



RegioConf

THE EU, REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

REGIONAL WORKSHOP SAO PAULO: 13-14 March 2014, Universidade de Sao Paulo, Brazil

LIST OF WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

PROJECT PARTNERS

- ✓ Thomas Diez, University of Tübingen
- ✓ Eva Scherwitz, University of Tübingen
- ✓ Eleonora Poli, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)
- ✓ Kai Lehmann, University of São Paulo
- ✓ Cynthia Haddad, University of Sao Paulo
- ✓ Octavio Forti Neto, University of Sao Paulo

FURTHER PANELISTS

- ✓ Marcial Suarez, Fluminense Federal University, Brazil
- ✓ Francisco Fontano Pardo, Deputy Chief of Mission, EU Delegation in Brasília
- ✓ Ambassador Celestino Baena Soares, Director of the Department South America II, Itamaray (Brazilian Foreign Ministry)
- ✓ Miriam Saraiva, State University, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- ✓ Alex Main, Centre for Economic and Policy Research, Washington, D.C., United States
- ✓ Ambassador Jaime Güell Bográn, Ambassador of Honduras to Brazil
- ✓ Rafael Duarte Vila, Institute of International Relations, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil
- ✓ Patrício Salazar Benítez, Commercial Consul for Ecuador in Sao Paulo, Brazil

The first regional project workshop hosted by the Institute of International Relations of the University of Sao Paulo has brought together project partners as well as Latin American (LA), European, Northern American researchers and practitioners in order to discuss the role of the EU in the process of regional integration and conflict resolution in Latin America.

The two-day workshop was composed of **4 Panel sessions**. It started with a *first introductory session* to the project framework (presented by Diez) before addressing both European (Scherwitz) as well as LA perspectives (Lehmann) on contemporary regional security issues. Both the European and LA perspectives highlighted the difficulty in providing a clear-cut regional conflict definition. Both perspectives slightly diverged in terms of the evaluation of regional integration processes. From an EU point of view, some LA sub-regional organizations are characterised as stagnating. From a LA perspective, the EU's ambitions with regard to LA regional integration have remained unclear and might well contribute, even if unintentionally, to deepen divisions among LA countries. Further discussions on perceptions and mutual misunderstandings perfectly introduced the topics addressed in the second panel.

Speakers in this *second panel* underlined the need for the EU to adopt a more humble attitude by firstly understanding the specific nature of LA regional integration and underlying conflicts (Fontano Pardo). The importance of factors such as sovereignty and autonomy of LA state leaders (Saraiva) were discussed together with the fact that Brazil might not be willing to become a regional power (Suarez, Saraiva). Moreover, according to some interventions, asymmetries in the economic performances (GDP) and political orientation (liberal or not) of LA countries make regional integration through trade agreements rather difficult to realise (Saraiva, Diez). For these reasons, the relevance of European assistance for LA regional integration was strongly questioned as the European model appears to be hardly applicable to the Latin American case. Specifically, Ambassador Soares defined LA regionalism as “regionalismo aberto”, an open form regionalism, able to adjust its features to actual needs. Nonetheless, many examples of European support for successful societal and infrastructural integration in LA were mentioned and several speakers appreciated the importance of mutual learning for both the EU and LA integration processes.

The *third and fourth panel* of the workshop addressed specific case studies, namely the coup d'état in Honduras of 2009 and its implication for Central America, as well as the conflict among Colombia Venezuela and Ecuador. In the case of Central American regional integration and conflict transformation, the EU was deemed to play a positive and qualified role (especially with regard to EU conflict mediation of the San José Dialogue Process throughout the 1980ies). Differently, the EU's current approach in relation to the above mentioned region and towards the Hondurian conflict was seen as rather passive and featureless. In this respect, speakers argued whether the EU's position regarding the Honduran elections in 2009 (Güell Bográn; Main) might well have been aligned with the US.

Moreover, panellists pointed out that the European Union appears to be deeply engaged to overcome cross-border issues by promoting regionalism through economic means. However, in the case of Central America, a general lack of control over the use of EU funding might compromise the implementation of such goals. The EU's approach towards the Hondurian conflict was evaluated as much using the changing context and socialisation approach rather than using its trade leverage as a means of compulsion towards Central America. (A critical view was further expressed with regard to the fact that the EU does not take into consideration the fact that its funding, instead of promoting regional institutions in Central America, might possibly finance drug trafficking and corruption.)

The *fourth and final panel* of the workshop was dedicated to the conflict between Colombia, Ecuador and Venezuela. In a first presentation of the EU's approach towards the conflict, Haddad pointed out that, differently from the US's military-focused approach, the EU has been promoting regional conflict resolution mainly through socialisation processes, such as workshops and peace laboratories involving civil society. The incentive pathway was also applied, with the 2012 trade agreement among Colombia and Ecuador being the most valuable example. Nevertheless, in a more critical view, it was pointed out that a certain degree of ignorance with regard to the problems of the region made the EU's institutionally oriented approach rather inflexible. With regard to Ecuador, Consul Salazar Benítez underlined how the country, which is member of a number of different regional organizations (Mercosur, CELAC, CAN etc.), does not share the EU's preference of addressing security issues at a broader regional level, but prefers to use these organizations in pragmatic way, relying on them when seen as appropriate for regional security questions. Very positive developments were rather seen in bilateral cabinet meetings between for instance Ecuador and Colombia in order to address frontier questions (Salazar Benítez).

In a *final wrap-up* of the workshop, Diez underlined the need for the EU to take into account the differences of the LA model of regional integration. Accordingly, the EU might well be open to learn the rather pragmatic stance and problem-solving approach of LA integration, which led to some positive developments in terms of societal integration.

Diez further raised the question, whether some of the criticism of the EU's ignorance of LA integration needs, might not be the result of a misunderstanding of the EU's aspirations towards LA integration in itself.

All participants agreed on the usefulness to continue this fruitful dialogue between practitioners and academics from both regions, which enabled specifically enriching encounters at the course of the workshop.