspended, Venezuela joined Mercosur as a full member on 31 July 2013 following approval by the parliaments of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay.

The consensus established between progressive South American governments led to a broadening of Mercosur's political agendas and a multiplication of institutional bodies at regional level, focusing on the multidimensionality of the integration process (CAVALCANTI, 2019). The new themes introduced into the bloc's sphere have incorporated and expanded the social, cultural and participatory dimensions, transcending the commercial limits of integration.

In the wake of normative and institutional multiplication, the 2004-2006 MERCOSUR Work Program was established, which defined a work agenda focused on Social MERCOSUR, with the aim of broadening the participation of civil society and discussing issues of human rights, educational and cultural integration. Also noteworthy was the proposal of an integration agenda aimed at the physical and energy integration of the member states and the promotion of scientific and technological cooperation.

In 2010, the Strategic Social Action Plan (PEAS) was created, defining ten lines of action aimed at (i) eradicating poverty and reducing social inequalities, (ii) promoting human and gender rights, ethnic and racial equality, (iii) universalizing public health, (iv) universalization of public education and eradication of illiteracy, (v) cultural diversity, (vi) productive inclusion, (vii) decent work and social security rights, (viii) environmental sustainability, (ix) social dialogue and (x) regional cooperation for the implementation and financing of social policies (MERCOSUR, 2012).

In terms of deepening the regional approach to human rights, we highlight the establishment of the Meeting of High Authorities on Human Rights and Foreign Affairs (RAADH) in 2004, the 2005 Declaration of Asunción of Commitment to the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, and the Institute for Public Policy and Human Rights (IPPDH) created in 2009. It is also worth noting the establishment of the Citizenship Statute in 2010, the Gender Equality Policy Guidelines in 2014 and the revision of the Socio-Labor Declaration in 2015.

With the aim of deepening the political and social dimension, the Mercosur Parliament (PARLASUR) was established in 2006 to replace the Joint Parliamentary Commission, and the Mercosur Social Institute (ISM) in 2007 with the aim of offering technical collaboration and planning in the preparation of social projects and promoting studies on social policies. In 2008, the Commission for the Coordination of Ministers of Social Affairs (CCMASM) was created as an auxiliary body of the Common Market Council, made up of representatives of the Ministries of Social Development and Citizenship of the member states of the bloc, with the task of supervising the implementation of existing social projects within the Mercosur framework, acting jointly with the ISM.

### **Mercosur under the Temer-Macri and Bolsonaro Consensus**

The election of Mauricio Macri to the Argentine presidency in November 2015, the Brazilian political crisis that triggered the coup against President Dilma Roussef in December of the same year, the ascension of Vice President Michel Temer to the presidency of the republic in August 2016, with a sharp turn in economic policy and foreign policy that later culminated in the electoral victory of Jair Bolsonaro in the October 2018 elections, the electoral victory of Jair Bolsonaro in the October 2018 elections, the self-proclamation of Juan Guaidó as Venezuelan head of state in January 2019 and the coup d'état that ousted Evo Morales from the presidency of Bolivia in November of the same year are political processes that have taken place within the framework of a liberal and conservative turn in South American politics in these years and that have caused implications for the integration process.

The overthrow of progressive governments led to the deepening of the neoliberal agenda in the region, marked by the increased encouragement of trade liberalization policies and the signing of free trade agreements (TADDEI, 2018). The rise of the new right in South American governments has produced substantial changes in international relations in the region, with consequences for integration processes. The international agenda of these governments was driven by the aim of dismantling the progressive legacy in the region and by a discourse of confrontation with integration and cooperation experiences conceived as "ideological" or "Bolivarian" (SANAHUJA, 2019). The supposed fight against the ideological character of Mercosur was linked to the intensification of free trade and greater openness of the South American economies, resulting in proposals related to the flexibilization of the bloc and advances in talks, negotiation rounds, memoranda and trade agreements with third countries

and other regional organizations, such as the Dominican Republic, Canada, South Korea, Singapore, the Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union (CAVALCANTI, 2019).

The liberal-conservative turn in the foreign policy of South American countries led to setbacks and stagnation in the social and participatory agenda that had been stimulated by the progressive governments that preceded them. The process of multiplying Mercosur bodies and institutional spaces suffered a setback as South America's right-wing governments took office, proposing a break with the social-liberal policies of previous governments and promoting an agenda of reinvigorating neoliberalism and a return to the Washington Consensus.

Mauricio Macri's victory in the 2015 Argentine elections interrupted the sequence of three presidential terms served by representatives of the Justicialist Party and accelerated the neoliberal project in the country. During Macri's administration, the country experienced the deepening of a long process of reprimarization of its economy, the devaluation of the national currency, the deregulation of various sectors of the economy, the reduction of tariffs on exports, the liberalization of the circulation of capital and the increase in the cost of fuel and public service tariffs (TADDEI, 2018).

In terms of foreign relations, the Macri government has shown itself to be a supporter of international cooperation projects that promote the free market, rejecting non-hegemonic regional initiatives. In addition to the death of Hugo Chávez, Macri's presidency has had a considerable impact on the Latin American integration process, stimulating a process of regional fragmentation or disintegration (KLACHKO; ARKONADA, 2017). In this way, Macri has sought to facilitate the signing of trade treaties, such as the agreement between Mercosur and the European Union, and has endeavored to distance Argentina from regional integration processes considered by his government to be "ideological"<sup>5</sup>, such as UNASUR and CELAC (TADDEI, 2018).

Similarly to the Macri government, the Brazilian government of Michel Temer (2016-2018) adopted a liberal orientation in the country's economic policy. In the document entitled "*Uma ponte para o futuro*" (A bridge to the future) published in 2015 by the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB), which guided Temer's government, the political group defended the precariousness of work through the labor reform, the intention to reduce

---

<sup>5</sup> Clarín. *Mauricio Macri: "Unasur es el último error" donde "prevaleció la ideología y los prejuicios*. 22 de março de 2019. Available: [clarin.com/politica/mauricio-macri-unasur-ultimo-error-prevalecio-ideologia-prejuicios\\_0\\_80rKmxSsw.html](http://clarin.com/politica/mauricio-macri-unasur-ultimo-error-prevalecio-ideologia-prejuicios_0_80rKmxSsw.html)

pensioners' rights through the pension reform and the limitation of public spending through the Constitutional Amendment that established the "spending ceiling".

In terms of Brazilian foreign policy, José Serra, Brazil's foreign minister, defended a new orientation that pointed to a return to the guiding principles of open regionalism, with a special focus on increasing intra-regional and extra-bloc free trade (CAVALCANTI, 2019; PERRONE DE MIRANDA, 2019; SANTOS; LEÃO; ROSA, 2021). During this period, initiatives were taken to move away from the theses of post-liberal regionalism, such as the suspension of Brazil as a member of UNASUR, Brazil's engagement in the Lima Group and closer international relations with the Pacific Alliance and extra-regional partners (SANTOS; LEÃO; ROSA, 2021).

In the October 2018 elections, far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro was elected to the presidency of Brazil, defeating Workers' Party candidate Fernando Haddad in the second round. Economist Paulo Guedes was appointed economy minister, and at his first press conference he stated that Mercosur would not be a priority for his administration, nor would bilateral relations with Argentina<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, Guedes was in favor of making the bloc more flexible, criticizing it for being "a prisoner of ideological alliances" since, in his view, it favored relations with countries with "Bolivarian inclinations"<sup>7</sup>.

The Bolsonaro government sought greater alignment with the US, especially during Donald Trump's presidency, on issues of global and regional interest, denounced what it called the "globalist" plot and "cultural Marxism", distrust of multilateral organizations and disbelief in global warming and scientific knowledge in general (HIRST; MACIEL, 2022). Brazil's foreign policy with regard to regional integration processes is characterized by the Bolsonaro administration's continuation of the policy inaugurated by Michel Temer, with the regional project placing greater emphasis on the trade agenda.

In Paraguay and Uruguay, with the election of Mario Abdo Benítez in August 2018 and Luis Lacalle Pou in March 2020 respectively, orthodox proposals linked to a return to open regionalism in the integration process gained greater momentum, at a political juncture in which Argentine President Alberto Fernández, elected in December 2019, acted as a counterpoint to the other liberal-conservative governments in South America.

---

<sup>6</sup> G1. *Declarações de Paulo Guedes sobre Mercosul surpreendem membros do bloco*. Available: <https://g1.globo.com/economia/noticia/2018/10/30/declaracoes-de-paulo-guedes-sobre-mercossul-surpreendem-membros-do-bloco.ghtml>

<sup>7</sup> Estado de São Paulo. *Paulo Guedes anuncia prioridades econômicas do governo Bolsonaro*. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5p8BUHKbu8>

The new liberal-conservative South American governments sought to curb the political agendas related to the social and participatory Mercosur promoted by the previous governments and, on the other hand, sought to give greater strength to the economic and trade bias of regional integration (SANAHUJA, 2019). In this direction, the consensus between the Macri and Temer governments promoted a new direction in the bloc's conduct, guiding the need for convergence with the Pacific Alliance, new impetus for free trade negotiations with the European Union and proposals to make Mercosur more flexible (CAETANO; LÓPEZ BURIAN; LUJÁN, 2019).

Measures to make the bloc more flexible have been advocated by Uruguay since 2006, but with the rise of right-wing governments in South America, there has been greater support for these proposals<sup>8</sup>. In general, the flexibilization proposals aim to reduce the common external tariff and repeal the existing rule in the Community legal order that prevents member countries from establishing individual trade liberalization strategies, such as bilateral or multilateral free trade agreements with third countries (SANAHUJA, 2019).

As part of the strategy of the new right to exploit Mercosur's free trade vocation more intensely and, in addition, to promote the isolation of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela in South America, the foreign ministers of the four founding countries took the unanimous decision to suspend Venezuela from the bloc indefinitely on the grounds of violating the democratic clause set out in the Ushuaia Protocol. Thus, on 1 April 2017, the declaration of the Member States on Venezuela was signed and, in August of the same year, Venezuela was suspended from Mercosur on the grounds that the country's government had caused a rupture in the democratic order, marked by human rights violations and disrespect for the rule of law.

The Venezuelan suspension was part of the efforts to destabilize the Bolivarian revolution after the death of Hugo Chávez. In 2017, the Lima Group was created with the aim of forming a liberal-conservative consensus on the American continent around the Venezuelan crisis with the aim of delegitimizing the government of Nicolás Maduro, and subsequently recognizing the self-declared president of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó (SANAHUJA, 2019). The Lima Declaration of 8 August 2017, signed by twelve American countries (including Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay), condemned the Venezuelan government for breaking with the country's

---

<sup>8</sup> Uruguai. *Reunión entre presidentes de Uruguay, Lacalle Pou, y de Paraguay, Abdo Benítez*. Available: <https://www.gub.uy/presidencia/comunicacion/audios/completos/reunion-entre-presidentes-uruguay-lacalle-pou-paraguay-abdo-benitez>



democratic constitutional order, expressing the Lima Group's support for the decision to suspend Venezuela from Mercosur<sup>9</sup>.

### Final considerations

This study is based on the hypothesis that Latin American integration is in constant dispute between different projects. On the one hand, liberal and conservative elites seek to impose a model of integration subordinated to the interests of financial capital, transnational companies and central capitalist states, which is identified with open regionalism. On the other hand, progressive social organizations and political forces are presenting alternative proposals for regionalism that go beyond essentially commercial regional projects, seeking to distance themselves from the model of regional development centred on neoliberal policies, in favour of a plurality of axes of integration and the safeguarding of national sovereignty.

During its thirty years of existence, Mercosur has undergone different reorientations depending on the political convergence that was forming in the region, sometimes with governments with a neoliberal orientation and supporters of open regionalism, sometimes with progressive governments promoting a revisionist agenda for regional integration centered on the multidimensionality of the integration process.

Bilateral integration between Brazil and Argentina developed from 1985 onwards, as a fundamental preliminary experience for the creation of Mercosur, had a pendulum aspect, oscillating between the models of developmental regionalism and open regionalism. In its first decade, the bloc adopted an essentially commercial integration model, centered on the precepts of open regionalism and the convergence of neoliberal governments. Fractions of the national elites, such as the Brazilian industrial and Argentine agricultural sectors, defended the need for regional integration of a commercial nature, based on the myth of the benefits of economic globalization. As part of the program of structural reforms and trade opening, the economic elites and their representatives accelerated the process of modernizing the peripheral economies of their respective countries through Mercosur integration.

In the early years of the 21st century, during the cycle of progressive governments in South America, the integration process incorporated new regional agendas, transcending its commercial vocation without abandoning it. Mercosur expressed the adoption of post-liberal

---

<sup>9</sup> Available: [https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/canais\\_atendimento/imprensa/notas-a-imprensa/declaracao-de-lima#esp](https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/canais_atendimento/imprensa/notas-a-imprensa/declaracao-de-lima#esp)

policies that led to a reformist regionalism under Brazilian leadership, which sought to transcend the commercial agenda of integration, implementing new agendas related to political, social and cultural issues, without, however, proposing a break with the economic precepts of open regionalism. With the electoral collapse or coups of the progressive South American governments, there was a return to open regionalism with the Temer-Macri and Bolsonaro Consensus, with the institutional emptying of the social dimension, the slowing down of the integration process and the preponderance of trade issues.

With Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's victory in the Brazilian presidential election in October 2022, there is an expectation that Mercosur and other Latin American integration processes in which Brazil participates will be promoted, since one of the new government's foreign policy priorities is international dialogue with Latin American nations and the Global South in general, such as African countries. Mercosur and other Latin American integration processes could therefore be rearranged if a new progressive consensus is formed in the second decade of the 21st century.

## REFERENCES

BANCO INTERAMERICANO DE DESENVOLVIMENTO. **Além das Fronteiras: O Novo Regionalismo na América Latina**. Washington, D.C., 2003.

BARCELÓ SEVERGNINI, N. Definiciones de la identidad del Uruguay durante el primer gobierno del Frente Amplio. **Estudios Internacionales**, Santiago, v. 52, n. 195, p. 111-132, 2020.

BALASSA, B. **Teoría de la integración económica**. México: Uteha, 1964.

BETETA, H.; MORENO-BRID, J. C. El desarrollo en las ideas de la CEPAL. **Economía UNAM**, Ciudad de México, v. 9, n. 27, p. 76-90, dic. 2012

BIELSCHOWSKY, R. Cinquenta anos de pensamento na CEPAL - uma resenha. *In*: BIELSCHOWSKY, R. **Cinquenta anos de pensamento na CEPAL**. Rio de Janeiro: Record, p. 13-68, 2000.

BIZZOZERO, L. Uruguay y los procesos de integración regional. Trayectoria, cambios y debates. **Civitas**, Porto Alegre, v. 10, n. 1, p. 97-117, 2010.

BRICEÑO-RUIZ, J. Ejes y modelos en la etapa actual de la integración económica regional en América Latina. **Estudios Internacionales**, Santiago, v. 45, n. 175, p. 9-39, agosto 2013.

BOUZAS, R. A economia norte-americana e a América Latina. Complementaridade e conflito numa fase de crise. In: PLASTINO, C. A.; BOUZAS, R. (org.). **A América Latina e a crise internacional**. Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal: Instituto de Relações Internacionais-PUC/RJ: Instituto de Estudios de Estados Unidos-CIDE, 1985. p. 41-69.

BUENO, C.; RAMANZINI JÚNIOR, H.; VIGEVANI, T. Uma perspectiva de longo período sobre a integração latino-americana vista pelo Brasil. **Contexto Internacional**, Rio de Janeiro, v. 36, n. 2, p. 549-583, jul./dez. 2014.

CAETANO, G. Breve historia del MERCOSUR en sus 20 años. Coyunturas e instituciones (1991-2011). In: CAETANO, G. (coord.). **MERCOSUR 20 años**. Montevideo: CEFIR, 2011. cap. 1, p. 21-71.

CAETANO, G.; LÓPEZ BURIAN, C.; LUJÁN, C. El Brasil de Bolsonaro, las orientaciones posibles de su política exterior y el futuro del regionalismo en Sudamérica. **Revista Uruguay de Ciencia Política**, Montevideo, v. 28, n. 1, p. 95-130, jun. 2019.

CANDEAS, A. **A integração Brasil-Argentina: história de uma ideia na “visão do outro”**. Brasília: FUNAG, 2010.

CASELLA, P. B. **Mercosul: exigências e perspectivas: integração e consolidação de espaço econômico: 1995-2001-2006**. São Paulo: LTr, 1996.

CAVALCANTI, F. G. O Mercosul pós-Dilma Rousseff e o retorno do regionalismo aberto. In: BRICEÑO RUIZ, J. *et al.* (coord.). **La integración latinoamericana en debate: incertidumbre, formatos institucionales fragmentados y caminos alternativos latentes**. 1. ed. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Teseo, 2019. p. 69-96.

CEPAL. **El Mercado Común Latinoamericano**. Naciones Unidas, México, Julio. 1959.

CEPAL. **El regionalismo abierto em América Latina y el Caribe: la integración económica al servicio de la transformación productiva**. 1994.

DE DAVID, T. D.; SILVA, M. B. O.; TERRA, R. B. M. R. B. A dimensão jurídica do imperialismo na (des)ordem global capitalista: uma análise com base na crítica marxista ao direito internacional e às relações político-econômicas de dominação e dependência. **Revista de Direito Internacional**, Brasília, v. 15, n. 3, p. 380-400, 2018.

DECLARAÇÕES de Paulo Guedes sobre Mercosul surpreendem membros do bloco. **G1**, 30 out. 2018. Available: <https://g1.globo.com/economia/noticia/2018/10/30/declaracoes-de-paulo-guedes-sobre-mercopol-surpreendem-membros-do-bloco.ghtml>. Access: 10 Aug. 2023.

DEVLIN, R.; ESTEVADEORDAL, A. **¿Qué hay de Nuevo en el Nuevo Regionalismo en las Américas?**. Buenos Aires: Banco Interamericano de Desenvolvimento, 2001.

DOMINGUES, J. M. **Aproximações à América Latina: desafios contemporâneos**. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2007.

FERRO, L. Democracia y Política Exterior: Uruguay (1985-2006). **América Latina Hoy**, v. 44, p. 115-132, 2006.

FURTADO, C. **Formação Econômica da América Latina**. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro, Lia, 1970.

GARCIA, M. A. A opção sul-americana: reflexões sobre política externa (2003-2016). **Textos selecionados de Marco Aurélio Garcia**. GASPAR, B.; SPINA, R. (org.). São Paulo: Fundação Perseu Abramo: IMAG, 2018.

GRANATO, L.; ALLENDE, R. A. A política externa dos governos kichneristas (2003-2011): do modelo próprio ao MERCOSUL. **Século XXI**, Porto Alegre, v. 04, n. 02, p. 135-157, jul-dez 2013.

HARNECKER, M. **Um mundo a construir: novos caminhos**. 1. ed. São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2018.

HARVEY, D. **O neoliberalismo. História e implicações**. São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2008.

HIRST, M.; MACIEL, T. Brazil's foreign policy in the time of the Bolsonaro government. **SciELO Preprints**, [S. l.], 2022. DOI: 10.1590/SciELOPreprints.4771.

IANNI, O. **O labirinto latino-americano**. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 1993.

KLACHKO, P.; ARKONADA, K. **As lutas populares na América Latina e os governos progressistas: crise e desafios da atualidade**. 1. ed. São Paulo: Expressão Popular, Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2017.

LOCKHART, N. F. La identidad de Unasur: ¿Regionalismo post-neoliberal o post-hegemônico? **Revista de Ciências Sociais (Cr)**, San José, v. 02, n. 140, p. 97-109, 2013.

LO BRUTTO, G.; CRIVELLI, E. El panorama actual de la integración en América Latina. *In*: MEDINA, T. O.; MUÑOZ, E. E. (Compiladoras). **La cooperación Sur-Sur em América Latina y el Caribe: balance de una década (2008-2018)**. 1. ed. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2019. p. 241-253.

MARIANO, K. L. P. **Regionalismo na América do Sul: um novo esquema de análise e a experiência do Mercosul**. São Paulo: Editora UNESP; São Paulo: Cultura Acadêmica, 2015.

MARTIN, A. R. Sopa de letrinhas: Alba, Alca, Mercosul, Unasul, Can... Para onde vai a Integração Latino-americana? *In*: ARROYO, M.; ZUSMAN, P. **Argentina e Brasil: possibilidades e obstáculos no processo de integração territorial**. São Paulo: Humanitas; Buenos Aires: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 2010. p. 37-57.

MASI, F.; BITTENCOURT, G. Las economías pequeñas en el Mercosur: evolución y perspectivas de desarrollo. *In*: **Desafío de integrarse para crecer**. Balance y perspectivas del Mercosur en su primera década. Buenos Aires: BID; Red MERCOSUR; Siglo XXI Editora, 2002. p. 375-398.

MAURICIO Macri: “Unasur es el último error” donde “prevaleció la ideología y los prejuicios. **Clarín**, Buenos Aires, 22 de março de 2019. Available: [clarin.com/politica/mauricio-macri-unasur-ultimo-error-prevalecio-ideologia-prejuicios\\_0\\_80rKmxSsw.html](http://clarin.com/politica/mauricio-macri-unasur-ultimo-error-prevalecio-ideologia-prejuicios_0_80rKmxSsw.html). Access: 10 Aug. 2023.

MERCOSUL. **Plano Estratégico de Ação Social do MERCOSUL (PEAS)**. Assunção, Paraguai, 2012.

MERINO, G. E. Proyectos estratégicos e integración regional en América Latina. El surgimiento de la Alianza del Pacífico, el fortalecimiento del regionalismo abierto y el retroceso del regionalismo autónomo. **Relaciones Internacionales**, La Plata, v. 26, n. 52, p. 17-38, jun. 2017.

MERINO, G. E. El MERCOSUR en tiempos de retorno neoliberal. *In*: V Jornadas Nacionales de Investigación en Geografía Argentina – XI Jornadas de Investigación y Extensión del Centro de Investigaciones Geográficas, 2018, Tandil. **Anais [...]**. Tandil: UNPL, 2018. p. 1055-1067.

MONIZ BANDEIRA, L. A. **Estado Nacional e Política Internacional na América Latina: o continente nas relações Argentina-Brasil (1930-1992)**. 2. ed. São Paulo: Ensaio, 1995.

MONIZ BANDEIRA, L. A. **Geopolítica e política exterior Estados Unidos, Brasil e América do Sul**. 2. ed. Brasília: FUNAG, 2010.

OLIVEIRA, A. C. **Do velho ao novo regionalismo: evolução das políticas conjuntas para o desenvolvimento planejado da América Latina**. CEPAL, Santiago, 2014.

PAIKIN, D. La cooperación Sur-Sur y la integración latinoamericana: una mirada desde el Mercosur. *In*: MEDINA, T. O.; MUÑOZ, E. E. (Compiladoras). **La cooperación Sur-Sur em América Latina y el Caribe: balance de una década (2008-2018)**. 1. ed. Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2019. p. 205-240.

PAULO Guedes anuncia prioridades econômicas do governo Bolsonaro. **Estado de São Paulo**, São Paulo, 29 out. 2018.

PÉREZ ANTÓN, R. Rumbos y avatares de la política exterior. *In*: CAETANO, G. **20 años de democracia: Uruguay 1985-2005: miradas múltiples**. Montevideo: Taurus: 2005. p. 109-130.

PERRONE DE MIRANDA, S. A “nova política externa brasileira” de Temer para a América do Sul. **Conjuntura Austral**, [S. l.], v. 10, n. 51, p. 126-138, 2019.

PREBISCH, R. O desenvolvimento econômico da América Latina e alguns dos seus problemas principais. *In*: BIELSCHOWSKY, R. (org.). **Cinquenta anos de pensamento na CEPAL**. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 2000.

RODRIGUEZ, J. C. Una ecuación irresuelta: Paraguay-Mercosur. *In*: SIERRA, G. (coord.). **Los Rostros del Mercosur**. El Difícil Camino de lo Comercial a lo Societal. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2001. p. 361-372.

SANAHUJA, J. A. Del “regionalismo abierto” al “regionalismo post-liberal”. Crisis y cambio en la integración regional en América Latina. *In*: ALFONSO, L. M.; PEÑA, L.; VÁZQUEZ M. (coord.). **Anuario de la Integración Regional de América Latina y el Gran Caribe 2008-2009**. Buenos Aires: CRIES, 2009. p. 11-54.

SANAHUJA, J. A. La crisis de la integración y el regionalismo en América Latina: giro liberal-conservador y contestación normativa. **Anuario Ceipaz 2018-2019**, Madrid, n. 11, p. 107-126, 2019.

SANTOS, L. W.; LEÃO, A. P. F.; ROSA, J. R. V. Explaining the Changes in Brazilian Foreign Policy towards South America under Michel Temer’s Administration (2016-2018): The Return to the Logic of Open Regionalism. **Contexto Internacional**, Rio de Janeiro, v. 43, n 3, p. 489-513, 2021.

SERBIN, A. Déficit democrático y participación ciudadana en el marco del regionalismo post-liberal. *IN*: SERBIN, A.; MARTÍNEZ, L.; RAMAZINI JÚNIOR, H. (Coord.). **Anuario de la Integración Regional de América Latina y el Gran Caribe**. Buenos Aires: CRIES, 2012. p. 73-128.

SERBIN, A. Atuando sozinho? Governos, sociedade civil e regionalismo na América do Sul. **Lua Nova: Revista de Cultura e Política**, São Paulo, n. 90, p. 297-327, 2013.

TADDEI, E. H. Relegitimação da governabilidade neoliberal, resistências populares e desafios emancipatórios na Argentina e Nossa América. *In*: LEITE, J. C.; UEMURA, J.; SIQUEIRA, F. (org.) **O Eclipse do progressismo: a esquerda latino-americana em debate**. São Paulo: Elefante, 2018. p. 17-59.

URUGUAI. **Reunión entre presidentes de Uruguay, Lacalle Pou, y de Paraguay**. Abdo Benítez. 17 fev. 2021.

VÁZQUEZ, M. Los tres consensos del MERCOSUR. Entre la autonomía y la dependencia. **BORDES**, José C. Paz, Pcia. de Buenos Aires, n. 5, p. 59-69, 2017.

VAZQUEZ, M. El MERCOSUR de Bolsonaro y Macri o el MERCOSUR de las tres renuncias. **BORDES**, José C. Paz, Pcia. de Buenos Aires, n. 11, p. 111-119, 2019.

YEGROS, R. S.; BREZZO, L. M. **História das Relações Internacionais do Paraguai**. Brasília, FUNAG, 2013.

YORE, M.; PALAU, T. **La participación paraguaya en el Mercosur**. Reflexiones desde la visión de los actores subalternos. Asunción: BASE Investigaciones Sociales, 2001.

### *CRediT Author Statement*

---

**Acknowledgements:** Not applicable.

**Funding:** This study received support and funding from the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - CAPES)

**Conflict of interest:** There no conflict of interest.

**Ethical approval:** Yes, the work was carried out within the dictates of academic ethics.

**Availability of data and material:** Yes, documents and bibliographic materials are available for access.

**Authors' contributions:** The authors contributed to the conception and design of the study; literature review; analysis and interpretation of data; drafting of the manuscript; intellectual revision of the manuscript; final revision of the version submitted to the journal.

---

**Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação.**  
Proofreading, formatting, normalization and translation.

