

**THE SÃO PAULO FORUM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF LATIN AMERICAN  
REGIONAL INTEGRATION**

by Bruno de Paula Castanho e Silva  
Institute of Political Science and Governance  
Tallinn University  
bcastanho@hotmail.com

Paper presented at the XXII<sup>nd</sup> World Congress of Political Science, Madrid, Spain (8-12  
July 2012)

## **Abstract**

*In 1990 was created in São Paulo, under the initiative and leadership of Luis Inácio Lula da Silva and Fidel Castro, the São Paulo Forum (FSP, in the Portuguese/Spanish acronym for Foro de São Paulo). It gathered 48 leftist political parties and movements from Latin America, and aimed at discussing the strategy that socialists should adopt in a post-Soviet world. The group grew larger, and now its annual meetings are attended by several of Presidents or their representatives from Latin American countries. The paper's objective is to show how, since members of this group started to assume power in Latin America, many important steps in the regional integration process and foreign policy decisions coincide with positions defended in official joint declarations of the FSP, to an extent that it can no longer be ignored as a relevant space for the development of ideas and strategies that come to be applied throughout the continent.*

Keywords: São Paulo Forum, Latin America, Regional integration, Leftist parties

## **Introduction**

In July 1990 forty-eight left-wing political parties and movements from Latin America gathered in São Paulo to discuss how they should act in order to keep socialism alive in a world without the Soviet leadership. Among the presents, only one person was a head of state – Fidel Castro. Still, the group decided to proceed with such meetings, what has been happening in an almost yearly basis until now. In July 2012, twenty-two years later, the XVIII meeting of what was later named the São Paulo Forum (hereafter FSP, according to the Portuguese and Spanish acronym) will receive representatives from more than one hundred organizations from all around the world, among which no less than 12 are ruling parties in their respective states.

The group grew in number of members, in political power held by these members and also in its organizational aspect. In 1990, when they first got together in São Paulo, the *Declaration of São Paulo* was produced, after a regular seminar with discussions. Through the years, permanent bodies were gradually created, such as a general secretariat, work-groups to draft base-documents with topics for discussions on the meetings, specific workshops for minorities, youth and parliamentarians and several other

organs. The main conclusions reached are published on a Final Declaration after each meeting, as well as on specific resolutions adopted by each workshop. A formidable and seemingly efficient structure that almost every year puts together leftist political parties' representatives from all around the world in order to discuss their most recent development.

In almost two hundred years, since the beginning of the independence movements in the continent, never has the Latin American left been so strong as it is right now, and never had it grew so fast and successfully as in the last two decades. In 1990 socialist oriented parties were, in all countries except for Cuba, in no better position than the strongest opposition. As the years passed, electoral triumphs brought these groups one by one into power, starting with Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in the late 90's until the recent victories by Ollanta Humala in Peru and Cristina Fernández Kirchner in Argentina, in 2011.

Whether the interaction and exchange of experience made possible by the FSP gatherings had an influence in these electoral outcomes, or if the rise of the left and the existence of the Foro are just coincidences, this is an interesting topic for research, but which will not be the subject of this paper<sup>1</sup>. The focus here is to look to foreign policy instead of internal, and discuss the current Latin American integration process from the point of view of the FSP resolutions and declarations.

The regionalization process in Latin America lives now a quite particular moment. Several organizations aimed at continental integration have been impuled for the past two decades, specially from 2000 onwards, and sometimes it is difficult to make out exactly what each one of them stand for, and where does the sphere of action ends for a certain organization and starts for another, in a scenario that reflects that of the whole post-Cold War world, where, in the words of Björn Hettne, *“regional formations increasingly interact, overlap and transform, thus creating a new global political landscape which is significantly different from the Westphalian international system”* (Hettne 2005, 269).

What can be seen is a drive towards regional integration that probably had no precedents in Latin American history and which has, since leftist forces started to rule important countries in the continent, taken a very different road than the traditional models of integration.

---

1 Ronald Chilcote mentions that the ideas which emerged from the interaction between left intellectuals and politicians resulted in electoral successes in urban areas where the left had not before been able to win. See Chilcote 2003, 12-3. Venezuelan journalist and oppositionist Alejandro Peña-Esclusa argues that the FSP members indeed act with a high level of organization in order to put forward each others interests, internally and externally. See Peña-Esclusa 2009.

The idea of this paper is to discuss whether the recent developments in regional integration in Latin America might be somehow related to the ideas defended by the FSP in its meetings for the past two decades. The intention is to see if the actual evolution in this process, specially with the UNASUR, have similarities with the integration principles, methods and goals defended by the Foro members since they were only oppositionists, and in case of an affirmative answer, to suggest possibilities of further research.

For that, in the first section a brief history of the Foro will be presented, with the context of its appearance and the reasons and purposes of its maintenance. Next, the ideas of the group regarding specifically regional integration will be presented in chronological order, with attention to the details that would prove important in the future. On the third section, this evolution of ideas will be contrasted to the actual evolution in Latin American integration, specially in what concerns the Mercosur and the UNASUR, to observe if the changes observed in the first and the proposals of the second were somehow anticipated on the FSP documents. Last, some final remarks shall summarize the findings and present ideas for further observation and research.

When talking about the Foro's positions in given topics, we will use mainly its own documents, which can be found on the internet<sup>2</sup>. Whenever a quotation is given, directly or not, the source will be indicated by the kind of document from which it was taken (a Final Declaration, Parliamentary Workshop resolution, etc) with the city and year of the respective meeting. Since most documents are originally available only in Portuguese or Spanish, direct quotations were translated into English by the author, with the original version in footnote.

## **The Foro and its history**

The history of the São Paulo Forum dates back to 1990. With the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe, leftist movements everywhere lost their main reference, and started to have serious doubts about the viability of their own future in a world that seemed to be definitely and irreversibly taken by liberal democratic capitalist ideas. The main expression of this scenario is the famous book by Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History*

---

<sup>2</sup> The complete documents from 1990 until 2007 can be found on the link [http://www.midiaseम्मascara.org/attachments/007\\_atas\\_foro\\_sao\\_paulo.pdf](http://www.midiaseम्मascara.org/attachments/007_atas_foro_sao_paulo.pdf); the resolutions and Final Declarations from the meetings between 2008 and 2012 can be found on the official website of the Foro, <http://forodesaopaulo.org>.

*and the Last Man*, where the author defends that liberal democracy have defeated all other ideologies when it comes to popular legitimacy, and that the movement towards this kind of regime was a global trend (Fukuyama 2006, 343).

To fight these widespread views, 48 leftist political parties, organizations and movements from Latin America, under the leadership of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Fidel Castro, got together in São Paulo for discussing the future of their struggle in the new world order, and from that resulted the *São Paulo Declaration* from July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1990, where they compromise to fight imperialism, neoliberalism and defend the socialism as the necessary and urgent solution to social oppressions.

The São Paulo Declaration states the commitment of its signers to reject liberal economy and condemns the United States as an imperialist power that seeks only to keep Latin American people dominated under poor life conditions. The document reinforces the unrestricted support to the Cuban Revolution<sup>3</sup> and the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua. The parties recognize the social, cultural and political differences between Latin American societies, and acknowledge different paths to socialism, but understand that this goal is the only one that could bring social justice to the continent. The proposal for regional integration would exclude the imperialist domain, and should be based upon the revival of Latin American identity and heritage, on economic reforms that benefit the lower classes and on the respect to human rights and popular sovereignty.

In the words of the Central Document of the VII meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1997,

The Foro understands itself as an instance to elaborate alternative policies. It is not, and does not intend to be, a new International, but only a gathering of political parties and movements who are defined by their anti-imperialistic and anti-neoliberal character, with open and honest debate, in which organizations with distinct political tracks and ideologies can express their views<sup>4</sup>.

When of its creation, several Latin American countries were going through

---

3 Still, according to Roberto Regalado, there were some members who were critical both to the Cuban model of socialism and to the single-party system (Regalado 2008).

4 “El Foro se define como una instancia de elaboración de políticas alternativas. Sin ser, ni pretender ser, una nueva Internacional, si es un agrupamiento de partidos y movimientos políticos que se define por su carácter antiimperialista y antineoliberal, de debate abierto y libre, al interior del cual pueden expresarse organizaciones de distintos signos políticos y ideológicos”.

democratization processes, after military anti-communist dictatorships, and were applying liberal measures on their economies, under the incentives of United States and the IMF. Therefore, the São Paulo Forum members, at that point, were mostly internal oppositionists in their countries, and had very limited power of practical action on the political field.

This led to an earlier stage of the group when its declarations and meetings were not much more than opportunities for politicians to rally against the evils of liberalism and the United States. As Duncan Green notes when commenting the III meeting, which took place in Managua in 1992, *“radical economists involved in preparing for the event were dismayed by the lack of ideas and imagination shown by the politicians. Orator after orator inveighed against the evils of capitalism, but had little to say on practical alternatives”* (Green 1996, 121).

In 1997 James Petras, renowned scholar on Latin American issues, saw little future for the FSP as an organization. According to him,

The assimilation of neoliberal doctrines, the deep commitments to purely electoral politics, and the de facto alliances with neoliberal regimes on the part of leading pragmatists in the Foro had undermined its practical and subversive nature. It had become an increasingly ritualistic event divorced from the radical social movements that confronted the neoliberal regimes and their Foro partners” (Petras 1997, 85).

Three years later his criticism to an alleged softening of the Foro members was even bolder. In his words, *“none of these parties or coalitions seriously raise the socialist alternative”* (Petras and Harding 2000, 4). This might have been a little harsh, specially at that time, but indeed later on some of the Foro members, while never halting its obvious leftist tone, admitted something like a “peaceful coexistence” with capitalism. As we can read from the Base-Document to the XIII Meeting, to take place in 2007 in San Salvador, El Salvador,

Many of the organizations that integrate the São Paulo Forum still have as their final goal the construction of an alternative society, superior to capitalism. Others work for the constitution of societies

with high welfare, political democracy and popular sovereignty, within the boundaries of capitalism<sup>5</sup>.

Michael Löwy, on the other hand, praised the FSP at the time as *“the common expression of the main progressive socialist or left-nationalist parties in the continent”* (Löwy 1998, 77), and as a first time ever successful attempt of bringing together these forces in Latin America (Löwy and Stanley 2002, 129).

Be that as it may, in fact the Foro developed its activities ever further during the late 90's. In the 1996 meeting in San Salvador there were 52 member organizations and 144 invited ones. In 1997, at the Porto Alegre meeting Final Declaration, it was decided that the FSP would *“establish permanent mechanisms of coordination and discussion among its members<sup>6</sup>”*, and in 1998 a Permanent Parliamentary Forum was created, where members of national parliaments who were involved also with the FSP would *“work together in the joint elaboration of alternative integration methods”*. The institutional enlargement counted also with the creation of a journal – America Libre -, counting on its editorial board with prominent leftist scholars and intellectuals from Latin America. Among the authors who published articles on its 21 numbers are Immanuel Wallerstein, Michael Löwy, Eduardo Galeano, Leonardo Boff, José Saramago and many others<sup>7</sup>.

The turning point for the Foro, however, came in 2002, when Lula da Silva was elected president of Brazil by a wide majority, and the Workers' Party became the largest in the Parliament. From this moment on the largest country in Latin America came under the rule of the mastermind behind the São Paulo Forum, and gave thus the means the group needed to implement their ideas. Reflecting this moment, the meeting in Managua in December 2002 was attended by 595 representatives from 142 political parties and organizations from 45 countries.

The tone of the final declarations also changed, following this change of objective positions. In the early 90s the FSP seemed more concerned with discussing revolutionary strategies for leftist organizations to reach power in their countries (São Paulo Declaration 1990). The topics covered on these first texts – final declarations from the meetings in

---

5 Muchas de las organizaciones que integran el Foro de São Paulo siguen teniendo como “objetivo final” la construcción de una sociedad alternativa y superior al capitalismo. Outras organizaciones trabajan por la constitución de sociedades com altas dosis de bienestar social, democracia política y soberanía popular, en los marcos del capitalismo.

6 El 7 Encuentro del Foro de São Paulo resolvió establecer mecanismos de coordinacion y discusión permanentes entre sus miembros.

7 Available online: <<http://www.nodo50.org/americalibre/index.htm>> Access in 10 Jun. 2012.

Mexico City 1991, Managua 1992, Havana 1993 and Montevideo 1995 – deal with an evaluation of the international economy by then, the threats posed by liberalism and imperialism, and how the left should answer to that, in order to assure the survival of socialism. They recognize that the revolution cannot be led by one class only, and that grassroots social movements are essential to the success of their efforts.

Later, when more and more of its members were obtaining electoral victories, the Foro started to promote Latin American integration as the best alternative to bring development to the continent and reach a situation of more social justice and true democracy – the term “socialism” started to disappear from the declarations, being substituted by “progressive” or “democratic” forces. However, the members reject any attempt to make a distinction between the leftist governments in Latin America, which qualifies some as moderate and others as radical. This is, according to the preface to the publications containing the Resolutions adopted in Managua 2011 (XVII meeting), a strategy of the right to weaken the leftist governments by turning them against each other.

Also, more concrete suggestions started to be done. If, on earlier stages, most words were used on general anti-capitalist rhetoric, now specific political points were addressed individually by the workgroups, such as a condemnation to the health system in El Salvador (Resolución sobre el tema de la Salud en El Salvador, 2002) and a recommendation to the position its members should have in the 2004/2005 electoral process to the Organization of American States (Resolução contra candidatura de Francisco Flores 2004).

On this election, it is interesting to notice how the final result is in accordance with the recommendations of the FSP work-group (what does not mean, at all, a causal relation). Due to the early resignation of Miguel Angel Rodriguez as O.A.S. Secretary General, in October 2004, three candidates appeared to attempt the succession: José Insulza, from Chile, Luis Ernesto Derbez, from Mexico and Francisco Flores, from El Salvador. The last one was Washington's favorite, but after facing a harsh resistance placed by several countries, he withdrew his pledge on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2005<sup>8</sup>. This refusal to his name and support to Chilean socialist Insulza was open by authorities from Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, exactly countries ruled by members of the FSP.

Now, on that one can read on a resolution by the São Paulo Forum, from 23<sup>th</sup>

---

8 About the 2004 elections at the O.A.S., see ROTHER, Larry. O.A.S. to pick Chile socialist U.S. opposed as its leader. *The New York Times*. April 30, 2005. Available on: <[http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/30/international/americas/30oas.html?\\_r=1&scp=3&sq=miguel%20angel%20rodriguez%20organization&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/30/international/americas/30oas.html?_r=1&scp=3&sq=miguel%20angel%20rodriguez%20organization&st=cse)>

November 2004, entitled “Resolution against Francisco Flores' Candidature” the following words: “*The member-parties of the Foro de São Paulo work group, reunited in São Paulo on 22 and 23 November, reject the candidature of Mr. Francisco Flores Pérez, former President of El Salvador, to the American States Organization General Secretary*”<sup>9</sup>. After this, the obstinate rejection of the names preferred by Washington led by these states resulted in the Insulza election in the end of April 2005.

The main points of convergence between the FSP declarations and states' policies is, still, in Latin American integration, especially the actions undertaken by leftist governments from 2004 onwards. This will be the subject of the following section.

### **Regionalization under the FSP**

The topic of regional integration evolved throughout the years within the São Paulo Forum. In the first meetings it was mentioned briefly, with some general words on the desirability of a process of regionalization that was not led by the United States. Nevertheless, some of the principles and goals presented in these meetings proved to be the basis upon which the group developed the issue in later meetings.

When leftist forces started to take power, on the other hand, regional integration started to be taken into a more central position on the discussions and final agreements. The creation of continental institutions was now seen as an important and unavoidable priority, if these parties were to retain their rule and continue with the structural changes within the ruled states. The following pages will present in more detail the history of the integration ideas defended by the FSP since its foundation in 1990 until what is contained on the base-Document adopted for the 2012 meeting in Caracas, Venezuela.

A proposal for Latin American integration received only one paragraph in the São Paulo Declaration in 1990. The members defended a model of cooperation against the imperialistic rule, which should “*reaffirm the sovereignty and self-determination of Latin America and its nations*”<sup>10</sup>, giving an impulse to the “*internationalist solidarity*”. The only concrete point to be taken from it was that, in the end, the United States had to be kept out.

---

9 Os partidos membros do grupo de trabalho do Foro de São Paulo, reunidos em São Paulo nos dias 22 e 23 de novembro, rejeitam a candidatura do Sr. Francisco Flores Pérez, ex-presidente de El Salvador, à Secretaria Geral da Organização dos Estados Americanos (OEA).

10 [Ela passa pela] reafirmação da soberania e auto-determinação da América Latina e nossas nações.

In the Final Declaration of the II meeting, in Mexico City 1991, the economic and political integration of Latin America and the Caribbean was seen as the “*core solution to the difficulties and problems*” found in the region. The text points out that such an integration could only be achieved if “*it is established in our countries democratic and independent states and governments committed to the transformation [of society]*”<sup>11</sup>, meaning, governments lead by the FSP members. Without them, any integration initiative would be carried out to the benefit of imperialism and the neoliberal elites.

In the III meeting, in Managua, Nicaragua, 1992, the method that should be used by the integration was delineated: it was supposed to come “*from under*”, integrating into a network of cooperation several organizations from civil society such as those formed by workers, peasants, feminists, religious and ethnic groups. Considering that, in this moment, most FSP parties and organizations were on the political opposition in their countries, although had still a good access, as is usual with the left, to labor unions and social movements, it seems natural that these, being the source of strength for many of these organizations, should be seen as the main promoters of the desired integration.

In Havana 1993 it was the first time that the Foro suggested the creation of a “*Latin American community of nations*”, economically and politically integrated, aimed at repositioning the continent in an international society “*controlled by large economic blocs and their policies, adverse to the interests of our peoples*”. With such a group working together these states would be able to resist the dominance by stronger actors.

Almost two years later, the meeting in Montevideo 1995 happened in the aftermath of the I Summit of the Americas in Miami, where 34 nations agreed to create the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The FSP meeting was marked by opposition to this model of regional integration, accusing it of being a tool for the United States to keep the rest of the continent in a peripheral position.

In this final declaration the members presented ten items which they thought were the priorities for the regional integration process. It is worth noting that only two deal with trade issues – the main concern of the Mercosur by then and of the FTAA proposal –, while the others give emphasis to other areas such as human rights, minorities and immigration. As we will have the chance to see more ahead, this was to become the model for the integration groups created under FSP member governments – and even the Mercosur was to take a turn into this direction. It was decided also the creation of a

---

11 [Avançar até esta meta] só será possível se forem estabelecido em nossos países Estados democráticos e independentes e governos comprometidos com a transformação.

Meeting of Parliamentarians for Latin American Sovereignty and Integration, which happened in Havana and gathered 153 congressmen and women from 19 countries. This was to become, from 1997 onwards, a permanent body specifically for parliamentarians within the FSP organizational framework, responsible for discussing how the Foro parties could coordinate their actions in sub-regional, regional and international parliaments (according to the VI meeting - El Salvador - Final Declaration).

In 1998, during the VIII meeting, in Mexico City, this group of parliamentarians presented its first joint resolution, which is also the first document in which the FSP or one of its bodies presents a longer and more detailed proposal for Latin American integration.

On the economic side, it defends the state as conductor of development, the increase in industrial production as opposed to financial speculation and protectionist measures to defend national actors, following the traditional teachings of structuralist economics.

However, it is stated that the main concern of integration shall be political and social, instead of economic. Among the priorities are the promotion of human rights, the establishment of regional funds to reduce the asymmetries, the environmental concerns and the enforcement of integration between civil society organizations. A Latin American community of nations should not be a merely free trade area, but actually a space for the fight against poverty in the region, where the stronger states would have the duty to aid weaker ones. Following such lines, the Final Declaration of the 2001 meeting in Havana proposes the creation of interstate development banks in Latin America and the establishment of coordinated plans on the energy sector.

No surprise, thus, that in the first meeting of the Southern section of the FSP, in December 2005, it was praised, besides the entrance of Venezuela in the Mercosur – which would be signed two days later – the announcement of both the creation of regional structural fund for development, and the construction of a gas pipeline to connect several countries in South America – a project that is, by now, almost entirely abandoned.

From the beginning of the 2000s, when leftist parties started to reach power in Latin America, regional integration entered definitely in the Foro agenda. In 2005, on the Southern group meeting mentioned in the previous paragraph, a long account of the up-to-date situation of the Mercosur was given, and proposals for further integration were made. The shift took by this organization from its original focus in free trade towards a vision centered on development and correction of asymmetries was praised, the necessity for a new institutional framework, with supranational structures, was stressed, and the need for

a common foreign policy was mentioned. On the new character of the bloc, the text reads as follows, *“Mercosur has for us a strategic political character, and our political will is to deepen and develop it, since we understand that it should not be limited to a mere free trade area, a vision which, undoubtedly, has been one of the main reasons for its current impairment”*<sup>12</sup>.

In the 2007 meeting (San Salvador) Final Declaration the search for Latin American and Caribbean integration was mentioned as the main concern of the meeting, around which other topics would stand. In the 2008 (Montevideo) Final document one can read that *“There will be no future in our countries if we stand isolated. Latin America and the Caribbean are the continent of hope. Its richness is invaluable but its insertion in the world will depend exclusively on the strength and legitimacy reached by the integration process”*<sup>13</sup>. In Buenos Aires 2010 the parties pointed out, as a fundamental task for the left in its struggle against a rightist counter-attack, to *“hasten the integration process”*. The meeting in 2012, to be held in July in Venezuela, is expected, according to its base-document, to have as its main task the evaluation of the integration process with emphasis on the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), launched in 2010.

As we could see, the issue of regional integration came to be, along the years, one of the top priorities of the São Paulo Forum. Its relevance is not only programmatic, based on ideas to foster economic and social development, but also strategic, since it is considered to be essential for the maintenance of national power by the FSP members in their countries. The principles of this integration, which started to be delineated already in the first summits, include the focus of regional organizations in social, political and cultural matters, as opposed to the typical view that they should start with trade issues.

Active regional cooperation aimed at reducing poverty all around the continent should be, from the start, a priority, and the reduction of inequalities and asymmetries was to be one of its purposes. If traditionally regionalization theories understand the natural evolution of an integration process is to start as a free trade area, develop into a customs union and then go all the way until a monetary union, with political integration and other topics coming up only on the later stages (Gavine and Lombaerde 2005), the idea of the FSP was to put forward political integration and social issues right from the beginning,

---

12 El MERCOSUR tiene para nosotros un carácter político estratégico y es nuestra voluntad política desarrollarlo y profundizarlo, y a la par entendemos que no debe acotarse exclusivamente a establecer un espacio comercial común, esta visión sin lugar a dudas ha sido uno de los factores que más há debilitado al bloque.

13 No habra destino para nuestros países de mantenernos aislados. América Latina y el Caribe son el continente de la esperanza. Sus riquezas son incalculables pero su inserción en el mundo dependerá exclusivamente de la fuerza y legitimidad que alcancen sus procesos de integración.

seeing trade agreements to be not more than instruments to achieve the really important goal of social development.

A common tariff for imports was secondary in this system, where the relevance was placed upon the possibility of an institution to talk, in the international arena, for all Latin American states, and to, internally, solve eventual political crises that might appear. Liberalization of commerce was not only discarded as a necessary first step, but seen as maybe not even necessary at all, in comparison to regional financial institutions for the foment of development policies.

In this sense, the next section will be dedicated to discussing how the regional integration process actually worked in Latin America for the past 10 years, from the perspective of the FSP traditional ideas on how it should be conducted.

### **São Paulo Forum, Mercosur and UNASUR since 2002**

Mercosur is often considered to be the most successful case of regional integration in Latin America (see, for instance, Malamud 2010). It emerged in a moment when Brazil, Uruguay and Argentina were in the process to overcome the legacies left by military dictatorships, and saw regional integration as a way to increase trade and achieve economic growth.

It started with the idea of constituting, at first, a free trade area and a customs union, following the usual path of integration. Influenced by liberal ideas, Brazil and Argentina engaged in commercial liberalization during the 90s, and the primacy in the Mercosur was of economic issues over political ones (Gardini 2011, 687). However, when the East Asian and Russian crises arrived in South America, first in Brazil in 1999 and more severely in Argentina one year later, the Mercosur lost most of its relevance, and the commitments to promotion of trade were largely ignored.

The organization began to recover its importance for the national governments after 2003, when Lula da Silva came to power in Brazil and Nestor Kirchner in Argentina. However, the spirit behind the new initiative was different from the previous period. If during the 90s trade was the main – and almost exclusive – concern for the group, now it became subordinated to political interests. According to Paulo Roberto de Almeida, *“total dedication was devoted to the attraction of new partners – Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela, and Ecuador – and facilitating their integration into the bloc (...) there was no real progresses*

*in the fields of trade liberalization and economic opening among member countries*" (Almeida 2010, 168-9).

Nevertheless, institutional integration proceeded at a rather fast pace, even though commercial issues were left aside. In 2004 the Olivos Protocol that defined the establishment of a Permanent Tribunal of Revision came into force and a Structural Convergence Fund (FOCEM) was created, with aims at reducing the asymmetries between its members, and in 2005 the Mercosur's Parliament (Parlasur) was legally created, starting its operations in 2007.

To Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães, High Representative of the Mercosur, the mentioned reduction of asymmetries is essential not only to the development of the bloc, but even to its existence (Guimarães 2012, 18), and the problem must be addressed properly and with more resources than it is now.

What one can notice from this brief recent history of the Mercosur is that it follows closely the ideas that permeate the São Paulo Forum declarations through the years, as we can see on the shift of focus from trade to political and social aspects. Already in the 1998 Parliamentary group meeting resolution, during the Mexico City meeting, the reduction of asymmetries was essential, and this purpose should *"be translated into compensatory and development funds to the less developed countries, regions or sectors"*<sup>14</sup>.

In the Final Declaration of the 2002 meeting in Antigua, Guatemala, one can read that *"to deepen Latin American and Caribbean integration means, first of all, give priority to the political and social dimensions, through the construction of institutions – regional parliaments elected by direct vote"*.<sup>15</sup> The Parlasur has still a small area of action, and thus far only Paraguay have effectively concluded direct elections to it, even though the other states seem to be preparing to do so. There is resistance from national parliamentarians in the four countries, who do not wish to see their sovereignty escape into a regional assembly and, as noted by Karina Mariano, the result of this struggle might say how far the integration process in South America can go (Mariano 2011, 152-3). If the Parlasur manage to get a higher degree of competences, this might be a signal that there would still be much more room for South American regionalization.

However, for some influential sectors within Brazilian Workers' Party administration

---

14 El objetivo de reducir las asimetrías debe traducirse en fondos compensatorios y de desarrollo para los países, regiones y sectores menos desarrollados o vulnerables.

15 Profundizar la integración latinoamericana y caribeña significa, ante todo, priorizar la dimensión política y social, mediante la construcción de instituciones – parlamentos regionales directamente electos.

Mercosur is an instrument for a more broad South American integration (Saraiva and Ruiz 2009, 161), what is in harmony with the stated in the Final Declaration of the São Paulo Forum from 2002, in Guatemala, according to which *“The XI FSP Meeting (...) proposes (...) that we advance in the projects of changing the current processes: Mercosur, Andean Community, the Center-American integration process and the CARICOM. Our perspective is the construction of a Latin American Community of Nations”*<sup>16</sup>.

The relevance that the Mercosur still enjoys today might be seen as a result of its history and of the previous institutionalization already occurred before 2003. The organization that was created almost only under the auspices of Lula da Silva, Nestor Kirchner, Hugo Chavez and others is the Union of South American Nations – The UNASUR.

This is the real embodied version of an international organization thought, developed and instituted by the leaders who are part of the São Paulo Forum. According to Lula da Silva, in a message he sent to the XVI meeting in Buenos Aires 2010, *“Experiences such as the UNASUR and the CELAC are heirs of the debates we had in the Foro”*<sup>17</sup>. Therefore, it deserves a closer look, in order to see how much of it corresponds to the integration process idealized in the group's meetings.

In the year 2000 Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso invited his peers to a Summit in Brasília, where the establishment of a South American Community of Nations was proposed. In 2004, when Brazil was already under Lula da Silva, 12 heads of states or their representatives, in a summit in Cuzco, Peru, signed the Declaration of Cuzco, which founded the Community of South American Nations, following the main lines of the designed proposed previously by Cardoso.

Due to divergences that some of the newly elected leaders had with the principles laid before, in 2007 it was decided that the organization should change its name to Union of South American Nations, and that the initially minimalist project, which aimed at a slow and gradual integration (Tokatlian 2005, 77) ought to become a maximalist one, where broad goals such as reduction of poverty, inclusion of indigenous people, active cooperation for development and faster political integration appear on the constituency charter, opposed to the moderate intentions of the former group (Briceño-Ruiz 2010, 209).

---

16 El XI Encuentro del Foro de São Paulo (...) propone (...) que avancemos en las propuestas de cambio de los actuales procesos: MERCOSUR, Comunidad Andina de Naciones, el proceso de integración controamericano y el CARICOM. Nuestra perspectiva es la construcción de una Comunidad Latinoamericana de Naciones que defienda la soberanía y la riqueza de sus pueblos.

17 Experiências como a Unasul e a Comunidade da América Latina e do Caribe são herdeiras dos debates que levamos no Foro.

The treaty that constitutes the UNASUR, signed in 2008, is undoubtedly ambitious. Among its specific objectives it includes the universal access to quality education, social security and health care, financial integration and attaining a South American citizenship. The agreement still determines the creation of a South American Parliament, to be located in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and whose constituency would be subject to an additional protocol.

According to Pía Riggirozzi, the UNASUR presents a new paradigm in regional integration, founded on post-hegemonic and post-trade principles and whose full meaning cannot be grasped by the existing frameworks (Riggirozzi 2011). The UNASUR, while absolutely subverting the usual evolution process of integration procedures, by putting forward extremely ambitious goals right from the beginning, also still lacks much formal consistency, since its members still hold tight to their autonomy for independent action (Saraiva 2010, 160).

Another resilient obstacle to further development of the new organization is the distinct view that Brazil and Venezuela seem to have on the subject. According to Burges, the first is more pragmatic and puts economic interests above the rest, seeking to conquer a large Latin American market, while the latter is moved more by ideological considerations, specially on the “Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century<sup>18</sup>” (Burges 2007, 1343-4).

Keeping the institutionalization levels below a certain limit, however, might be on the interest of the states for a while. The UNASUR owes much of its force to the fact that most of the current Latin American governments, even though with significant differences, share a core of basic ideological and programmatic principles. Therefore, while this is the case, these actors can use the UNASUR structure for their purposes, but if more severe disagreements emerge, or if some important member-states experience an electoral change, there would not be a strong arena ready for these new enemy parties to work with. The maintenance of low levels of institutionalization allows the actors to use it only while it is certain that their interests will be attended, with smaller risks of backfiring if the political power changes internally (Käkönen and Lähteenmäki 1995, 27).

But how does the UNASUR fits to the proposals made in the FSP?

First of all, again we must notice the insistence on a regional parliament. By now this project is still being discussed inside each nation, and the procedures to formalize it are under way. We must note, however, the following words by the Parliamentary group of

---

18 It is interesting to remark that the term “Socialism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” started to be applied to Bolivarian Venezuela by Hugo Chavez in 2005 during the XII meeting of the São Paulo Forum (Perez 2008, 355).

the FSP, on its resolution from the XVI meeting in Buenos Aires 2010:

The setting-up of a single parliament that binds in a first instance the parliaments of all the member-states of the UNASUR and soon of the whole Latin America is a pending task to which we should devote our attention. The binding character of the decisions of our regional parliaments, as well as narrowing the ties with national parliaments, must be impelled.<sup>19</sup>

Obviously the creation of a parliamentary body that works above national Legislative changes completely the idea of sovereignty and is not an easy task. Not only it collides with the “*unlimited respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and inviolability of states*” present in the preamble of the UNASUR constitutive treaty as well as a historical position within the Foro of respect for state sovereignty and repulse to any kind of imperialism.

This contradiction was noted by Olivier Dabène, for whom

These constitutions, as well as the SPF (São Paulo Forum) reflections, seem to be caught in a double bind. On the one side, there is an undeniable attraction for deep supranational integration. But on the other, regional integration is defensive, driven by a preoccupation with imperialist threats. The latter spurs an insistence on sovereignty, while the former requires ceding or pooling sovereignty. Admittedly, this leftist conception of regional integration entails a collective defense of sovereignty, while at the same time it compels individual countries to cede sovereignty. Yet, I claim that leftist governments in the last fifteen years have not addressed this contradiction properly. (Dabène 2012, 18).

However, this might be only an apparent paradox. Andrew Moravcsik, studying the European Community, demonstrated that while the regional integration might reduce

---

<sup>19</sup> La instalación de un único parlamento que vincule en una primera instancia a los parlamentos de los países integrantes de UNASUR y luego de toda América Latina es una tarea pendiente a la que le debemos prestar la debida atención. El carácter vinculante de las decisiones de nuestros parlamentos regionales, así como estrechar vínculos con los parlamentos nacionales debe ser una tarea a impulsar.

sovereignty when we consider the nation state as a unitary actor, it actually increases the power in the hands of national executives (Moravcsik 1994). What happened was that international organizations tend to create “*intergovernmental cartels*” (Moravcsik 1994, 63), where the leaders of each country’s executive are the ones negotiating and making decisions with their peer heads of state in areas where, before, they would have to face their national congress and opposition.

The transfer of powers to a supranational entity, therefore, would not be seen by the FSP members as giving away of sovereignty given that they remain in power and manage to be the major force within this body. What was transferred was competence from national instances and parliaments to executive intergovernmental summits, actually reinforcing the heads of state.

What could make matters more complicated is that the FSP has established itself, as we saw, as a solid anti-imperialistic body, where traditionally the U.S. plays the role of the imperial power. The integration projects carried out in Latin America in recent years, especially the CELAC, reflect this position of excluding the United States from Latin American political life as much as possible. Martín Arboleda notices that, in Andean countries, regional integration tends to be seen by most political parties as something inherently positive, except if there is the presence of the United States, case when most of them reject the idea because they believe the process would be merely a tool in the hands of a great power to dominate the others (Arboleda 2011).

Nevertheless, it is not reasonable to imagine that these states would be willing to change one imperial master for another, and that might be a source of trouble. Brazil sees itself as a natural regional leader and, even though it does not seem willing to use force to assert this leadership, the country still might use harsh measures when dealing with its neighbors (Malamud 2011, 5). The FSP, with its recent declarations emphasizing the importance of regional integration, of direct democracy and supranational instances of power seems to have made a choice in this dispute, however, it is still to be seen if among Latin American states Brazil has really ceased to be seen as a potential new empire.

The UNASUR also gives emphasis on its treaty, in the form of specific objectives listed in article 3, to several aspects considered important by the FSP in an integration process: reduction of inequalities and asymmetries, energy and infrastructure integration, cooperation on immigration issues, focus on small and medium size enterprises, environmentalist concern, and others.

On the first resolution of the parliamentary workshop, signed on the 1998 meeting in

Mexico City, where parliamentarians who were members of the FSP defined guidelines for regional integration, the use of regional integration for overcoming poverty and asymmetries is required for any attempt of regionalization. Besides that, *“Sustainability and care with the environment are, along with fighting poverty, the fundamental challenges of any economic strategy or integration agreement”*<sup>20</sup>. Besides that, one can read also that the process should also *“claim the growth of smaller income private sector, micro, small and medium size entrepreneurs”*<sup>21</sup>. The same document requires also the recognition of plain rights to immigrants on the scope of human rights.

On the base-Document for the XIII meeting in El Salvador (2007), a whole chapter is dedicated to *“An Alternative Integration”*. There, the cooperation in the areas of infrastructure and energy is considered to be basic to the development aimed by the group. Here, it is said also that *“the main challenge that our governments face is to take the continental integration into its plenitude”*<sup>22</sup>, and the social and cultural character of the process are stressed.

## **Final remarks**

It seems that Lula da Silva was correct in his words. Indeed, the UNASUR and the CELAC do look like heirs from discussions carried out on the São Paulo Forum.

Observing the UNASUR treaty from 2008 and the process of its development, we can see that in several aspects it materializes what the FSP's resolutions prescribed for a Latin American community of nations. Unlike most of its counterparts around the world, this organization makes it clear from the start that commercial liberalization is but one of its objectives, and far from being the most important. Cultural integration, economic development through regional funds, partnerships in energy issues and, specially, political insertion in the international society are distinguishing features in this bloc.

All these aspects, absolutely uncommon for regional organizations in such an early stage of development anywhere else in the world and, as noted by Pía Riggiorzi (2011),

---

20 La sustentabilidad y el cuidado del medio ambiente son, junto con el combate a la pobreza, los retos fundamentales de cualquier estrategia económica o acuerdo de integración.

21 Reivindicando el crecimiento de los sectores privado de menores ingresos, micros, pequeños y medianos empresarios.

22 Llevar la integración del continente a su plenitud es probablemente el principal reto que está planteado para nuestros gobiernos.

distinct from both the “old” and the “new” regionalization theories, were what the members of the São Paulo Forum were advising that should be done. If, in internal politics, it is possible to compare the program of a given party with its realizations when it came to power, in this case the declarations and resolutions are the program against which we can compare the steps taken in order to integrate politically, economically and socially the continent.

We do not intend to suggest, by any means, that the meetings of the Foro are some kind of conspiracy reunion where leaders get together to decide the future of the continent, and then go back to their countries with specific goals and tasks. The point is to see this group as an informal brainstorming institution for leftist parties and organizations, where they can discuss their development, their strategies, and get new ideas on many areas. As such, the FSP would somehow be like a think-tank, with the difference that, among its members, there are more politicians than academics.

Considering how much of its ideas were finally adopted on the Latin American integration process, it is possible to argue that following its declarations can give the observer a good sign on the perspectives for development in Latin American politics.

Also, being an informal place where politicians and eventually heads of state can meet without the institutional constraints usually imposed on official meetings, it can help to bring together leaders of nations in other political aspects besides regional integration. Knowing that the members share, just for being there actually, at least some ideological principles, the contact have indeed the potential to bring them closer and end up resulting in more harmony in the actions taken by these countries in international issues.

In this context, the study of the São Paulo Forum is essential for a better comprehension of the most recent events in Latin American politics. Its resolutions can help us to understand some of the innovations which mark the continental integration, and have the potential to assist the observer who wishes to analyze the future trends in the region.

## **References:**

Almeida, Paulo Roberto de. 2010. “Never Before Seen in Brazil: Luis Inácio Lula da Silva's Grand Diplomacy”, *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, 53 (2): 160-77.

Arboleda, Martín. 2011. “Party Based Anti Integrationism in the Andes: A Critical

Approach”, *The Latin Americanist*, 55 (3): 93-118.

Briceño-Ruiz, José. 2010. “From the South American Free Trade Area to the Union of South American Nations: the Transformations of a Rising Regional Process”. *Latin American Policy*, 1 (2): 208-29.

Burges, Sean. 2007. “Building a Global Southern Coalition: the Competing Approaches of Brazil's Lula and Venezuela's Chávez”, *Third World Quarterly*, 28 (7): 1343-1358.

Cervo, Amado Luiz. 2007. *Relações Internacionais da América Latina: Velhos e Novos Paradigmas* [International relations of Latin America: new and old paradigms]. São Paulo: Saraiva.

Chilcote, Ronald. 2003. “The Left in Latin America: Theory and Practice”. *Latin American Perspectives*, 30 (4): 10-15.

Cuzco. *Declaration on the South American Community of Nations*. Cuzco, december 8, 2004.

Dabène, Olivier. 2012. “Explaining Latin America's Fourth Wave of Regional Integration”. Draft of paper presented at the 30<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Latin American Studies Association, San Francisco, 23-26 May.

Fukuyama, Francis. 2006. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.

Gardini, Gian Luca. 2011. “MERCOSUR: What You See Is Not Always What You Get”. *European Law Journal*, 17 (5): 683-700.

Gavine, Brigid, and Lombaerde, Philippe de. 2005. “Economic Theories of Regional Integration” In *Global Politics of Regionalism: Theory and Practice*, edited by Mary Farrell, Björn Hettne, and Luk Van Langenhove, 69-83, London: Pluto Books.

Green, Duncan. 1996. “Latin America: Neoliberal Failure and the Search for Alternatives”, *Third World Quarterly*, 17 (1): 109-22.

Guimarães, Samuel Pinheiro. 2012. “O Futuro do Mercosul” [Mercosur's Future], *Austral: Revista Brasileira de Estratégia e Relações Internacionais*, 1 (1): 13-22.

Hettne, Björn. 2005. “Regionalism and world order” In *Global Politics of Regionalism: Theory and Practice*, edited by Mary Farrell, Björn Hettne, and Luk Van Langenhove, 269-89, London: Pluto Books.

Käkönen, Jyrki, and Kaisa Lähteenmäki. 1995. *Regionalization and the Theory of International Relations*. Tampere: Tampere Peace Research Institute.

Löwy, Michael. 1998. “Hasta la Victoria...”, *Latin American Perspectives*, 25 (6): 76-7.

Löwy, Michael, and Charlotte Stanley. 2002. “Toward an International of Resistance against Capitalist Globalization”, *Latin American Perspectives*, 29 (6): 127-31.

Malamud, Andrés. 2005. “Latin American Regionalism and EU Studies”, *European Integration*, 32 (6): 637-57.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2011. "A Leader Without Followers? The Growing Divergence Between the Regional and Global Performance of Brazilian Foreign Policy", *Latin American Politics and Society*, 53 (3): 1-24.

Mansfield, Edward, and Helen Milner. 1999. "The New Wave of Regionalism", *International Organization*, 53 (3): 589-627.

Mariano, Karina Pasquariello. 2011. "A Eleição Parlamentar no Mercosul" [Parliamentary Election in Mercosur], *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, 54 (2): 138-57.

Mercosul. *Protocolo constitutivo do Parlamento do Mercosul*. Montevideo, 09 December 2005.

Mercosul. *Protocolo de adesão da República bolivariana da Venezuela ao Mercosul*. Caracas, July 4, 2006.

Moravcsik, Andrew. 1994. "Why the European Union Strengthens the State: Domestic Politics and International Cooperation", paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, New York, 1-4 September.

Peña-Eslusa, Alejandro. 2009. *The Foro de São Paulo: a Threat to Freedom in Latin America*. Bogotá: Mary Montes Edition.

Perez, Maribel Barboza. 2008. "Riesgos del Proceso de (re)Apropiación Empresarial en el Modelo de Socialismo del Siglo XXI" [Risks of the enterprise (re)appropriation process in the model of Socialism of the XXI Century]. *Revista Gaceta Laboral*, 14 (3): 351-69.

Petras, James. 1997. "Alternatives to Neoliberalism in Latin America", *Latin American Perspectives*, 24 (1): 80-91.

Petras, James, and Timothy Harding. 2000. "Introduction", *Latin American Perspectives*, 27 (5): 3-10.

Regalado, Roberto. 2008. *Encuentros y Desencuentros de la Izquierda Latinoamericana: Una Mirada desde el Foro de São Paulo*, Mexico City: Ocean Sur.

Riggirozzi, Pía. 2011. "Region, Regionness and Regionalism in Latin America: Towards a New Synthesis". *New Political Economy* (In Press).

Rother, Larry. "O.A.S. to Pick Chile Socialist U.S. Opposed as Its Leader". *The New York Times*. April 30, 2005. Available on: [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/30/international/americas/30oas.html?\\_r=1&scp=3&sq=miguel%20angel%20rodriguez%20organization&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/30/international/americas/30oas.html?_r=1&scp=3&sq=miguel%20angel%20rodriguez%20organization&st=cse)

Saraiva, Miriam Gomes. 2010. "Brazilian Foreign Policy Towards South America during the Lula Administration: Caught Between South America and Mercosur", *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, 53 (special edition): 151-68.

Saraiva, Miriam Gomes, and José Briceño Ruiz. 2009. "Argentina, Brasil e Venezuela: as Diferentes Percepções sobre a Construção do Mercosul" [Argentina, Brazil, and

Venezuela: different perceptions over Mercosur's construction]. *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional*, 52 (1): 149-66.

Tokatlian, Juan Gabriel. 2005. "La Comunidad Sudamericana: Una Perspectiva Minimalista" [The South American Community: a minimalist perspective]. *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 21: 75-9.