Mercosur, the Role of Ideas and a More Comprehensive Regionalism[*]

ABSTRACT
Mercosur's political agenda experienced a "redefinition" after the 1999-2002 regional crisis. The emergence of issues related to pre-existing asymmetries and the creation of a regional Parliament, amongst other things, show the importance of the new sociopolitical agenda since 2003. Thus, a broader and more comprehensive scope which includes an ideational approach is required. Nevertheless, according to presidential discourses, more steps forward should be expected in South American regional integration.

KEYWORDS
Mercosur • constructivism • regional integration • ideational approach

Mercosur: el papel de las ideas y un regionalismo más abarcante

RESUMEN
La agenda política del Mercosur ha experimentado una suerte de "redefinición" después de la crisis regional de 1999-2002. La emergencia de temas relacionados con las asimetrías regionales prexistentes y la creación de un parlamento del Mercosur, entre otras cosas, muestran la importancia de la nueva agenda sociopolítica desarrollada a partir de 2003. Por ello, se requiere la incorporación de un enfoque más amplio y abarcador que se acerque desde lo ideacional. Sin embargo, si nos atuviéramos a los discursos presidenciales, serían de esperar muchos más avances en el campo de la integración regional.

PALABRAS CLAVE
Mercosur • constructivismo • integración regional • enfoque ideacional

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The present paper is part of a study which seeks to approach the dimension of identity and the theories of International Relations that emphasize the role of ideas with a substantial topic, such as the processes of regional integration in Latin America and, more concretely, the Mercosur case. The research did not receive funding, but it has been nourished by the inputs and suggestions of participants at the IPSA panel (Madrid, July 2012) where it was presented as a first draft, as well as by the valuable corrections of the peer reviewers of the journal.

Mercosur, the Role of Ideas and a More Comprehensive Regionalism[1]

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Introduction

Mercosur's political agenda experienced a "redefinition" after the 1999-2002 crisis. The emergence of issues related to pre-existing asymmetries and the creation of a regional Parliament, amongst other things, show the importance of the new sociopolitical agenda since 2003. Thus, a broader and more comprehensive scope which includes an ideational approach is required. Nevertheless, according to presidential discourses, more steps forward should be expected in South American regional integration. These regional agreements are based on decision makers' ideas and perceptions and, notably, on a special understanding of the political projects of the member states.

In this paper, firstly, the Mercosur "redefinition period" (2003-2007) is tackled, emphasising on the sociopolitical agenda. In spite of the traditional focus on material elements such as power and economic interests, other elements, like the sociocultural ones, come into play. Secondly, it is argued the relevance of the role of elite's ideas, values and perceptions is argued, while reaching agreements. People are the unit of analysis, and the regional integration process is understood as a dynamic process, whereas rationalist theories would apply a rather static and state-centric approach.

1 I would like to thank the blind referees for their comments and suggestions. However, the mistakes still remaining in the article are just my responsibility.

And finally, as a conclusion, a complementary theoretical explanation of this 2003-2007 period is proposed in order to shed some light on Mercosur's regional integration process, providing a more complex explanation for a more comprehensive regionalism. Furthermore, this article ends by indicating the doubts that have arisen in recent years, due to high expectations generated by presidential declarations and regional summits, whereas the real measures adopted by national bureaucracies are quite limited.

1. The sociopolitical redefinition (2003-2007)

Aspirations of regional integration have always been present in Latin America since the time of independences. The leaders of the new-born republics, and notably Simón Bolívar, tried to design a united regional area, partly due to their own convictions, and partly because the unity could be understood as a defensive measure against hypothetical risks and aggressions (at the very first moment, from European countries, and later from the United States). However, this uniting driving force was always in tension with strong nationalist ideas, aiming to build national symbols in order to establish clear differences among the new republics. This task was mainly functional for local oligarchs to retain their privileges and power. This dichotomy between unitary projects and strong nationalism explains, in certain way, the –better or worse– performance of regional integration processes which have taken place in Latin American history.

Although the scope of this work is far from presenting a detailed overview of Latin American regional integration, it is suitable to provide some milestones to follow the antecedents of this process. In the 1950's, under the structuralist ideas coming from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), directed by Raúl Prebisch, a vision of a regional market was launched with the intention of limiting the high dependency that Latin American countries (the periphery) suffered from the core countries. In this context, the ALALC was created in 1960 and, after not having satisfied the expectations, a new institution was launched in 1980: the ALADI. In that decade (the 80's) characterized by democratic transitions all over the region and by an increasing globalization process, presidents chose to put the focus on economic integration ("open regionalism") in order to be able to compete

in the world economy and to have a stronger voice as a regional block in a "new world". It is useful to remember that it is in this international context (post-Cold War scenario, neoliberalism consensus and globalization process), as well as the regional one (recovered democracies and the search to insertion in world economy), where the new wave of regionalism takes place, including Mercosur (as shown below).

In 1991, the Asunción Treaty, by which the Mercosur was created, was signed with the intention of establishing a common market and increasing commercial flows among the four member states, i.e. Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. At the same time, the aim of democracy consolidation, after a long history of military regimes in those countries, was also a key question to foster regional integration. However, despite the early implementation of a sort of educational Mercosur and some small steps forward in the social field –such as the Mercosur's Workers' Right Declaration (*Declaración Sociolaboral del Mercosur*) in 1998–, sociopolitical issues were not regarded as high priorities for Mercosur during the 90's.

Thus, the decade following the end of the Cold War, while dominated by a neoliberal atmosphere, was characterized by a focus on the commercial aspects of the regional project to the detriment of sociopolitical areas. It is important to notice that, in this period, the United States had launched –in Miami, in 1994– a project to link the whole hemisphere under a free trade area (FTAA-ALCA). Notwithstanding the failure of this initiative –as shown in Mar de Plata, in 2005–, the negotiation of the treaty gave the chance to South American countries to realize of the importance of being together in order to better protect their interests against other major powers, such as the United States.

In any case, during the nineties, increasing levels of economic interdependence and commercial flows among the member states were produced, giving the general idea that Mercosur was a great success, mainly in terms of quantitative variables and macroeconomic indicators. However, the *real* devaluation in 1999 and the consequent economic, political and institutional crisis in Argentina in 2001, as well as in the region as a whole, led to a re-evaluation of the regional project. In this situation, Domingo Cavallo, then Minister of Economy in Argentina, argued that Mercosur should be

reduced to a free trade area instead of trying to create a common market. Nevertheless, the regional crisis and the risk of weakening the project became an opportunity to redefine the regional process. Eduardo Duhalde took office in Argentina in 2002 (and Nestor Kirchner in May, 2003) and Lula da Silva also took office in Brazil in January 2003, both presidents deciding to put the emphasis on regional tasks, as the best way to overcome the crisis. Thus, in some way, regional efforts were needed in order to improve national affairs. The Buenos Aires Consensus in 2003 could be seen as the starting point of this bilateral understanding between Presidents Lula and Kirchner. By virtue of this agreement, they tried to show the Buenos Aires Consensus as the opposite of the well-known Washington Consensus a decade before. Later on, further details about this 2003 agreement will be presented, but for the moment the focus will be placed on the social dimension of this document, as well as on the main place reserved for the ideas of 'development' and 'bilateral consensus'.

Concerning the international context, which also determines in certain way the regional one, the September 11 events mean a turning point in US foreign policy. Since 2001, US interests show an increasing emphasis towards security affairs (notably in Middle East and Islamic countries) and economic relations (mainly, the commercial links to Asia and the Pacific area). Paradoxically, the marginalization of Latin American affairs generated by the new strategies coming from the White House let more room for Latin American leaders to arrange the way they negotiate among themselves and how they decide to share their own projects for the future. This autonomy partially explains why South American presidents were able to get involved with a regional project with socio-political nuances.

After the 1999-2002 crisis, a bilateral (Argentinean-Brazilian) agreement arose, while small members states, i.e Paraguay and Uruguay, complained about not being taken into consideration when it came to regional decision making. In 2005 this situation was slightly improved. Paraguay succeeded in its claims and Mercosur created a mechanism to attenuate the asymmetries among the Mercosur regions: the FOCEM, a small yet strongly symbolic fund, given that the smaller countries pay less while obtaining more. At the same time, the leftist Frente Amplio

won the presidential elections in Uruguay and Tabaré Vázquez took office. During his Mercosur presidency pro-tempore, he launched a sociopolitical program called "Somos Mercosur" (*We Are Mercosur*), which will be explained in-depth below. But, probably, the best proof of this sociopolitical redefinition was the gradual construction of the Mercosur Parliament. Starting from the Parliamentarian Joint Commission, which was composed of members of the national parliaments, a regional Parliament was created in 2005[2], expecting to be directly elected by Mercosur citizens. The Constitutive Protocol states that "la instalación del Parlamento del Mercosur, con una adecuada representación de los intereses de los ciudadanos de los Estados Partes, significará un aporte a la calidad y equilibrio institucional del Mercosur, creando un espacio común en el que se reflejen el pluralismo y las diversidades de la Región y que contribuye a la democracia, la participación, la representatividad, la transparencia y la legitimidad social en el desarrollo del proceso de integración y de sus normas" (quoted in Vázquez and Geneyro 2006, 8-9). Thus, even if this institution suffers from the lack of decision power, it was considered from the beginning as a deliberative arena, where citizens' claims would be discussed and entered into the political agenda. In order to achieve that goal, the Political Agreement, that was reached at the Mercosur Parliament Plenary in Montevideo (October 18th, 2010), stated the controversial issue of the attenuate proportionality in the Mercosur Parliament composition. According to this agreement, the population will not be the only element to establish the number of parliament members chosen in each country[3]. In short, although the deadlines for each stage have never been honoured, the fact is that a regional Parliament has been created in order to be elected by Mercosur societies, and their members will talk with a regional voice, even if they will not have decision-making power, at least for the following years.

2 Mercosur/CMC/DEC Nº23/05, 2005. Protocolo Constitutivo del Parlamento del Mercosur.

3 For more information on Political Agreement, see the website: http://www.parlamentodelmercosur.org/innovaportal/v/4594/1/secretaria/cancilleres_del_mercosur_aprueban_el_acuerdo_politico_del_parlasur.html (last access: May, 3, 2012)

To sum up, the special understanding between Brasilia and Buenos Aires (plus Asunción and Montevideo some years later) provided the opportunity to put some sociopolitical elements in action, at least at a discursive level.

2. The ideational role in Mercosur's regional integration

Traditionally, the ideational role[4] has been undervalued when considering regional integration. Material logics such as power, security or commercial interests have primarily been used to explain why and how some countries decide to put in common some decisions concerning regional politics. For this reason, rationalist theories are more popular than the reflectivist ones. In order to complement and balance our approach to regional integration, a combination of several methodologies is offered, starting from a meta-theoretical constructivist approach, which will enable us to put the focus on ideational logics, without avoiding the material ones. At the same time, and while understanding the integration process as a dynamic phenomenon which changes with time, an important role will be given to historic institutionalism, seeking to find changes and continuities in Mercosur regional integration. Last but not least, the 'interpretative actors' perspective' will be included in order to stress the key role of decision makers' ideas and perceptions to fulfil regional politics.

Constructivism can be understood as a meta-theoretical approach (Guzzini 2000), highlighting three statements: according to epistemology, knowledge is socially constructed; according to ontology, the world is socially constructed; and the link between both elements is a reflexive process in both directions. Connected to these thoughts, the *ideational approach* by Goldstein and Keohane (1993), states that ideas are important and these authors wonder what role ideas play. According to them (Goldstein and Keohane 1993, 12-20), ideas help to organize the world

4 In this work, "ideational" means ideas, values and perceptions; that is, intangible elements difficult to separate and individualize when decisions are examined, but elements which are always present in decision makers' minds, so relevant in order to try to explain why those decisions –and not others- are chosen.

and, in doing so, ideas shape the agendas, which, at the end of the day, have influence on the outcomes. Thus, there are three types of ideas: (i) ideas as road maps, that is, perceptions and the way we think shape our vision and thoughts about people and decisions; (ii) ideas as focal points and glue, understood as a way to bring different perceptions together in order to provide easier coordination; and, finally (iii), institutionalized ideas, i.e. after being put into practice, ideas become part of the institutions themselves and, in many cases, the initial idea changes at the same time and direction as the institution itself does.

Authors such as Sven Steinmo and Kathleen Thelen (1992) underline the importance of institutional changes over long periods of time, avoiding shortcomings or explanations of events –in our particular case, several stages of South American regional integration– as something fixed and immutable. They classify four types of changes: (i) important changes on political or socioeconomic context, which implies that institutions become irrelevant or keep latent; (ii) changes concerning the balance of power of sociopolitical context, which could encourage old institutions to promote new objectives; (iii) exogenous changes, which modifies the objectives and strategies pursued by existing institutions; and finally, (iv) changes in political actors, who shape their strategies to fix them to institution changes. As we will tackle below, these types of changes and dynamics can be applied to Mercosur's regional integration process in order to try to explain this phenomenon and the way it takes place.

The importance of leaders and decision makers, mainly in a process often defined as inter-governmentalist or presidential diplomacy,[5] makes suitable the application of an approach based on the way actors think and internalize their perceptions before taking decisions. According to Carslnaes' typology (Carlsnaes 2005 [2002]) –combining individualistic and holistic ontologies and objective and interpretative epistemologies–,

5 For more on this concept, see among others Malamud (2010 [1991]). "La diplomacia presidencial y los pilares institucionales del Mercosur: un examen empírico", http://www.relacionesinternacionales.info/ojs/index.php?journal=Relaciones_Internacionales&page=article&op=view&path[]=241&path[]=214 (Last access: May, 3, 2012).

we focus on the last combination: an approach based on an interpretative actors' perspective, that is, an individualistic ontology and an interpretative epistemology. This approach stresses the particular ideas, values and perceptions of decision makers, which led to certain decisions being taken during the Mercosur regional integration process.

3. Complementary theoretical explanation of Mercosur redefinition

In this section, the theoretical-methodological framework is applied to the Mercosur redefinition period, covering 2003 to 2007. As an example, it could also be applied to any paradigmatic inflection point of the Mercosur process. Indeed, the ideas understood as a road map –Goldstein and Keohane's first type (1993)– are quite clear in the perceptions of Presidents Alfonsín and Sarney, where it was implied the early rapprochement and political cooperation between Argentina and Brazil in the mid-80's, notably concerning the nuclear field. Thus, the idea of regional integration (or, at least at that precise moment, bilateral integration) is thought of as the road map to consolidate democracy in both countries and to definitely avoid the risk of war between neighbors, which was so tangible during previous dictatorships.

Likewise, the second type enunciated by the authors, Goldstein and Keohane (1993), comprising ideas as focal points and glue, could be exemplified during the 90's, when neoliberal momentum mainly shifted regional integration into commercial and economic interdependence. In fact, in those years there was a huge consensus on the suitability of developing regional integration, which was evaluated as very successful, in order to improve macroeconomic indicators and commercial flows. So, regional integration is partially seen as the focal point and glue that motivates decision makers –and also some epistemic communities– to emphasize the economic dimension and to link the Mercosur project to increasing development.

After the 1999-2002 crisis, some important changes[6] in the political and socioeconomic context took place, which implied that old institutions –or more accurately in our case, the existing regional integra-

6 Hereafter, I apply the classification of changes claimed by Thelen and Steinmo (1992).

tion mechanisms– started to pursue new objectives, and by doing so, they became relevant in a new way. This sociopolitical context change is especially evident in the case of Argentina, where the political, socioeconomic and institutional crisis fostered the necessity to rethink the state, its relation with other countries and the way Argentina was expected to interact with the world, and also to ameliorate its development standards. In this setting, the then-President Eduardo Duhalde pledged his commitment to strengthen the links with Brazil, given its isolation from the world and the financial markets. The regional integration process –and, more specifically, the bilateral project between Buenos Aires and Brasilia– was seen as a kind of reinsertion into the international arena and as a starting point to overcome the regional crisis. Therefore, as a result of both political opportunity and decision takers' will, Mercosur acquired a new relevance, linked to a further sociopolitical agenda, which tried to avoid focusing only on economic factors.

In the same period of time, several exogenous changes took place[7], with the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and the crystallization of a globalized world with emerging powers being the most important ones. Not wanting to go too far on this subject, given that it excedes the scope of this paper, the increasing idea of regional blocs as a suitable way to a better insertion in the international arena is worth noting. Furthermore, new *fora* as the BRICS, comprising emerging powers such as Brazil, tried to talk with one voice, i.e., the regional one, even if it was contested by other countries within the same region. This is quite evident in the case of Brazil's attempt to obtain a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in order to speak on behalf of the region, while Argentinean traditional diplomacy has fought against it. Nevertheless, in 2004 and just for few months, Brazilian and Argentinean governments agreed to share their rotative seat in UNSC. Moreover, and even if Brazil never wanted to assume the cost of regional leadership as the 'paymaster',

7 Third type of change, following Thelen and Steinmo (1992).

some initiatives concerning asymmetries inside Mercosur were taken. Notably, the FOCEM (Mercosur Structural Convergence Fund) was created in 2005 with a redistributive logic, although holding a limited amount of money. This symbolic value makes this regional mechanism quite important as it represents a regional logic rather than a national one, although FOCEM is very weak and limited (as has already been said). What is important to highlight at this point is that Brazil and Argentina are the two countries that pay the most and receive the least, even if there are high poverty rates in both countries. And in addition, apart from Paraguay, Uruguay is the most favoured country, even if the smallest member of Mercosur is richer than their neighbors in terms of per-capita incomes.

Finally, taking the last type of historical change proposed by Thelen and Steinmo (1992), there are other kinds of dynamism: political actors shape their strategies according to changes in institutions; that is, presidents and decision makers from the Mercosur member states shifted and partially shaped their attitude in relation to the regional integration process depending on new changes and perceptions about this process from 2003, notably the sociopolitical redefinition. At this point, the interpretative actors' perspective of Carlsnaes (Carlsnaes 2005 [2002]) is very useful, as it stresses the leaders' ideas and perceptions, which, when framed in a specific context, motivate a particular decision. A proper example could be the Buenos Aires Consensus, in 2003, in which Presidents Lula and Kirchner agreed to design a new agenda based on democratic consolidation, development and the improvement of life conditions. Regarding Mercosur, they stated their "convicción de que el Mercosur no es sólo un bloque comercial sino que constituye un espacio catalizador de valores, tradiciones y futuro compartido" (quoted on Vázquez and Geneyro 2006, 2). Thus, the Buenos Aires Consensus together with the "2004-2006 Brazilian Working Program"[8] could be understood as the starting point for several so-

8 Mercosur/CMC/DEC Nº26/05, 2005. Programa de Trabajo 2004/2006.

ciopolitical initiatives developed and implemented, with more or less intensity and fortune, during the following years. By the degree of "intensity and fortune", we are referring to the important gap between presidential declarations and summits' agreements in relation to the extent that these are actually internalized in national laws and implemented by national bureaucracies. The constant Mercosur deficit between discourse and practice remains an outstanding incoherence.

In some particular cases, such as the Brazilian and Argentinean presidents' consensus, it is important to notice the relevance of Lula's approach to the region, and also, of the Worker's Party's approach to regional politics, epitomized by Marco Aurelio Garcia, presidential advisor for international affairs. Lula's will to give priority to regional views, linked to a sociopolitical nuance, was shown in his 2003 presidential address, among others, where he highlighted his emphasis on the strength of Mercosur and the common destiny of Brazil and its regional neighbors. Lula's vision of regional integration as something to be 'interiorized' has lasted until the end of his period in office. During his last Mercosur summit over which Brazil happened to be president pro-tempore, he tried to foster new regional initiatives in order to gain a momentum for further integration.[9]

Another event that can be examined under the interpretative actors' perspective approach is the launch of the Somos Mercosur –*We are Mercosur*– Programme. After taking office in 2005, Uruguayan President Tabaré Vázquez launched this programme during Uruguay's pro-tempore presidency in the second semester of 2005. Uruguay's left-wing party, Frente Amplio, had developed a regional vision during its time in opposition. Those ideas and perceptions towards a more sociopolitical regional integration constrained decision makers

9 On this subject about Brazilian Presidency Pro-Tempore during the second semester 2010, see the Brazilian Foreign Affairs, Celso Amorim, Speech in front of Mercosur Parliament: http://www.itamaraty.gov.br/sala-de-imprensa/notas-a-imprensa/discurso-do-ministro-celso-amorim-na-xxvi-sessao-plenaria-do-parlamento-do-mercosul-montevideu-18-de-outubro-de-2010 (last access: May, 3, 2012).

to act for a Mercosur closer to citizens. In fact, the Somos Mercosur Programme aimed to resituate Mercosur closer to people and further from markets, affirming three lines: (i) to strengthen Mercosur's civil society participation in defining and building regional model; (ii) to put citizens' needs at the core of the process; and (iii) to contribute to foster a Mercosur identity[10]. Therefore, the aspiration of giving more room to the Mercosur civil society was developed by the constitution of Mercosur Social Summits of 2006. Nevertheless, the assessment of impacts and outcomes derived from these summits are not very successful. Indeed, according to social actors themselves, social summits are becoming routine and losing relevance. However, what is important at this point is the way that decision makers' ideas and perceptions about the suitability of introducing sociopolitical elements to the regional integration process were applied to the real world and, at the same time, how presidents' ideas were translated –for better or for worse– into decisions and regional programmes.

Finally, we tackle the third type of ideas from the *ideational approach* by Goldstein and Keohane (1993): institutionalized ideas. According to this, the prolonged use of ideas affects decisions and norms, which determine changes in institutions and mechanism as the regional integration process, and in some cases the original ideas and perceptions become interiorized into the institutions themselves. Translated to our subject, it could be affirmed that the perception of the idea of regional integration as something suitable (in the 80's as guarantor of recovered democracies, and in the 90's because of the increasing economic interdependence) generated the institutionalization of the Mercosur concept. Although recognizing that national politics remain more relevant for decision makers and given the poor results in some regional fields, it is undeniable that the ideas of sharing some kind of common future and the ability to take some decisions together

10 For more on this subject, see www.mrecic.gov.ar/ccsc/index.htm (last access: May, 3, 2012).

have become ingrained and will probably continue to do so for some time to come. Furthermore, Mercosur employees[11], regardless of their different opinions about the degree of success of institution decisions, have come to interiorize the fact that, after the 1999-2002 crisis, the idea of regional integration is no longer at stake and that a sociopolitical nuance has impregnated the Mercosur agenda. This shift has taken place mainly because of the fact that decision makers, and relevant actors in general, have seen the region as a suitable *political constructo* and they have incorporated (with more or less vehemence) regional views to their ideas and perceptions.

Conclusions

In the first place, this paper offered an overview of the 2003-2007 redefinition period, when sociopolitical elements were introduced into the Mercosur agenda. Afterwards, some theoretical-methodological approaches have been presented in order to be applied to some specific cases framed within the redefinition period mentioned above. And finally, a more comprehensive regional explanation has been shown, which, by including the ideational perspective, gives us a chance to look at reality through a more complex prism and to avoid the shortcomings related to evaluations of Mercosur focused exclusively on commercial flows or economic indicators in general.

This complementary approach avoids normative statements about what Mercosur "should be" or what should have been done. It also avoids euphoria for the improvements already achieved, which in many cases could be considered as insufficient. On the contrary, this complementary approach aspires to provide a more rigorous analysis of Mercosur processes, including some perspectives traditionally neglected, such as the ideational one. On the one hand, said approach demonstrates (the way) that integration ideas have driven a sociopolitical redefinition

11 Taken from interviews with Mercosur employees and decision takers from the Mercosur member states, between October and December, 2010, in Montevideo, Uruguay.

since 2003 and, on the other, that high expectations have turned into high frustration for some actors, as they have come to realize that great speeches do not have a parallel in decision implementations. So, there is sufficient evidence that demonstrates the existence of a gap between discourse and reality.

For this reason, uncertainty about Mercosur is once again on the rise (if it ever disappeared)[12]. Paradoxically, the higher frustration increases, the more agreements and achievements are presented in Mercosur summits, notably in San Juan (July, 2010) and Foz do Iguaçu (December, 2010). Some of them have created some expectation once again: the approval of the Customs Code, an issue expected for a long time and considered as a proof of good will in the face of bi-regional negotiations between Mercosur and the European Union; the approval of the Political Agreement, which establishes the attenuated proportionality for the Mercosur Parliament; the approval of a Mercosur Citizen Statute, understood as more of a guide for mid-term citizen rights than a document with real implications for Mercosur citizens in everyday life; the recently created position of High General Representative of Mercosur, with many relevant aims highlighting coordination among Mercosur institutions (inside dimension) and representation in the international arena (outside dimension).

That being said, the Customs Code is not yet in force and negotiations with the European Union are not flowing towards a "happy ending". The Mercosur Parliament is not meeting the deadlines, everything indicates that it will be properly constituted later than expected and, what is even worse, it seems that it will not have decision-making power. The Mercosur Citizen Statute is not expected to enter into force before 2021 (!). And finally, there are doubts concerning the real relevance and capacity of the High General Representative of Mercosur, which are logically raised just by looking backwards and remembering the Permanent Representatives Commission case, which was the origin of this new institution.

12 On this subject, see among others the book by Caetano (2009). http://cefir.org.uy/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2010/06/La-reforma-institucional-del-MERCOSUR.-Del-diagn%C3%B3stico-a-las-propuestas..pdf (Last access: May 3, 2012).

To sum up, there are mainly two sorts of questions that generate uncertainty around Mercosur. Firstly, as we have already mentioned, there is a gap between rhetoric and practice, which provokes certain frustration in some regional actors. Thus, there is a first problem concerning the real implementation of decisions taken at presidential level. And secondly, there is a general uncertainty about the real role played by Brazil. While avoiding the assumption of a clear leadership (and consequently having to act as a paymaster), it seems that Brazil fosters integration as a springboard for becoming a global player. So, the second problem deals with Brazil's ambiguity towards the region. Indeed, Lula has appeared to be very keen to act as something between a regional leader and a global player, but doubts about Brazilian priorities have arisen. Furthermore, as Andrés Malamud (2009, 126-148) points out, as Brazil's regional neighbors are challenging its so-called leadership, rivalries among them are emerging. According to others (Lechini and Giaccaglia 2010), it seems that Brazil is trying to give an exaggerated image of itself in the international arena so as to be recognized as a global player, while trying to look 'smaller' in the regional scenario in order to avoid appearing as a dangerous hegemon. Whichever the case may be, it looks like Mercosur's regional integration process is surfing between redefinition and uncertainty. Nevertheless, as astonishing as this may seem, the idea of regional integration has been internalized or "institutionalized" in Goldstein and Keohane's words, even if the Mercosur process shows an important lack of institutionalization.

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